“THE NAKED GOSPEL”:

VARIETIES OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS POETRY

FROM RICHARD HENRY DANA TO HERMAN MELVILLE

by

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor David S. Reynolds

“’The Naked Gospel’: Varieties of American Religious Poetry, From Richard Henry Dana to Herman Melville” examines the term “religious” in nineteenth-century America poetry. Without ignoring the enormous influence of European and British Romanticisms, it positions a rich but neglected body of nineteenth-century American religious verse *vis-à-vis* American commentary and criticism of the period. It surveys attempts by nineteenth-century American editors and writers to collect and represent a native religious verse and outlines the standards by which an American poem was judged as “religious.” These judgments, my study argues, reflect how deeply rooted Romantic thought had become in American denominational identity, even before the influence of Emerson on American culture was widespread, and reveal the extent to which temperament, not theology, was the shared interpretive frame for the selection, as well as the production, of American religious poetry.

In light of these views of the period's interpenetration of Romantic thought and American religious identity, my study examines further the verse of three Americans

who were identified by their contemporaries as “religious” poets: the contemplative verse of Calvinist-Romantic Richard Henry Dana, the devotional lyrics of Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier, and “The Cathedral,” James Russell Lowell’s poem which, in narrating a pilgrimage to Chartres, depicts the collision between the ecclesiastical imagination of Anglo-Catholic poetics and the iconoclasm of modern skepticism. Selected for their commitment to an established faith-tradition (Calvinism, Quakerism) or, in the case of "The Cathedral," a recognizable "indebtedness to the faith...eschewed" (Anglo-Catholicism), these religious poems resist the dichotomy between tradition and insight, or the easy passage from doctrine to imagination, and seek insight through available forms of Christian tradition, though not without great difficulty.

In keeping with the desire to discuss nineteenth-century American religious verse within an American context, I call upon William James, whose work *Varieties of Religious Experience* supplies my study with a critical vocabulary, a structure, and an interpretive frame. Like the religious anthologies outlined in my introduction, James' discussion of religious experience is a compendium of Christian temperaments not theologies, “ways of feeling” religious, not “spiritual.” Two of these temperaments, "the sick soul,” and “mysticism,” along with what James identified as the twin ends of the "ecclesiastical system" and "naked gospel scheme," provide a structure for my study's individual chapters.

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Introduction

It was the second of his Gifford lectures on natural religion (1901-2) in which William James first introduced his now-familiar definition of "religion." Having (in his first lecture) rejected the authority of institutional religion and its "second-hand" tradition, James now turned to the immediacy of individual experience. His definition of religion would serve as a new point of departure:

> Religion, as I now ask you to arbitrarily to take shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, in so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*.[1]

No single description can offer a complete account of religion at the turn of the century, but James' definition (in the author's own words) "puts us on track" of what the "religious" had come to mean for nineteenth-century America. Ostensibly intended to circumscribe his lecture's central topic, James' definition of religion describes in miniature the framework of American religious thoughts and habits. The individual parts of that framework—feelings, experience, solitude—together constitute a long-standing tradition of American religious thought, present since the time of the Puritans; moreover, the definition, which James uses throughout his lecture to seize upon the most "accomplished" religious experiences of men and women, what the author calls the *documents humains* of religious classics, also captures the habits of both ordinary Americans as they struggled to adapt to the changing landscape of nineteenth-century belief and spirituality. James' Janus-like definition—which looked in the direction of American's past and future simultaneously--and more generally his inquiry into the

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (Vintage Books/Library of America: New York, 2000), 36.

nature of religious experience, describe his country's past as well as acting as a harbinger of "things to come." With his new point of departure, the author of *Varieties of Religious Experience* may have very well arrived at the cusp of modernity, but his feet were firmly planted in the religious *ethos* of an early age.

Readers familiar with that *ethos* will recognize in James' description not only a depiction of the period's religious zeitgeist but a sensitivity to its crises as well. That sensitivity was, in part, a product of the author's own experience. But as influential as experience and an understanding of the spiritual milieu would prove to be for his lectures, there can be little doubt that when James circumscribed the topic of religion, he called upon Ralph Waldo Emerson. More than any other "factor," it was Emerson who offered James's study of religion a living principle. Despite often being "silently woven" into James's prose, it was the language of "Spiritual Laws" with its emphasis on "solitude," "experience," and "Nature," that provided James with an American lexicon of religious experience. And this lexicon provided James with more than words. Emerson, more than any other religious thinker, embodied for nineteenth-century America what Lawrence Buell identified as the role of "privatizer of religion."[2] His work represented the first "modern" American theorizing of, in James' own words, "the individual [who] transacts business by himself alone."[3] As such, Emerson's work offered James with a paradigm for religious experience, a "focal exemplar" through which all other examples of the *Varieties* were to be viewed and judged.

James's use of Emerson as poet is especially significant in *Varieties*' penultimate lectures. In "Other Characteristics," James alludes to Emerson an example of *the*

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[2] *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 181.
[3] *Varieties,* 34.

"aesthetic motive" of Protestant imagination.[4] Judging the "ecclesiastical" element of religious expression—those "exalted and mysterious verbal additions" of scholasticism and Anglo-Catholic worship—as "pragmatically useless," James concedes that their power to move the imagination is enormous. To illustrate, James provides the example of English Catholic John Henry Newman whose work he contrasts with that of the American poet Emerson. Each man, argues James, represent the diverse, yet equally Romantic, literary aims of Protestants and Catholics: Emerson's work "aim[s] at intellectual purity and simplification" while John Henry Newman stands for those writers who claim "richness is the supreme *imaginative* requirement." For imaginations like Newman's, James wonders "how flat does evangelical Protestantism appear, how bare those isolated religious lives whose boast it is that 'man in the bush with God may meet.'" This phrase is an allusion to Emerson's "Good-Bye," a poem whose speaker concludes that men encounters God not in "high conceit" of "school" or "clan" but in the objects of the natural world. Yet Newman's "aesthetic way of feeling the Christian scheme" is unimpressed with Emerson's claim. "What a pulverization and leveling" this must seem," exclaims James and continues, "To an imagination used to the perspective of dignity and glory, the naked gospel scheme seems to offer an almshouse for a palace."

The passage is brief. James quickly moves on to a consideration of "Confession" and other "essential elements" of institutional religion. But his plotting of the two endpoints that represent "aesthetic ways of feeling" provides us with a helpful "middle" on which to chart a variety of American religious lyrics written during the long, Romantic period (1820-1880). Currently, Emerson and the poetry of the "naked gospel scene" with its emphasis on individual experience and the objects of nature dominate our

[4] Varieties, 411-413.

understanding of the "religious" in nineteenth-century lyrics. We share with James his initial indifference expressed at the start of *Varieties* towards theology and organized religion. Yet, what if we, with the help of James' phenomenological description of the twin limits of religious imagination, considered Emerson as one "end" of nineteenth-century American religious lyrics instead of as its center?

Like James, we would find it difficult to identify a representative American poet who wrote during the Romantic period as "ecclesiastical"; Catholic poets, for example, did not make inroads in the country's literature until the century's last decades. Yet, for several American poets (including James Russell Lowell), the "ecclesiastical" was one alternative "limit" of religious expression that, when put to use, could signal an important contrast with the conceit that "man in the bush with god can meet." In other words, there are other directions in the "ways of *feeling*" "religious" in the period's lyrics that resemble, yet move away from, Emersonian idealism, while still remaining (or attempting to remain) Romantic. The so-called "religious" but Romantic vision of these poets cannot be made wholly intelligible through the study of what one recent writer has called the period's process of "spiritualization."[5] Neither can they cannot be satisfactorily understood as returns to the traditional modes of Christian orthodoxy or examples of the triumph of secularization. Recognition of these alternate visions in American religious lyrics, then, requires a methodology that allows for wider application of the term "religious" without collapsing into these before mentioned categories.

This study seeks to employ such an approach. Without ignoring the enormous influence of European and British Romanticisms, this dissertation positions a rich but

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[5] See Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality, From Emerson to Oprah*. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005).

neglected body of nineteenth-century American religious verse *vis-à-vis* American commentary and criticism of the period. It surveys attempts by nineteenth-century American editors and writers to collect and represent a native religious verse and outlines the standards by which an American poem was judged as "religious." These judgments, my study argues, reflect how deeply rooted Romantic thought had become in American denominational identity, even before the influence of Emerson on American culture was widespread, and reveal the extent to which temperament, not theology, was the shared interpretive frame for the selection, as well as the production, of American religious poetry.

In light of these views of the period's interpenetration of Romantic thought and American religious identity, my study examines further the verse of three Americans who were identified by their contemporaries as "religious" poets: the contemplative verse of Calvinist-Romantic Richard Henry Dana, the devotional lyrics of Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier, and "The Cathedral," James Russell Lowell's poem which, in narrating a pilgrimage to Chartres, depicts the collision between the ecclesiastical imagination of Anglo-Catholic poetics and the iconoclasm of modern skepticism. Selected for their commitment to an established faith-tradition (Calvinism, Quakerism) or, in the case of "The Cathedral," a recognizable "indebtedness to the faith...eschewed" (Anglo-Catholicism), these religious poems resist the dichotomy between tradition and insight, or the easy passage from doctrine to imagination, and seek insight through available forms of Christian tradition, though not without great difficulty.[6] In addition, these poems look forward to the century's most ambitious and least-understood American

[6] Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 388.

religious poem, Herman Melville's *Clarel* (1876), which is discussed in this study's epilogue. Although the work of British Victorians such as Tennyson and Matthew Arnold played a key role in framing the issues at the heart of Melville's poem, *Clarel*'s real accomplishment consists in its relation to the patterns of religious thought and poetic practice within its own local literary culture.

The term "religious poetry" which I have applied to the poems discussed in this dissertation has itself been the subject of examination. Several of those examinations are cited in the following pages. But my aim has been to allow, when possible, the term "religious"(as well as its derivations of "sacred" and "devotional") to emerge from the archival material that forms the starting point of my investigation. From that starting point—a survey of American verse anthologies publishing during the 1800s—emerges various distributaries that branch into the dissertation's individual chapters. Led by these occasions of the term "religious," my examination of the poetry of Dana, Whittier, and Lowell is channeled through archival research and close reading and avoids turning the "religious" into a stable generic classification. By avoiding the temptation to over-theorize the "religious," my approach mirrors the adaptability of the term as it appeared during the Romantic period. My study also eschews making the term "religious" synonymous with "spiritual," a term which Leigh Eric Schmidt argues has specific historical roots in nineteenth-century American liberalism. In fact, despite possessing several of the characteristics of "spiritually inclined progressives," the poets discussed in the following pages negated crucial features of religious liberalism and resisted the century's "spiritualization" of religious thought and practices.[7] They resisted forms of Emersonian idealism, which, in matters of faith, placed absolute value on the self and the

[7] Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 12.

role of nature in authentic religious experience. They registered their resistance to this idealism and "the doctrine of direct personal inspiration" differently, but, by committing to explorations of religious experience using the traditional resources of Christian verse (allegory, devotional practices, liturgy), their poetry forms an alternative constellation in the American religious imagination: a religious poetry born during the Romantic movement, yet skeptical of the "new objects of worship," even as it refused to advance a particular religious position or "forward the cause of religion" in ways attempted by earlier sacred verse.[8]

In keeping with the desire to discuss nineteenth-century American religious verse within an American context, I call upon James, whose work *Varieties* supplies my study with a critical vocabulary, a structure, and an interpretive frame. Like the religious anthologies outlined in my introduction, James' discussion of religious experience is a compendium of Christian temperaments not theologies, "ways of feeling" religious, not "spiritual." Two of these temperaments, "the sick soul," and "mysticism," along with what James identified as the twin ends of the "ecclesiastical system" and "naked gospel scheme," provide a structure for my study's individual chapters.[9]

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[8] George Willis Cooke called Emerson's "The Problem" the "statement of [the] doctrine of direct personal inspiration, which is the source…of all genius [in] art, literature, or religion" *The Poets of Transcendentalism*. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1903), 10. See my discussion on Cooke's anthology and Emerson's poem in Chapter 1.; Although he did not coin "the new objects of worship," poet and reviewer William Bliss Carmen used the phrase in his review of Emily Dickinson to describe what the "religious" had come to mean for the poets of American Romanticism: "She is a reviver and establisher of the religious sentiment. Full of skepticism and the gentle irony of former unbelief, putting aside the accepting and narrowing creed, she brings us, as Emerson did, face to face with new objects of worship." *The Boston Evening Transcript*, Nov. 21, 1896; In "Religion and Literature," T.S. Eliot defines one kind of "religious literature" as "deliberately and defiantly" Christian, dedicated to "forwarding the cause of religion." (*Selected Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1960).

[9] James employed the two terms—"sick soul" and "mysticism"—as titles for lectures 6 and 7, and 16 and 17 respectively.

Chapter 1:

"Ways of Feeling the Christian Scheme":

Anthologies of Religious Verse in America, 1831-1903

The literary anthology has always been a popular means of preserving and promoting a country's native literature. Its power to influence and shape the judgments of generations of educators, scholars, and students is enormous. Yet even when an anthology loses its grip on readers or ceases to circulate in the classroom, it can still teach from the archive. In recent years, literary historians have turned to American verse anthologies in order to reconstruct "the complex processes by which canons in poetry are made and remade."[1] "If you want to learn [how] a canon begins to get canonized," writes one historian, "the literary anthology presents a reasonable place to start."[2] For Alan Golding, Jane Tompkins, and others, to understand the processes of literary canonization by way of such works as Stedman's *An American Anthology* (1902), or its earlier, nineteenth-century incarnation Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America* (1842), is to witness firsthand the formation of the era's attitudes concerning poetry.[3] The drama of the anthology serves as a powerful reminder of the capricious character of literary judgment. Poets enter and exit. Their poems arrive on the scene abbreviated and muted,

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[1] Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), xvi.

[2] Alan Spiegel, *James Agee and the Legend of Himself* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 15.

[3] Works that turn to the anthology for a better understanding of the reception of American verse of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century include Mary Loeffelholz, *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-century Women's Poetry*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Christopher Beach, *Poetic Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), esp. 82-149; Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*; Neil Fraistat, *Poems in Their Place: The Intertexuality and Order of Poetic Collections* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Jane Tompkins, *Sensation Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

at the service of some new critical principle, representing conformity when yesterday they stood for change. Editors “anxiously justify their choices” yet “speak as if they themselves played virtually no part.”[4]

The study of the American anthology, however, can provide more than a theater for the debates on the literary canon. The nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were awash in anthologies whose ostensible purpose involved the promotion of not simply a national but a *religious* literature. In fact, the most widely-stated purpose for collections of verse published in America between 1825 and 1900 was to assist readers in acts of private devotion and "to meet the various occasions which suggest[ed] devout thought."[5] These devotional, or religious, anthologies of verse were part of a larger development in American religious literature in which, according to historian Frank Luther Mott, three-fourths of all the public's reading was "theological, ethical, and devotional."[6] During a visit to an American bookshop in 1833, French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville found an "almost innumerable quality of [American] religious books, Bibles, sermons, pious stories, controversial tracts, and reports of charitable societies."[7] American religious literature benefited from, among other material causes, recent advances in publishing technology, but de Tocqueville knew that the numbers disclosed a greater reality. "For Americans," he wrote, ""the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is impossible...to conceive one without the other."[8] With both political and

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[4] Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 188.
[5]Stephen G. Bulfinch, *The Harp and the Cross : A Collection of Religious Poetry* (Boston, Mass.: Walker, Wise and Co., 1857), iii.
[6] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 370.
[7] *Democracy in America*, ed. Jacob Peter Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2000), 470.
[8] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 293.

material restrictions loosened, American writers were now free to conceive, in a way unimagined by former generations, a new literature of the spirit.

Naturally, it is not possible to read this new literature without encountering religious poetry. Although present from the time of the Puritans, religious verse that took Christian life, thought or experience as its subject increased in number dramatically during the first half of the nineteenth century and by mid-century was more widespread than any other time in the country's history. Even the Civil War, which shattered the spirit of the nation, did little to diminish the reach of religious verse. The war appears to have whet the nation's constantly increasing taste for "devotional poetry" and "sacred songs." In an environment where religion "mingled" with the products of the new country so completely, there was no shortage of lyrics to quench the thirst of the most devout. Religious journals offered "devotional" verse along with theological commentary. New and revised hymnals emerged so often (nineteen Unitarian hymnals alone in 1869) that one collector of sacred verse called the 1860's "the hymnological decade."[9] And the collected works of John Greenleaf Whittier, sisters Alice and Phoebe Cary, and other poets included a section entitled "religious verse."[10]

Yet it was through the anthology that readers encountered religious verse in its most powerful, and most popular, surroundings. "We speak from actual knowledge," wrote one reviewer of the period's religious anthology, "when we say that…compilations

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[9] Charles Dexter Cleveland, *Lyra Sacra Americana: Or, Gems from American Sacred Poetry* (New York; London: Scribner; S. Low, Son, and Marston, 1868), vi.

[10] Nineteenth-century American collections that are comprised of poems marked as "Religious" or "Sacred" include *The Poems, Sacred, Passionate, and Humorous, of Nathaniel Parker Willis*,(New York: Clarke and Maynard, 1868); *The Poetical Works of Alice and Phoebe Cary* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876); *Poems and Essays by Jones Very* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1886); *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier: Poems of Nature, Poems Subjective and Reminiscent, Religious Poems*. Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1888-9); and *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896).

of religious poems have sold in greater numbers than the works of the most popular writers."[11] At first glance, these collections of "spiritual gems" resemble in several ways their more secular counterparts. Like the general anthologies of American writing, religious verse anthologies promulgated a native literature and helped form a national character. Their beginnings in the first quarter of the nineteenth century paralleled the birth of American literature and, like the literature of the early national period, received their inspiration in no small part from British sources. They too have persisted long into our "age of anthologies" as evidenced by the recent publication of anthologies like Harold Bloom's *American Religious Poems*.[12] Yet for all their resemblances to the general anthology, religious anthologies present a distinctive profile of America's literary character and their study offers an important glimpse into the period's deliberations over what constituted a native, "religious" poetry. This chapter examines four such profiles that reflect the values of its denominational culture and express, through their commentary on, and compilation of, the country's religious poetry, their own "way" of what William James described as "feeling the Christian scheme."

George Cheever and *The American Common-place of Poetry*

At midcentury, Edgar Allan Poe placed the blame for the slow growth of his own country's literature on its editors.[13] But few were as disappointed in the slow growth of American religious verse as those editors who collected it themselves. The advertisement

[11] Unsigned review of *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith* by Alfred P. Putnam, quoted in Robert Brothers advertisement as a part of back matter in Andrew P. Peabody, *Christian Belief and Life*. (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1875).
[12] Harold Bloom, *American Religious Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2006).
[13] See review of *The Poets and Poetry of America: With a Historical Introduction* by Rufus W. Griswold in *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 549-556.

to Griswold's *The Sacred Poets of England and America* regrets the fact that "there [was] no poetry so rare as the poetry of devotion."[14] Elizabeth Dana called many of her own selections in *Sacred and Household Poetry* "sad, sad examples" "reflect[ing] only the light, but not the direct rays of [the] Sun."[15] In 1864, the American anthologist George Rider looked back on more than half a century of American religious verse and witnessed failure. "There are volumes of poems written by Christian men and women," the anthologist lamented, "without a disclosure of the Christian Faith...without either the heat or light of its presence."[16] That same year a reviewer for *New England Magazine* spoke for many when he summarized more than half a century of religious poetry in this way: "When we think of what religion is and what poetry is, and what their marriage ought to be, a great part of what is published as religious poetry seems to us a scandalous mockery."[17] For those collecting sacred verse in a country where "Christianity reign[ed] without obstacles," the relationship between religion and poetry appeared to be one fraught with disappointment.[18]

This disappointment is expressed by George Cheever in the nineteenth century's first significant collection of American religious verse, *The American Common-place Book of Poetry*.[19] As editor, Cheever, a Congregationalist preacher, joined a small but influential group of religious ministers who, in the first half of the century, turned to

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[14] Rufus W. Griswold, *The Sacred Poets of England and America, from the Earliest to the Present Time* (New York: Appleton, 1850), 4.
[15] Elizabeth Dana, *Sacred and Household Poetry, Gathered from the Highways and Byways* (Boston: Moulton and Clark; Taggard and Chase, 1858), 14.
[16] George T. Rider, *Lyra Americana; or Verses of Praise and Faith, from American Poets* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1865), vi.
[17] Unsigned review of *Lyra Anglicana* by the Rev. George T. Rider, *North American Review,* January 1865, Vol. 204, 303-4.
[18] Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 292.
[19] *The American Common-place Book of Poetry, with Occasional Notes.* (Boston: Russell, Shattuck, and Co., 1831). Subsequent quotations can be found on pages 3-6, unless otherwise noted.

religious verse as a means of shaping the moral taste of their American readers. Unlike Baptist preacher Griswold or Samuel Kettell, editor of *Specimens of American Poetry* (1829), Cheever made no secret that his collection was religious in nature.[20] "All the pieces in this volume are of the purest moral character," wrote Cheever in the collection's preface, "and, considering its limits, and the comparative scantiness of American poetry, a good number of them contain, in an uncommon degree, the religious and poetical spirit united." Despite that union, however, Cheever bemoaned the lack of the "rarest of poetry…the poetry of devotion." He called attention to the "*few* beloved volumes" of religious verse in English that captured the "Christian character," and attributed that character to the "spirit of the Bible" rather than the "genius" of his country. Surveying the field of post-Revolutionary American poetry, Cheever characterized its religious verse as "cold": "We may find plenty of the sentimentality of religion, expressed too, in beautiful language—but as cold as a winter's night transitory frost-work on our windows." In judging the works of *American Common-place*, Cheever anticipated the disappointment felt by various nineteenth-century compilers of religious verse; his words would also be echoed a century later by T.S. Eliot who described the majority of devotional poetry as a product of "pious insincerity."[21]

Amid the "frost-work" of American religious verse, however, Cheever found signs of life. "[I] rank Richard Henry Dana Sr. at the head of all the American poets," wrote Cheever in his notes to his *American Common-place,* "[because] he has proved successful in a higher and more difficult range of poetry," the devotional lyric. More

[20] For a brief but notable discussion of this group and their place in American literary tradition, see Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 52-59; also see Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic,* 11-18.
[21] *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 30.

than any other American poet, Dana composed devotional lyrics that (in Cheever's words) "agitated the soul with a deeper emotion" and "aimed...to rouse up the soul to a solemn consideration of its future destines."[22] William Cullen Bryant appears in *American Common-place* more often than any other writer; poems such as "Thanatopsis," "To a Waterfowl," and "A Winter Scene," show the writer's "reverence for religion." After Bryant and Dana, the poets who are represented most include (in descending order) John Pierpont, Lydia Sigourney, James Gates Percival, Carlos Wilcox, Nathaniel Parker Willis, John Brainard, James Hillhouse, Fitz-Greene Halleck, John Greenleaf Whittier (who was only 23 at the time) and several anonymous poems from the *Christian Examiner*. These poets were to become, at least for another half a century, the *dramatis personae* of American anthologies, religious or otherwise.

Of these poets, only Carlos Wilcox appears to have attracted Cheever's interest enough to warrant a set of lengthy footnotes. Wilcox, who had died four years before the publication of *American Common-place*, had been a Congregationalist preacher (like Cheever) and his long, unfinished poems "The Age of Benevolence" and "The Religion of Taste" present a clear Christian scheme of salvation, corresponding to that of the Reformed tradition in which the reality of sin and the need for repentance are necessary elements.[23] In comments which would often accompanied Wilcox's poetry when it was anthologized, Cheever observed the "Christian character" of the preacher's poetry and the

[22] See Chapter 2 of this study for a more extensive look at the poetry of Richard Henry Dana and his particular brand of Romantic Calvinism.

[23] For a recent treatment of Wilcox, see Barbara Packer's entry "Early Narrative and Lyric" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Nineteenth-century Poetry, 1800-1910*, Eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44-48.

poet's resemblance to Cowper.[24] Cheever also remarked on the poet's "local" attraction: Wilcox's evocation of a September sunset over Andover Theological Seminary reminded Cheever of his own tenure at the school (which he attended in 1825):

> Every person who has witnessed the splendor of the sunset scenery in Andover will recognize with delight the *local* as well as the general truth and beauty of this description….The great extent of the landscape; the situation of the hill, on the broad level summit of which stand the building of the Theological Institution; the vast amphitheatre of luxuriant forest and filled…the perfect outline of the horizon…When the sun goes down, it is all in a blaze with his descending glory.

Cheever's footnote—itself a kind of lyrical tribute to his Alma Mater—illustrates the influence of seminary culture on the beginnings of American criticism and literary aspirations. As Mark Noll reminds us, seminaries such as Andover affected the study of theology as well as "created expanding networks of individuals who had been introduced to elite texts…and then made up a market for books, pamphlets, and periodicals that strengthened the ties among those who wrote and those who read."[25] As part of a network of Reformed Calvinist thinkers, who first included Lyman Beecher and later James Marsh and Horace Bushnell, Cheever was actively engaged in harmonizing the tenants of Calvinist thought with the emerging Romanticism of his era. By praising Wilcox's sunset as an authentic description in both its particular and general features, Cheever promoted the participants of his denominational culture while providing his

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[24] For example, Cheever's comments on Wilcox are reproduced in Rufus Griswold, *The Poets and Poems of America* (Philadelphia: Cary and Hart, 1843), 118, and Charles Dexter Cleveland, *A Compendium of American Literature* (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1859), 374.

[25] *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 254.

readers with poems of “moral and devout reflection.” In the poems of Wilcox, as well as of Richard Henry Dana, Cheever discovered a reliable mix of orthodoxy and the new Romanticism, a “marriage” not found in either the eighteenth-century lyrics of Connecticut Wit (and Calvinist) Timothy Dwight, or the nature poems of Bryant.

A reviewer for the *North American Review* disagreed:

> We agree with Mr. Cheever in his opinion that Religion is the highest theme for poetry, and that a writer who treats it in the best manner, must be regarded as taking precedence. But...we are not sure that [Dana or Wilcox]...has correctly conceived the *form* in which religion is employed to the greatest advantage as a theme for poetry.[26]

According to the *North American Review,* the honor of *the* American religious poet went to Bryant, whose poem "Thanatopsis" exemplified a form of devotional poetry that was "religious, without the least tinge of gloom...or looseness of principle." Bryant's poetry accomplished the goal of all religious poetry which was "to awaken and express devotional feeling." "An exposition of doctrine," the reviewer concluded, " however important and however elegantly dressed in the garb of verse, is not poetry; and a poem that awakens devotional feeling is essential religious, however destitute of any tincture of dogmatical divinity."

The debate between Cheever and the *North American Review* reveals three important features that are often overlooked in the study of early-nineteenth-century religious verse. First, as an ancillary discussion within the more general debate over the direction of a national literature, the measure of a poet's "sacred" poems played a

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[26] Unsigned review of *The American Common-Place Book of Poetry, with Occasional Notes.* By George Cheever. *North American Review*, October 1831, 297-302.

significant role in the early canonization of American literature. Anthologies such as *American Common-Place* circulated American poems widely, claiming to feed a public hungry for home-grown devotional verse. Although their editors were often affiliated with a specific denomination or movement, these anthologies presented a rich and diverse selection of Christian verse which offered a blueprint for later "secular" anthologies of American verse, like Edmund Clarence Stedman's *An American Anthology* (1900). Because these later anthologies still inform our present, religious anthologies of this so-called "pre-canonical moment" can be properly seen as a foundation of our current debates over the American literary canon; their inquiries into what constituted an "authentic" American religious poetry were as significant and certainly more demanding than any question in the debate over an authentic native literature.[27] The convictions on both sides of the debate were as strong as those of Rev. Leonard Bacon, Pastor of the First Church, New Haven Connecticut, who wrote an impassioned defense of the religious origins of the emerging native literature:

> Can there be a truly American literature which shall not be eminently controlled and enlivened by the spirit of the Christian religion? […] Can there be a literature truly and thoroughly American, which shall not be as thoroughly Christian?[28]

The answer to Bacon's rhetorical questions from *both* sides of this debate would have been "No."

Secondly, the quarrel between the Congregationalist Cheever and the Unitarian-

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[27] For anthologies of the "pre-canonical movement," see the first chapter of Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*, 3-18.

[28] "The Proper Character and Function of American Literature" in *The American Biblical Repository.* No. 5 Vol. 37 (January, 1840), 20, 22.

sympathizing editorial board at the *North American Review* reveals the extent to which denominational identity was an important component in the early stages of literary criticism. More than a simple variation of judicial criticism, concerns over the "form" of a devotional poem often involved deeply-held ideas about theology and the current religious *milieu*. In part, the reason for the debate between Cheever and the *NAR* was Dana's well-known involvement as a religious polemicist who in 1831 wrote for the "Unitarian-baiting organ" *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*. That the writers at the *North American Review,* a majority of whom were Unitarian, would have sided with Bryant, himself a nominal Unitarian, against the conservative Cheever and his choice of poet should come as no surprise. As a leader in the evangelical reforms of the Second Great Awakening, Cheever found in Dana a clear acknowledgement of sin and man's dependency on God. Similarly, Unitarians, feeling the pressures of a resurgent Calvinism but wishing to avoid the label of theological "looseness," endorsed Bryant as a poet free from "gloom" and "dogmatical divinity." For both parties, denominational identity indicated not simply an amorphous adherence to moral platitudes but a deep commitment to an intellectual life grounded in religious principles.

Lastly, the debate between Cheever and the *North American Review* illustrates that, despite their theological differences, "orthodox" and "liberal" shared much in common. Most significantly, their shared idiom demonstrates that long before the *annus mirabilis* in which Emerson's *Nature* was published (1836), Romanticism had long provided the lexicon in the debate over religious poetry. Cheever felt most at home with a unique expression of Christian Romanticism. His *American Common-Place Book of Poetry*--the first such "Romantic" anthology published in America—alludes subtly to a

number of works by British Romantic poets, especially Coleridge; additionally, his later theological works, such as *The Religion of Experience and That of Imitation* (1843) captures the rhetoric of the Romantic era's spiritual temper. In his assessment of Dana as the nation's most important devotional poet, Cheever suggests several assumptions which we have come to associate with the Romantic *episteme*, including the beliefs that "feeling" or "emotion" alone provided the form of religious poetry and religious tradition—here expressed as "dogma"—was the least suited for devotional lyrics. A closer look at the *North American Review*'s review of Cheever's anthology reveals an even-more strict observance of the boundaries set down by Romanticism: the reaction against reason, the adoration of originality, and the attention to nature as the primary object of art.[29] Often these associations can found linked closely in succession, as when the reviewer for *North American Review* lauds Bryant's use of imagery: "His imagery is the true and lively expression of nature not transmitted through the pages of a one thousand preceding writers but taken fresh at first hand from the breathing face of the divine original."

These kinds of literary debates and denominational tensions in the first quarter of the nineteenth century have often been described as a defense of the "moral *status quo*" of early America's criticism, an adolescent period which would soon be superseded by the more "mature criticism" of Poe and Ralph Waldo Emerson.[30] In addition,

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[29] William Charvat argued that this shared set of Romantic principles contributed to the Transcendental movement: "Both the liberal and the orthodox theologies were striving to make the moral principle an active rather than a merely restrictive one and from this point of view they may both be said to have contributed to the development of American transcendentalism." *The Origins of American Critical Thought: 1810-1835. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 16.*

[30] The seminal history of early American criticism is still Charvat's *The Origins of American Critical Thought.* There, Charvat characterizes the "moral tone of [the period's] criticism" which he explained by nature of "the number of clergymen who reviewed books" as a defense of the "political, economic, and moral *status quo*" (6, 7). Works following Charvat assessment of the period include Harry H. Clark,

anthologies such as *The American Common-place* have disapprovingly been characterized as "didactic," "moralizing," and (in Poe's own pun on the collection's title) "exceedingly commonplace."[31] While it is true that Cheever hoped that *The American Common-Place* would teach—his *Studies in Poetry*, published one year earlier, aimed to present verse "worthy to be committed to memory by the pupil and made the object of thoughtful and minute examination"—these labels belie the richness of Cheever's "moral idealism" and achievement of his collection's "paratext" (that is, the preface, titles, notes, and overall design of *The American Common-place*).[32] "Moral" is the right word for the period's expectations for religious poetry insomuch as the word distinguishes itself from a "theological" appraisal. Not even Cheever who, along with Philip Schaff, were the most "orthodox" of the century's religious anthologists, had a set of unyielding criteria for poetry based upon Calvinist or, in Schaff's case, Mercersburg, theology. However, the term "moral" is misleading if by it we mean that the work of Cheever and others was simply an extension of eighteenth-century critical practices or a resistance to the "new objects of worship" of Romantic poetry. On the contrary, it points to unique concerns by editors of devotional literature over the role of "religious" within a culture animated by the "fires of religious zeal."

The American Common-place and its critics reveal that the measure of "religious"

"Changing Attitudes in Early American Literary Criticism, 1800-1840" in *The Development of American Literary Criticism.* ed. Floyd Stovall H. Clark. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 15-73 and John Rathburn, *American Literary Criticism, 1800-1860*. (Boston: Twayne, 1979). The idea that the Romantic criticism broke with the former moral criticism is a commonplace; the phrase "mature criticism" is from *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature* eds. Steven R. Serafin and Alfred Bendixen (London and New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2005), s.vv. ":Literary Criticism before 1914."

[31] These characterizations were made, in order, by Margaret Denny, "Cheever's Anthology and American Romanticism," *American Literature* 15 (March, 1943), 1-9; Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*, 14; and Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 551.

[32] *Studies in Poetry: Embracing Notices of the Lives and Writings of the Best Poets in the English Language…* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830), iv.

in the period's new native poetry was a problem of interpreting what Joshua Leavitt, editor of *The Christian Lyre* (1831), called *the* "religious effect" of sacred lyrics: "We want music here which is easy, yet effective; simple, touching, animating, moving; music in short, which will produce a *religious effect* rather than that which is only calculating to please a musical ear."[33] "Such pieces," Leavitt claims, "[*Lyre*] is intended to collect and preserve," a collection of religious lyrics that, rising above the merely "musical," could rouse "the religious affections." Years after his anthology, Cheever, in an essay on Issac Watts' hymn "Sin, like a Venomous Disease," expressed the same concern over the religious effect of hymns. As he did in the preface of *The American Common-place*, Cheever argues that such an effect should be judged by its appeal to the truth *and* beauty of a poem and can only be expressed by one who can "speak out strongly even though he may lay himself open to captious objections" since "sin *is* a venomous disease; we *are* dust-eaters and wind-graspers."[34] It must be also be beautiful, an expression of "religious truth and feeling." "Let every man therein abide in the same calling wherewith he was called" concludes Cheever, "and let not Watts and Cowper be sent to dance attendance upon the fancies of modern musical composers or systematic theologians, however excellent they be." Cheever's appeal then is for a religious poet to uphold the doctrine of original sin and the dictates of beauty, beholden not to theologians or to literary critics but to readers.

Cheever "lost" the argument with the *North American Review* if only because *The American Common-place* depended so heavily on poetry by known Unitarians, especially Bryant and a handful of poets who had been previously published in *The Christian*

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[33] *The Christian Lyre* Vol. 1. 3rd Edition. (New York: Jonathan Levitt, 1831), i.
[34] ""Distemper, Folly, and the Madness of Sin" in *Deacon Giles's Distillery: And Other Miscellanies* (New York: J. Wiley, 1853), 184-5.

Examiner. This latter source for Cheever's devotional collection was one of the period's most important Unitarian reviews, "not alone because of its exposition of the Unitarian point of view in theology…but because of its distinctive work in literary criticism."[35] Cheever's decision to make use of The *Christian Examiner* reveals both the shortage of nineteenth-century Calvinist poetry and the editor's ardent aim at literary "catholicity." That aim would be a frequent gesture of editors after Cheever. "It has been [our] aim," wrote the editor of *The Library of Poetry for Sunday Reading* (1880), "to make the present collection truly catholic…embrac[ing] a body of representative poems of all ages, denominations, and countries."[36] The editor of *Library* was Philip Schaff, the century's most vocal advocates of the Mercersburg theology, a subject of controversy among Reformed thinkers. Yet, despite his belief in the doctrine of the "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Schaff included John Greenleaf Whittier's "Our Master" (1866), a poem which explicitly rejects all liturgical representations of Christ. Schaff's collection allowed American "authors…the fullest liberty of uttering their sentiments in their own words." As we shall see, Episcopalian anthologists voiced a similar desire for literary catholicity (and registered the same disappointment). But for Cheever and other members of the Reformed movements of the first half of the century, their brand of "religious" poetry, as practiced by Dana and Wilcox, was beset both by another form of "denominational" poetry and a brand of "devotional poem" which made no obvious claims or commitment to an established belief or body of faith.

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[35] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), 284-5.
[36] Eds. Philip Schaff and Arthur Gilman, *A Library of Poetry for Sunday Reading* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1889), iii.

Alfred P. Putnam and *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith*

Preservation lies at the heart of all literary anthologies, but for those editors engaged in preserving American religious literature as it was being written, the act carried with a sense of elevated purpose; these religious anthologies did not simply present readers with objects for meditation but were conscious expressions of the editor's version, either in its outline or detail, of the whole of Christendom. "Religious literature, the psalms and liturgies of the churches," wrote Emerson, "are of a slow growth…selections gathered from the ages, leaving the worse and saving the better, until at last the work of the whole communion of worshippers."[37] But for the anthologist, the "growth" by which the "worse" disappeared while "the better" was saved was not a natural process but one which involved an active gathering of lyrics from the period's religious and non-religious publications—church hymnals, the collected work of individual poets, magazines, and newspapers—often saving them from literary oblivion.[38] Cheever remarked that many of the collection's poems were "drawn out from corners where they had long lain forgotten and neglected." A reviewer for *New England Magazine* suggested Cheever had best left them there, for, in a few years time, "quantities of dust will be found in [*American Common-place]* with many an old and mouldering bone."[39] To reflect the distance an editor might need to travel to find the "gems of sacred poetry," Elizabeth Dana subtitled her anthology, "Gathered from the Highways and the By-Ways"; she writes in that anthology's preface that her role has been "to collect and preserve." Poe had warned editors of going too far afield to "rake up from the by-ways of the country the 'inglorious

[37] "Quotations and Originality" in *Essays and Poems*. Library of America College Editions. (New York, Library of America, 1996), 1030.
[38] Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 551
[39] Unsigned review of *American Common-place Book of Poetry* by George B. Cheever, *New England Magazine*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, July 1831, 91-2.

Miltons' who may, possibly there abound." But in order to faithfully reflect the "catholicity" of American religious poetry, anthologists were often travelling great distances to gather what the anonymous compiler of *The Changed Cross and Other Religious Poems* described as the "waifs" of religious verse.[40]

Perhaps the most impressive act of preservation with respects to nineteenth-century American religious verse was Alfred Putnam's *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith* (1875). In his preface, Unitarian clergyman Putnam described his collection as an act of recovery as well as discovery: "I have drawn the offerings," he writes, "from annuals and pamphlets, some of which were printed many years ago; from volumes which have had their day, and are not now easily to be obtained; from precious manuscripts whose content now for the first time see the light; and from other repositories where not a few of the treasures which are here gathered have long lain buried, and were in more or less danger of remaining quite neglected."[41] *Singers* presents 561 such "offerings" of the "devotional spirit," selected from three generations of Unitarian poetry: the "rational, yet Christian" poets of "older Unitarian piety" (e.g. Henry Ware, John Pierpont, and Bryant), the first Transcendentalists who "sought [God] in the inward life and the soul's oneness" (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Jones Very, and James Freeman) and the disciples of the "radical theology" whose poetry was tinctured with the light of "mystical…insight" (William Channing Gannett and John White Chadwick).[42] The collection served to introduce new Unitarian writers (like

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[40] *The Changed Cross and Other Religious Poems* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph and Co., 1870), i.
[41] *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith; Being Selections of Hymns and Other Sacred Poems of the Liberal Church in America* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1875), v. Subsequent quotations can be found on pages v-xiii, unless otherwise noted.
[42] This grouping of the stages of Unitarian "spiritual expression" is suggested, and briefly described, by George Willis Cooke in *Unitarianism in America: A History of its Origin and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 243-4.

Chadwick) while reminding readers of the literary origins of the liberal movement, adding "new value" to the early verse of those like Charles Sprague whose work had, by 1875, almost disappeared from print.[43]

Singers exceeded (in number) all earlier attempts by Unitarians to document the period's sacred verse, including Stephen Bulfinch's *The Harp and the Cross* (1857). It is even more impressive when we consider that, unlike Cheever, Putnam did not need to cross denominational lines in order to fill his collection. The writers highlighted in *Singers and Songs* were almost all self-avowed Unitarians and those, in Putnam's words, "Theists and others [who] verge near the Evangelical Faith refused to accept any sectarian name or be identified with any sectarian organization." In contrast to the sometimes amorphous results of the religious collections by Cheever and the Unitarian Bulfinch, *Singers and Songs* strong "liberal" identity both reflects the increase in religious verse during the late antebellum and post-War periods and emphasizes that, while Reformed thinkers like Cheever "reigned supreme…in the realm of elite public discourse," liberal thinkers lead the century in literary productivity, especially in respects to religious lyrics written for both public and private occasions.[44] Additionally, Putnam's characterization of his chosen "religious" verse is elastic enough to encompass a wide variety of American lyrics but remain recognizably "liberal":

> [These poems] reveal, as a class, a strong faith…in God as the Father; a love of all that is grand and beautiful in Nature; a deep conviction that a divine hand is in all things, and is guiding all things on to a glorious…end; a profound and earnest reverence for Christ and a heartfelt recognition of

[43] See the unsigned review of *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith* in *Old and New* ed. Edward Everett Hale Vol. 11. No. 4. April 1875, 468.
[44] Noll, *America's God*, 255.

> his Cross as the emblem and pledge of victory; a genuine "enthusiasm for humanity" and a large and genial sympathy and fellowship with all…souls in every sect or communion.

As we have seen, the claim of literary "catholicity" was a familiar one on the part of editors of the period's religious verse. But this passage is notable for its clear expression of several interrelated aspects of a distinctive approach to religious verse which can characterized as "Unitarian." These aspects include the primacy of God as "Father," a belief in the objects of Nature as analogous to workings of divine love, and a conviction in Christ's "emblematic" function, all of which deeply move the reader in the act of contemplation towards "a genial sympathy…with all souls in every sect and communion."

Sympathy, in particular, was a byword in Unitarian discourse for an important element of religious experience; for Putnam as well as for many other Unitarian ministers turned editors and poets, sympathy and its associated feelings were replacements for the "narrowness" of doctrine and creed. Many of Putnam's highlighted poets wrote and preached extensively on the role of sympathy in the Christian life. The author of six poems included in *Singers and Songs*, Thomas Wentworth Higginson published *The Sympathy of Religions* (1871) in which he declared religious tolerance as Christianity's highest virtue and "exclusiveness" as its "one unpardonable sin."[45] When asked how a preacher could "affect others" and what "the secret of his power over his audience" was, Unitarian minister William Channing Gannett answered, "Sympathy—sympathy

[45] *The Sympathy of Religions* (Boston: The Free Religious Association, 1876), 24.

established between them and him by his utterance."[46] His son, William Channing, was considered by Putnam as one of the late century's most accomplished writer of Unitarian poems, especially "The Secret Place of the Most High." In addition, it is sympathy that permits the others aspects of the Unitarian outlook, expressed in the poetry of Putnam's collection—the presence of divine love, the recognition of Nature as teacher, and the use of Christ as a model for moral life—to cohere. Paradoxically, the Unitarian, by believing that nothing in his faith is "indispensible" for his salvation (and thereby avoiding religious controversy), experiences a "zeal" that, according to the author of *Reasons Why I am a Unitarian* (1860), is based on a "*sense of want*, not a string of theological conclusions"; this zeal is felt "not as a creed, but a sympathy," a crucial difference which , according to Higginson, distinguishes Unitarian faith from that of Trinitarian doctrine.[47] While it has far too many permutations to define definitively, "sympathy" appears to Putnam as "the religious truth" of his chosen devotional poems, an important element which he hoped would produce not the "solemn considerations" (in Cheever's words) of sin and death but the desire to join the larger community of Christian believers.

At the heart of Putnam's desire to "awaken" devotional feelings was the hymn. "There is but little heresy in hymns," he wrote, "It is only the trust and love…of the soul, which are deeper than our speculative opinions and ecclesiastical preferences." The idea that the hymn could transcend denominational prejudice was often expressed in American hymnals and periodical reviews. Anna Warner, in her preface to *Hymns of the Church Militant*, introduced her selection of sacred lyrics by suggesting that while in

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[46] William Channing Gannett, *Ezra Stiles Gannett: 1824-1871, A Memoir* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1875), 64.
[47] John R Beard, D.D., *Reasons Why I am an Unitarian, In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 1860), 63-4.

"prose one denomination will war with another," hymns capture "the living words of deep Christian experience" and "tell that the Church is one."[48] Editors often sought hymns from multiple denominational sources, as one compiler of hymns who "[took] advantage in the forms of the Episcopal Church, in the silent worship of the Quaker, in the Congregational singing of the Lutheran and the Methodist, and in the Extempore prayer usual in our New England churches"[49]

But, for many other editors of religious anthologies, hymns appeared to do more than rise above the "din of clashed belief"; they also provided readers with a template for private devotion. "Domestic worship is the time and occasion for the hymn," wrote a reviewer from the Unitarian periodical *The Monthly Religious Magazine*, "Some book of devotional poetry…should be ever at hand, should always accompany the Bible and the liturgy in the delightful ritual of the family altar."[50] In Putnam's collection as well as other collections of nineteenth-century religious lyric, it is often difficult to distinguish the difference between hymns which were designed for a liturgical setting and those intended for "domestic worship," since the term "hymn" could apply to the verse of public worship *and* private devotion, as it did for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his brother Samuel.[51] Henry, the most popular poet of his generation, wrote verse for liturgical settings, including a hymn for Samuel's ordination. Yet it was Samuel who did most (in Putnam's words) "to make richer...the musical and devotional element of worship." From 1840-1860, he edited (along with the Rev. Samuel Johnson) several

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[48] Anna Barlett Warner, *Hymns of the Church Militant* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858), iv.
[49] *Service Book for the Use of the Church of the Disciples*. (Boston, Benjamin H. Greene, 1844), vi.
[50] Unsigned review of *Hymns of the Ages*, 1865. *The Monthly Religious Magazine*. Vol. 33. No. 1., January 1865, 1.
[51] For a discussion of the "fluid" categories in the 'devotional,' 'religious,' or 'secular' reading" in American religious anthologies, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 287-335.

works of hymnody including a small but important collection of Vesper songs in 1859. One of his Vesper hymns which Putnam anthologizes, "Again as evening shadow falls," illustrates how nineteenth-century hymns refused to be dichotomized into public or personal spheres; additionally, as it confirms elements of the Unitarian outlook, it also reveals a bond with “secular” poems, particularly those written by his brother Henry:

> Again as evening shadow falls,
> We gather in these hallowed walls;
> And vesper-hymn and vesper-prayer
> Rise mingling on the holy air.
> May struggling hearts that seek release
> Here find the rest of God's own peace;
> And, strengthened here by hymn and prayer,
> Lay down the burdens and the care.

By advancing the community's need for rest at the end of the day, the hymn owes more to brother Henry's poem "The Day is Done" (written one year earlier, in 1845) than to the Christian literary tradition of either vesper hymnody or Unitarian doctrine. Located in the village and at the fireside instead within the "hallowed walls" of the church, "The Day is Done" also describes a community's "restlessness" at the end of the day and its pursuit of peace. Even though the peace of mind in "The Day is Done" is found not in tradition ("grand old masters") but in a "simple and heartfelt lay," the poem's declaration that popular verse can soothe the soul is analogous to the hymn's statement that singing can "in the spirit's secret cell...for ever dwell." But the resemblances between the two works extend beyond terminology. The accents sounded by both men, one as a poet addressing

the work of poetry, the other as a minister defending the work of devotion, are identical. Both works credit the important work of silence ("sweeter songs than lips can sing") and individual contemplation (which is akin to "the benediction/that follows after prayer") in liturgical terms. Both writers present a series of "events"—the onset of evening, the singing/reading of a "song," the banishment of anxiety—that culminate in a discovery of peace which editors such as Putnam defined as "religious." By discovering religious peace in the midst of "life's tumult," each writer plays the important role of comforter, offering rest to those who were, in the words of Derwent, the liberal Anglican priest of Melville's *Clarel* "stranded upon an interim/Between the ebb and the flow."[52]

For the liberal hymnists of Putnam's anthology, consolation was as important an element of denominational identity as sympathy, for it stood in contrast to what Jeffrey Vanderwilt described as the "monitory" nature of Reformed hymnody, exemplified by the eighteenth-century lyrics of Watts and Cowper and the "cautionary tales" of Dana and Wilcox.[53] *Singers and Songs* also presents a somewhat more upbeat appraisal of life than does what Ann Douglas has called the "consolation literature of the period," illustrated by poets such as Congregationalist-turned-Episcopalian Lydia H. Sigourney; like Sigourney's poems which detail the parental grief over the loss of a child, Sprague's "Death of an Infant" and Charles T. Brooks' "Death of a Young Man" belong to a religious literature that is "domestic and personal," which remind the reader that "everyone will be forced sooner or later by the death of a loved one…to turn from public

[52] The phrase "din of clashed belief" is from Herman Melville, *Clarel*. eds. Harrison Hayford, Walter E. Bezanson, Hershel Parker. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 3.21.98.
[53] See Jeffrey Vanderwilt, "Singing about Death in American Protestant Hymnody" in *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology*. Eds. Richard J Mouw and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 179-205.

to private considerations."[54] But the consideration of, and preparation for, death was not a frequent preoccupations within the denominational culture of the Longfellows. Henry Ware Jr., Mary Whitwell Hale, James Freeman Clarke and others Unitarian hymnists of Putnam's collection who wrote in the fifty years between 1825 and 1875 seldom focused on "death of the grave" as Watts had or offered "prospective[s] over the river" but instead attempted to give their readers "views of the divine providence, of the work of Christ…as present and *here*."[55] The template of religious experience offered by the religious poets of Putnam's *Singers and Songs* guided readers in their hour of "domestic worship," out of the "gloom" of belief in "sin from necessity," and into the direct presence of Christ.[56]

Unless we recognize how mutually dependent the judgments of American orthodox and liberal devotional lyrics were upon each other, we cannot fully understand how *Singers and Songs* (or *American Common-place*) constructs the "religious" for its readers. What "religious" meant to Putnam and other Unitarian writers is intelligible only against the background of Reformed orthodoxy. Though frequently present in the period's theological discourse, orthodoxy of the kind we associate with the Reformed churches was almost completely absent (if Cheever's collection, or the dearth of Reformed anthologies of religious verse after 1831, are any indication) in nineteenth-century devotional lyrics; editors like Cheever, Schaff, and Horatio Hastings Weld, editor of *Pearls of Sacred Wisdom* (1869) had to make do with what little they had available. Furthermore, Putnam and other Unitarian poets and purveyors of liberal literature were

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[54] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 203.
[55] Unsigned review of *Hymns of the Ages*, 4-5.
[56] The phrase "sin from necessity" was originally Martin Luther's but was commonly used by Unitarians to identify the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. See, for example, Jared Sparks, *An Inquiry in the Comparative Moral Tendency of Trinitarian and Unitarian Doctrines; in a Series of Letters to Rev. Dr. Miller of Princeton*. (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823), 290.

compelled to refer frequently to the "orthodoxy" which they had rejected. If we remember that a large part of the energies of Cheever's denominational culture resulted from a perceived Unitarian encroachment on New England churches—Andover Seminary was established in 1808 after an Unitarian was appointed as professor of theology at Harvard in 1805—then it becomes clear that each group needed the other to make sensible whatever loose confederation of ideas it held regarding the judging and compiling of religious verse. *The American Common-place* with its attention to the "spirit of the Bible" and the "solemn considerations of [the soul's] future destines" attempted to counteract the "cold" (read: liberal) devotions of a poetry which was stripped of its awareness of sin and the imminence of death; *Singers and Songs*, on the other hand, claimed both to prevail over what Unitarian minister Joseph Henry Allen described as the "imperative, absolute" and "terrible…system of Orthodoxy" and to stand "on a liberal ground" composed of the interrelated elements of "catholicity," sympathy, and consolation.[57]

George Willis Cooke and *The Poets of Transcendentalism*

In her memoir A *New England Girlhood* (1889), the American poet Lucy Larcom illustrated the formative power that this template could have on religious experience. "Almost the first decided taste of my life was the love of hymns," she recalls in her account of childhood, "Committing them to memory was as natural as breathing."[58] These same hymns ("of Watts' and Select"), however, occasion her first brush with religious despair: "I was told…that I did not love God [because] I was not good."

[57] *Ten Discourses on Orthodoxy* (Boston: W.M. Crosby and H.P. Nichols, 1849), 7.
[58] *A New England Girlhood: Outline from Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Comp, 1887), 58-73.

Despair is finally driven away by a "strange minister" who visits her church and tells Larcom, "He is alive! He is your best friend and He will show you how to be good!" Leaving behind "the thumb-worn "Watts," the young girl learns to embrace the "religious" through the more gentle strains of her "chosen hymns" and "the fragrance of clover-blossoms, and the songs of blue-birds and robins, and the deep undertone of the sea." Larcom's account reveals how the outlook of liberal religious lyrics could release the devoted reader from the bondage of "Calvin's creed." But, in doing so, it could also throw that reader *beyond* what Emerson identified as the "pale negations" of Unitarianism and into a world in which "religious feeling" is indistinguishable from the objects of nature and the authority of the individual spirit. Larcom herself admits as much in her memoir's introductory remarks: "To me, the reverent faith of the people I lived among and their faithful everyday living was poetry; blossoms and trees and blue skies were poetry; God himself was poetry."[59]

The liberal understanding of "religious" as presented in Putnam's anthology would be altered by changes within Unitarianism, namely by the movement of Transcendentalism. *Singers and Songs* included poets who we today consider key figures of Transcendentalism, including Jones Very, but the movement would produce its own "religious" verse. As the first anthology of Transcendentalist poetry, George Cooke's *The Poets of Transcendentalism* (1903) looks back at over half a century of verse, "much of it [having] not been republished," and monumentalizes the "poetical output of [the] movement." Unlike several of the anthologies discussed in this chapter, its aim is not devotional, but, as Cooke writes, "If the collection has a large number of religious poems, it is because this movement was deeply religious in its nature and in its influence."

[59] Larcom, *A New England Girlhood*, 10.

Several of Cooke's inclusions signals a shift in tone from Putnam's compilation of "strong faith," especially with regard to his focus on lyrics that had a "profound and earnest reverence for Christ" (Christ is seldom mentioned in the poems of Cooke's selected authors). Cooke retained several of Putnam's liberal voices but adds to the chorus, among others, Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, Christopher Pease Cranch, and Henry David Thoreau.[60] In the collection's introductory remarks, Cooke chooses Emerson as Transcendentalism's representative poet and "The Problem"—"a statement of [the] doctrine of direct personal inspiration"—as its representative poem.

Identified by one of Emerson's biographers as the poet's "most magnificent glorification of the religious spirit," "The Problem" opens by declaring the vocation of the ministry being without merit. [61] "Yet not for all his faith can see," Emerson's speaker confesses, "Would I that cowled churchman be." The poem details the superiority of nature over religious tradition ("Out from the heart of nature rolled/The burdens of the Bible old") and argues, in Cooke's words, "the actual faith of the Transcendentalist [which is that] 'self-reliance' *is* God-reliance." With "The Problem" as his paradigm of authentic faith, Cooke reformulates the "religious" as "self-reliance." In so doing, he reflects how the period enlarged the scope, and diminished the application, of what it considered "religious." By authenticating individual conscience as evidence of the divine, Cooke, along with poems such as Cranch's "I in Thee and Thou in Me," and Thoreau's "Conscience," claimed to cast a wider net over the lyrics of religious feeling. But by suggesting that "self-reliance," or (in the language of Thoreau's "Conscience")

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[60] *The Poets of Transcendentalism: An Anthology with Introductory Essay and Biographical Notes*. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1903). Subsequent quotations are taken from pages 1-29 unless otherwise noted.

[61] Ralph Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 314.

"the soul…/true to the backbone/Unto itself alone/And false to none," is the essential component of the religious poetry, *The Poets of Transcendentalism* weakens the elements of sympathy and consolation, elements so vital to the Unitarian outlook on devotion, and renders the term "religious" almost inconsequential. In an effort to legitimate "the values which Unitarianism had concluded were no longer estimable," it mirrored the aim of the British anthologist of American sacred verse who argued that "every true poet is essentially a religious poetry" and proceeded to publish, by way of an example, "Silence" by Edgar Allan Poe.[62]

It is true that earlier anthologies had hinted at such a transvaluation of religion and poetry. J.G. Holland's *Christ and the Twelve; or Scenes and Events in the Life of Our Savior* (1867) is a notable example. But that collection, which aimed "to feed [the] starving imaginations" of its readers by presenting Christian themes through the form of Biblical narrative, consigned the beauty of imagination to the service of devotion; the idea of "religious" was still anchored to a commitment to religious beliefs.[63] *The Poets of Transcendentalism* was the first American anthology of religious verse to reject the traditional application of the term "religious" and embrace openly the theme of "poetry as religion." It defined the "religious" as loosely as Walt Whitman did, when, in his preface

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[62] Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 8; H.G. Adams, *An Cyclopaedia of Sacred Poetical Quotations…*(London: Groombridge and Sons, 1854), xii.

[63] J.G. Holland, *Christ and the Twelve: or Scenes and Events in the Life of Our Savior and His Apostles, As Painted by the Poets* (Springfield, MA: Gurdon Bill and Company, 1867), v. In his introduction, Holland suggests that a change in the popular taste for sacred verse parallels a shift from "religion as a scheme of duty" to a "subtler spirituality" in which "the poetical aspect of religion….is alike a want and a satisfaction." "The new love of sacred poetry" writes Holland, "shows that the popular mind is emerging from the bare practicalities of religion, as a scheme of saving and reforming faith, into a lively apprehension of the divine beauty of the things of God." Yet, as Holland maintains, and his selections, composed by British and American poets in the mode of Biblical narrative form, illustrate, beauty is at the service of religious devotion. The "devotional character" of *Christ and the Twelve* does not aim to satisfy "Christian feeling, Christian desire, Christian worship" alone, but rather, like the various Episcopalian anthologies of the period, offer a devotional "structure" to counter the vagaries of everyday life.

to the 1872 version of *Leaves of Grass*, he meant by the term simply "deep purpose."[64] Adapting "religious" in this way allowed Cooke to promote the "feelings" of his anthologized poets over those of his readers, who, in acts of public worship or private devotion, drew upon religious lyrics for consolation and connection to either their local denominational culture or a wider Christian membership. It represented a shift from a focus on the reader's devotional life to the anthologized poet's "religious feelings," making the collection virtually indistinguishable from its secular counterparts.[65]

This definition of "religious"—which is identical to our current use of the word "spiritual"—was by no means Cooke's invention, but a century-long attenuation of Christian doctrine which was hastened by both American orthodox and liberal thinkers.[66] Nineteenth-century Reformer writers of the "New Divinity" seminaries of Andover and New Haven , who identified themselves as working within the tradition of Jonathan Edwards, attempted to transform the elements of Christian orthodoxy into the language of religious affection, a process Jarislav Pelikan has called "the affectional transposition of doctrine."[67] As we have seen, liberal Christian writers, as participants in the Romantic *episteme,* shared with orthodox reformers a concern for religious feelings; "Of all…forms in which we find Orthodoxy," wrote Unitarian minister Joseph Henry Allen, "we have not controversy, no quarrel…with [their forms] of sentiment and religious feelings [which] finds no difficulty in any of the ordinary religious forms of speech."[68] Starting as

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[64] *Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 1002.
[65] Cf. Edmund Clarence Stedman's *An American Anthology* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1900).
[66] For a study on the shift from "religious" to "spiritual" and the liberal groups who participated in that shift, see Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
[67] *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 122.
[68] *Ten Discourses*, 3-4.

soon as the new century began, when members of each group turned to the judgment and circulation of native poetry, their shared discourse only intensified the debate of the role of verse on their readers' religious affections. Each group knew that the essence of true religion was *more* than feelings or affections but had a difficult time explaining *how* poems which they identified with their denominational culture were anything more than expressions of "generalized emotion and ethical intention."[69] This mutual problem of expression partially accounts for the interdenominational interest in devotion, since the private worship of readers gave religious anthologies their *raison d'être*. By "affirming that the utterance of art is (potentially) just as spiritual as that of the Bible," Transcendentalism, and the spiritual movements which it helped produce, did not solve the long-standing problems between religion and poetry so much as overleap them.[70] Ostensibly, our current literary measure of the "religious" is indebted more to Cooke and the writers like John Burroughs who defined religion as "the sentiment or feeling of awe and reverence in the presence of the vastness any mystery of life" than to the work of editors like Putnam and Cheever.[71] But our appointment of Emerson and Whitman as the twin representatives of American religious poetry—the former the century's great "privatizer of religion," the latter the "Adam" of "religious poetry…in America"—owes a

[69] The comment is from Lionel Trilling, "Wordsworth and the Rabbis" in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent.* Ed. Leon Wieseltier. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 180. The passage reads, "When the dogmatic principle in religion is slighted, religion goes along for awhile on *generalized emotion and ethical intention*…and then loses the force of its impulse, even the essence of its being."
[70] Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 29.
[71] *The Light of Day: Religious Discussions and Criticisms from the Naturalist's Point of View* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1900), viii.

debt to the work of these Christian editors who were wrestling with the issue of religion's relationship with poetry before these poets appeared on the literary scene.[72]

George Rider's *Lyra Americana,* and other Episcopalian Collections

Between the efforts of Cheever (1831) and the publication of *The Poets of Transcendentalism* (1903) lie other attempts to anthologize American sacred lyrics, each with its own variations on disappointment, expectation, and nationalism, as well as a desire to shape denominational affiliation with the era's Romantic temper. One group who made a significant contribution to the literature was comprised of Episcopalians. Contributions include Charles Dexter Cleveland's *Lyra Sacra Americana* (1868), H. Hasting Weld's *Pearls of Sacred Poetry* (1869), C.W. Leffingwell's *Lyrics of the Living Church* (1891), and W. Garrett Horder's *The Treasury of American Sacred Song* (1896). The most notable of these contributions was the earliest, Rev. George Rider's *Lyra Americana* (1864). Rider, in an attempt to collect poems "irrespective of Doctrinal or Ecclesiastical affinities," placed poems of his fellow Episcopal clergymen alongside the works of Unitarians, Baptists, Congregationalists, and even Transcendental mystics. Emerson and Jones Very sit beside the Dutch Reformed minister George Washington Bethune; Longfellow and his brother, Unitarian minister and hymn-writer Stephen share space with James Russell Lowell and his brother the Episcopalian clergyman Robert Lowell; and the verse of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Margaret Fuller, alongside the hymns of Sarah F. Adams and Sigourney represent the different faiths of women. The

[72] It was Lawrence Buell who called Emerson "the privatizer of religion" in *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 18 and Bloom who announced "Whatever religion and religious poetry is in Europe, or in Africa or Asia, in America it is Whitmanian" in *American Religious Poems*, xlvi.

collection itself demonstrates the variety of Christian verse in a culture often described as given to religious homogeneity.

But like Cheever before him, Rider characterized the scene of American religious poetry as impoverished:

> After a painstaking survey of the whole field, we are driven to the conclusion that the Christian Faith seems incidental rather than intrinsic--an accidental mood rather than an informing spirit. Few of our poets are distinctively or altogether religious. There are volumes of poems written by Christian men and women without the disclosure of the Christian faith: without either the light or the heat of its presence. Again, in other directions, Faith takes the shape of sentiment or of ethical speculation.

Rider's evaluation reflects the various attitudes towards the period's sacred verse made by Reformed and liberal editors but with a difference. Rider does not advocate a stronger adherence to doctrine nor does he blame the "incidental" quality of American Christian verse on its failure to realize "devotional feelings" in the suitable forms of sympathy and consolation. Instead, he deems his country's native verse as "lack[ing] that deep Historical back-ground of Ecclesiastical architecture and tradition—that rich Liturgical usage and feeling...[of] the English school."

Like his Episcopalian contemporaries with whom he shared an interest in native religious verse, Rider was influenced by the ideas of the Oxford Movement, a group of nineteenth-century Anglicans who appealed for a renewal of "catholic" thought and practices within the Church of England. Their appeals were made not only in theological tracts (which earned the group the name "Tractarians") but hymns and devotional poetry

which influenced "a whole new development in hymnody and modified even the well-established Evangelical tradition" in England as well as America.[73] Although American Episcopalism was not affected as profoundly as England by the social and political upheavals of the Oxford movement, religious lyrics written by the key figures of that movement, including John Keble, Issac Williams, and John Henry Newman, shaped the ways in which editors like Rider conceived the possibilities for religious verse in their own country.[74]

The spirit of Tractarian poetry was Romantic, a fact which Newman disclosed in his autobiography published a year after *Lyra Americana*, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865-6). There, Newman, whose conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845 was as powerful an event for nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholicism as Emerson's abandonment of the Unitarian ministry would be for nineteenth- and twentieth-century Christian liberals, described the Oxford movement as both a "re-action" to the "dry and superficial teaching and the literature of the last generation," and a natural development of the new sensibility in the county's religious spirit, quickened by the Romantic literature of Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth.[75] As we have seen, the work of

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[73] G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 5.

[74] For a history of the Oxford Movement's influence on American Episcopalism and culture, see Charles C. Tiffany, *The American Church History Series* Vol. 7, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1899) 456-560; Paul A. Carter *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 187-89; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 184-217; Diana Hachstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Ninteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93-135; and E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 235-8.

[75] *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Ed. Ian Kerr (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 99-100; a good study of the shared characteristics between the Oxford movement and literary Romanticism is Michael H. Bright, "English Literary Romanticism and the Oxford Movement" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 40, 1979, 385-404; a book-length exploration of the connections between the two can be found in Stephen

Coleridge and Wordsworth played a critical role in the ways in which Reformed Calvinists like Cheever understood what constituted a "religious poem." But Rider sought an additional element of the "religious," one as congruent with his denominational culture as (in Melville's words) "that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin" had been for Cheever's. Rider called that element the "Ecclesiastical" and "Liturgical…feeling." In doing so, Rider followed the lead of Anglican theologian and poet John Keble whose *The Christian Year* (1827)--the century's most popular volume of religious verse—presented readers with poems of "sound faith," and promised to create "the sober standard of feelings" by offering, in "authorized formularies…of the Liturgy," a stability for the period's "un-bounded curiosity…and morbid eagerness."[76] As such, it was an attempt, in the form of an anthology, to overcome an impasse created by orthodox and liberals in their debate over what made an American poem "religious." Moreover, collections like *Lyra Americana* were born of a desire to feed "the starving imaginations" of the religiously devout and to "bring [their] thoughts and feelings into more entire unison with those recommended and exemplified" by traditional Christian orthodoxy.

Episcopalian editors of religious poems, as well as the poets they promoted, sought to familiarize readers with Christian teaching in two ways: by selecting poems that treat the themes of the Christian calendar (such as Advent or Lent), the sacraments (Baptism, Holy Communion), church architecture (especially that of the Gothic style), and Anglo-Catholic ritual and worship practice; and by arranging those poems to conform to the liturgical season. Several anthologies of the period arranged their poems

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Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[76] *The Christian Year, Lyra Innocentium, and Other Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), 1; *For* a review of *The Christian Year*'s popularity in the Victorian age, see Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 72-113.

in some fashion different from listing poems by composition date or period and these arrangements reflected their devotional "character, " as is the case with Holland's *Christ and the Twelve* (from the Annunciation to the afterlife) and Schaff's *A Library of Poetry* (from "The Poet" to "The Poet in View of Heaven"). But arrangement for Episcopalians was a key element of the "Liturgical feeling." By evoking the "authorized formularies" of the Prayer Book, Rider's poets, such as Arthur Cleveland Coxe, "display the elemental poetry of *true religion*," which "captivates the imagination without repelling the reason."[77] This element of Anglo-Catholic poetry is exhibited perhaps most clearly by novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, who after her conversion to Episcopalianism, penned "Hours of the Night," a collection of seven short poems, each representing an hour of Easter Vigil in which the faithful anticipate Christ's resurrection. Rider's own "Easter-Day," a blank verse meditation that combines autobiography with neo-gothic monumentalism, shows how liturgical observance could offer a poem a form it might otherwise be missing. As Rider's speaker approaches the church where "unseen things of God/Verge nearest to our darkened sphere," he encounters sacramental objects and a world which mirrors the eternal. Unlike the treatment of worship in a majority of the period's poetry, the poem claims that traditional worship service—the Te Deum, the "old, primal creed, the celebration of the Eucharist—does not stand at odds with the subjectivity of the Romantic *episteme*. "Easter Day's" template of religious experience is

[77] Arthur Cleveland Coxe, *Christian Ballads. (Philadelphia: L. Johnson and Co., 1847), vii-ix.*

repeated by *Lyra Americana's* other Episcopalian contributors, including Bishop George Washington Doane, James Wallace Eastburn, and William Croswell.[78]

But even Rider recognized that the "liturgical feeling" so prized by Anglo-Catholic thinkers and poets was not congruent with the presence of the larger religious spirit of American poetry. That spirit, Rider confessed, derived from the contemplation of "Nature": "All her sweetest inspirations have come down like life-blood into our sacred verse." Rider established this fact, as Cheever, Putnam, and Cooke would, by publishing the nature verse of Whittier, Emerson, Very, and Bryant, around which his anthology added the scaffolding of his denominational culture. William James identified this need to arrange religious experience through the "sacerdotal system" of Anglo-Catholicism as the central component of the "ecclesiastical imagination." In contrast to this imagination (of which Newman was the chief exemplar) James placed the imagination of evangelical Protestantism which boasts how "man in the bush with God may meet." The allusion to Emerson's poem "Good-bye," united with his description of the aesthetic "richness" of ecclesiastical imagination depicts for James the twin limits of "feeling the Christian scheme." Rider's anthology illustrates—by necessity and perhaps even in the spirit of "catholicity"—both schemes and, as such, joins in spirit those anthologies by Cheever, Putnam, and Cooke that attempt to portray the "religious" in the country's native verse.

[78] Many of these Episcopalian poets were unknown outside the precincts of the church's local culture. See unsigned review of *Lyra Americana* in *Littell's Living Age* Vol. 31, October-November 1865, Boston: Littell, Son, and Company, 421.

Chapter Two:

"Sick Soul, New Phasis": The Calvinist-Romantic Imagination of Richard Henry Dana Sr.

With many other American poets of his generation, Richard Henry Dana (1787-1879) faced the challenge of writing lyrics that united "religious and poetical spirit...not merely moral in principle, but devotional in *feeling*"[1] The devotional lyrics of poets like Dana, as highlighted in our last chapter, played an important role in the establishing of native American literature; not only did these lyrics make and reflect the changing tastes of readers, but poets such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, Lydia Huntley Sigourney, John Pierpont, and Carlos Wilcox "provide[d] a fresh ministry of spiritual strength and comfort" to American readers.[2] Although Dana was an active beneficiary of this circulation of devotional lyrics, his aims were even more ambitious. In an age he called "Christian" in name "but skeptic at heart," Dana wrote for the "man [who] cease[d] to be superstitious without learning to be religious."[3] His poetry illustrates a deep concern for what he called "the present['s] paralyzing effect upon the imagination."[4] No American poet before Emerson, in fact, gave as strong a voice as Dana did to the powers of the imagination in a country "more hungry for its future than addicted to its past."[5]

Five years before the publication of Emerson's "Nature," the anthologist George

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[1] George Cheever, *Studies in Poetry* (Carter and Hendee, 1830). V.
[2] Alfred P. Putnam, *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith*. (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1875), Vii.
[3] " Natural History of Enthusism" in *Poems and Prose Writings in Two Volumes*. Vol. 2 (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 384
[4] "The Past and the Present" in *Poems and Prose Writing*, 2:231.
[5] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1984). 20

Cheever ranked Dana at "the head of all…American poets."[6] His emphasis on the soul and its emotion, placed against a background of sin and "the solemn consideration" of death, made him appear to Cheever (and other orthodox Christians) as a faithful recorder of American Calvinism. But his earlier role as writer for *The North American Review* positioned Dana at the fulcrum of the shifting sensibilities in the first two decades of nineteenth-century American Romanticism. As such, the poet was a citizen of two worlds, a fact illustrated by Dana's most anthologized poem, "The Little Beach Bird":

> Thy wail,--
> What doth it bring to me?
>
> Thou call'st along the sand, and haunt'st the surge,
> Restless and Sad; as if, in strange accord
> With the motion and the roar
> Of waves that drive to shore,
> One spirit did ye urge,--
> The Mystery, --The Word.[7]

The speaker of this passage suggests all the permutations of Dana's twofold identity as Calvinist and Romantic: the questioning of Nature's lessons, the solitary speaker's tentative, almost equivocating, voice, the attention to the background of "guilt, remorse, and despair." The appearance of "The Word," however, makes clear the bird song's Christological meaning and sets the poem apart from its literary progenitor, "To a

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[6] George Cheever, *The American Common-place Book of Poetry, with Occasional Notes.* (Boston: Russell, Shattuck, and Co., 1831), 130.
[7] Dana, Richard Henry. *Poems and Prose Writings in Two Volumes*. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850). Vol. 1. Lines 11-18. Hereafter poetry cited in text by line-number.

Waterfowl" (1821). Bryant's poem, often anthologized alongside "The Little-Beach Bird," contains no such specific Christian content but instead presents a "Power" who "from zone to zone,/Guides through the boundless sky" the bird's flight, a lesson of providential care to those who, like the speaker, are "lone wandering, but not lost."[8] Being lost, however, is the bird's business in Dana's poem; it takes the speaker's invitation to "quit…the shore" to dispel the poem's tone of "mourning." This elegiac tone contrasts with Bryant's hopeful meditation, a distinction suggested by an early reviewer of the two poets who extolled Bryant's tone as "religious, without the least tinge of gloom" and censured Dana as ill-equipped "to awaken [or] express devotional feeling."[9]

This critical-theological contrast between the two poets was repeated several times throughout their lifetimes, until the end of the century when dominant American criticism seldom discussed the merits of poetry using what Jane Tompkins identified the language of "religious controversy" based on "doctrinal grounds."[10] Without these grounds, comparisons between the two poets ceased. However the receptions of each writer were markedly different. While alive, William Cullen Bryant was widely celebrated as the century's greatest American poet; his collection of verse *Thanatopsis and Other Poems* (1821) has been often cited by critics as "the first great book of American verse."[11] While not our most prized poet, Bryant has become nineteenth-century America's "first poet" of American Romanticism and a harbinger of the

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[8] *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant,* ed. Henry Cady Sturges and Richard Henry Stoddard (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1903), 26-7.
[9] Unsigned review of *The American Common-Place of Poetry with Occasional Notes* by George B. Cheever. *North American Review,* Oct. 1831, (Vol. 33, Issue 73), 301.
[10] *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860.* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1985), 21.
[11] Dana Gioia, "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism" In *The Columbia History of American Poetry,* ed. Jay Parini (New York: Columbia U.P., 1993), 75.

transcendental poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson. More importantly, his devotionally-tinctured poems represent for us the important beginnings of the "spiritualization" of American religious sensibility. Leigh Eric Schmidt has recently described this process of "spiritualization" as the significant redefinition of Protestant practices during the nineteenth century by religious liberalism. "Almost from first to last," Schmidt writes" [it] charted a path...away from the old 'religions of authority' into the new 'religion of the spirit.'"[12] If poems such as "Thanatopsis" and "To a Waterfowl" do not fit seamlessly into the "new religion of the spirit," they, at the very least, anticipate the devotional verse of Jones Very and the "meditation" movement led by Felix Adler and Henry Wood.

Dana, on the other hand, has largely been forgotten. Apart from the occasional anthologizing of his two "bird" poems, "The Dying Raven" and “The Little-Beach Bird," he has almost vanished entirely from the American landscape. Having arrived in the public eye almost fully formed, Dana enjoyed immediate recognition from his peers: Bryant said of his first effort, "You have come into your own poetical existence in full strength."[13] John Greenleaf Whittier called Dana's "The Buccaneer" one of the two greatest poetic achievements of the Romantic age (the other was "Thanatopsis"—the two poets were often yoked together in the minds of many Americans). But even as it ascended, Dana's star was outshone by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier himself, who were taking their place in the constellation of America's new poetry. Furthermore, the religious roots of the “antebellum present” laid down by Dana and his intellectual circle (which included Cheever and Marsh) were largely uprooted by

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[12] *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 7.
[13] Quoted in *Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant*. ed. Parke Godwin (New York: D. Appleton and Comp., 1883), 215.

the theological thought of Channing and Emerson, men who shaped the New England literary culture that we take as the face of nineteenth-century American Romanticism today.[14]

This chapter reconsiders Dana by taking seriously the "doctrinal grounds" on which his early reputation was founded. It focuses on four of Dana's poems—"Daybreak" (1827), "The Dying Raven" (1825), "Fragment of an Epistle" (1826), and "Thoughts on the Soul" (1829)—and examines the ways in which these "meditative abstractions" balance the doctrines of the New England theology with the demands of Romantic thought and its "new objects of worship." Although these poems seldom square orthodoxy with poetic innovation successfully, they testify to the tension between devotion and literary imagination and acknowledge the struggles of faith without yielding to the sometimes-easy temptations of sentimentalism, skepticism, or despair. Despite failing to be "culturally productive," or to exert influence on the direction of nineteenth-century theology or American poetry, these poems represent one of the few examples in post-Revolutionary America literature of a Romantic devotional poetry committed to an established faith-tradition.[15] Tracing *how* that commitment is articulated is a crucial part of understanding the period's sometimes multivalent attitudes about Christian tradition and literary imagination.

"The Demon of Calvinism"

Dana viewed early nineteenth-century American culture as preoccupied with the present and neglectful of its past. "There is nothing *old* under the sun!" he exclaimed,

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[14] Marek Wilczynski, "*Lumen Obscurum*: Coleridge and the Conservative Romantic Theology in New England," *American Transcendentalist Quarterly* 20 (December 2006): 599-610.
[15] Wilczynski, 607.

reversing the Solomonic touchstone, in his essay "The Past and the Present."[16] Man needs imagination, and imagination, as Dana understood it, needs the past. Without it, “the actions of [our] minds are outward,” observational, and “justle aside reflection.” Reflection, what Dana called “meditative abstraction,” helps us escape the terror of “unrelated existences” of the present. Ostensibly, Dana's preoccupation with the past appears a foil to Ralph Waldo Emerson's later call to "enjoy an original relation to the universe," "a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition."[17] But years before the publication of "Nature,” Dana disputed Emerson's "dichotomy between tradition and insight" and endeavored to find in the past that "spiritualizing power" which belonged to the heart and to the imagination. In attempting to square what he called "the new phasis" of Romantic thought with traditional Christian orthodoxy, Dana anticipated the work of other American Christian Romanticists including James Marsh and Caleb Sprague Henry. Like them, Dana saw in British Romanticism, especially in Wordsworth and Coleridge, a "companionable form," a resolution to the impasses between traditional faith and modern thought. However, Dana endeavored to answer the religious problems of his age in verse, not syllogisms, making him a unique (and therefore valuable) figure in annals of antebellum poetry: nineteenth-century America's most recognized "Calvinist" poet was also one of its most fiercely Romantic.

As descendents of Anne Bradstreet and long-time members of the First Orthodox Congregationalist Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Richard Henry Dana and his family were no strangers to religious conversion. Their parish, established in 1632, was home to the first generations of New England Puritans who believed, along with their

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[16] 2.15
[17] “Nature” in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America), 7.

first minister, Thomas Hooker, that the work of conversion was "the most mysterious of all the works of God."[18] Although the outbursts of evangelical enthusiasm and religious conversion which marked the period of the first Great Awakening in America were more muted at First Parish, the church experienced its own quiet reformation. Under the leadership of Nathaniel Appleton and Timothy Hilliard, First Parish shifted away in the 1700s from Calvinistic doctrines and towards a Proto-Unitarian Arminianism. This shift began a long "cold war" within First Parish between emerging Unitarians and orthodox Trinitarians, which lasted well into the nineteenth century. In 1827, the Dana family found themselves in the midst of controversy. In a gesture which was enacted in several other New England churches, the Dana's minister Abiel Holmes barred Unitarian preachers from the pulpit. Two years later, Rev. Holmes was driven out and First Parish officially joined the Unitarian community.

In a painful decision, the Dana family left the building in which nine generations of their ancestors had worshiped and join Holmes and other traditional Congregationalists in founding the Shepard Congregationalist Society (named after the "soul-melting preacher" of their past).[19] A member of the Dana family donated land for the new church building which was built on the northwest corner of Mount Auburn Street, just below the site of the city's first schoolhouse. Shepard Congregationalist Church became a new home for the "very orthodox [and] zealous" who, like the poet Washington Allston (who was also Dana's brother-in-law), desired traditional Christian worship and "a strong

[18] Quote attributed to Thomas Hooker, compiled in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*. Compiled by Martin H. Mansen. (London: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001), 52.
[19] Quoted in Moses Coit Tyler, *A History of American Literature During the Colonial Period, 1607-1765* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1879), 207.

defense of Trinitarianism."[20] Dana's oldest son Richard, who would go on to become the celebrated writer of *Two Years Before the Mast*, described the move as part of a "great and stirring effort to re-establish Orthodoxy in Boston." But to him the move was less disruptive than his father's own conversion and role in the Unitarian controversy. In a letter to his wife written years after the move, Richard described how his father's new found faith placed the family under a "cloud" which lasted throughout his youth. He urged his wife to read his correspondences of that time (she had found a box of letters while he was away) in order to see how he "lived, acted, felt before the demon of Calvinism and Revivalism got hold upon the family..." He concluded, "The effect of those years on us all, and especially on Father, never can be quite erased."[21]

Dana joined the Orthodox Congregationalists at a time when the denomination was losing its grip on New England culture and religious thought; New England Congregationalists had been steadily losing influence for almost a decade. Its ambition to end Unitarian influence was entering into its third decade and failing. When Dana wrote for *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*, a periodical one historian has called "the Unitarian-baiting organ" of Boston, he was participating in an exhausted, protracted battle which appeared to have little effect on the minds and habits of practicing orthodoxy.[22] Although Congregationalist and Presbyterian writers controlled "elite public discourse," it was the Unitarians (and later the Transcendentalists) who controlled literary discourse, including poetry.[23] Furthermore, Dana's active engagement with the theology of John Calvin

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[20] Moses F. Sweeter, *Allston* (Boston, Houghton Osgood, 1879), 133.
[21] Quoted in Charles Francis Adams, *Richard Henry Dana*: *A Biography* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1891), 20.
[22] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1930), 570.
[23] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002), 255; for the Unitarian literary triumph see William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought: 1810-1835* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 173.

emerged at the end of a decade in which American Calvinistic thought was (in the words of Mark Noll) "with a great rush, broadened, deepened, diversified, and fragmented."[24] Dana's imaginative work, especially "Thoughts on the Soul," reflects both these realities—the failures of the Congregationalist to diminish Unitarian influence and the fragmentation of Calvinistic thought—in remarkable ways. Before we examine this work, we turn to the question of Dana's conversion and his contemporary reception as the "Calvinist" poet.

Biographers suggest that Dana's conversion was instantaneous, a result of attending revival meetings led by Lyman Beecher, the evangelical preacher who traveled to New England to "deliver it from immorality."[25] Yet Dana's poetry hints that the conversion was more gradual. Of the four poems published in the *New York Review*, three ("The Dying Bird," "Fragment of an Epistle," and "The Husband and Wife's Grave") were written before the winter of 1826 (the commonly-held season of his conversion). These poems offer a glimpse of a man who, if not wholly persuaded of, was strongly attracted to Christian orthodoxy. "The Little-Beach Bird" was published in April 1826. That poem, with its proclamation of "The Mystery,-the Word" cannot be understood unless placed within a traditional Christological context. The remaining poems published in Dana's first poetic volume (1827) were "The Buccaneer," "The Changes of Home," "The Pleasure-Boat," "A Clump of Daises," and "Daybreak." Although it is possible Dana wrote them all within the span of one year, it is more probable that he composed these five poems during his and his church's turbulent conversion. Of these poems, only "Daybreak" displays a singular concern for Christian

[24] Noll, *America's God*, 293.
[25] Doreen Hunter, "America's First Romantics: Richard Henry Dana, Sr. and Washington Allston" in *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1, (March 1972), 17.

thought and devotion. "The Buccaneer," which was to go on to become Dana's most popular poem, and "Changes of Home" are longer narrative poems, modeled in part after Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Marnier." They received from that poem Coleridge's sense of guilt and spiritual anxiety and tell their stories against what William James called a "background of sin" (an important feature of Dana's work which I will return to shortly).

How influential was Calvinism on Dana's work? Dana's first critics insisted that it was the spring from which his poetry flowed. "They will understand him best," wrote one reviewer, "who have groped their way through New England Calvinism."[26] Another reviewer wrote, "Dana's psychological insights were the result of his belief in Calvinism and spiritual redemption."[27] Julian Hawthorne, whose had inherited his father Nathaniel's preoccupation with the religious history of New England, praised Dana for his ability to capture "a truly Calvinistic conception of the reality of sin."[28] Edward Percy Whipple said of "The Buccaneer," "The truth would seem to be that Dana's over-powering conception of the reality of sin—a conception almost as strong as that which fixed in the imagination of Jonathan Edwards—interferes with the artistic disposition of his imagined scenes and characters..."[29] By using the term "Calvinism" or "Calvinistic," these nineteenth-century reviewers were not acknowledging Dana's strict adherence to theological principles as set down by John Calvin. Rather, they used the term as George Santayana would when, in his 1911 lecture "The Genteel Tradition in American

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[26] George Washington Peck, *American Whig Review* (Jan. 1850): 70.
[27] Reverend Nehemiah Adams, *Literary and Theological Review* (June 1834): 234.
[28] This appraisal, which is included in a 1891 school text book entitled simply *American Literature*, is quoted in *The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors*, Vol. VII, ed. Charles Wells Moulton (New York: Henry Malkan, 1910), 157.
[29] *Poets and Poetry of America, Essays and Reviews, Vol.1*, 1844 quoted in *Library of Literary Criticism*, 155.

Philosophy," he defined Calvinism not as a theology but as a loose grasp of philosophical doctrines as expressed by "the agonized conscience":

> Calvinism...is a view of the world which an agonized conscience readily embraces. Calvinism asserts three things: that sin exists, that sin is punished, and that it is beautiful that sin should exist to be punished....The heart of the Calvinist is divided between tragic concern at his own miserable condition and tragic exultation about the universe at large. He oscillates between a profound abasement and a paradoxical elation of the spirit. To be a Calvinist philosophically is to feel a fierce pleasure in the existence of misery.[30]

Santayana's definition of Calvinism is an example of what had become for many nineteenth-century thinkers the religious past, "the hereditary spirit" that occasionally haunted sensitive minds. In large part, this is the spirit most of Dana's critics disapproved of. "Most of his poetry is grave and much of it religious" wrote one reviewer mid-century.[31] "His theology is to blame," replied Amos Bronson Alcott when asked about Dana's faults.[32]

Throughout the 1800's, the tendency to describe Calvinism as a temperament was widespread. Emerson called this "hereditary spirit" a "disease." "Our young people," he wrote in *Spiritual Laws*, "are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, predestination, and the like." These problems, Emerson argued, were not natural and "never presented a practical difficulty to any man." They were instead "the

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[30] *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana* ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 41.
[31] W.A. Jones, *The American Review*, 1841 quoted in *Library of Literary Criticism*, 155.
[32] Quoted in Doreen M. Hunter, *Richard Henry Dana Sr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 100.

soul's mumps, and measles, and whooping-coughs" contracted by those who went "out [their] way to seek them."[33] For Herman Melville, the "Calvinistic *sense* of Innate Depravity and Original Sin" which he recognized in the short stories of Hawthorne was not a result of a chance meeting but an unavoidable result of the examined life, a "mood" from which "no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free."[34] But for all the important differences between these two attitudes towards sin, Emerson and Melville would have agreed with Santayana that to be a Calvinist philosophically" was not a philosophy at all but a temperament or "mood." Ironically it was Oliver Wendell Holmes, the son of Abiel Holmes, Dana's minister at First Parish in Cambridge, who, in an essay on Jonathan Edwards, composed the one of the century's most scornful and ingenious attacks on Calvinistic thought:

> In studying the characteristics of Edwards...we find so much to remind use of Pascal that...we could almost feel assured that the Catholic had come back to earth in the Calvinist. Both were of a delicate and nervous constitution, habitual invalids....both were alike sensitive, pure in heart and in life, profoundly penetrated with the awful meaning of human existence; both filled with a sense of their own littleness and sinfulness...both singularly powerful as controversialists and alive all over to the *gaudia certaminis*—one fighting the Jesuits and the other the Arminians.[35]

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[33] "Spiritual Laws" in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 305.
[34] "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in Herman Melville and Harrison Hayford. *Pierre; Israel Potter; The Piazza Tales; The Confidence-Man; Uncollected Prose; and Billy Budd, Sailor* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1159.
[35] "Jonathan Edwards" in *The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes* Vol. 8. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1892), 363-4.

By equating it with Catholicism, Holmes, like so many other nineteenth-century thinkers (like Whittier, as we shall see in chapter three), makes Calvinism the "other," the foil against which healthy, often liberal, Protestantism thrives.

Another well-known explication of this agonized conscience can be found in William James' series of lectures on the "sick soul."[36] These lectures contain perhaps the clearest distillation of these nineteenth-century attitudes towards the Calvinist temperament as understood from the emerging perspective of twentieth-century pragmatism. Although James never mentions Calvinism by name, his discussion of those who "cannot so swiftly throw off the burden" of sin recall the prior century's view of (in Melville's words) "Puritanic gloom." [37] His treatment of religious melancholy is more thorough than Santayana's, yet it too proceeds from the premises set down by Emerson's "Spiritual Laws." In the "gospel of healthy-mindedness," writes James, sin is viewed as "a wrong correspondence of one's life with the environment." It is "irrational and *not* to be pinned in, or preserved, or consecrated in any final system of truth." Those with sick souls, on the other hand, experience an "absolute disenchantment with ordinary life" from which there is rarely a full recovery. Until a "deeper kind of consciousness," is reached, resting not in "simple ignorance" but something "vastly more complex," sin becomes for sick souls a constant presence, the "fixed background of their imagination." [38] For James, the figure who exemplified the imaginative energies of the Calvinist temperament best was John Bunyan. "Poor patient Bunyan" continues James, carries for us the "unintelligible and intolerable burden to which one is mysteriously the heir." His was a "typical case of the psychopathic temperament, sensitive of conscience to a diseased

[36] Lectures 6 and 7, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 121-154.
[37] James, *Varieties*, 126.
[38] James, *Varieties*, 127-129.

degree," a man marked by "fearful melancholy self-contempt and despair." And his "religious melancholy enshrined literature" catalogues the other qualities which mark the Calvinist temperament: the unceasing "sense of sin," the uncritical (and sometimes hysterical) reliance on Christian scripture and the enthusiasm mood swings.[39]

Like many American Protestants, Dana identified closely with the works of Bunyan and he found in *Pilgrim's Progress* a mirror that reflected both the travails of his religious and aesthetic conversions. Evidence of this close identification is most explicit in "Daybreak," a *reveille* in nine Spenserians detailing the difficulties of devotion. The poem's epigraph is taken from the passage in which the character Pilgrim, having spent the night in "Peace" (the name of his bedchamber), greets the dawn with song. Yet this epigraph does not include Pilgrim's morning song, one of several examples of verse contained within the prose allegory of *Pilgrim's Progress.* Instead of reproducing Pilgrim's hymn, which praises the "love and care/Of Jesus" the poem, after a brief description of the first appearance of the sun, Dana moves uninterrupted into the speaker's inability to compose the "morning's song":

> Star of the dawning! Cheerful is thine eye;
> And yet in the broad day it must grow dim.
> Thou seem'st to look on me, as asking why
> My mourning eyes with silent tears do swim. (5-8)

"Daybreak" never strays far from the armature of Pilgrim's journey. Although Pilgrim's hymn is replaced by the speaker's failure to greet the morning, this "holy hour" (16) meditation on the "ills and pains of life" (17) exists within a world where (in Bunyan's words) "the weariness of inward sickness" stir up dreams of heaven. "While I to earth am

[39] James, *Varieties,* 147-8.

bound," grieves the speaker, "When will the heavens be mine?" (45). Like Pilgrim, the speaker's absolute disenchantment with the world extends to the lives of others: "When I see cold man of reason proud,/My solitude is sad,--I'm lonely in the crowd" (26-7). And at poem's conclusion, the speaker is absorbed back into the allegory and, without offering a clear resolution to the poem's central problem of devotion, returns to the Pilgrim's bedchamber , where the speaker asks for "Peace, when ends the day;/And let me with the dawn, like Pilgrim, sing and pray" (80-1).

The poem's strong association with Calvinist poetics does not stop with Bunyan. *Pilgrim's Progress* offers a departure point and return, but "Daybreak" recalls the work of Dana's more immediate predecessors. When the Sun confronts the poem's speaker with the fact of Nature's power to dispel grief, he responds:

> I feel its calm. But there's a sombrous hue,
> Edging that eastern cloud, of deep, dull red;
> Nor glitters yet the cold and heavy dew;
> And all the woods and hill-tops stand outspread
> With dusky lights, which warmth nor comfort shed.
> Still--save the bird that scarcely lifts its song--
> The vast world seems the tomb of all the dead;
> The silent city emptied of its throng
> And ended, all alike, grief, mirth, love, hate, and wrong. (19-27)

This passage reveals a cache of associations with Calvinist or Calvinist-influenced British poetry made popular in America during Dana's youth. James Thomson's *The Seasons* supplies the speaker's Miltonic rhetoric. The speaker's likening of this "vast world" to a

"tomb of all the dead" recall the darker subject matter of the Graveyard Poets, especially Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. Both works were American best sellers in 1777.[40] Perhaps the passage (and the poem) owes it greatest debt to the work of William Cowper. Cowper, who wrote the popular Calvinist hymns "God moves in mysterious ways" and "Oh for a closer walk with God," was also the author of *The Task* which was the overall bestselling book in America in 1787, the year Dana was born.[41] Cowper's poetry often details the experiences of unfulfilled spiritual relief and his mental instability was widely recognized. Cheever compared Dana's poetry repeatedly with Cowper and Dana himself cited the poet several times in his essays as an exemplar of the religious writer: "With the exception of Milton, there is no poet [like Cowper] who illustrates his thought from Scripture with so much of the Scriptual Sense of poetry."[42] In his review on Robert Pollack's religious poem *The Course of Time*, Dana used Cowper as a kind of touchstone for the religious poet. "It has been said," he writes, "that Cowper owed his popularity…to the religious character of his writing." But the "religious character" cannot be separated from the poetry since "the entire man, so those who religious principle has led to self-examination…[and] receive right impressions and form true estimates of the essentials of poetry."[43] To be a "religious poet" was to be not a specialized kind of poet, as Eliot has argued, but *the* poet whose power came not of holding orthodox principles and writing verse, but rather "from a feeling as if were from some mysterious impulse communicated to [him] from the soul deep within."[44]

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[40] See Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Bestsellers in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), 45.
[41] Mott, *Golden Multitudes*, 46-7.
[42] *Poems and Prose*, 2: 225.
[43] *Poems and Prose*, 2: 345-6
[44] See T.S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature" in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1960), 343- 354.

In important ways, Dana's remarks on Cowper mirror his own role as a poet of the New England Theology. "Daybreak," as well as many of his other works, illustrates the "Calvinistic Sense" without explicitly forwarding the cause of Calvinism. Putting aside the allusions to Bunyan, the poem contains no unambiguous debt to theology or doctrine but owes its *aporia* to the poetry of Dana's youth. In that poetry, the "religious" was as much a feeling as it was a set of principles. For Dana, as well as for Bryant, whatever religious poetry would become in the hands of nineteenth-century American poets, it would not be identifiable as forwarding the cause of religion but instead contain the "sense" of religion, the "religious feeling," anthologists such as Cheever were searching for. [45] It was also this "sense" that critics identified in Dana as "the agonized conscience," even before the poet had experienced his religious conversion. Ironically, the poems written *before* "Daybreak" contain as many features of orthodox Calvinism, although because these features are buried beneath encrustations of natural observation and moralizing, readers are liable to miss them.

"The New Phasis"

For Dana, the three features of the burgeoning American Romantic criticism that we discussed in chapter one —nationalism, religious revivalism, and a theological-based

[45] A touchstone issue for both men was the influence of Scripture on poetry. In his review of John Hillshouse's "Hadad," Bryant tackles the proper use of the Bible by poets, a matter of "which there has been [lately] must discussion." Published in the same issue of *The New York Review* as Dana's first poem "The Dying Raven," (April, 1825) Bryant's review overlooks the details of this variation on the rebellion of Absalom as related in the second book of Samuel and instead presents "Hadad" as a prelude to a discussion on the congruity between "Holy Writ" and poetry. The marriage between the two, Bryant argues, is fraught with "serious difficulties" both to poet and reader. The review warns the poets of the potentially immobilizing effects of "habitual reverence" and cautions readers of the poem's "impiety." Yet despite the difficulties, the marriage between scripture and poetry is to be wished for. Scripture ought to be as available to the poet as it is "the pulpit orator." If the verse "corresponds" in some way to the original scripture, form was of no consequence. For whether it be dramatic, or narrative, or lyric, a poem that "lends the mind to dwell upon scripture more intently will *naturally* deepen and confirm" the spiritual life of readers.

idiom grounded in self-knowledge and feelings—constituted an "unmistakable shift of spiritual temper" in the environment in which he wrote and thought.[46] This critic turned poet turned critic again played a minor role in affecting the era's attitudes towards poetry and religion. Instead, Dana spent much of his time avoiding becoming overwhelmed by the era's shift in aesthetic and religious sensibility. His relevance as critic is not in the originality of his thought or the relevance of the solutions he proposed. Rather, his value as a reviewer and cultural arbiter consists of the ways in which his critical works "struggle" with problems, many of which were of a philosophical nature, he would later return to in poems like "The Dying Raven" and "Thoughts on the Soul." The limits of our knowledge, our relationship to God and nature, the powers of the imagination, the effects of sin and death: these problems appear frequently in his essays which treat a variety of topics from the limits of theocracy ("Law as Suited to Man") to the uses of old furniture ("Old Times"). But, from the vantage point of his later poems, his prose treatment of this problems appear as tributaries flowing from Dana's one lifelong preoccupation with the "many forms" in which "we try/to utter God's infinity."[47]

As co-founder and literary critic of the *New American Review*, the magazine which would later criticize his poems for lack of form, Dana served as an American conduit for the new modes of thought and sensibility emerging from Europe. As a writer for "the most formidable representative of New England intellectualism," Dana reviewed several examples of the new Romantic literature.[48] In doing so, Dana along with Willard

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[46] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 583. See Ahlstrom's chapters entitled "The Romantic Mood" and "Romantic Religion in New England" (583-614) for a closer look at this period.
[47] Emerson, "The Bohemian Hymn" in *Collected Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of American), 368-9.
[48] John W. Rathbun, *American Literary Criticism: 1800-1860* Vol. 1 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), 16.

Phillips, A.H. Everett, Edward T. Channing, acted as a buffer for some of the revolutionary ideas of the new sensibility since many of these ideas were "seldom indigenous."[49] And in his evaluation of British literature, the issues of devotion, contemplation, and religious verse were never far from his mind.

Of the small circle of American critics writing on British literature, Dana "welcomed" Wordsworth first. His review of William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets* (1819) ostensibly defends the poet from charges of egotism and escapism.[50] Dana's defense of Wordsworth as the architect of "the new condition of things" was a response to Hazlitt's characterization of the British poet as one who "sees nothing but himself and the universe." "Wordsworth," writes Dana, "may be said to have presented poetry under a new phasis." While reading "we are absorbed into *what we are about* in this new condition of things." In that new condition, Dana writes, a "silent change [is] wrought in ourselves" and that the "pleasures, the businesses and the desires of our lives" are revealed as "illusions." Wordsworth "clears our dim imaginations and the poetry of our being becomes its truth." The natural objects upon which his vision directs itself remain what they really are, "the same as seen yesterday" but what has changed is that they "have received a higher life for us." In this higher life "we find a moral strength and from the riot of the imagination comes a holier calm." The achievement of Wordsworth's poetry, insists Dana, is that it is contemplative and religious.

Dana's promotion of the literature of his compatriots was also tinctured with a concern for contemplation and higher truth. His review of American poet Washington Allston (1817) sounded the same accents of the "enlarged philosophy" of Romantic

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[49] Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 584.
[50] *Poems and Prose Writing*, 2:156-267. Dana's evaluation of Wordsworth (261-265) and Coleridge (265-267) occurs at the end of the review.

contemplative verse:

> [The new poetry] teaches us that there is nothing vulgar but vice, and there is scarce an object through the whole of existence that is not in some way poetical to a truly poetic mind...[We] feel anxious for the knowledge of truth on all subjects, as it not only leads us to a right understanding of the particular object of our contemplations, but makes better acquainted with something else; for there is nothing lonely in nature, but each thing is connected with many others, by more ties than those which hold a tree in the ground.[51]

Although unoriginal, passages like these were not yet commonplace in American critical discourse. Neither was the sober yet keen style of Dana's reasoning, a result perhaps of his training in law. The passage makes a case for a liberalizing of the range of poetic materials based on a faith in the principle of analogy. Through the process of analogy, all things are connected, a knowledge of one object, regardless of what that is, leads to knowledge of another object. Herein lies the power of this epistemological principle: through the agent of imagination, it accounts for everything, inversely illustrating Emerson's dictum, " whoever discredits analogy...has not poetic power."[52] As Dana explained it to his readers, this idea of analogy betrays neither traditional Christian thought nor scientific rationalism but is in fact the key to all future (especially American) poetry. Yet affirming that "there is nothing lonely in nature," he grounded his current discussion firmly in Wordsworth's preface for *Lyrical Ballads* and what he called the "new phasis" of Romantic contemplation.

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[51] *Poems and Prose Writing*, 2:106.
[52] *English Traits* in *Essays and Lectures*, 896-7.

Dana admired Wordsworth's confidence in the analogical method which confirmed "there is nothing lonely in nature." He praised Wordsworth's verse and predicted that it would be the model for future American devotional and contemplative verse. Among his contemporaries, the nature of his admiration and praise was unique as it balanced between the competing demands of moral and aesthetic criticism. Despite this admiration, however, when Dana turned from writing criticism to verse, particularly that which depicted the natural world, he was content to adopt a variety of strategies that we associate with more traditional modes of imaginative representation, including typology, allegory, and didacticism. The adoption of these traditional modes within what Dana conceived of as the armature of the contemplative Romantic poem does not appear to be the result of conscious forethought. Yet there are strong hints of a deliberate design. For those hints, we now turn to an examination of Dana's first poem, "The Dying Raven."

"The Dying Raven"

"The Dying Raven," the other bird meditation by Dana, exemplifies the liminal position the poet's thoughts held between, on the one hand, Christian orthodoxy and the objects of traditional devotional poetry and on the other, the emerging Romantic episteme and new "condition of things." Dana believed that the form of contemplative poetry presented by Wordsworth and Coleridge could be readily convertible into devotional poetry, but these poems show the strain of such an ideal.

Even in its earlier incarnation, "The Dying Raven" revealed the tensions which would later mark Dana's religious writing. Originally entitled "The Dying Crow," the poem's central character became a point of contention between Dana and his editor at *The*

New York Review, William Cullen Bryant. Bryant published the poem in 1825 but not before challenging Dana's ornithological observations, substituting "Raven" for "Crow" in the poem's title. He reasoned that the poem's litany of "magnificent titles" given to a bird whose character is "not generally highly thought of" would be greatly improved if it were matched with a bird whose symbolism was widely recognized.[53] After all, the bird of Dana's poem is, like the raven sent by Noah to find dry land, a symbol of hope (Genesis 8: 6-7). Dana responded to the change with a joke: "There is something mighty incongruous to my mind in a man, in the heart of New England, lamenting over a bird which he knows nothing but of Scripture."[54] As a rejoinder, the joke compressed two celebrated commonplaces concerning Romantic poetry in nineteenth-century discourse: nature's superiority to tradition and the authority of personal experience. Ironically, it was Dana's lack of conviction in these commonplaces that constitute a large part of the poem's tension.

If we momentarily set aside our present inquiry, "The Dying Raven" would still call for special attention, if only for its significance to the poet. The lyrics were Dana's first and, next to "The Little Beach Bird," were the most frequently anthologized of all his poems during the nineteenth century. Edgar Allan Poe defended himself against charges of plagiarizing parts of the poem for "The Raven," which included publishing an explication of the metric differences between "The Raven" and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."[55] That the three poems were grouped together in Poe's published defense suggests something of the poem's popularity, especially considering Poe's

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[53] May 25, 1825, in *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. Thomas G Voss (New York: Fordham, U.P., 1992), 183.
[54] Quoted in Hunter, *Richard Henry Dana*, 65.
[55] March 8, 1845, *Broadway Review*, 147-50 collected in *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 709-718.

aversion to Dana's poems. "The Dying Raven" scarcely resembles Poe's meditation on "Despair brooding over Wisdom." But it does have more in common with the themes of moral blindness and redemption found in the Mariner's story of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Simply put, "The Dying Raven" depicts, in the words of its author, a "lamenting over a bird." Its verses can be divided tentatively into three identifiable segments which traditionally mark the lament form: an opening in which the speaker's recollects the past and describes his present environment (1-29), a long middle passage of praise for the dying bird and an invective against death (30-98), and finally an acceptance of death and hope for immortality at the poem's conclusion (99-120). Despite these identifying marks, however, the ethos of the poem appears at odds with its chosen form. "I needs must mourn for thee" the speaker confesses at poem's end, "For I, who have/No fields, nor gather into garners, ---I/Bear thee both thanks and love..."(96-8). This late admission reveals the poem's interest in "lamenting" (a verb in the present progressive tense) over "lament" (a subject or verb in the past tense) and its commitment to portray "dying" before understanding death. In other words, the poem is a *monody* (Gk "alone song") sung by a solitary figure who is not alone, an *epicedium* (Gk "funeral song") sung over a dying, but not yet dead, body. The poem resembles what the "uncouth swain" of Milton's *Lycidas* might have composed if he'd been present on the Irish seas for the drowning of Edward King.

What were "The Dying Raven"'s poetic antecedents? The influence for a majority of Dana's poems written before 1827 can be found in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's collection *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). *Lyrical Ballads,* with its variety of verse

forms captured Dana's imagination early on and held it, even when Dana abandoned verse-writing altogether. His modeling of what is arguably the most important single volume of the Romantic period was prescient and deliberate. In Dana's hands, the story of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" becomes "The Buccaneer" and the folk ballads of Wordsworth provided the "The Pleasure Boat" and "I Saw Her Once" their shape and grammar of thought. Some poems combine two influences, as "Changes of Home" does the blank verse of "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree..." with the dialogic narrative of "The Foster-Mother's Tale," often to mixed results. Naturally, Dana's poems also show the impact of later poems by Wordsworth ("The Excursion" which Dana references at the start of "Changes of Home") and especially the theological thought of Coleridge; they also show glimpses of Keats and even Byron.

"The Dying Raven," however, appears to fall neither within the precincts of *Lyrical Ballads* nor fully outside them. Its blank verse evokes Coleridge's "The Nightingale," although it lacks a fluid conversational style and treats that poem's ideality more as foil than as inspiration. Addressing that poem's central claim—"In nature there is nothing melancholy"—the speaker of "The Dying Raven" begins with the question, "Come to these lonely woods to die alone?" The poem's answer to this opening question is anything but clear. The loneliness and solitude of the dying crow co-exist with the exuberance of the "blessed bands" of the crow's companions. Their activity is described as a jubilant mob-scene but is nevertheless purposeful. They "stand, and sip the streams/Or peering over it—vanity well feigned--;/ At quaint approval seem to glow and nod/At their reflected graces" (15-8). In addition, the crows fill heaven, "on high, bald trees/From varnished cells some peep, and the old boughs/Make to rejoice and dance in

warmer winds" (21-3). The speaker's summarizes their playful movements thus:

> Over my head the winds and they make music;
> And grateful in return for what they take,
> Bright hues and odors to the air they give.
> Thus mutual love brings mutual delight,--
> Brings beauty, life; for love is life,--hate, death.

This opening passage is a pastiche of Romantic verse, most notably Coleridge's line from "Dejection: An Ode.": "O Lady! We receive but what we give, /And in our life alone does nature live" (Dana will return to this conceit several times, most notably in "Thoughts on the Soul").[56] In Dana's hands, however, Coleridge's notion of resonance with nature becomes spectacle. Like the crow who "peers" at his reflection in the stream, nature is too absorbed in its own giving and taking to connect with man. Its "mutual love" is a removed scene from the real world of experience below where a single crow, secluded from the rest of his companions, dies alone on the forest floor.

The allusions to Coleridge (and to a lesser degree, Wordsworth) are intentional, yet the poem does not achieve its "form" by calling into question Coleridgean insight or the ideational structure associated with Romantic lyric meditation. Dana lacked the distance necessary to either refute or develop further the poetics of the "new phasis." But neither does "The Dying Raven" find its respite in natural description alone. Its skepticism concerning the natural world is betrayed by its hesitance, illustrated in the speakers oft-made equivocations of "as if" and "seems." Rather, the poem moves forward by backing away from the meditation; instead of proceeding "inward" the poem

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[56] "Dejection: An Ode" in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 16. Ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 2001), 695-702.

falls back on a method of typologizing. For example, in an attempt to square the experience of nature's fecundity with the apparent cruelty and meaninglessness of the dying crow, the speaker shifts from naturalistic to typological description (and back again) rather suddenly:

> Thou Prophet of so fair a revelation!
> Thou who abod'st with us the winter long,
> ...To speak comfort unto lonely man,
> Didst say to him, though seemingly alone
> 'Mid wastes and snows, and silent, lifeless trees
> Or the more silent ground, it was not death
> But nature's sleep and rest... (29-31, 36-40)

From this stanza in which the dying crow is called "Prophet" to the poem's midway point, the speaker links the bird with several titles. At line 46, the crow becomes "Priest of Nature, Priest of God, to man!/Thou spok'st of Faith." And at line 54, "Preacher to man's spirit!/Emblem of Hope! Companion! Comforter!" Elsewhere it is called "Comforter of Storms," and "King."

These titles place the dying crow within a nexus of Christian traditions in three ways. First, as one who brings "faith," hope," and love (referred to in line 111 as "universal love"), the crow represents the culmination of the three theological virtues found in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:13). Secondly, the poem suggests the presence of the doctrine of the Trinity. As one who is "brought down" for the sake of others, the crow's death is redemptive (as Christ's was). But the crow additionally "showed Paradise and deathless flowers," (God) to the speaker and acted as his

"comforter." (Holy Spirit). Lastly, the titles "Prophet" "Priest" and "King" join the dying crow with the *munis triplex*, or the three-fold office of Christ, a Christological doctrine which interpreted the work of the son of God as mediator.

Of the three traditions, the doctrine of *munis triplex* appears not merely illustrative (as the first two allusions are) but determinative of the poem's *topos*. It is also the only tradition that can properly be called "typological." Typology, it will be remembered, is the study of Old Testament persons, events, or things (called "types"), in light of the life and work of Jesus Christ as documented in the four gospels. St. Augustine defined typology as the claim that "the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New."[57] Its goal was to demonstrate the "dynamic unity of the divine plan of salvation." The study of typology in American literature, especially its use by the seventeenth-century Puritans and its appropriation by nineteenth-century writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville has generated a library of criticism.[58] One of those contributors is Karl Keller who divides nineteenth-century Americans who confront Puritan typology into two categories: those, like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, who "lost faith in Puritan ideology but retained Puritan typological structure of ideas" and those, like Hawthorne, Melville, and Emily Dickinson, who "maintained closer ties with Puritan ideas…but only by dismantling seventeenth-century structures that had come down to them, among them the

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[57] St. Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 2,73 quoted in *Cathechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 36.

[58] See, for example, Ursula Brumm, *American Thought and Religious Typology*, trans. John Hoaglund (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), especially her discussion on Hawthorne and Melville, 111-197 ; Sacvan Bercovitch's essay collections, *Typology and Early American Literature* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), and *The American Puritan Imagination: Essays in Reevaluation* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1974).

typological."[59] Dana fits in neither category comfortably.

The doctrine's greatest champion was John Calvin, who treated Christ's three-fold office of "Prophet, Priest, and King" in Book II of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. There, Calvin makes clear that the doctrine provides an exordium for the *Institutes'* soteriology but also illustrates the teaching's function as "devotion." The recognition of Christ's three-fold office forms for our faith "a firm basis" for Christian living. Understanding Christ by means of his three-fold office, Calvin argues, is to see more fully his lessons of "humiliation and exaltation." By recognizing Christ's kingship, we can "patiently pass through this life with its misery...content with one thing: that our King will never leave us destitute, but will provide for our needs until...we are called to triumph." By acknowledging his priesthood, we are reminded of the death of our only "intercessor," our propitiation for sins, for which we can have full "trust in prayer." Finally, by comprehending his "prophetic dignity" we are led "to know that in the sum of doctrine as he has given it to us all parts of perfect wisdom are contained."[60]

It is not known whether or not Dana read the *Institutes* before (or even after) his conversion in 1827. Since the doctrine's presence reached beyond Calvin's theological works and into the sermons and church confessionals of the nineteenth century, it is possible that Dana never read Calvin but instead encountered this staple of Reformed theology through the Westminster Confession of Faith. There, the doctrine is presented as a detailed paraphrase of Calvin's argument.[61] Yet Calvin's exegesis has been known

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[59] "Alephs, Zahirs, and the Triumph of Ambiguity: Typology in Nineteenth-Century American Literature" in *Literary Uses of Typology*. ed. Earl Miner (New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1977), 302.
[60] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Vol. 1 Ed. John T. McNeill, Trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 11.494-503.
[61] See G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, (New Jersey: Prebyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1964), Chapter 8, sections 1-8, 69-84.

to offer usable form to poets. As Barbara Lewalski has argued, Calvin's use of typology is "central" to his exegesis and "his highly influential hermeneutical recommendations and practice...provided a model for later exegetes—and for Christian poets."[62] "The Dying Raven" shares much with Calvin's own adaptation of the doctrine, especially in the theologian's emphasis on the prophetic office of Christ, and appears even to adopt some of its terminology.

As a representative of Christ, the crow takes on Christ's multiple offices. All the lessons of Christ's "humility and exaltation" are intact in the poem's "exegesis" of the crow's song. What insight is gained from contemplating the bird's death—the need for man to "endure" the "winter long," to "ope his intellectual eye," to not fear death at the end of his life—is analogous to the lessons taught by Christ's work on earth (as understood by Calvin and Reformed theology). Like Christ's, the crow's death is foretold (29-44). Like Christ, the crow teaches that although "seemingly alone" our "solitude" is an illusion (50). The stanza which begins "Thou Priest of Nature, Priest of God," echoes Christ's prayer to God in the Gospel of John (14-17), a passage which Calvin presents as evidence of "reconciliation and intercession" of the priestly office; the crow reminds us that our home is in "Paradise" among the "deathless flowers" for which it "prays" for us "to listen to the flow/Of living waters" (52-4).[63] Even though the lessons sometimes fail to match up seamlessly with their corresponding offices, these differences do not erase the transference of the *munis triplex* onto the bird and its effect on determining the meaning behind its death. For example, when the crow is joined with the office of "king" (lines 54-62) the crow is an "emblem of Hope." As one "low brought down" who

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[62] *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-century Religious Lyric* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1979), 118.
[63] Calvin, *Institutes*, 497.

represents endurance in humiliation and death, the crow resembles priest (in Calvin's terms) more than "king." Additionally, the crow' priestly office resembles more closely Calvin's treatment of Christ's prophetic powers. However, as the triple office gave "structure to the doctrine of the work of Christ as mediator," so too does the doctrine determine the structure to these middle passages.

By prefacing the poem's superstructure of Romantic pastiche, these typological links attempt to ground the otherwise scattered series of impressions depicted by the poem's speaker. Furthermore, the multiple typological references take the speaker out of "real time" and position him within the sphere of biblical history and theology. But to what end? As the poem enters its third and final act, the raven, who has assumed Christological significant by virtue of a variety of typological allusions, has offered the speaker no theological insight; neither has it deepened the understanding nor altered the mood of the speaker. There are select passages that acknowledgment hope in the face of mortality—the forest floor "tenderly makes a bed" for the raven—but avoids the assurances of a peaceful death which marks the elegiac concluding lines of Bryant's "Thanatopsis": "...approach thy grave,/Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch/About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams." Instead, death's approach brings neither redemption nor reformation but bewilderment:

> As I look up to their bright angel faces
> Intelligent and capable of voice
> They seem to me. Their silence to my soul
> Come ominous. The same to thee, doom'd bird
> Silence or sound: For thee there is no sound,

No silence. (78-83)

This passage—one of the most remarkable in Dana's work—compresses together the beatific yet remote vision of nature, the horror of solitary experience and the breakdown of sympathy, and the disenchantment but necessity of faith without evidence. The speaker passes through each one of these phases as his eyes move from the activity of the healthy and blissfully unaware ravens through the emptiness of his affections finally resting in the absence of all sound and vision.

At the poem conclusion, the speaker warns that "who[ever] scoffs at these sympathies/Makes mock of the divinity within...the universal spirit" (107-111). "The universal spirit" is terminology more appropriate in a Transcendental rather than a traditional Christian context. It recalls the "Power" depicted in Bryant's "To a Waterfowl." It also looks ahead to the philosophy-laden poetry of Christopher Pearse Cranch. Three years later, Dana would denounce the idea of a Universal Soul in "Thoughts on the Soul"—"Think'st in a Universal Soul will merge/Thy soul, as rain-drops mingle with the surge?"(145-6)—but even in "The Dying Raven" there is little tolerance for religious universalism.[64] On the contrary, the poem concludes on a note of singularity, summarizing the raven's death as a hermetically-sealed revelation available only to the heart which can read itself: "He who the lily clothes in simple glory, /He who doth hear the ravens cry for food,/Hath on our hearts, with hand invisible,/In signs mysterious, written what alone/Our hearts may read. (114-120) This last allusion to scripture (Matt 6:28) is not enough to dispel the impression that the raven's death as well as the speaker's understanding of that death take place within a world without clear lessons.

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[64] "Thoughts on the Soul," *Poems and Prose*, 1:85-96

" The Dying Raven" is a meditation born of what historian Jaroslav Pelikan called "the crisis of orthodoxy," a period in which "the public and confessional theology of the churches" appeared artificial while a "private 'theology of the heart' emerged as the authentic expression of religious belief.[65] That crisis was an opportunity for imaginative verse since poetry was well-suited to transpose doctrine into affection . But, as the failures of this poem demonstrates, the transposition requires more than meditating on the objects of nature or the powers of imagination and waiting for a reply. Dana did more than "search for a profitable doctrine" to "dress in Meter," but he could not drag into the light the truths he found in Calvinism by imitating the meditations of Coleridge and Wordsworth.[66] "The Dying Crow" reveals Dana's deep-seated fideism, the belief that knowledge of God comes from faith alone, not observation or experience. The expression of fideism, which includes a "vocabulary of remoteness, silent anticipation, and apocalyptic anxiety", is at odds with the analogical imagination Dana admired in Wordsworth.[67]

"Fragment of an Epistle"

Unlike the two bird poems, the remaining new poems added to the 1827 poetic volume, "A Clump of Daises" and "The Pleasure Boat" are unmemorable, beginning a group of forgettable sketches on objects of nature Dana was to add to his collected works

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[65] *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 122.

[66] In the introduction to the section on Poetry of *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of their Writings*, Vol. 2, edited by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Harper and Row, 1963, 547) Puritan poets are characterized as having "searched for profitable doctrine which would teach great precepts when molded into spacious lines."

[67] Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Criticism from Butler to Johnson*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 190. For an excellent examination of fideism and other variants of Christian imagination, including the analogical, see 177-193.

of 1833. After "The Little Beach Bird," Dana no longer poured his entire effort into the nature lyric but endeavored instead to experiment with a mixed form of meditative verse. However, with "A Fragment of an Epistle," Dana continued to adore the powers of nature; now, that adoration was contained within an armature of devotional lyrics. With regard to his poetic content and focus, his religious conversion seemed to enlarge, not simply recast, his former critical preoccupations with Romanticism. In other words, the Romantic spirit present in Dana's earlier work is also present in his post-conversion devotional verse.

"Fragment of an Epistle" (1825) was only his second poem, but this meditation on suffering and religious conversion provides an apt introduction to the problems of form in nineteenth-century American religious poetry and, in particular, Dana's poetry. The problems of form are of two orders. First, like many of the so-called "devotional poems" written during the antebellum period, "Fragment"'s "meter-making argument" is at odds with its meter. The poem's shorter couplets of octosyllabic verse, which Saintsbury characterized as "well…adapted for argument, satire, and exposition," are not suited for the grave subject matter of a devotional poem.[68] Aware of its "easy ambling pace," Dana defended his choice of meter by citing the case of Milton, who "had taken great liberties...in his two exquisite little poems in the same measure," but he admitted that "Fragment" exemplified what Byron had called the "fatal facility" of the shorter couplets.[69] Within the poem's evocation of slow suffering and gradual insight, the shorter couplet, more at home in Hudibrastic satire or brisk romantic narrative, almost proves fatal, as it was for many of the poems that fill the anthologies which I considered in my

[68] George Saintsbury, *Historical Manual of English Prosody*. 1910. (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 192.
[69] Preface to *Poems and Prose Writing* Vol. 2, x.

introduction.

But unlike those poems, the form of "Fragment," is significant enough to withstand a closer look, if by form we mean, as Cleanth Brooks did, "something far more internal than metrical patterns."[70] This "internal" meaning represents the second, more significant, problem of form for Dana. "Fragment" aspires to the prayerful meditation and evocations of nature of the Romantic meditation, as exemplified by Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight." Its aspiration to imitate that poem's pattern of "description-meditation-description" or the gravitas of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and its failure to do so gives the poem a peculiar power seldom seen in American verse before the American Renaissance.[71]

Written "while recovering from severe illness," the poem recounts the purgative effects of sickness and its lessons for what James called "the healthy-minded" soul.[72] These lessons, formed within a series of prosodic "environments," in which each stanza is loosely connected to the last, contain every thematic preoccupation found in Dana's poetry and prose. Some lessons consider the sinful condition of the soul—"[T]here rose/Within my bosom's dull response/A troubled memory of wrong (9-11)—and the uselessness of reason to the speaker's "desert mind" (109). Others take up the restorative powers of nature, situating its most poignant observations in winter scenes: "[My] long confinement.../ stealing dark by crystal bowers/Built up winter, on its bank,/Built up by winter.../see boys slide/O'er crusted plain stretched smooth and wide" (42-46). Some

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[70] Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harvest Books/Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1947), 194.
[71] See M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 527-557.
[72] *Poems and Prose Writing*, Vol. 2, x.

messages appear to the speaker by traditional allegory, as when "Patience, suffering's child.../Sat chanting to me song so holy/A song to soothe my melancholy"(25-28) while others emerge wrapped in a proto-Transcendental idiom: "The Eternal One,/With sacred fire from forth his throne/Has touched my heart" (21-24).

The most challenging lesson that Dana's speaker confronts occurs at the poem's midway point. Here the poem "turns" from nature to scripture, by way of two biblical allusions, the first to *Revelations* and the second to the story of Jacob's dream, found in the book of Genesis. Gazing out at the snow, the speaker, having been "to long confinement" cursed, glimpses a vision of heaven:

> I thought on that celestial sight,
> That city seen by aged John,
> ...Brighter and brighter grew the road
> Twixt me and the descending god;
> And while I yearned to tread its length,
> Down went the Sun in all its strength.
>
> And gone his path, like the steps of light
> By angels trod at dead of night,
> While Jacob slept. (57-63)

After the vision, the speaker falls back into the despair of his weak condition, but not before recognizing the significance and what he has seen and felt:

> Why could not I, in spirit, raise
> Pillar of Bethal to His praise

Who blessed me, and free worship pay,

Like Issac's son upon his way?

Are holy thoughts but happy dreams

Chased by despair...? (67-72)

The vision of Saint John's celestial city emerges from the muddled lessons of the first half of the poem only to quickly disappear with the sun's eclipse. The apocalyptic vision gives way to the personal, albeit still biblical, dream of Jacob. But the uncertainty of living up to the (literally) monumental achievement of Jacob fills the speaker with despair, causing him to doubt his visions of heaven and return to the "gentle graces" of "Nature's face." Here, with the benefit of Nature who heals the speaker with "her simple graces," sickness will eventually end its instruction, yet the route by which the speaker has reached insight—through aborted digressions and departure points, biblical allusions, and uncertainty—is, for us, the real lesson.

Although he concludes by describing the graces of "Nature's face," the speaker's bewilderment at the loss of the apocalyptic vision and his reflection on the "Pillar of Bethel" constitute the poem's true contribution. The poem's allusion to the journey of Jacob follows in the path of two former treatments of the biblical story, both well-known by Dana and both occasioned by Rembrandt's painting "Jacob's Dream." The first was the American poet Washington Allston's "On Rembrandt, Occasioned by His Picture of Jacob's Dream" (1813).[73] In Allston's sonnet, "Jacob's dream" represents a lost "superstitious age/When all beyond the narrow grasp of mind/Seem'd fraught with meaning of supernal kind" (1-3). As a form of rebellion against the present, Allston's

[73] Washington Allston, *Lectures on Art, and Poems* ed. Richard Henry Dana Jr. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 276.

speaker steps back into the past and "hail[s]" what lies beyond his ken, "like the ramblings of an idiot's speech,/No image giving of a thing on earth,/Nor thought significant in Reason's reach" (10-13). The poem's last lines are a celebration of the Romantic artist, who makes art out of life's "random shadowings" (12). The other important treatment, also reviewed by Dana, is found in William Hazlitt's preface to *Lectures on the English Poets*:

> The progress of knowledge...circumscribe[s] the limits of the imagination...The history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is the same; and both have received a shock from the progress of experimental philosophy...There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time, the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become adverse to the imagination, nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances...[74]

This discussion of "the limits of the imagination" was critical to Dana's defense of Wordsworth in his review of Hazlitt's lectures. Here, Hazlitt emphasizes not on a single poet or poem but the condition of poetry in an age of science. What both treatments of "Jacob's Dream" confront is the diminishment of religion and poetry by "the progress of knowledge." Against the backdrop of these interpretations, the story of Jacob's pilgrimage and dream becomes a parable not of man's journey with God and its accompanying visions but of remoteness and imaginative paralysis. Sleeping while above him the "angels of God [are] ascending and descending" a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, the image of Jacob dreaming represents what Jenny Franchot calls "pastness":

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[74] *Lectures on the English Poets* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894). 12.

> We gaze on accoutrements and art of past centuries—saintly faces, Biblical scenes, church interiors, crucifixes. Or we encounter their representations in books [...]. Such images and texts are...the loss by which, ironically, we have come to know ourselves; we are *not* belief. We are that which we have lost. Belief's pastness is...the narrative of Western's culture's birth into the modern.[75]

In Allston's sonnet, the parable of Jacob, an invention of the "twilight age," is a vehicle for the Romantic artist's alchemy; for Hazlitt's introductory remarks on poetry, the ladder is what *was* possible for the "spirit of poetry," but now embodies the world we stand "less [in] awe of...which we calculate more surely, and look [on] with more indifference."[76] Both variations enter into the biblical story through its incongruity with the modern age.

Without ignoring either possibility, the speaker of "Fragment," is neither comfortable to consent to the willed naiveté of Allston's poem nor prepared to place, as Hazlitt did, modern limits on religious imagination. Instead, he extends the lesson of Jacob's vision by returning to, and expanding, the biblical account found in Genesis: "And Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put for his pillows and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on top of it." (Genesis) The raising of the pillar, not the dream, is the meditation's center of gravity. For Dana's meditation, the pillar has the same typology as it had for Jonathan Edwards, a "type of the messiah... signif[ying] the dependence of the saints have upon Christ [in whom] they have rest and peace."[77] It also functioned as a warning, as it did in *Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian erects a pillar

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[75] Jenny Franchot, "Unseemingly Commemoration: Religion, Fragments, and the Icon." *American Literary History*, 9(Autumn 1997): 205.
[76] Hazlitt, *Lectures*, 13
[77] *The Works of President Edwards: With a Memoir of His Life* Vol. 9. (New York: Carvill, 1830), 231.

to warn "Holy Pilgrims" of danger and "*prevent those who should come after from falling into the hands of Great Despair*."[78] But Dana, who was familiar with the works of both men, gives the pillar an additional value: the pillar is faith and, as such, the failure to raise it signals the speaker's powerlessness to capture the momentary vision by imitation of Jacob's monumental act.

The powerlessness to raise such a monument suggests that, in order for religious experience to be meaningful, the vision it brings needs be accounted for. And what in "Fragment" is the account of that vision if not the poem itself? Almost a half a century later, Herman Melville, in his poem "Art," would make use of the story of Jacob as a symbol of artistic creativity. In the comfort of our imagination, we may dream of "brave unbodied schemes" writes Melville, but their true test comes when the contraries of the creative process—humility and pride, "instinct and study," "audacity—reverence"---"fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,/To wrestle with the angel—Art."[79] Melville's summary of the vicissitudes of the creative process goes further than "Fragment" in its high estimation of the artist, as well as assimilating more deeply the narrative of Jacob. But in the economy of Melville's poem, the wound Jacob receives from wrestling the angel is not evidence of God or his covenant but of ideality's fight with experience. In this respect, "Fragment," when read alongside the better part of Dana's poetry and critical prose, is more ambitious. The evidence which the speaker of "Fragment" seeks is of both a divine and an aesthetic nature; the pillar is both a sign of God and of the vision's imaginative authority. The orientation of Dana's speaker in "Fragment" is primarily towards the audience, as it must be in a poem of devotion. However filled with "holy thoughts," the speaker must

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[78] *The Pilgrim's Progress.* Ed Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1960), 118.
[79] *The Poems of Herman Melville*, Ed. Douglas Robillard (Kent State U.P., 2000), 322.

consider "the gloom/which visits [his] soul...the despair" not for his own sake only, but for the sake of other "Holy Pilgrims." "I deny," writes Dana in "Natural History of Enthusiasm, "the frequent assertion that whatever one sees directly, he may make distinct to another."[80] But he must also judge what "form to lend" these visions and be attentive to those stories and (again, in Melville's words) "symbols vain once counted wise."

Although it hardly qualifies as a religious poem because of its "quality of doubt," neither does a poem like "Fragment" exhibit the confidence of earlier Puritan meditations or the moral sentimentality of contemporary poets such as Lydia Sigourney and those found in *The Christian Examiner*.[81] Instead, the poem exhibits an acute awareness of the problem of belief in a disenchanted world and the duty to warn others of despair, even when the solution to that despair is not forthcoming. The poem's speaker acts like the first apostles who, in Dana's estimation, "went directly to the sinner's heart [and] compelled him to turn his eyes and look at the prison there [and] behold how dark it was."[82] As we saw in "A Dying Raven," the speaker's faith is fideistic. But here, God's absence takes on another feature, one Santayana identified as a failure of imagination. "The failure to find God among the stars," wrote Santayana "does not indicate that human experience affords no avenue to God…but indicates rather the atrophy in this particular man of the imaginative faculty."[83] The "desert mind" at poem's end which thirsts for the "shower/That wets the parching earth" is emptied of the forms of nature

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[80] *Poems and Prose*, 2:?

[81] Eliot used the phrase "quality of doubt" to describe Tennyson's *In Memoriam*: "[the poem] can, I think, justly be called a religious poem, but for another reason than that which made it seem religious to his contemporaries. It is not religious because of the quality of its faith, but because of the *quality of its doubt*. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience." "In Memoriam," from *Selected Essays*, 294.

[82] *Poems and Prose Writing*, 2:394.

[83] George Santayana, *The Life of Reason; Or, the Phases of Human Progress*, Vol. 1 (New York: C. Scribner and Son, 1917), 122.

and self (and thus ready to see God), but also uninspired to the point of despair. Sin and the "atrophy" of imagination have become one.

In an earlier poem, Dana had called this state "the dull, still desert of the mind" which only communion with God could break.[84] Only by passing through (in Richard Baxter's words which Dana often quoted) "the desert of sin" could a man hope to see the glory of God.[85] This stage of recognizing the powers of iniquity was not only crucial for the "unconverted sinner" but was central to the logic of poems like "Fragment" and "Thoughts on the Soul." "Thoughts on the Soul" ties together many of Dana's former preoccupations including devotion, doubt, and the noetic effects of sin. An attack on Unitarianism, the poem is Dana's most explicit statement on the powers of the imagination:

> It is the Soul's prerogative, its fate,
> To shape the outward to its own estate.
> If right itself, then all around is well;
> If wrong, it makes of all without a hell.
> So multiplies the Soul its joy or pain.
> Gives out itself, itself takes back again. (1-6)

Barbara Packer describes the speaker of this passage as "a spirit in a Swedenborgian heaven or hell, perpetually generating the reality it perceives."[86] But while the poem ends in Christian mysticism, its argument against the Unitarian/Transcendentalist doctrines of sin and the "Universal Spirit" is animated by two depictions of imagination.

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[84] "Changes of Home," *Poems and Prose Writing*, 1:35-58, line 86.
[85] *Poems and Prose Writing*, 2:362.
[86] "Early Narrative and Lyric" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Nineteenth-century Poetry, 1800-1910*, Eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Cyrus R. K. Patell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60.

The first depiction proceeds from Calvinistic epistemology and presents imagination, as Calvin presented man's nature, as the "perpetual factory of idols." "Man's mind, " argued Calvin, "full of its own pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity;…it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God."[87] In "Thoughts" the soul's "prerogative" is to practice the faculty of imagination, a "power it can't recall" (117). Its power is to "reduplicate" its own image in the world, particularly in those "new objects of worship" of nature and self. In a passage which repudiates the theme of "A Dying Raven," the poem's speaker describes the natural world as a hall of mirrors where "man reduplicates himself…/In yonder lake reflected rock and tree," even in "yon bird, that seeks her food upon that bough/[who] pecks not alone" (69-70; 71-2) "Turn where thou wilt," the speaker commands, "thyself in all things see/Reflected back" (84-5). The soul of man, searching for a "companionable form," finds itself at the mercy of his own idols and so falls back on "dread self, one dread eternity" (136). Only the consciousness of sin can remove the dream of "a Universal Soul" who will "merge/Thy soul, as rain-drops mingle with the surge" (144-5). This mockery of the Universal Soul anticipates "The Mast-head" chapter in *Moby Dick* in which Melville satirizes Transcendentalism with a story of an absent-minded youth on whale-watch who "takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature." Feeling his spirit "ebb way to whence it came; diffused through time and space," the youth is only inches away from the horror of drowning in "Descartian vortices."[88] Like Melville's youth, the sinner who is deceived by the imaginative powers of his own soul thinks "sin will have its end/And

[87] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:108
[88] *Moby Dick; or, The Whale*, eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 159.

they purge spirit with the holy blend/In joys as holy" but will instead be thrown into a "sea of fire" by his own "dominant desire" (147-9; 157, 159).

After several lines which capture the evangelical temper of Dana's time—"Blest are the pure in heart. Wouldst thou be blest? /He'll cleanse thy spotted soul. Wouldst thou find rest?(171-2)—the speaker settles down to the imagination of the "cleared sight" (187). This second kind of imagination is a version of Coleridge's secondary imagination, an echo of God's "forming…creating power" (183-4) that (in Coleridge's description) "struggles to idealize and unify" but nevertheless opens our vision to "new forms of life" by first repairing our "inward ills" (208)[89]. It is also a verse summary of Dana's early appreciation of Wordsworth, published in the *North American Review* thirteen years before. Anatomizing the soul's powers, the speaker welcomes the sinner, whom he calls "Brother," into the "new condition of things" where the businesses of life are revealed as illusion. The earth which might "seem bare" is re-populated, not with idols but with real life, which "the Living Hand" brought forth, and man's connections with Nature reappear as does his true participation with his world: "Have thy soul feel the universal breath/With which all nature's quick, and learn to be/sharer in all that thou does touch and see" (250-2).

With an exception of the "falling leaf" and the stream, however, these passages which describe the restoration of analogical imagination offer few examples of analogical relations between nature and God. Instead, the "riot of imagination" through which the sinner passes to reach a "holier calm" is implied to make way for *another* stage of conversion: the Soul's ascent to God. "Send thy spirit forth/Up to the Infinite" instructs

[89] Coleridge's description of the primary and second imagination can be found in Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 7. Part 1. Eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1983), 304-5.

the speaker, "now read the laws/No[t] with thy earthly mind, that half detects/Something of outward things by slow effects/viewing creature causes, learn to know/The hidden springs…/purposes, relations, sympathies" (302-307). We are now (in words Dana used to describe Wordsworth's poems) "absorbed into what we are about." The argument for analogy, and for the soul's role in imaging correspondences, are absorbed into the "light! light!.../light effable…light divine/Immortal light" (314; 316-7) a conclusion which resembles the coda of "Daylight." In "Thoughts on the Soul," what began in the darkness of idolizing "dread self" ends in the light of mystical union with God. Discovering God in the natural world was only a half-way house for the sick soul on its way to religious epiphany.

His last poem, "Thoughts on the Soul" marks Dana's final attempt to square Calvinist epistemology with forms of Romantic imagination. What distinguishes it from "A Dying Raven" or "Daybreak" is that it embraces the poet's evangelical and denominational moment. The speaker addresses an unknown sinner instead of himself. He gives himself over to the period's enthusiasm for revival and reform. He mocks current theological excessiveness and transposes his own theological beliefs into the language of the affections: "Love, joy, e'en sorrow—yield thyself to all!/They make thy freedom" (255-6). By striking a didactic tone, Dana is free to *observe* the "tremendous energies" (129) of the soul and its various powers of religious imagination without having to *illustrate* them. In doing so, the poem fails the litmus test that T.S. Eliot applied to religious verse—a religious poem, he argued, should "deal with actuality" not what the poet "want[s] to feel—but succeeds in offering us both the underpinnings of nearly all Dana's work and the ingredients of the denominational controversies which lay

at the center of New England theological culture.[90]

[90] *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 29.

Chapter Three:

Iconoclasm and the Inner Light: The Religious Poems of Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier

Few literary reputations have been as affected by the label of "genteel poet " as that of John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). Although Whittier is never mentioned by name in George Santayana's first essays on the subject, his poem "Maud Muller" is only one of two poems—Henry Longfellow's "Evangeline" is the other—held up as an example of "that frank and gentle romanticism" of antebellum American lyrics, which reflected the "conventions of the society in which they arose."[1] This formulation of the "genteel tradition" has exerted a powerful presence in the canonical history of nineteenth-century American poetry. Yet most readers do not recognize that Santayana initially used it to describe Whittier's poetry in *religious*, not simply literary, terms. Although a fair account of the conclusion of "Maud Muller" ("For all sad words of tongue or pen/The saddest are these: 'It might have been'"), Santayana's description of a "simple sweet…Protestant literature…which gazed at this terrible world and said how beautiful and how interesting it all was" is as inaccurate an account of Whittier's religious imagination as it would be of Emerson's or Whitman's.

Among his American contemporaries, Whittier was unrivaled in his role as *the* century's religious poet. Unlike Richard Henry Dana, whose career, considered in my last chapter, lasted only seven years, Whittier wrote and published religious poems for over three generations. From 1826, when "The Exile's Return" appeared in William

[1] "Genteel American Poetry," 1915, reprinted in *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana*. ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 73. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this work.

Lloyd Garrison's *Newbury Port Free Press*, to his last poem, the unpublished "Dreadful burden of the sins we feel," written days before his death in 1892, Whittier published more than 500 poems over a period of 66 years. More than half of these poems treat openly the themes of Christian teaching, theology, and tradition. No other American poet of the nineteenth century, save perhaps Whitman and Emily Dickinson, was as prolific as Whittier; certainly, no one matched his productivity as a writer of religious verse.

Currently, Whittier is remembered as one of the Fireside Poets, a label which groups him with William Cullen Bryant and the "New England Triumvirate" of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell.[2] Although this affiliation has not been unfavorable to Whittier's reputation, it does little to suggest the value his poems might have on the study of religion and poetry in nineteenth-century America. To be sure, critics have occasionally pointed out the religious underpinning of "Snowbound" (1866) , and biographers have highlighted Whittier's Quaker background in relation to his role in the abolitionist movement.[3] But readers have seen the study of

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[2] The label was affixed to the three writers by Odell Shepard in "The New England Triumvirate: Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell" *Literary History of the United States* Vol. 1 (1947; third edition, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), 587. This group was also referred to by George Arms in *The Fields were Green* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1948), 1-8, as the "Schoolroom Poets" since their poems were memorized by generations of school children in the first half of the Twentieth-century. For an insightful study on the ways "Snow-Bound," was used in American education, see Angela Sorby *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917* (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 35-67.

[3] See, for example, Gregory E. Jordan, "Wind and Fire: St. Catherine of Siena and the North Wind in John Greenleaf Whittier's 'Snow-Bound,'" in *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* Vol. 8., No.1. (Winter 2005), Lewis H. Miller, "The Supernaturalism of Snow-Bound" *The New England Quarterly,* Vol. 53, No. 3. (Sep., 1980), 291-307, and Lewis Leary's discussion on the poem in *John Greenleaf Whittier* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), 157-165. A useful discussion of Whittier and his religious beliefs may be found in the following works: Edward Wagenknecht, *John Greenleaf Whittier: A Portrait in Paradox* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1967), esp. 157-194; John B. Pickard, *John Greenleaf Whittier: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1961), esp. 109-117; Rufus M. Jones, "Whittier's Fundamental Religious Faith" in *The Faith of John Greenleaf Whittier* (np: published by the direction of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1957), 7-27; Whitman Bennett, *Whittier: Bard of Freedom* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), esp. 10-17; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *John Greenleaf Whittier* (New York: Macmillian Company, 1902), esp. 115-134.

the poet's religion as peripheral to the study of the poet's life and politics. Moreover, Whittier scarcely seems to exist for literary historians, who, interested in the interaction between religion and American literature during the antebellum and post-war period, have directed their attentions to writers more ostensibly "religious." Examples include American hymnists Henry Ware Jr. and Alice Cary, who, by "forwarding the cause of religion" more deliberately, crafted verse more "defiantly" Christian.[4] Conversely, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson responded to religion in ways that would later characterize a more "modern" American poetry, which is often playful, ironic, and often indifferent towards the claims of Christian orthodoxy. Whittier fits uneasily either description of an (exclusive) writer of sacred verse or the lyricist of religious indifference or (in Eliot's words) "religious doubt."[5] Difficult to categorize in this regard yet pigeonholed as a "fireside" poet, Whittier has rarely been taken seriously as a religious poet. As a result, most readers have failed to recognize the significance of religion in Whittier's poetry or the achievement of his religious poems.

Continuing our inquiry into what makes a poem "religious" in nineteenth-century American literature, this chapter first takes a look at Whittier's contemporary and current reputation as religious poet. Then, in turning to the "religious poems" of the Riverside edition, I categorize further Whittier lyrics. Such a categorization affords a new look at Whittier's religious poetry, allowing readers to approach Whittier as many of his contemporaries did—as a religious poet—without accepting uncritically George Santayana's judgment that Whittier's religious vision constitutes "a simple,

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[4] T.S. Eliot used the phrase "deliberately and defiantly Christian" to describe a special kind of apologetic religious verse that "forwards the cause" of Christian orthodoxy in "Religion and Literature" from *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.), 346.

[5] *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1960),294. For an explanation of Eliot's use of "doubt" as a characteristic of modern religious poetry, see chap.2, n. 84.

sweet…Protestant literature." Most importantly they reveal a poet for whom Christian tradition, articulated through the principles and practice of Quakerism, was a source of inspiration.

From Iconoclasm to Gentility

Ignored today, Whittier's religious poems enjoyed enormous popularity during the poet's lifetime. As we observed in our introduction, anthologies of American religious verse played an instrumental role in introducing readers to new poets. Whittier's introduction came as early as 1831. Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Unitarian collections included many of Whittier's poems. Additionally, poems such as "The Eternal Goodness" (1865) were well-suited for Christian worship, appearing as "favorites" in the hymnals of different Christian denominations.[6] Their appeal was due (in part) to Whittier's study of the "simplest and most conventional forms...of newspaper verse" including the popular ballad measure.[7] However, more instrumental than versification was the way these poems captured what the poet himself called "the common heart of Christendom."[8] "To multitudes of people," wrote one early historian of American religious lyrics, "Whittier is the best loved [for his] broad tolerant spirit and his deep human sympathy [which has] endeared him to the popular heart in a very peculiar way."[9] The British anthologist H.G. Adams, who highlighted Whittier's work in his

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[6] All "religious" poems discussed in this chapter are listed, in order of composition date, in *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier: Poems of Nature, Poems Subjective and Reminiscent, Religious Poems*. Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1888-9), 188-343. This volume, as well as the others in the series, do not include line numbers. Unless otherwise noted, all other poems, and writings, by Whittier are cited by volume and page number from the same series (Vols. 1, 3-7).

[7] Gay Wilson Allen, *American Prosody*, 1935(Reprint, NY: Octagon Books, 1966), 128.

[8] The phrase appears in Whittier's preface for *The Patience of Hope*. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862.) v.

[9] Edward S. Ninde, *The Story of the American Hymn*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1921), 227.

collection of "sacred poetical quotations...and devotional poetry," described his selections as "those grand truths and principles of Christianity on which all denominations of the Savior's professed followers" can agree to.[10]

In his preface to “The Pennsylvanian Pilgrim” (1870), Whittier credited Quakerism as the source of this interdenominational sympathy. Quaker tradition, writes Whittier in the poem’s preface, links orthodox religious thought with the current age of religious liberalism and reform: “The power of [Quakerism] has been felt through two centuries in the amelioration of penal severities, the abolition of slavery, the reform of the erring, the relief of the poor and suffering—felt in brief in every step of human progress.”[11] For Whittier, Quaker tradition was the source and horizon of his imagination. Like so many of his religious poems, “The Pennsylvania Pilgrim” argues for universal tolerance without losing its special association with the history of his denominational affiliation. The elements of religious tolerance and sympathy result not from any special awareness of the period’s “spiritual temper” but rather from a commitment to being the “historian and poet” of American Quakerism.

But not all of Whittier’s religious poems included in the century’s religious anthologies gave witness to the “the common heart of Christendom.” Often their inclusion revealed difference, sometimes division, among Christian communities. Philip Schaff, who was one of the century's most important American advocates of Tractarian worship and sacramental theology, reprinted 25 Whittier poems in his *Library of Sunday Poetry* (over three times more than any other American poet) including "Our Master"

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[10] H.G. Adams, *A cyclopaedia of sacred poetical quotations: consisting of choice passages from the sacred poetry of all ages and countries…* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1854) , iv.
[11] “The Pennsylvanian Pilgrim,” 1:319

(1866) a poem which explicitly rejects all liturgical representations of Christ.[12] "The Brewing of the Soma" (1872) Whittier's most popular hymn, openly satirizes public displays of piety; it is a hymn about the dangers of hymns. Like so many of his religious lyrics, the hymn ridicules traditional worship practices and encourages us to instead listen to the "still small voice of calm." By including Whittier in their anthologies, editors like Schaff and George T. Rider were embracing the "still small voice" of revelation while ignoring the poet's iconoclasm. Conversely, Unitarians championed Whittier's attack on worship practices and his rejection of theology but were uncomfortable with Whittier's belief in Christ's divine nature. Alfred Putnam, the Unitarian anthologist of *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith: Selections of Hymns and Other Sacred Poems of the Liberal Church in America*, excluded Whittier from his collections altogether, despite his declaration to include "richer and loftier strains of devotion" and hymns which "bring together denominations...held apart by theology and dogma."[13]

Whittier's iconoclastic rhetoric is almost certainly the reason behind the inclusion of two early poems in *The Sacred Poets of England and America*, a collection of religious verse from the well-known and nominally-Baptist editor Rufus Griswold.[14] Griswold selected Whittier's "Palestine" (1837), one of the first of Whittier's many "Holy Land" poems, for its affectionate description of where "pilgrim and prophet" have traveled but also its celebration of the fact that the "outward hath gone! but in glory and power,/The

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[12] See *A Library of Poetry for Sunday Reading*. Eds. Philip Schaff and Arthur Gilman. (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1889).
[13] *Singers and Songs of the Liberal Faith: Being Selections of Hymns and Other Sacred Poems of the Liberal Church in America*. Ed. Alfred P. Putnam (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1875), vii.
[14] See *The Sacred Poets of England and America*, ed. Rufus Griswold (New York: D. Appleton and Co.,1850).

spirit surviveth the things of an hour." "The Female Martyr" (1833) also exults the absence of visible sainthood: "Young martyr!.../No white-robed sisters round thee trod./No holy hymn, nor funeral prayer/...Nor flower, nor cross, nor hallowed taper." Throughout his life, Whittier praised the role of the iconoclast--"Well speed thy mission, bold Iconoclast!" begins "The Men of Old"(1849)—but also expressed the dangers of religious reformation. When asked which work best defined his career, Whittier chose "The Reformer" (1846), a poem which narrates the dangers of "[s]miting the godless shrines of men" since "The Waster…seem[s] the builder too." But the Transcendentalist-turned-Catholic Orestes Brownson saw in the poet no such restraint. "God gave him noble gifts," Brownson wrote in 1850, "every one of which he has used to undermine faith…to break down authority, and to establish the reign of anarchy, and all under the gentle mask of promoting love and good-will [and] diffusing the Christian spirit." Brownson's condemnation is singular in the century's reactions to Whittier, but it illustrates the degree to which the poet's penchant for iconoclasm could overwhelm his calls for Christian unity. [15]

In his satire on nineteenth-century New England literary culture, "A Fable for Critics" (1848), James Russell Lowell captured these various and divergent receptions of Whittier in his portrayal of the poet as a religious dissenter. Incapable of judging between "inspiration" and "simple excitement," Whittier uses poetry to wage a "metaphysical fight" against his opponents and preaches the gospel while striking his

[15] *Brownson's Quarterly Review* Vol. IV, No. IV (October 1850), 540. Brownson's harsh characterization of Whittier was based not only on the "Religious Poems" discussed in this chapter but on Whittier's so-called "Labor Poems" which included the before-mentioned "The Reformer," and three poems highly critical of Roman Catholicism, "The Prisoner of Naples" (1850) "Italy," and "To Pius IX" (1849) the last of which equates priests and bishops with "vampires."

listeners "with the mallet of Thor." But perhaps the poet's greatest peculiarity, argued Lowell, was his interior struggle against his own denominational attachments:

> His swelling and vehement heart
> Strains the strait-breasted drab of the Quaker apart,
> And reveals the live man, still supreme and erect,
> Underneath the bemummying wrappers of sect.[16]

The problem with Whittier is in his "antithesis of dogma and character," a point Lowell would later more explicit in his review of the poet's "In War, and Other Poems." "Mr. Whittier," wrote Lowell "is the most American of our poets… [whose] patriotism burns all the more intensively [because] it is smothered by his creed." But the source of this creed which consumed Whittier was not, according to Lowell, Quakerism but rather was "imbued with the spirit of Puritanism." [17] Lowell even compared Whittier to Calvinist William Cowper: "he stands akin…to [Cowper] in intensity of religious anxiety verging sometimes on morbidness."[18] The fact that Whittier, who had spent a lifetime offering counter-narratives to Puritanism's "awful drama of supernaturalism," would be identified by some of his contemporaries as Puritan in spirit is ironic. But Lowell's portrait of a man whose "failures arise…/From the very same cause that has made him a poet" illuminates the poet's mixed reception as religious poet and illustrates two important features of Whittier's religious poetry and its relation to Quaker thought.

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[16] "A Fable for Critics" in *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*. Vol. 3 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1890), pgs 54-56.
[17] "In War, and Other Poems," in *The Function of the Poet, and Other Essays*. ed. Albert Mordell (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1920), 127.
[18] Lowell, "In War," 128; see ch.2, for my discussion on the habit of nineteenth-century critics to discuss Calvinism as a temperament, not a theology.

First, Lowell's portrait illustrates how Whittier's religious poems are animated by historical Quakerism. Quakerism traced its roots, and formative identity, to seventeenth-century Puritanism. As historian Sydney Ahlstrom explains, Quakers and Puritans most resembled one another in their "relentless movement from the hierarchical, sacramental, and objective Christianity of the Middle Ages towards various radical extremes." With George Fox as guide, the apprentice shoemaker who testified to the "direct revelation of Christ to the soul," Quakers—also called the Society of Friends—became "the most important and enduring manifestation of Puritan radicalism" in America. [19] By addressing Whittier as "O leather-clad Fox," Lowell does more than mock Whittier's role as a war-mongering member of a pacifist sect; he also transforms the "true lyric bard" of Quakerism into that denomination's point of origin, American Puritanism. Pretending to be a man of peace and "goodwill," Whittier is identical to the militant Puritan in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" who "lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem."[20] In the words of Orestes Brownson, Whittier was an iconoclast hiding behind "the gentle mask" of Christian charity. To be sure, Lowell's evocation of the religious history simplifies both denominations. Yet his portrait suggests that Whittier's iconoclasm, as well as his service to "the dumb and down-trodden," resulted from the poet's close identification with the ideas and habits of historical Quakerism. Lowell's caricature was not wholly imaginary. At midcentury, the Society of Friends faced an identity crisis of its own, a result of its too-close association with Calvinism and its uneasy alliances with liberal theology. As we shall soon see, Whittier faced this same crisis and treated it as the unstated subject of several poems.

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[19] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 176.
[20] "Young Goodman Brown" in *Tales and Sketches* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 278.

More significant than his portrait of Whittier as a war-thirsty Puritan, however, is Lowell's rendering of the poet's heart. The image of his heart pushing against its "Quaker drab," implies the limits Whittier's religion placed on his imagination.[21] But Lowell also observed that the fire of his heart burned more "intensely" *because* it was "smothered by his creed." Ostensibly, the observation makes little sense—fires die when they are "smothered" or deprived of oxygen—and is an example of Lowell's frequent use of hyperbole. Yet both image and observation point to the perceived reciprocity between the poet's imagination and his religious belief. In other words, whether Whittier's poetry represents and enacts the conflict between character and creed or simply embodies a paradox not understood but felt, the "remarkable force and effectiveness" of the poet's imagination is fundamentally religious and animated by his denominational affiliation.

Fifty years after "Fable," this historical/denominational context in which Whittier's poetry was appreciated disappeared, and, with it, the religious poems' popularity. With the start of the last century, Whittier's reputation as an iconoclast or an architect of Christian unity was replaced by a reputation as, simply, "the religious poet."[22] Gone were the "peculiar way[s]" Whittier's religious poem could upset or unite; now, his poems rendered an indefinite spirituality by exploring the "heart-brimming experiences of solitude and nature."[23] "Whittier's religion was of the heart," wrote one early

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[21] Overall, Whittier's biographers have similarly maintained that Whittier's religious life hampered his ability to faithfully capture the spirit of the age. "Undeniably, the inhibitions of Quakerism prevented Whittier from responding as might have been expected to…the tremendous emotions of the period" Bennett, *Bard of Freedom*, 270.

[22] Whittier biographers who "domesticated" the Quaker at the turn-of-the-century were following the lead of—and often borrowed generously from—Samuel T. Pickard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin,1894). These biographers include: Richard Burton, *John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1901), esp 111-2; Higginson, *John Greenleaf Whittier* (1902); and George Rice Carpenter, *John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), esp. 273-280.

[23] Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 80

biographer, "rather than the heart."[24] In the words of critic Edmund C. Stedman, Whittier was the poet of "faith [which] gives a tone to the whole range of his verse."[25] Of the 17 poems that Stedman chose for *An American Anthology* (1900), which included "The Barefoot Boy," "Maud Muller," "Skipper Ireson's Ride," "In School Days," and "Snowbound," only "The Eternal Goodness" exhibits a substantial interest in nineteenth-century religious controversy. [26] Twentieth-century anthologists, like Mark Von Doren, followed Stedman's lead in ignoring the religious poems in favor of the "Anti-slavery" or "Subjective and Reminiscent" poems, so-termed by Whittier and editor Horace Scudder for the Riverside Edition.

Today, if Whittier's religious poems are anthologized at all, they are offered as inferior examples of Transcendental spirituality or "genteel" poetics. Such is the case with Harold Bloom's recent collection *American Religious Poems*; along with "The Eternal Goodness," Bloom selects two fine illustrations of Whittier's work—"First-Day Thoughts" and "Unity"—and places them between poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes.[27] A cursory reading of these selections suggests the ways in which Whittier's religious imagination diverged from those of his contemporaries.

Both Longfellow's "My Cathedral" and Oliver Wendell Holmes' "The Living Temple," poems which precede and follow "First-Day Things," depict mankind's move "beyond" religious tradition to spiritual authenticity and truth. The speaker of "My

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[24] Burton, *John Greenleaf Whittier,* 111
[25] *Poets of America* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1885), 128.
[26] See *An American Anthology* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1900). The number of Whittier poems included in Stedman's collection is exceeded only by the number of representative poems by Emerson and Longfellow; Wagenknecht, *John Greenleaf Whittier,* 191.
[27] Harold Bloom, *American Religious Poems*. (New York: Library of America, 2006.). The selections from Longfellow, Whittier, and Holmes (in this order) can be found on pages 76-90.

Cathedral" discovers spiritual insight in the forest where two "stately pines" form cathedral towers, a place of worship created "Not [by] Art but Nature." Likewise, "The Living Temple" enjoins the reader to "[l]ook in upon thy wondrous frame" for the "mystic temple" and away from what the poet identifies in "The Chambered Nautilus" as the soul's "low-vaulted past." These movements beyond tradition to the new objects of the "religious"—nature and the "noble" self—were routine for the Romantic era's contemplative poetry; Whittier practiced them as well. Yet "First-Day Thoughts" diverges significantly from the anthology's sampling of the genteel tradition by presenting public worship—the "old accustomed place among/ …brethren"—as an important step in spiritual development. By placing the speaker in a Quaker meeting house, the poem suggests that authentic religious experience can occur *within* the economy of traditional Christian thought and habits. Alternatively, Whittier's poem "The Eternal Goodness" questions this very same economy by rejecting reason ("lines of argument/…logic linked and strong), theology, ("iron creeds") and organized worship ("aisles of prayer/…fix[ed] with mete and bound"). In moving beyond Christian tradition, the speaker discovers God's "goodness and his love" not in a natural "worship without words" but in a supernatural emptiness, born of "trembling self-distrust."

Although each *deliberatio* appears at odds with the other— "First-Day Thoughts" considers the spiritual efficacy of the "old accustomed place" while "The Eternal Goodness" casts into doubt "the poor device[s] of man"—the poems' speakers share a departure point and a destination. They both begin in the quiet expectation of a Quaker at prayer and conclude by experiencing "the still small voice" of religious insight. In so doing, even while expressing outwardly different postures towards Christian tradition

(one sympathetic, the other iconoclastic), Whittier's poems have more in common with one another than they do with the nature poems of Transcendentalism and hardly exemplify the "simple, sweet, Protestant literature" Santayana identified as the "genteel tradition."[28]

That Whittier was recognized by his contemporaries in various ways suggests something of the poet's adaptable self-presentation, a result, Lowell's portrait points out, of the poet's commitment to Quakerism. For a closer look at this commitment, and the ways in which Whittier transforms orthodoxy into verse, we now turn to the "Religious Poems" of the Riverside Edition. To return to these religious poems is to bypass this century-long attenuation of the "religious" Whittier; to examine them is to witness, as his contemporaries did, the poet as nondenominational pacifist, militant Quaker, iconoclast, architect for Christian unity, polemicist, and "the best interpret[er] of the devotional spirit [the] country had yet produced."[29]

The "Religious Poems" of the Riverside Collection

Modeled in part on the Riverside Longfellow (1886), *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier* (1888-9) was the second in a series of "definitive editions" published

[28] In the anthology's "Reader's Guide" (632-2) co-editor Jesse Zuba suggests something of "First-Day Thoughts" unique position in the constellation of American poets writing religious verse. But the point that Whittier is alone among the major poets of the nineteenth century in treating religious practices sympathetically is almost entirely overlooked. Why? Our current discussion of the "religious" in American verse is largely confined to the twin representative poetries of Whitman, for whom, in Zuba's words, "formal religious belonging is largely irrelevant to [his] spiritual concerns" and Emerson, whose poem "The Problem" which concludes the anthology's discussion on "Organized Religion," speaks for those who are "conflicted about the place of established religion in their spiritual lives." Indeed, if these two attitudes towards traditional religious practices —indifference and doubt—dominate the works that are currently deemed "religious" by anthologists and critics alike, then it should come as no surprise that Whittier's reputation as religious poet, if not entirely muted, has undergone a century-long attenuation.

[29] This comment by George W. Cooke is quoted in *Schmidt, Restless Souls*, 81.

by Houghton Mifflin in the last years of the nineteenth century.[30] *Writings* was followed by the Riverside/Cambridge editions of the complete works of Lowell (1891) and Oliver Wendell Holmes (1894), which, with help from the poets themselves, were edited by Horace Scudder. Whittier collaborated closely with Scudder and the two men arranged the author's poems primarily into the categories of genre and theme.[31] By organizing poems under the titles of, for example, "Narrative and Legendary Poems," "Songs of Labor and Reform," and "Poems Subjective and Reminiscent," they eschewed the practice of arranging poems chronologically—the Riverside/Cambridge editions of Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes are organized by year and volume —and emphasized the generic and rhetorical scope of Whittier's lifework. While their reasoning for a poem's inclusion under the title "Religious Poems" is not always clear, their arrangement is often purposeful and, as we shall see, significant. Of course, it was not uncommon for a similar arrangement to be found in the collected works of other American poets. Nathaniel Parker Willis, Alice and Phoebe Cary, and Harriet Beecher Stowe all published collections which included a section entitled "Sacred" or "Religious Poems." But these collections applied the title as a way of preserving a poem's first appearance in a formally published volume or compilation.[32] By applying the title to a group of poems for the first time, the Riverside Whittier functioned similarly to the period's religious anthologies which framed and documented the "religious" for its readership; this framing of the

[30] For a description of Scudder's collaboration with Whittier, see Eleanor M Tilton's "Making Whittier Definitive," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1939), 281-314.
[31] See Tilton, "Making Whittier Definitive," 281-286.
[32] See *The Poems, Sacred, Passionate, and Humorous, of Nathaniel Parker Willis,*(New York: Clarke and Maynard, 1868); *The Poetical Works of Alice and Phoebe Cary* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876); and *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1896).

"religious" was made even more noteworthy considering the grouping in this case received the approval of the poems' author.

The 70 poems listed under "Religious Poems" are organized chronologically. Like all poets, Whittier had his thematic preoccupations and from time to time, experimented with meter. The appearance of a "Quaker" sequence of 1880-1 is one such an example of both: six brief but powerful treatments of the theme of faith, expressed in a verse form closely resembling that of the Italian sonnet. On the whole, Whittier held fast to the ballad measure and the octosyllabic four-stress line. Furthermore, his focus on the subject of man's journey to God seldom wavered. The Riverside collection opens with "The Star of Bethlehem" (1830), a narration of a pilgrimage to a Holy Land, and concludes with "Revelation" (1886), a first-person reimagining of a spiritual crisis in the life of George Fox. Like the works anthologized for Bloom's collection of religious poetry, both poems begin in anticipation amid some difficulty. For the pilgrim of "The Star of Bethlehem" it is the strange world of the Muslim-dominated Holy Land—"Moslem graves…/And mosque-spires…/And graybeard Mollahs…/Chanting their Koran." For the Fox-inspired speaker of "Revelation," Nature, the "strange god of Force" assails him with doubts. Both poems work through this "strange," initial experience differently—the pilgrim discovers growing at his feet a "Star-flower of the Virgin child," while the speaker of "Revelation" recalls the doctrines of his faith—but both speakers receive the insight that "the darkness of His providence/Is star-lit with benign intents."

In addition to the "Holy Land" poems (and a few scattered experiments in Biblical narrative), two other thematic subcategories of religious poem emerge, including

one which gained Whittier the label of "iconoclast," namely the theme of religious hypocrisy and error. These poems expose what the speaker of "Utterance" identifies as the "scheme/Creeds, cult and ritual" of organized religion and attack (in Emerson's words) "the many forms" in which we try "[t]o utter God's infinity."[33] The collection's other dominant theme is that of faith and self-doubt. These poems begin in inquiry, disbelief, and darkness and find resolution either in the "still small voice" of divine instruction or the "inner light" of divine love. At first, it would appear that these two thematic sub-categories are mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed treatments of religious error and religious authenticity. Although it is beneficial to treat them at first as separate modes—one conceived in the tradition of New England satirical verse which took aim at the faults of orthodox religion, the other in the devotional *ethos* of the Metaphysical poets and the faith-hymns of Isaac Watts—the separation between the two in the follow section is provisional.[34] In the most compelling of his portrayals of religious experience, Whittier makes one the background of the other: hypocrisy and religious error help compose the darkness against which the pilgrim struggles and the "still small voice" of the true God pieces the "din of clashed belief" of divided Christendom.[35]

"Geneva Creed, Roman Crown"

As the nation's representative poet of the abolitionist movement, Whittier spent 35 years outlining the theme of hypocrisy; his "Anti-slavery Poems" supplied a workshop

[33] "Bohemian Hymn" in *Collected Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 368.
[34] For a clear summary of the New England satirical verse which targets religion, see George L. Roth, "New England Satire on Religion, 1790-1820" in *The New England Quarterly* 28 (1955), 246-254. For a focus account on one author, see Colin Wells' study of the poetry of Timothy Dwight , *The Devil and Doctor Dwight: Satire and Theology in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2002.
[35] The phrase "din of clashed belief" is from Herman Melville, *Clarel*. eds. Harrison Hayford, Walter E. Bezanson, Hershel Parker. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991.), 3.21.98.

of sorts for his religious imagination.[36] In them, Whittier depicted the hypocrisy of America's collusion with the institution of slavery as an almost metaphysical horror, capable of staining nature itself. In "The Slave-Ships," the vessel delivering slaves to the New World tinctures "the bird and blossom,/The green earth and the sky" with the "blackness of [its] crime." But Whittier was seldom so broad in his attack on hypocrisy. If Whittier identifies the hypocrisy of Protestantism, he implicates not simply "Christians" but entire denominations by name. In "Letter From a Missionary" the poem's speaker charges "good and pious men/A Presbyterian Elder, Baptist deacon,/A local preacher…" with the crime of condoning the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This penchant for the details of American denominational culture is combined with a severe view of Catholicism. Even though the ire of the anti-slavery poems is largely aimed at the hypocrisy of Protestant Evangelicals, they also target the liturgical and ecclesiastical furniture of Catholic thought and practices. Intensifying William Hazlitt's claim that "greatest hypocrites in the world are religious hypocrites," "Clerical Oppressors" presents members of the clergy as the greatest of sinners, "paid hypocrites, who turn Judgment aside, and rob the Holy Book/Of those high words of truth which search and burn/In warning and rebuke." [37] The speaker of "The Sentence of John L. Brown" warns that to deny the Bible's stand against slavery is to become complicit with the "mousing priesthood" who in pre-Reformation days "ply/their garbled text and gloss of sin,/And make the lettered scroll deny/Its living soul within." Even if the injustice described is not religious in kind, Whittier personifies it as a participant in ritualistic worship. "Official

[36] All "anti-slavery" poems discussed in the subsequent paragraph can be found in *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 3.9-270.
[37] *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt.* eds. A.R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1902), 192.

Piety" describes a slave pirate, who "watching from his bloody deck/…holding death in check/While prayers are said, brows crossed, and beads are told" transforms into a "thousand-throated priesthood" who sing "Te Deums to the shuddering sky." At the end of that poem, a priest "lock[s] fast the door/Of Hope against three million souls of men" and genuflects "with unrolled eyeballs…/Whining a prayer for help to hid the key!" Here, as elsewhere in the "anti-slavery" poems, Whittier illustrates the theme of hypocrisy by combining religious indignation with ecclesiastical metaphor.

Shaped to fit the fierce debate over slavery, the treatment of hypocrisy in the "Anti-slavery Poems" is identical to the one presented in the "Religious Poems." In his religious lyrics, Whittier strikes at the "schemes" of organized religion, utilizing language redolent of traditional Protestant challenges to "Popery." But he also censures the "creeds" of Protestant culture as well. Without the clear aim Whittier exhibited in the composition of his "Anti-slavery Poems"—the abolishment of the slave-trade—Whittier's utilization of iconoclastic rhetoric appears more diffuse. Yet Whittier had his favorite targets—the creed of Calvinism and the "ritualistic" worship of Catholicism—and his unvarying attack on them constituted the poet's two-pronged attack on religious hypocrisy and error.

The social and intellectual history of Calvinism is a frequent subject of Whittier's religious poems. "The Familist's Hymn" (1838), "The Exiles" (1841), and "Hymn for the Dunkers" (1877) take up the historical oppression of American Quakerism by Puritans, while "The Overheart" (1859) and "Andrew Rykman's Prayer" (1863) treat the universal menace of contemporary Calvinism. As we have already seen, "The Eternal Goodness" (which one critic called Whittier's "fullest statement of…dissent from the

Calvinistic point of view") rejects traditional Christian theology's "logic linked and strong"; the object of that rejection is the "iron creeds" of theology, a phrase which always means in Whittier's poetry the Calvinist doctrines of total depravity and predestination.[38] This idea of "iron" theology is beautiful realized in the last image of "The Preacher," one of Whittier's "narrative poems," in which the "church-spires" that populate the New England landscape, "lift their vein defense/As if to scatter the bolts of God/With the points of Calvin's thunder-rod." [39] Even in poems whose subject is not ostensibly religious, the "Genevan creed" appears, as it does in a passage at the end of "Snowbound" (1866). The passage, in which a Doctor's belief in "Calvin's creed" is suspended momentarily in order to help a family trapped by snow, is crucial to the poem's theme of isolation and community and suggests that Calvinism is incompatible with Christian charity.

Perhaps the most famous of Whittier's attacks on Calvinism, "The Minister's Daughter" (1880), imagines the conversion of a Calvinist at the hands of a child. After delivering a sermon in which "he had told of the primal fall,/And how thenceforth the wrath of God/Rested on each and all," a Calvinist minister and his daughter stop to admire the "old, lost beauty/Of the Garden of the Lord." Instead of admiring the apple tree's bounty, the child deems it "wicked." "Had there been no Garden of Eden/There never had been a fall," she reasons, "And if never a tree had blossomed/God would have loved us all." Her father admonishes her to "fear and love Him," but, although she fears Him, she cannot since He is not "as good and gentle,/Kind and loving" as her earthly father. Ashamed of his faith, the minister questions both his vocation and his faith:

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[38] Wagenknecht, *John Greenleaf Whittier*, 191.
[39] *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 230.

To what grim and dreadful idol
Had he lent the holiest name?
Did his own heart, loving and human,
The God of his worship shame? […]
Thereafter his hearers noted
In his prayers a tenderer strain,
And never the gospel of hatred
Burned on his lips again.

Here, the "gospel of hatred"—shorthand for the Calvinist doctrines of original sin and total depravity—is transformed into the "tenderer strain" of trusting in God's benevolence. Through the power of a young girl's words, "Sinai's mount of law" has become the "Syrian lilies." Ann Douglas characterized this transformation from "Adult politics" to "infantile piety, *Ecclesia* to nursery," as the "feminization" of American Calvinism.[40] But the Minister does not so much as succumb to his daughter's teaching as follow his heart. Destroying the "grim and dreadful idol" is the poem's iconoclastic gesture, but the Minister's true hypocrisy is the lack of fidelity to his own religious affections.

Calvinism's influence on religious emotions appears in "Trinitas" (1858), a poem which performs what historian Jaroslav Pelikan called "the affectional transposition of doctrine."[41] Puzzled by the doctrine of the Trinity ("the dark riddle"), the poem's speaker unsuccessfully seeks for a solution in "blindfold" nature and human society before observing an act of love by one who seemed "secure/From inward guilt or outward lure."

[40] *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press, 1998), 19.
[41] *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 122.

That night, the speaker turns to "what Hippo's saint and Calvin said; /The living seeking to the dead" for an explanation, but "in vain" he "turn[s], in weary quest,/Old pages, where…/The poor creed-mongers dreamed and guessed." The speaker prays again, and this time, is answered by the "still, small voice" who transforms the day's events into compelling evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity:

> "The equal Father in rain and sun,
> His Christ in the good to evil done,
> His voice in thy soul; and the Three are One!"
>
> I shut my grave Aquinas fast;
> The monkish gloss of ages past,
> The schoolman's creed aside I cast.

The "still, small voice" reveals what the "schoolman's creed" cannot, namely that evidence of theological truth is found not in theology but in the three-fold presence of nature, sympathy, and divine illumination; the dogma has now been "transposed" into affection. Earlier in the poem, the speaker is shocked to see the "fallen sister…secure/From inward guilt or outward lure." Because the speaker uses "*inward guilt*" to interpret his own religious experience, he is now chastised by the divine visitation for being "blind of sight, of faith so small" and, in a line which recalls Peter's denial of Christ, having "this day…denied them all!" Seeing "shame and sin" where there is none, Calvinism impedes love as well as illumination and leads to blindness, hypocrisy, and eventually death.

"Trinitas" also presents the figure of "grave Aquinas" whose work offers a "monkish gloss" on experience. But the medieval theologian is not the poem's only representative of Roman Catholicism. Catholic thought appears in the figure of St. Augustine ("Hippo's saint) and, in the second half of the speaker's observation on "inward guilt or *outward lure,*" the suggestion of Catholic practice. Although "outward lure" includes the speaker's misinterpretation of nature—or any error in judgment based on appearances of the spiritual in the visible world—the phrase also suggests the attraction of religious ritual and habit, especially those associated with the Roman Catholic Church. The pairing of Calvinism and Catholicism in Whittier's "Labor" and "Narrative" poems often functions as a unified symbol for the repressive authority from which the "pilgrim needs a pass no more," or acts as an opportunity for political iconoclasm (the voice of "To Ronge" cries, "Sharp sword of God, all idols down/Genevan creed and Roman Crown"). But in poems like "Trinitas," it is Whittier's formula for the totality of religious error, comprised of the two greatest obstacles in man's journey to God: the "iron creed" of Calvinist dogma and the "ghastly symbols" of Roman Catholic worship and ritual.

For literary reasons, the "ghastly symbols" are a more effective target for the iconoclasm of Whittier's religious poetry than Calvinist doctrine. In the "Narrative Poems," such as "The Pennsylvanian Pilgrim" and "The Double-Headed Snake of New England," Whittier could censure the doctrine of total depravity or predestination by drawing from stories of early Quaker oppression by Puritans; he could dress doctrine with history. But his religious poetry required what Peter Levi called the "scaffolding"

of symbol, even when the source of the symbol was also the object of his attack.[42] Whittier may not be targeting historical Catholicism in all the poems that include "cult and ritual," but, as the "Anti-Slavery Poems" reveal, the liturgical and ecclesiastical tradition of Catholicism provided a ready economy of symbolism for the poet's attack on *all* religious hypocrisy and error. Written the same year as "Snow-Bound," "Our Master" suggest the materials of Roman Catholic liturgy and ritual: "Nor holy bread, nor blood of grape,/The lineaments restore/Of Him we know in outward shape/And in the flesh no more." Whittier's description of the ritual and elements of Communion not only rejects of the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation but dismisses the various positions held by Anglicans (Episcopalians), Lutherans, Methodists, and even Reformed Churches concerning the "Real Presence" of Christ during the commemoration of the Lord's Supper. The phrase "Blood of grape" covers both the use of wine and the unfermented grape juice used by Reformers and recalls the orgiastic drinking of pagan ritual. In place of these empty rituals, the speaker substitutes the "His own best evidence,/His witness…within":

> Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord
> What may Thy services be?
> Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,
> But simply following Thee
> Thy litanies, sweet offices
> Of love and gratitude;
> Thy sacramental liturgies
> The joy of doing good.

[42] Preface in *The Penguin Book of English Christian Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984)

The triple address, "Friend, Brother, Lord" is a crucial component in the "Religious Poems." By it, Whittier's speakers deliver their messages to Quaker ("Friend"), fellow Christian ("Brother") and directly to "Lord." Like the economized description of "blood of grape" and "sacramental liturgies" (which refers specifically to Catholic and Anglican tradition, but also includes *all* forms of Christian worship), the compression of his address and brief alteration of organized worship into religious affections—"sacramental litanies" transforms into "love and gratitude" in the space of one line—Whittier miniaturizes his iconoclastic rhetoric in order to "strip the altar" of all empty ritual as well as to reflect a closeness with, and possible unity of, all Christendom.

In "Worship" (1848), the parallel between "pagan" and Christian forms of ritual, understated in poems like "Our Master" ("blood of grape"), is made clear. The poem's opening lines, "The Pagan's myths through marble lips are spoken,/And ghosts of old Beliefs still flit and moan," are followed by vivid descriptions of religious offences committed by Christian culture in its pursuit of worshipping God. "Worship" portrays the pagan and the Christian as identical, and, in some of the most severe examples of Whittier's iconoclastic rhetoric, condemns their practice of ritualized worship:

> Red altars, kindling through that night of error,
> Smoked with warm blood beneath the cruel eye,
> [....] Then through great temples swelled the dismal moaning,
> Of dirge-like music and sepulchral prayer;
> Pale wizard priests, o'er occult symbols droning,
> Swung their white censers in the burdened air
> As if the pomp of rituals, and the savor

Of gums and spices could the Unseen One please;

As is His ear could bend, with childish favor,

To the poor flattery of the organ keys!

"Worship"'s evocation of the Roman Catholic/Anglican Mass as a pagan, even satanic, celebration joins other America writing that attacks Catholicism while also targeting the ritual and worship-practices of organized religion. The poem's "ghastly symbols" are provided by Roman Catholic tradition but can be applied to the perceived excesses of Protestants, even those members of the Reformed tradition who would have joined Whittier in his condemnation of "Romish" liturgy. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is the most well-known illustration from the period; its description of the midnight witch meeting evokes both the Roman Catholic mass and the evangelical revival, even as it exposes the hypocrisy of American Calvinism. This multivalent confrontation with the period's "orthodox" religion appears most prominent in fiction but also appears in poems by Oliver Wendell Holmes and Emerson, both entitled simply "Worship."[43] Perhaps Whittier's own "The Brewing of the Soma" best exemplifies this kind of "anti-worship" worship poem. The poem details the mystical powers of Soma, an ancient ritual drink, which, according to Hindu mythology, was both a sacred elixir and god. A satire on the intemperance of religious enthusiasm, "Brewing" gained popularity among nineteenth-century Christians when it was included in several church hymnals. The abridged hymn begins "Dear Lord and Father of mankind/Forgive our foolish ways." What the hymn does not include, however, is the poem's stated "foolish ways," the 11

[43] For a discussion on nineteenth-century American fiction's attack on Roman Catholicism, see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 76-110; David S. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 180-187.

previous stanzas, which abound in the "ghastly symbols" of Catholic liturgy and ritual and suggest the specter of paganism all while satirizing the world's religions:

> Each after age has striven
>
> By music, incense, vigils drear,
>
> And trance, to bring the skies more near,
>
> Or lift men up to heaven! […]
>
> The scourge's keen delight of pain,
>
> The Dervish dance, the Orphic strain,
>
> The desert's hair-grown hermit sunk
>
> The naked Santon, hashish-drunk,
>
> The cloister madness of the monk,
>
> The fakir's torture-show.

In Whittier's attack on ritual, no group is spared. "Brewing" is unique in Whittier's poetry for its attack on world religions. But even while the poem appropriates images from Hindu and Islamic religion, it never leaves behind the furniture and figures of Christian ritual.[44]

Whittier's two-pronged attack on the creed of Calvinism and the "ritualistic" worship of Catholicism mirrors similar attacks by nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism on the two groups. Jenny Franchot has argued that, for religious liberals, the two targets of Catholicism and Calvinism were, in fact, one. She writes, "[T]he

[44] Included in the Riverside collection under "Anti-slavery Poems," "The Haschish" (1854), preceded "The Brewing of the Soma" but appears as a kind of companion piece to Whittier's satire on religious enthusiasm. Like "Brewing" the poem details a number of religious improprieties when the plant is eaten: a Muslim scales a synagogue and "the Rabbi shakes his beard at Moses." But perhaps the greatest scene is the Christian preacher, who " eats, and straight appears/His Bible in a new translation;/Its angels negro overseers/And Heaven itself a snug plantation." The poem is another illustration of the ways in which themes dedicated to the cause of abolishing slavery were later used for the purposes of censuring religious hypocrisy and error.

attack on Catholic absolutism [was] part of liberal Protestantism's struggle to divest itself of absolutist Calvinist orthodoxy while attempting to control its own debilitation by rallying forces against a malevolent Rome."[45] Moreover, the movement of nineteenth-century religious progress was both preceded and nourished by the spirit of Quakerism, an observation William James made in his lecture on religious experience: "So far as our sects to-day are evolving into liberality, they are simply reverting in essence to the position which Fox and the early Quakers so long ago assumed."[46] We need look no further for additional evidence of the interpenetration of religious liberalism and Quaker tradition than in the intellectual biographies of two of the century's most important American poets, Emerson and Whitman, both of whom were influenced by Quakers such as Fox and Elias Hicks.[47] Committed to his Quaker principles, Whittier articulated in these religious poems a position that corresponded to a more extensive critique leveled at orthodoxy by religious liberals. But, while the trials of Whittier's character who address each other as "Friend" may at times resemble the world-weariness of the iconoclastic speaker of Emerson's "The Problem," or the compassion of Whitman's own sympathetic imagination in *Leaves of Grass*, Whittier's commitment to Quakerism determined, not merely illustrated, his religious vision, which was dedicated to leading his readers away

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[45] *Roads to Rome*, xxvii.
[46] *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 16.
[47] When asked what religion he "belonged" to, Emerson answered that he was "more than a Quaker than anything else." quoted in Robert D. Richardson Jr, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 158; for Whitman and Quakerism, see David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), esp. 24-27. Here, Reynolds reminds us that Whitman felt himself "destined" to be Hick's biographer. The two men resembled one another, Hicks being the forerunner of Whitman's mysticism: "Hicks ushered Quakerism to the brink of pre-Whitmanian religious vision." 38. See also Glenn N. Cummings, "Placing the Impalpable: Walt Whitman and Elias Hicks" *Modern Language Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 1998), 69-86.;

from (in his words) "the worn ways of cathedral-aisles" and down "the solitary path" illuminated by the "one distinctive doctrine of Quakerism—the Light within."[48]

"The Light Within"

As Quakerism's central doctrine," the "light within" (also identified in Whittier's poetry as "inner light," "inner ear," "inner sense," and "inner silence") is anything but distinctive. Theologically ambiguous enough to allow multiple, often conflicting, interpretations, and the doctrine originated in seventeenth-century England among Christians who had rejected the principles and practices of the Church of England. Fox believed that "each person had a measure of what the gospel of John called 'the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'"[49] How a person received this light and to what degree it constituted a *special* religious insight, however, remained matters of great concern for subsequent generations of Quakers. For the Quakers of Whittier's time, several crises sprang up around the nature and authority of the "inner light."

Whittier's poetry was born, so to speak, in the wake of the first such crisis of the nineteenth century, what one historian has called "the watershed event in American Quaker history, the Hicksite controversy of 1827-1828.[50] Named after the charismatic preacher Elias Hicks, this controversy over the doctrine of the inner light divided Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends, into two groups: those Friends who sympathized with the progressive ideas of Hicks, and those who maintained an orthodox

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[48] Unknown day and month, 1870, Letter to William Allinson in *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier.* Vol. 3. ed. John Pickard (Harvard: Belknap, 1975), 213.
[49] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. (New Haven, Yale 2003.) pp. 320.
[50] Whittier published his first poem, "The Exile's Departure" in 1826. He published over 150 in the next two years; Thomas D. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.), 14.

stand on Christ, the Bible, and sin. Because they believed that the inner light was equivalent to conscience, given to all irrespective of merit, the Hicksites, as this second group was called, argued against the Atonement, the Bible as the infallible word of God, and Original Sin. The Orthodox Friends naturally rejected these liberal reforms but because Quakers had, for 150 years, "eschewed systematic theological thinking," their understanding of the inner light was left vulnerable to attack.[51] Perhaps more powerful than any "liberalizing" attack on the doctrine, however, were the ways in which the Orthodox identity was affected by its affiliation with Evangelicals. Not wanting to equate the "inner light" with conscience alone, by joining the ranks of Evangelical Protestantism, Orthodox Friends ran the risk of eclipsing their tradition's unique insights with that of Calvinism's. Wishing to be confident in the teachings of Christ's divinity, the relevance of Holy Scripture, and the existence of evil, they were always in danger of relying on the doctrines of predestination and total depravity.

Whittier's association with the Orthodox party was no secret. "I prefer the old ways," he once stated simply. [52] Although his poetry praises theologians of liberalism—in "Channing" (1844) he calls the liberal theologian "a hero and a saint"—Whittier rejected the century's liberal spirit to which Quakerism appeared to be adapting itself. Whittier stood firm on the divinity of Christ and accepted the doctrine of the Trinity as true.[53] He did not wholly reject original sin and had little patience for Unitarianism's reverence for the role of human reason. He fought against many of the changes that were being made to Quaker meetings, such as the new emphasis on preaching instead of silent meditation. Yet the quarrel between the Orthodox party and the Hicksites, coupled with

[51] Hamm, *The Transformation*, 17.
[52] Sept.10, 1869, Letter to Ann Elizabeth Wendell in *Letters*, Pickard, 198-199.
[53] July 15, 1877, Letter to Gail Hamilton, in *Letters*, Pickard, 376.

the Friend's uneasy relationship with Evangelicals, produced in Whittier a life-long sympathy for liberalism, and nurtured a sensibility cautious towards religious enthusiasm and allergic to theology. Although he deemed the Hicksites "heretics," Whittier knew the dangers of judging others: "What will it avail us," he asked in a 1838 letter to an Orthodox Friend, "if, while boasting of our soundness and of our enmity to the delusion of Hicksism, we neglect to make a practical application of our belief to ourselves?"[54] Confessing in that same letter that he did not "dare claim to be any the better for [his] orthodox principles," Whittier greeted future schisms (and religious controversy in general) with a tolerant apprehension, focusing on the "practical application" of his faith. "The only orthodoxy I am especially interested in," he proclaimed, "is that of life and practice."

The life and practice of the "Friend" is the unspoken theme of many of Whittier's poems, including "The Chapel of the Hermits" (1851), which anticipates the theme of the "impossibility of faith" found in Matthew Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855) and later in Melville's *Clarel* (1876). The pilgrims of the poem, who pray for the strength to overcome unbelief, produce an inventory of their period's hindrance to faith:

> I do believe, and yet, in grief,
> I pray for help to unbelief;
> For needful strength aside to lay
> The daily cumberings of my way.
> I'm sick at heart of craft and cant,
> Sick of the crazed enthusiast's rant,

[54] Date, month, and recipient unknown, 1838, in *Letters* Vol.1, Pickard, 295.

Profession's smooth hypocracies,

And creeds of iron, and lives of ease.

Whittier's pilgrim is both Everyman and Quaker "Friend." His list of "daily cumberings" include the hazards modern man must face on his path to authentic faith. Additionally, they represent the various temptations and trials faced by American Quakerism in the wake of the Hicksite schism: Calvinism ("creeds of iron"), changes in liturgy ("craft"), cant ("theology"), hypocrisy, and "enthusiasm." Furthermore, the pilgrim's struggle is that of the "common heart of Christendom" but is felt most acutely by those friends who speak "where the still river slid away," one of the poem's many unmistakable references to the Merrimack River, an important feature in Whittier's "hometowns" of Haverhill and Amesbury, Massachusetts. Here, at the start of his journey, the pilgrim experiences despair, born of religious learning, a common departure point with other pilgrims of nineteenth-century literature, but particularly acute for the Quaker who must find the evidence of the "still small voice" among the competing voices of religious controversy.[55] At poem's end, Whittier's poem hears it, though not without trial, and the light of "New Jerusalem" falls on the "maple ridge" and "green-banked lake" in a New England landscape.

Poems like "The Chapel of the Hermits" are a result of Whittier's commitment to Quaker tradition and the poet's ongoing engagement with the crisis of identity which his faith community faced. The resemblance between the journey of the Quaker and that of (the fictional) Clarel or Obermann is what gave the best of Whittier's poems a wide appeal. But his dual commitment to Quaker principles and writing poetry proved, at times, to be challenging. Two such challenges arise from a close examination of the

[55] For a discussion on the despair born of religious learning (which includes theology) see my introduction,

Whittier's "Religious Poems": the first is a consistent attitude towards the objects of nature; the second is a reoccurring form of argumentation present in both lyrical and narrative modes, which is characterized by accumulation and a rhetoric of negation. These two qualities form the tension between the *ethos* of iconoclasm and that of mysticism, a feature hinted at in the reception history of Whittier by his contemporaries. This tension which originated, as Lowell had maintained, in Whittier's own faith tradition, felt by friend and mystic alike, animates what was for Whittier the purpose of a "religious poem": to comfort readers who, "wandering between two worlds, one dead/The other powerless to be born," need only see the "inner light" or hear the "still small voice" to experience God's love.

Nature and the Rhetoric of Negation

On the whole, the religious poems view nature as much more than "an ennobling recreation," but, unlike the work of Jones Very or Richard Henry Dana, the natural world is not presented as a conduit to the spiritual.[56] George T. Rider, the Episcopalian anthologist who objected to the century's sacred lyrics with the exception of those which "caught from Nature…her sweetest inspirations," included four of Whittier's religious poems in his *Lyra Americana*, two of which, "The Red River Voyageur," and "The Purer Path" treat the river as a symbol of spiritual progress.[57] But this use of natural symbolism is uncommon in Whittier's religious lyrics; insight into God's ways is rarely gained

[56] Norman Foerster, *Nature in American Literature: Studies in the Modern View of Nature*. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 27. The entire passage reads, "Like Bryant, Whittier looked to the outer and inhuman world, not for his religion, but for *an ennobling recreation*." Despite misunderstanding Whittier's use of nature in the religious poems, Foerster continues on to maintain, correctly, "Much as he loved nature…he was essentially…a religious poet" 33.
[57] *Lyra Americana* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1864), viii-ix.

through nature. Like the George Fox-inspired voice of "Revelation" who claims the "Elements and the Stars assail" and "reck…the helpless wills" of those who worship them, Whittier's religious speakers question nature's ability to assist man in finding epiphany. "Questions of Life" (1852) renders nature itself one vast riddle:

> What may the wind's low burden be?
> The meaning of the moaning see?
> The hieroglyphics of the stars?
> Or clouded sunset's crimson bars?
> I vainly ask, for mocks my skill
> The trick of Nature's cipher still.

Even in non-religious poems, Whittier seldom drew his materials from the natural world, often referring to nature in order to suggest its inadequacy for the spiritual life. "We felt that man was more than his adobe," he wrote in "Mountain Pictures, "The inward life than Nature's raiment more."[58] One important exception is "Snow-bound" (1866), which, in describing a New England Nor'easter and the family who endures it, provides an important contrast to the position taken by the "Religious Poems."

Whittier opens "Snow-bound" with the sun, a "cheerless/…darkly circled,/[which] gave at noon/A sadder light than waning moon." [59] It is a symbol of dread anticipation: "Its mute and ominous prophecy,/A portent seeming less than threat,/It sank from sight before it set." The family, trapped inside, are unable to ignore nature's anticipation and feel "a chill no coat, however stout,/Of homespun stuff could quite shut out." The storm hits, turns day into night, and the next morning arrives while

[58] "Mountain Pictures," 2:58.
[59] "Snow-Bound," 2:398. All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from 298-306.

"[a]ll day the hoary meteor fell." When the family finally emerges, they find that their world, so familiar the day before, has changed: "We looked upon a world unknown,/On nothing we could call our own." The sun, which earlier in the poem represented nature's "strangeness," a sign of almost-apocalyptic anticipation, now sheds light on the "strange" world of domes and towers, no longer restricted by limitation, and showing "a fenceless drift what once was road." At night, the moon "transfigure[s]" the objects of nature with an "unwarming light,/Which only seemed where'er it fell to make a coldness visible." Despite the absence of visible religious or social connections—"No church-bell lent its Christian tone/To the savage air, no social smoke/Curled over woods of snow-hung oak"—the household finds warmth and light at the "hearth-fire's ruddy glow."

The natural symbolism of "Snow-bound" illustrates well how this balance between the actions of accumulation and negation, building and dismantling, can achieve a kind of equipoise. The sun which provides life to the farm anticipates ("darkly circled") its own extinction; when it returns, it sheds light on an "world unknown/On nothing." The symbol of snow, with its power to conceal and uncover simultaneously, performs an important office not only for Whittier's poem but other American poems as well. Though it "seems nowhere to alight," the snow in Emerson's "The Snowstorm" (1847) demonstrates its power by paralyzing all human activity.[60] While Emerson's snow is both "fanciful" and "savage," and illustrates the sublime, sometimes frightening face of Nature, the snow of Robert Frost's "Desert Places" (1936) which creates a "blanker whiteness…./with no expression, nothing to express" is contrasted with the speaker's own "empty spaces." "I have it in me so much nearer to home," the poet

[60] "The Snowstorm" in *Collected Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 34.

concludes, "To scare myself with my own desert places."[61] Like Emerson's poem which it includes in its dedicatory remarks, "Snow-bound" affirms Nature's sublime, often terrifying "blankness" yet uses its power as a foil against which to highlight the illumination of the soul's interior furnishings ("the old rude-furnished room/Burst, flower like, into rosy bloom").[62]

Starting with dread anticipation, passing through absence, deprivation, and silence, and arriving at the light of love: "Snow-bound" enacts a pattern followed by almost all of the "Religious Poems" of the Riverside collection. But, while the poem utilizes the materials of the natural world to good effect, the religious poems either fail to use nature convincingly (the flower in "The Star of Bethlehem"), censure it as another worldly distraction ("First-Day Thoughts," "Revelation") or bypass it altogether. More comfortable with the elements familiar to mystical poetry, Whittier's speakers call on memory and imagination ("Andrew Rykman's Prayer," "In Quest"); they also summon experience ("The Friend's Burial), feelings of sympathy ("The Prayer-Seeker), and are aided, though infrequently, by dreams ("The Clear Vision," "Divine Compassion"). The pattern of poems like "Revelation" and "Trinitas"—from doubt through experience to illumination—mirrors the *via Triplex*, or the three stages or ways of purgation, illumination, and union in classical Christian mysticism. But unlike the work of John Donne or Edward Taylor, they do not present a specific method of meditation or devotional prayer. Rather, they portray the instruction of Quaker spirituality to sit in silence and to wait. Additionally, the poems' speakers almost always begin in darkness.

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[61] "Desert Places," in *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (New York: Library of America, 1995), 269.
[62] For a good summary on the treatment of theme of winter by American poets, see Tim Armstrong's "A Good Word for Winter: The Poetics of a Season" *The New England Quarterly,* Vol. 60. No. 4 (Dec. 1987), 568-583.

In *The Life of George Fox*, a work Whittier owned and returned to often, a young disciple of Fox recounts his teacher's advice:

> When I first went to him…he took me by the hand and said, "Young man, this is the word of the Lord to thee, there are three scriptures thou must witness to befulfilled. First, thou must turn *from darkness to light*; next thou must come to the knowledge of the glory of God; and next, thou must be changed from glory to glory."[63]

The turn "from darkness to light" and the recognition of God's benevolence is the primary poetic paradigm of Whittier's religious poems. "Trinitas" initially presents the doctrine of the Trinity as a "dark riddle." "I send my soul into darkness," admits the speaker of "Trust" (1853). While the recognition of God's benevolence is a fixed element in these poems, the "turn" is preceded by various forms of "darkness," most notably those which concern the affections (such as weariness, doubt, and despair) and the presence of religious commonplace and error; the former dominates lyrical poems (such as "Revelation") while the latter figures prominently in narrative or occasional poems. The difference often resides in whether the speaker of the poem is observing himself or others. Sometimes, these two forms—religious affections and religious error—appear together, as illustrated by the speaker of "The Story of Ida" (1884) whose world-weariness is caused by misunderstandings born of speculative theology, religious hypocrisy, and erroneous worship habits which are tainted by "sacerdotal tailoring/And tinsel gauds":

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[63] See Samuel T. Pickard, *Whittier-Land: A Handbook of North Essex* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 25; Quoted in Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of George Fox, With Dissertations on His Views Concerning the Doctrines, Testimonies, and Discipline of the Christian Church.* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1885), 410.

Weary of jangling noises never stilled
The skeptic's sneer, the bigot's hate, the din
Of clashing texts, the webs of creed men spin
Round simple truth, the children grown who build
With gilded cards their New Jerusalem…
…bedizening holy things.
I turn to with glad and grateful heart, from them
To the sweet story of the Florentine…

That Florentine was Ida, and the story of her acts of love was recorded by American writer Francesca Alexander. John Ruskin who wrote the preface for 1883 edition of Alexander's *The Story of Ida*, described it as a "story of a Catholic girl written by a Protestant one, yet the two of them, so united in the truth of Christian Faith, and in the joy of its love, that they are absolutely unconscious of any difference in the forms or letter of their religion."[64] To overlook religious controversy, "the din/Of clashing texts," is the desire of the poem's speaker, but his weariness over "difference" produces an accumulation of religious errors, a morass from which the speaker must emerge.

This accumulation of religious error is a key characteristic of Whittier's religious poems and is often joined to the rhetoric of negation, as it is in "The Meeting"(1868):

I ask no organ's soulless breath
To drone the themes of life and death,
No alter candle-lit by day,
No ornate wordsman's rhetoric-play,

[64] John Ruskin, Preface to Francesca Alexander, *The Story of Ida: Epitaph on an Ethrurian Tomb* (Kent: George Allen, 1883), vii.

No cool philosophy to teach

Its bland audacities of speech

To double-tasked idolaters

Themselves their gods and worshipers,

No pulpit hammered by the fist,

Of loud-asserting dogmatist,

Who borrows from the Hand of love

The smoking thunderbolts of Jove.

Rejected as they are enumerated, these elements of religious extravagance and error comprise the whole of Christendom. In order, the passage exemplifies Catholicism by its extravagances of liturgical and sacramental worship, superstitious belief, and foolish scholasticism; Unitarianism by "cool philosophy" and self-absorbed rhetoric; and the Evangelical Calvinism, by an enthusiastic and "dogmatic" trust in original sin, sermons of war instead of love. The speaker of "The Meeting"—the one American poem chosen by William Cullen Bryant to represent the "religious" in his collection *Library of World Poetry*—rejects these "shallow forms of make-believe" in order to prepare his soul for the "feeling which is evidence/That very near about us lies/The realm of spiritual mysteries."[65] The negation, then is part of the spiritual preparation, a *via negativa* to "the sphere of the supernal powers." "No" gathers the darkness, as well as dispels it. Whittier's use of accumulation and a rhetoric of negation accounts for the poet's mixed reception as iconoclast and "best interpreter of the devotional spirit." By uniting "no" with the accumulated furniture of religious thought and habits, Whittier's poems re-

[65] See *Library of World Poetry*. ed William Cullen Bryant (1872; repr., New York: Avenel Books, 1970), 285-287.

perform Protestant iconoclasm: idols are built solely to be knocked down. But, for the speaker and the actors of these poems, the aim of dismantling is not without purpose, for only in the vacancy created by the vanished objects of the religious past can God speak. Hawthorne may be the most well-known American writer for exclaiming "No! in thunder" (in Melville's words), but Whittier deployed the rhetoric of negation more frequently than any other of his contemporaries writing devotional verse.

While the poems of the Riverside collection excel at the art of demolition and "send[ing] the soul into the dark," they often struggle to convincingly realize the moment of illumination. Generally speaking, the "no" of an iconoclast and that of a mystic are different not only in degree but kind. Traditionally understood, the mystic abandons his earthly attachments through a process of purgation so that he might experience God; the iconoclast, on the other hand, "helps" others give up their attachments, so that *they* might experience God (or, at the very least, be free to do so). Both say "no" to images and the tyranny of the senses, but the mystic reproaches himself while the iconoclast rebukes others. Furthermore, this tension between the two roles is not reconciled but made more acute by the presence of a third role—that of poet—who, despite making use of the rhetoric and *ethos* of iconoclast and mystic, must also *express*, not simply be aware of, the moment of illumination. The poet must describe "the empty forms between the ivory gates" not simply experience them; he must "set down" for readers the freedom from illusion and error, not merely feel it.[66] In the Divinity School Address, Emerson characterized this failure to express the moment of illumination as a "burden." "The

[66] The phrase, "the empty forms between the ivory gates," is T.S. Eliot's from "Ash Wednesday," in *Collected Poems: 1902-1962*. (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1963.), Canto 6, line 18.

effect of conversation with the beauty of the soul," said Emerson, is "to beget a desire and need to impart to others the same knowledge and love." "If utterance is denied the thought lies like a burden on the man."[67] Since the iconoclast and the mystic are satisfied by experience alone, the burden belongs wholly to the poet.

In the poem "Utterance," which is part of the "Quaker" sonnet sequence of 1880-1, Whittier depicted that burden, along with the conflicting roles of iconoclast and mystic, born of his commitment to Quaker principles. The poem's first line begins *in media res*, deliberating the final lines of the previous poem "Help," in which the poet resolved to continue listening and recording "the still whisper of the Inward Word/…itself its own evidence" against the "wrath of the Eumenides," namely the Calvinist teaching of total depravity. Previous poems in the sequence had meditated on a range of theological issues: the good works of those who live without "creed" ("By Their Works"), the authority of the Bible ("The Word," "The Book"), and the efficacy of faith ("Requirement," "Help"); now, after having meditated on the doctrines of his religion and the issues which vexed nineteenth-century Quakerism, the speaker reflects on power of language to capture the insights of religious experience:

> But what avail inadequate words to meet
> The innermost of Truth? Who shall essay
> Blinded and weak, to point and lead the way,
> Or solve the mystery in familiar speech?

The question is commonplace, but the speaker's response is not. Without rejecting or idealizing the role of language, the speaker presents a modest yet thoughtful solution,

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[67] *Essays and Lectures (New York: Library of America, 1983), 83.*

born not of a “simple, sweet” vision of life, but of a commitment to the problem of utterance which is the burden of the religious poet:

> Yet, if it be that something not thy own,
> Some shadow of the Thought to which our schemes,
> Creeds, cult, and ritual are at best but dreams,
> Is even to thy unworthiness made known,
> Thou mayst not hide what yet thou shouldst not dare
> To utter lightly, lest on lips of thine
> The real seem false, the beauty undivine.
> So weighing duty in the scale of prayer,
> Give what seems given to thee. It may prove a seed
> Of goodness dropped in fallow-grounds of need.

Even if the experience of God in this life, the speaker reasons, is only the “shadow of Thought,” little better than the “schemes” of organized religion, you are compelled to share the gift of religious insight; your “duty” is to “give what *seems* given to thee.” No matter how inadequate it may appear, poetry is the capstone of religious experience. Earlier in his career, Whittier had dreamt of one day writing a master Quaker poem sequence, a "corner-stone for a Quaker temple of literature," built in the tradition of Wordsworth's ecclesiastical sonnets. [68] Although hardly in the vein of Wordsworth's ecclesiastical sonnets or George Herbert's "The Temple," this final sonnet sequence, along with the whole of the Riverside collection, monumentalize Whittier’s achievement as one of the America’s most important writers of religious verse.

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[68] Quoted in Pickard, *Life and Letters,* 1:227.

Chapter Four:

"Strenuous Doubt: Religious Skepticism in James Russell Lowell's *The Cathedral*

Of all of his late poems, James Russell Lowell (1819-1891) worked most intensely on *The Cathedral*, calling it, in 1869, "a kind of religious poem."[1] During months of writing, Lowell had assembled multiple versions of the poem, which, at eight hundred lines of blank verse, increasingly took on the character of the poem's central image, the Cathedral at Chartres. In a letter to then assistant-editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* William Dean Howells, Lowell, who was at that time America's most popular writer of satirical verse, noted that his newest project was atypical, as it was developing into "a bit of clean carving...a solid buttress or two and perhaps a gleam through painted glass."[2] *The Cathedral* was emerging as Lowell's most serious and sustained attempt at non-satirical verse. All that remained to be seen is how, or whether, "it would stand" in the eyes of the public.

When it was finally published in January 1870, *The Cathedral* attracted a range of responses that reflect the wide influence Lowell held on the public. Some readers welcomed the poet's new direction; Howell called it the best poem of his generation.[3] But readers who were accustomed to the poet's satire rejected the poem in a variety of ways. One critic imagined that the observations of *The Cathedral* were a result of lifting Parson Wilbur, the celebrated dilettante and "philological ornament" of *The Biglow*

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[1] Lowell to Miss Norton, Sept 6, 1869, in *Letters* 229.
[2] Lowell to H.D. Howells, Aug. 11, 1869, *Letters*, 226.
[3] H.D. Howells to Whitelaw Reid, Dec. 19, 1869 quoted in George Monteiro's "Howells on Lowell: An Unascribed Review," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4, (Dec. 1965): 508.

Papers, to "the heroic altitude."[4] Even friends who had been supportive of the poem in its infant stages now questioned whether Lowell had intended his religious verse to be satirical. Magazines contested Lowell's linguistic arcana and John Ruskin—the individual whose ideas most influenced *The Cathedral*—asked Lowell to "go back over [the poem] with a file."[5] One reviewer was even certain that Lowell had never written a poem "so artificial in its structure, so indirect and elaborate in its style, and so remote in its allusions" and argued that "speculation and theology" did not suit the poet's talent.[6] And in what might be the poem's most damning, as well as insightful, appraisal, Ralph Waldo Emerson said of the poem, "I like it, but I think he had to pump."[7]

After the death of Lowell in 1891 the poem endured similar readings, which often expressed the poem's failure in architectural terms. Critic and anthologist Edmund Stedman summarized what must have been by the end of the century a routine appraisal: "[The poem] is not a stately pile, conforming to itself, [but] a structure buil[t] part by part, and at different periods of grandeur or grotesqueness."[8] For Walt Whitman, *The Cathedral* confirmed that "Lowell was not a grower [but] a builder [who] measured his poems—kept them in a formula."[9] Widely disparaged by Romantic poets and Traditionalist critics in the nineteenth century, *The Cathedral* received almost no critical attention in the twentieth century, and effectively disappeared after the Second World

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[4] Unsigned review of *The Cathedral* by James Russell Lowell, *Overland Monthly and Outwest Magazine* Vol. 4 Issue 4, (April 1870): 386.
[5] For the public squabble over the poem's use of words like "down-shod," see, for example, *The Galaxy* Vol. 9, Issue 5, (May 1870): 908, and *Scribner's Monthly* Vol 4, Issue 2, (June 1872): 232; see also Lowell's response in his letter to R.S. Chilton, March 17, 1870, *Letters*, 253-4; Lowell describes Ruskin's reactions to the poem in a letter to C.E. Norton, Oct. 15, 1870, *Letters*, 264-5.
[6] Unsigned review of *The Cathedral* and Robert Browning's *Christmas Eve* in *The New Englander* Vol. 29, Issue 110 (Jan. 1870): 125-6.
[7] Edward Everett Hale, *James Russell Lowell and His Friends* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1899), 164.
[8] "James Russell Lowell" in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* Vol. 24 (May-Oct. 1882), 109-110.
[9] Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. Vol. I (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1961), 215.

War when Lowell's reputation as an American writer of significance declined. Criticized for everything from its lack of polish to its shortage of spontaneity, *The Cathedral* which had once stood in the minds of its readers as a monument to whim and failure, in our own time lies in ruin.[10]

Before closely exploring those ruins, this chapter examines first the religious element of Lowell's satirical verse. With the poet's most popular work "A Fable for Critics" as guide, I argue that, although Lowell resembled his liberal contemporaries in his rejection of theology and religious tradition as instruments of insight, his skepticism exceeded that of any other poet of the period, liberal or otherwise. This skepticism plays a significant role in his "religious" poetry as well, especially in *The Cathedral*, a work which illustrates how, for the sake of imagination, a poet's "original relation to the universe" required embracing Christian tradition as both "labyrinth and clue."

"Theology, art thou so blind?"

"Theology, art thou so blind?" asks the central character of Herman Melville's *Clarel* (1876).[11] For nineteenth-century American poets, the question was a familiar one. The same distrust the guides Clarel from hesitation to despair benefited American poets whose religious verse found inspiration in theology's limitations. In fact, Clarel's question at the start of Melville's poem dramatizes a shared point of departure for many nineteenth-century American poems, a point taken up (as we have seen) not only by the

[10] Biographers of Henry Adams have suggested that the poem influenced Adams' *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1904). See Robert Mane, *Henry Adams on the Road to Chartres* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 37-9. Adams' was Lowell's pupil at Harvard during 1870, the year *The Cathedral* was published; only one full-length study of *The Cathedral* has been written since the poem's publication: Thomas G. Tanselle, "The Craftsmanship of Lowell: Revisions in *The Cathedral*, in *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 70 (1966): 50-63.

[11] Herman Melville, *Clarel*. eds. Harrison Hayford, Walter E. Bezanson, Hershel Parker. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 1.1.22.

speaker of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Problem," but also those voices of the country's early moral poetry (Richard Henry Dana's "Fragment of an Epistle") and the religious musings of the "genteel tradition" (John Greenleaf Whittier's "Trinitas").

One of these American voices who answers Clarel's question with an unqualified "yes" is the speaker of James Russell Lowell's "A Fable for Critics" (1848).[12] Unlike the poems that fill the religious anthologies and collections that we examined in our first chapter, "A Fable" treats the limits of theological knowledge as a key element of satire, not for the advancement of devotion or the deepening of "religious" feeling. Ostensibly, the poem targets the nineteenth-century publishing world, but "the loom…for the [verses] fancy to spin on" is made of religious material. Populated with several portraits of the century's most prominent writers, including Emerson, Dana, Edgar Allan Poe, and Margaret Fuller, the poem presents an American literary culture whose members are corrupted by the vices of literary endeavor *and* spiritual hubris, an idea Lowell expresses in the language of theological discourse. Whether examining the verse of Emerson who "builds glorious temples" without a "doorway to get in a god," or the heart of Whittier which is buried "underneath the bemummying wrappers" of Quakerism, Lowell portrays the enthusiasm of literary vocation as a form of religious narrow-mindedness.

"A Fable for Critics" also argues that the short-sightedness of "men of one idea" results from a more profound blindness whose origin is theology itself.[13] While the pursuit of fame and literary fortune has its winners—Emerson and Whittier are not

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[12] *The Writings of James Russell Lowell in Prose and Poetry*, 10 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), 9.1-95. This volume, as well as the others in the series, do not include line numbers. Unless otherwise noted, all other poems, and writings, by Lowell are cited by volume and page number from the same series.

[13] The phrase "men of one idea" is from "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire" in *Literary Criticism of James Russell Lowell* ed. Herbert F. Smith (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska), 82.

without their accomplishments—as well as its losers, the pursuit of theology and theological knowledge is doomed from the start. The poem illustrates this point with the portraits of two religious figures, which represent two forms of theological inquiry, each from a different denominational culture. The first portrait is of Theodore Parker, the nineteenth century's most vocal advocates of liberal Christianity, who is described in the poem as a radical, who "dissents" from Unitarianism's "orthodox kind of dissent." Lowell depicts Parker as an incessant sermonizer, "talk[ing] in one breath" of both those characters who belong to the world of religion, theology, or mysticism ("Confutzee," Saint Paul, and Peter the Hermit) and those often ridiculous figures who live only in the imagination (Jack Robinson, "Pillicock" "Toots"). Composed from the "torn up" roots of the tree of knowledge, Parker's sermons are a pastiche of the known and unknown, making clear "through wisdom profane with his creed…/…what he *doesn't* believe in." What he does believe in, the poems contends, is himself: "Now P.'s creed than this may be lighter or darker,/But in one thing, 't is clear, he has faith, namely—Parker." The other portrait is of that of the Transcendentalist-turned-Catholic Orestes Brownson whose theology is equally insubstantial. "Providing first, then deftly confuting each side/With no doctrine pleased that's not somewhere denied," Brownson offers his listeners not the creed of self but the foolishness of reason. "He offers the true faith to drink in a sieve," writes Lowell, "When it reaches your lips there's naught left to believe,/But a few silly-(syllo-, I mean,) –gisms that squat 'em/Like tadpoles, o'erjoyed with the mud at the bottom." Although each portrait represents two different traditions, Lowell suggests that the liberal skepticism of Parker and the Catholic scholasticism of Brownson are identical methods of theological inquiry, each resulting in intellectual and spiritual emptiness.

To proclaim in 1848 the insignificance of specialized kinds of theological discourse was hardly novel. Yet in "A Fable for Critics," Lowell sounds the accents of the period's hesitation to "rally around speculative systems" more thoroughly than any other antebellum poet.[14] Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote several works that attacked the doctrines of Christian tradition, including "The Deacon's Masterpiece, or The Wonderful 'One-Hoss Shay'" a poem which registers the collapse of Calvinism, "how it went to pieces all at once,/All at once and nothing first,/Just as bubbles do when they burst."[15] Whittier spent a lifetime confronting the excesses of religious error and took aim at "iron creed" of Calvinist dogma and the "ghastly symbols" of Roman Catholic worship and ritual.[16] Yet both men restored the blindness caused by theology and traditional creed by proclaiming the reality of God's benevolence in religious experience, as Holmes did in this passage from "What We Think" (1857):

> Though temples crowd the crumbled brink,
>
> O'er truth's eternal flow,
>
> Their tablets bold with *what we think*,
>
> Their echoes dumb to *what we know*;
>
> That one unquestioned text we read,
>
> All doubt beyond, all fear above,
>
> Nor crackling pile nor cursing creed

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[14] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.

[15] *The Poetical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes in Two Volumes* Vol. 1. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1892), 417-421; for a helpful discussion of "The Deacon's Masterpiece" as a "religious poem," see David R. Williams, *Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind*. (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1987), 235-246.

[16] See Chapter 3, esp. 15-26.

Can burn or blot it: God is Love![17]

"A Fable for Critics," on the other hand, derides the various expressions of religious thought and habits without endorsing an alternative religious commitment (or, in Holmes case, a loosely-held grasp of ideas concerning the Divine's inherent goodness). In doing so, it resembles more closely poems like Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1666) than it does early American satire that was written as a confirmation of, or a corrective on, beliefs from the position of religious orthodoxy.[18] Like Butler's poem, "A Fable for Critics" attacks the very notions of theology and religious commitment, without asking readers to accept the *via media* of a more "enlightened" denomination or philosophy.[19]

Other satirical or "humorous" poems by Lowell exhibit a similar account of all things spiritual or metaphysical. The object of ridicule in "The Unhappy Lot of Mr. Knott" (1851) is the cult of American spiritualism, but its catalogue of questions asked by the conned public of the ghosts recalls the theological discourse of the age.[20] In a gesture akin to his depiction of the sermons of Parker, Lowell lists the public's absurd inquires, mixing together the doctrinal questions of theologians with the domestic and often petty concerns of ordinary life. "Is it true," ask the duped visitors to Knott's ghost-possessed house, "that the damned are fried or boiled?":

Was the Earth's axis greased or oiled?

Who cleaned the moon when it was soiled?

Was it a sin to be a belle?

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[17] Holmes, *Poetical Works*, 400-1

[18] See George L. Roth, "New England Satire on Religion, 1790-1820" in *The New England Quarterly* 28 (1955), 246-254.

[19] For a good discussion on *Hudibras* and its "formula of exclusion," see Blanford Parker, *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Criticism from Butler to Johnson.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25-60.

[20] *The Writings, 9*.96-123.

Did dancing sentence folks to hell?

[…] Did primitive Christians ever train?

What was the family name of Cain?

Described as "problems dark," these questions echo the theological controversies of Lowell's contemporaries over the existence of sin and hell and anticipate the tension between evangelical Christians and the advocates of Darwinism; they also poke fun at the scene from Book 5 of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Adam inquires into the nature of the universe and the mysteries of God's creation. Another so-called "humorous" poem, "Credidimus Joven Regnare" (1887) imagines the world "growing dark/A huge interrogation mark,/The Devil's crook Episcopal." Religion, "the old systems," which had once solved life's "conundrum," now "cracks" under the pressure of a new age. Yet neither can the soul, which the speaker calls "the bit of phosphorous/That fills the place of what that was for us," find consolation in Nature who "mutters *yes and no*." Lowell's satirical poems reflect the poet's opinion, steadfast for almost forty years, that religion and the answers it produced offered no insight and little protection against the de-humanizing effects of scientific rationalism.

Though more muted than the satirical poems in their critique of religious thought and habits, several of Lowell's poems that treat the blindness of theology attracted the label of "religious" as a result of their inclusion in the period's religious anthologies. Like Whittier, Lowell appealed to Unitarian and Episcopalian editors alike.[21] His

[21] Several religious collections of the period that included the Lowell poems discussed in this section are George T. Rider, *Lyra Americana; Or, Verses of Praise and Faith, from American Poets* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1865); Philip Schaff and Arthur Gilman , *A Library of Poetry for Sunday Reading : A Collection of the Best Poems for all Ages and Tongues : With Biographical and Literary Notes*. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1889); and George Willis Cooke, *The Poets of Transcendentalism : An Anthology with Introductory Essay and Biographical Notes*. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1903).

anthologized poems shared Whittier's preoccupation with the abuses of religion and religious hypocrisy. "Ambrose" (1848) fits comfortably alongside Whittier's "The Vision of Echard" as an example of the period's use of Catholic saints and mystics as figures of a liberalizing tendency within nineteenth-century Christian thought.[22] In the poem, Lowell re-imagines Saint Ambrose of Milan, not as a mentor to Augustine or father of the church, but as one who "wrestl[es] with the blessed Word/…That he might build a storm-proof creed." That creed—to believe that "all shall die/the eternal death who believe not"—is challenged when Ambrose encounters a stranger who resists the saint's "stamp of the one true" faith. "As each beholds in cloud and fire/The shape that answers to his own desire," instructs the stranger, "So each…in the Law shall find/The figure and fashion of his mind." Rebuked for his belief in the "dividual essence in Truth," the stranger demonstrates the power of the soul's "shaping" power by pouring water into six vases and asks, "O thou who wouldst unity make through strife,/Canst thou fit this sign to the Water of Life?" Unable to answer (and knowing the stranger to be an angel), Ambrose experiences "a sense of humbled grace" and falls "on his knees beneath the tree." Though of a divine nature, the stranger's actions demonstrates Emerson's advice to never argue theology or engage in theological dispute but "widen" the common ground found in the "natural emotions of the soul":

> If you meet a sectary or a hostile partisan, never recognize the dividing lines, but meet on what common ground remains—if only that the sun shines and the rain rains for both—the area will widen very fast and ere you know it, the boundary mountains on which the eye had a fastened

[22] *The Writings,* 7: 207-9; two other notable examples of this type are Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Sermon of St. Francis" and Oliver Wendell Holmes' "St. Anthony the Reformer."

> have melted into air. If he set out to contend, almost St. Paul will lie, almost St. John will hate. What low, poor, paltry, hypocritical people an argument on religion will make of the pure and chosen souls.[23]

"Argue not concerning God," wrote Walt Whitman in an uncharacteristically condensed version of Emerson's advice. The Ambrose of Lowell's poem learns the same lesson and experiences the power of sympathy.

In what was possibly his most popular "religious" poem, "Bibliolatres" (1849), Lowell again confronts those who "wrestle with the Blessed Word":

> Bowing thyself in dust before a Book,
> And thinking the great God is thine alone.
> O rash iconoclast, thou wilt not brook
> What gods the heathen carves in wood and stone,
> As if the Shepherd who from the outer cold
> Leads all his shivering lambs to one sure fold
> Were careful for the fashion of his crook.[24]

The "rash iconoclast" in this passage assumes a variety of associations. In one variant, he is a member of historical Protestantism, whose literal interpretation of the Bible "scare[s] the sheep out of the wholesome day." In breaking with the doctrines of the Catholic Church, he rejects the "crook" for the "dry and sapless rod," and, believing in *sola scriptura*, builds himself an "idol-volume" which "coops the living God." Lowell's target—religious literalism—is clear, but his support of Catholic tradition is provisional. Since man's lack of imagination is a sure sign of his religious impoverishment—"If thou

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[23] *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America), 366.
[24] *The Writings*, 7:271-3.

hast wanderings in the wilderness/And find'st not Sinai,'t is thy soul is poor"—then religious extravagance is, at times, a necessary novelty: it keeps the "shivering lambs" out of the cold. The "iconoclast… bends/Intent on manna still and mortal ends," misunderstands genuine human nature, and is unaware of the natural world, all errors which have their origin in the study of theology. For Lowell, as well as for other "genteel" poets of the time, these errors resulted in the figure of the religious "bully" but could also be, as it is in "The Street," an undated poem anthologized in George Willis Cooke's *The Poets of Transcendentalism*, "a dim ghost…hover[ing] to and fro,/Hugging their bodies round them like think shrouds/Wherein their souls were buried long ago."[25] In Lowell's religious imagination, the bully, who was also a "ghost," represented, principally, the absolutist Calvinist, certain of his orthodox beliefs in total depravity and predestination and (in Melville's words) "so fierce he hurled zeal's javelin home, [which] drove beyond the mark—pierced Rome,/And plunged beyond, thro' enemy/To friend."[26] The ghost could also stand in for the "pale negations" of Unitarianism whose members were, as Theodore Parker described it, "sick of theology" but "too dead to bury their dead."[27] "Dead," Lowell once said of the Unitarian church of which he was nominally a member, "Hold Truth's mirror to her lips and no breath is perceptible."[28] Collectively, the figure of the iconoclast embodies both the terrors of the Catholic and Puritan past (as he does in the portrait of Parker and "Ambrose") and the vacant present of the period's Unitarianism. Despite their indirect appraisal of Unitarian shortcomings, however,

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[25] *The Poets of Transcendentalism*, 49.
[26] *Clarel* , 2.1.80-3.
[27] "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity" in *The American Transcendentalists, Their Prose and Poetry* ed. Perry Miller (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 134.
[28] Quoted in Martin Duberman's *James Russell Lowell* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 30.

works such as "Ambrose" and "Bibliolatres" exemplify the lesson that (in William James' words) "doctrinarism in general [was] the philosophic sin."[29]

"A Skeptic with a Superstitious Imagination"

By replacing dogma with sympathy, Lowell's poems, satirical and lyrical, parallel the *ethos* of New England liberalism; many of them took their place with other "religious" poems written by Emerson, Whittier, Holmes, and Longfellow, which were chosen for inclusion in the period's liberal religious anthologies. However, of this group, Lowell as poet is possibly the nineteenth century's most atypical exemplar of literary liberalism. For example, Emerson, whose war with Unitarianism kept his poems out of the denomination's literature until Cooke's *The Poets of Transcendentalism* in 1903, composed poems more compatible with the Romantic element found in other Unitarian writers; in addition, despite his strong Trinitarianism and lack of patience for early liberal Christianity's reverence for the role of human reason, Whittier wrote poems that championed "catholicity" and consolation for the Christian believer, two aspects important to the writers and editors of Unitarian denominational culture.[30] Lowell did not fully embrace either of these strains of nineteenth-century religious Romanticism. His suspicion of the claim that man can experience in the objects of the natural world genuine religious transcendence is one such example of his disapproval of the era's "new objects of worship."

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[29] Quoted in Gerald E. Myers's *William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 610.
[30] For an examination of Whittier's "liberal" poetry, see Chpt, 3 while an explanation of these elements in Unitarian religious poems and anthologies can be found in Chpt.1, 14-23.

In his review of Bulwer-Lytton's "The New Timon" for *The North American Review,* Lowell expresses this disapproval, appraising not only the current poetry of Nature but also that of self-reliance:

> Mystery too has become a great staple with our poets. Everything must be accounted for by something more unaccountable… "The mystery of our being" has become a favorite object of contemplation. Egotism has been erected into a system of theology….Instead of poems, we have lectures on the morbid anatomy of self. Nature herself must subscribe their platform of doctrine…If they turn their eyes outward for a moment, they behold in the landscape only a smaller image of themselves.[31]

The mode of analogy as it was practiced by his Romantic contemporaries in England and America, reasons Lowell, was simply another means of outlining "the morbid anatomy of self." Such a recognition contrasts with the rhetoric of the Romantic era's spiritual temper, articulated by both orthodox and liberal writers. Certainly, it challenges the work of Transcendentalist poets who abided by Emerson's dictum that "whoever discredits analogy…has not poetic power."[32] But it also was set apart from the widespread emphasis on "religious feeling" and inwardness that dominated the discourse within American denominational culture. Lowell's critique of Romantic analogical poetry that used the materials of the natural world to speak of supernatural reality is also an evaluation of "self-reliance" which constituted (in the words of Cooke, anthologist of the Transcendentalist poets) "the actual faith of the Transcendentalist" poet.[33] "'The mystery of our being'" was a phrase commonly used by a host of American Christian writers to

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[31] *The North American Review* (April, 1867): 107-115.
[32] *English Traits* in *Essays and Lectures*, 896-7.
[33] *The Transcendentalist Poets*, 9.

identity the centrality of "feeling" and "emotion" in religious experience.[34] Casting it into doubt also questioned a shared term of the debate and signals Lowell's divergence from a "spiritually inclined progressives" *and* the more moderate Unitarians and non-denominational writers of his period.[35]

By equating the new "theology" with Romantic "egotism," Lowell resembles less the speaker of "The Problem" who comprehends in "the heart of Nature" the mysteries of God and man and more the voice of the Calvinist preacher in Richard Henry Dana's "Thoughts on the Soul":

> Yes man reduplicates himself. You see
>
> In yonder lake, reflected rock and tree.
>
> Each leaf at rest, or quivering in the air...
>
> Soul! fearful is thy power, which thus transforms
>
> All things into its likeness.[36]

The Calvinist voice and Lowell share in common a suspicion of analogical thinking and direct their doubts towards the emerging Transcendentalism of their period. For Dana,

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[34] See, for example, the use of the phrase in a story by Catherine Maria Sedgwick, "My Friend's Manuscript" in *The Knickerbocker or New York Monthly Magazine* Vol. 8, No.1, July 1836, 59; a sermon by Unitarian Rev. Horatio Stebbins, "God's Design in Sickness" in *The Monthly Religious Magazine* Vol. 13 No. 1, Jan. 1855, 329; and an article by radical John Weiss entitled "Man, the Temple" in *The Radical: A Monthly Magazine* Vol. 3, Sept.1867, 145; the phrase was also given an added meaning by Robert Hart, the British Geologist whose work *The Poetry of Science, or Studies of the Physical Phenomena* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1848) Lowell appears to have read. In his introduction, Hart attempts to square current scientific findings with the practice of poetry (and, by extension, religion). He writes, "The imaginative view of man and his world—the creations of the Romantic mind—have been and ever will be, dwelt on with a soul-absorbing passion. *The mystery of our being*…leads us by a natural process to a love for the Ideal. The discovery of [scientific] truths…should excite a higher feeling than a mere creation of the fancy. The phenomena of Reality are more startling than the phantoms of the Ideal. Truth is stranger than fiction" (xv). Readers familiar with Lowell hear a similar ambivalent attitude in the poet's work towards the relationship between the discoveries of scientific materialism and the primacy of the literary imagination.

[35] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality, From Emerson to Oprah* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005), 12.

[36] Richard Henry Dana. *Poems and Prose Writings in Two Volumes*. Vol. 1 (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 87, 89.

the distrust is animated by his Calvinist epistemology which traditionally presented man's imagination as a "perpetual factory of idols." For Lowell, however, the distrust did not involve denominational or theological concerns but originates in a more total skepticism concerning a kind of religious "enthusiasm" which in "A Fable for Critics" is checked but not corrected. In the minds of both poets, the problem consisted in the fact that man's imagination cannot help but reduplicate his religious temperament on the world of natural objects. As we have seen, Dana's verse "solved" this problem with his own version of a Romantic *psychomachia* ("battle of the soul") which combined the traditional narrative of the Christian pilgrimage with elements of the "new phasis" introduced by British poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[37] Lowell, on the other hand, appears to have felt no need for a solution, and, until he began to compose *The Cathedral* in 1869, was content to adopt his satirical imagination to his other verse attempts, "religious" or otherwise. His unwavering satirical approach to a variety of poetic modes forms an uneasy alliance between his works of "fancy" ("The Vision of Sir Launfal" or "Godminster Chimes") whose subjects—Lowell called them "plot[s] if I may give that name to anything so slight"—were taken from medieval literature and his visions of "humor" which proceeded from what he called "the jolt" of the "true."[38] It is revealing that Lowell, at the end of his life, called himself a "skeptic with a superstitious imagination."[39]

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[37] See Chapter 2.

[38] "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire" (1855), in *The Literary Criticism of James Russell Lowell* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 87.

[39] Lowell to Grace Norton, Christmas Day, 1885 in in *Letters of James Russell Lowell* Vol. 2 ed. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1904), 339. Lowell's religious and denominational affiliations have been of subject of some study—see for example , the most recent discussion in Edward Wagenknecht, *James Russell Lowell: Portrait of a Many-Sided Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 192-218—but, unlike that of Whittier or Emerson, the biography or personal writings of Lowell do not offer much in the way of a key for the poet's religious ideas. Towards

But the same skepticism that animates these latter visions often produced poems devoid of the consolation typically associated with the period's poems on death. We would be hard pressed to find in the work of either Emerson or Whittier a vision as spiritually despondent as that of "After the Burial" (1868):

> Yes, faith is a goodly anchor;
>
> When skies are sweet as a psalm,
>
> […]But, after the shipwreck, tell me
>
> What help in its iron thews,
>
> […]In the breaking gulfs of sorrow,
>
> When the helpless feet stretch out
>
> And find in the deeps of darkness
>
> No footing so solid as doubt,
>
> […]To the spirit its splendid conjectures,
>
> To the flesh its sweet despairs…[40]

Emily Dickinson called "After the Burial" a "Slipper Hymn" of "'Sweet Despair'" and responded to these lines with "One thing of it we borrow." That poem advances a similar fideism as Lowell's poem and expresses ambivalence over the often-overwhelming influence of religious feeling. [41] With an exception of Dickinson's own work (including

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the end of his life he had this to say of his religious affiliations: "You ask me if I am an Episcopalian. No, though I prefer the service of the Church of England, and attend it from time to time. But I am not much a church-goer, because I so seldom find any preaching that does not make me impatient and do me more harm than good. I confess to a strong lurch towards Calvinism (in some of its doctrines) that strengthens as I grow older." (Lowell to Mrs. S. B. Herrick, August 5, 1875 in *Letters*, 364-5).

[40] *The Writings*, 9: 214-6.

[41] Dickinson wrote "One thing of it we borrow" (poem #1464) in 1879 after reading Lowel's poem in *Short Studies in American Authors*, given to her by the book's editor, T.W. Higginson. See her letter to Higginson in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* Vol. 2. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 649-50.

"'Faith' is a fine invention") and portions of Melville's *Clarel*, seldom do we encounter in the poems of nineteenth-century Americans such unmitigated skepticism.[42]

T.S. Eliot, in describing the "quality of faith" in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, identified a similar version of skepticism as particular to a kind of nineteenth-century "religious" poetry:

> *In Memoriam* can justly be called a religious poem, but for another reason which made it seem religious to his contemporaries. It is not religious because of the quality of its faith but because of the quality of its doubt. Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience. [it is] a poem of despair but of despair of a religious kind.[43]

To borrow Eliot's words, it is the "quality of doubt" that makes works like "After the Burial" "a religious kind" of poetry. Yet the doubt rarely lapses into despair, for the speakers of Lowell's poems do not experience doubts as so much as expose them in others. "After the Burial" ends by addressing the so-called "wisdom" of religious consolation: "That little shoe…/With its emptiness confutes you,/And argues your wisdom down." These lines make use of the objects of nineteenth-century consolation literature (the dead child's "shoe") while simultaneously attacking the theology ("wisdom") which offered support to that very same literature.[44] "After the Burial" offers the clearest example of the way in which skepticism, present even in his most personal poems, targets the religious sentimentalist. That figure of the sentimentalist is described elsewhere by Lowell as "the spiritual hypochondriac with whom fancies become facts,

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[42] Harold Bloom included "After the Burial" as Lowell's sole contribution to American religious poetry in *American Religious Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2006).
[43] "*In Memoriam"* in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1960), 294.
[44] For a further discussion on the literature of consolation, see Ann Douglass, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 200-226.

while facts are a discomfort because they will not be evaporated into fancy."[45] For Lowell, unveiling the hypocrite revealed the meaning behind experience itself, as if "Nature intended [him] for paradies on some of her graver productions."[46] For the speaker of Lowell's "After the Burial," exposing spiritual sickness is as significant as the insight that emerges from private revelation.

Having rejected the ways in which poets had traditionally sought and expressed revelation—including those of spiritual consolation, analogical imagination, mystical self-reliance, scriptural tradition, and theology—Lowell committed himself to a program of literary skepticism, a commitment which draws strength from his view of the past as well as his participation in the transformations of his present. His iconoclasm has as its historical origins not the religious radicalism of the Protestant Reformation (as Whittier's had) but, as James had called it, the "robust gamecock spirit" of the Enlightenment; instead of the *hier stehe ich* of Luther ("Here I stand"), Lowell's poems echo the *je m'en fiche* ("Who gives a damn?") of Voltaire.[47] For what other American poet (besides perhaps Edgar Allan Poe) could say of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* that it "had given [him] as many heart laughs as any humorous book [he] ever read?"[48] Yet Lowell's skepticism, especially as it is expressed in *The Cathedral*, does more than mock the religious past. The term "religious" that he applied to the poem ("a kind of religious poem") exceeded the suggestion of the "dead" past and is an important articulation of what Charles Taylor identified as "the outlook of Enlightenment naturalism" a nineteenth-century movement which sought to transform Romanticism by "deny[ing] all

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[45] "Sentimentalism" (1867) in *The Literary Criticism*, 58.
[46] "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire," 82.
[47] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (Vintage Books/Library of America: New York, 2000), 40.
[48] "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire," 82.

notions of a spiritual reality beyond or behind things….and all notions…of nature." [49] Instead of despairing in the loss of the spiritual world, works like *The Cathedral* attempt to find meaning in the rigors of doubt itself; for in them "the joy" of dashing illusions, writes Taylor, "has something to do with" confronting the truth. Near that poem's conclusion, Lowell's speaker wonders if "the deeper faith that is to come/Will see God […] in the strenuous doubt" rather than the so-called certainty of creed, feeling, or Nature.[50] Here, doubt transforming into faith is not an example of the poet's frequent wordplay. It is Lowell's reversal of the moment of religious transfiguration, a "second naivete" of the skeptic modern man, who, having annihilated all possibility of hope, now returns to damn the results of his labor.

The Cathedral: Nature's "Sweet Frauds"

As the first reviews of the poem attest, *The Cathedral* lacks a cohesive structure. Even its narrative—a walk through the town of Chartres and a visit to its famous Gothic cathedral—is interrupted at several points by the speaker's observations that often appear unmoored from the objects which occasion them. Undoubtedly, Lowell meant his poem to evoke the Romantic meditations of British Romanticism. Yet unlike the best poems of Wordsworth or Coleridge, *The Cathedral* fails to present a easy exchange of ideas between its passages of description and those of meditation. This failure is, of course, in harmony with the poem's larger critique of Romantic idealism and underscores the notion that man, who is adrift in the world, cannot, without great effort, experience epiphany. But the poem's disjointed mode of presentation and labored syntax weaken, not

[49] *Sources of the Self*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 431.
[50] *The Cathedral* in *The Writings*, 10: 37-63.

strengthen, its overall treatment of imagination and religious belief. Generations of readers able to get beyond the two "contending" natures in the poem—what one reviewer called the collusion between the "witty, scoffing, light-minded" and the "idealizing, sentimental, and grave" voices—have been faced with the task of understanding what ideas remained standing after such a contest.[51] Despite these problems, however, the poem's 20 stanzas of blank verse on the topics of faith, sympathy, and imagination unfold with purpose. The musings of Lowell's enlightened poet-traveler are a series of concentrated examinations of (and addresses to) a hidden God that aim, often by means of an acerbic wit, at stripping away life's illusions. As such, the poem is a series of concentrated outbursts of occasional power.

The Cathedral is organized as follows: stanzas 1-7 form an extended meditation on Nature and the imagination; 8-9 reveal the speaker's reason for his travel and his arrival at Chartres; 10-17 depict his impressions of the interior of the Cathedral, which include those observations of worshippers and other visitors; and stanzas 18-20 return to the outside of the building, as the speaker meditates on the portals and porch of the North transept where the statues of the apostles and saints stand. These movements from the exterior to the interior of the Cathedral and back again, as well as the speaker's meditations on the objects which he encounters are suggestive of the poetry of religious pilgrimage or devotion. But the atmosphere of *The Cathedral* is quite different from that of *The Canterbury Tales* or George Herbert's *The Temple*. The speaker of *The Cathedral* entertains the metaphor of the pilgrimage, but his journey is of that of a wanderer. Since his chronic doubt derails all attempts at contemplation ("For, where the mind goes, goes

[51] Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, review of *The Cathedral* by James Russell Lowell in *Springfield Republican* (Sept. 18, 1876), 4-5.

old furniture"), his meditations on the images of worship are ineffective as "ways" or organizing schemes. Neither modeled after the travels of medieval pilgrims nor the stages of mystical vision, the speaker of *The Cathedral* is Lowell's representative modern poet, described in "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire" as one who observes the world as though he were walking "through a museum of natural curiosities."[52] Yet, despite his sometimes-facetious superiority, the poet's observations are in earnest, driven by real concerns and marked by what Jenny Franchot described as "an ambiguous indebtedness to the faith it eschewed…a mimesis of the rigors of prayer but…not that activity itself."[53]

The poem opens by questioning Nature's role in the formation of moral development. "Memory cheats us" argues the speaker, and Nature, who, "lets us mistake our longing for her love/…mocks [us] with various echoes of ourselves." As a departure point, it directly challenges one of Romanticism's greatest convictions—that our experience and recollection of the natural world beneficially influences our moral life. In part, the challenge is whimsical, gently mocking the idiom ("Ere yet the child has *loudened* to the boy") made popular by Wordsworth whose *Prelude*, especially popular during the second half of the Nineteenth Century among American romantics and transcendentalists, recounted Nature's benevolent lessons in childhood. But the speaker's challenge to Nature and its relationship to time, beauty, and companionship signals a refutation to the underpinnings of Romantic thought and the poetry which it produced:

> What we call Nature, all outside ourselves,
>
> Is but our own conceit of what we see,
>
> Our own reaction upon what we feel;

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[52] "Humor, Wit, Fun, and Satire," 82-3.
[53] Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 366.

> The world's a woman to our shifting mood,
> Feeling with us, or making due pretence;
> And therefore we the more persuade ourselves
> To make all things our thought's confederates
> Conniving with us in whateve'er we dream.

It is difficult to imagine a more damning start to a pilgrimage. Nature, "all outside ourselves," writes Lowell, is a "conceit," a "pretence." Human nature, including our ability to understand, reason, feels, and imagine ("dream"), cannot be trusted. Together, they "connive" to deceive mankind.

The epistemological skepticism of these early passages is more unmistakable than it is in Lowell's overtly satirical poems. Stripped of the minutiae that dominates works such as "The Unhappy Lot of Mr. Knott" and "A Fable for Critics," the speculative, prosaic lyrics of *The Cathedral* reveals its commitment to the same strain of fideism present in the earlier lyrics of Dana and American Calvinist poet Carlos Wilcox (and, six years later, in the musings of several pilgrims in Melville's *Clarel*). The speaker's attack on man's knowledge of the natural world is articulated in terms that unmistakably reject, as Calvin did in his refutation of medieval scholasticism, analogical thinking. "So when our Fancy seeks analogies," warns the speaker, "Though she have hidden what she after finds,/She loves to cheat herself with feigned surprise." Identifying the self as a "chamber…painted with images" filled with "visions [of] copies pale," updates, for the age of Wordsworth and Emerson, the Calvinist's belief in the mind as "the perpetual forge of idols." Yet, in a pattern that will be repeated several times over before the poem's conclusion, the speaker adopts, in the same passage, a more conciliatory tone.

> These first sweet frauds upon our consciousness,
>
> That blend the sensual with its imagined world,
>
> […] Can overtake the rapture of the sense,
>
> To thrust between ourselves and what we feel,
>
> Have something in them secretly divine.
>
> […]Our own breath dims the mirror of the sense,
>
> Looking too long and closely: at a flash
>
> We snatch the essential grace of meaning out.

Recalling the "sweet despair" of "After the Burial" (written one year earlier), Lowell's speaker considers religious epiphany possible if only we do not look "too long or too closely." "We murder to dissect," declared the speaker of Wordworth's "The Table's Turned," the "sweet…lore which Nature brings." The "sweetness" of spiritual desolation, as well as despair, has something to do with the evidence provided by religious feelings. That notion is ubiquitous in the Romantic poetry that Lowell satirizes persistently but also had its roots in the Protestant literature of religious affections. Jonathan Edwards called the moment of epiphany in the natural world a "sweet conjunction" and the inscrutable presence of God in his creation as "an awful sweetness."[54] The power of such a moment, Edwards' experience suggests, is intensified by the way in which it transformed the religious affections of the fideist who views Nature as fallen. Apart from nineteenth-century Calvinists whose influence on literature by 1869 was almost negligible, few writers were exploring these "sweet conjunctions" in the language of theological discourse. The speaker of *The Cathedral* captures an earlier

[54] *The Works of President Edwards* Vol. 1 (New York: Leavitt, Trow, and Co., 1844), 20.

moment of religious expression in which the interpenetration of nature, religious feelings, and iconoclasm could produce an unexpected, though brief, insight.

These first seven stanzas of *The Cathedral* express in discursive terms what Lowell identified later in the poem as the "scant isthmus" of modern faith, an image which captures the limited mobility of the thinking man who could no longer believe in Christian tradition but desired to retain some of its beauty and wisdom. *The Cathedral* is Lowell's contribution to the growing body of Victorian "poems of despair" (to use Eliot's words). Apart from *In Memoriam*, the two most memorable poems of the period were written by Matthew Arnold. "Dover Beach" (1867) depicts religious faith as a sea that was "once…full and round earth's shore/Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd" but now "withdraw[s]" and "retreat[s]…down the vast edges drear/And naked shingles of the world."[55] The other poem, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855), narrates a pilgrimage to a French hermitage where the poem's speaker can mourn his loss of faith alongside the worship and contemplation of Carthusian monks: "Wandering between two worlds, one dead/The other powerless to be born/…I come to shed [tears] at their side." Arnolds' speaker knows his faith is dead—"a past mode, an outworn theme"—but wills to forget by joining the monks in their silent prayer: "Oh hide me in your gloom profound,/Ye solemn seats of holy pain!/Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,/Till I possess my soul again."[56]

The Cathedral share similar images with these poems of the vacuum left by faith ("the vague, unsympathizing sea") and adds many of its own: for example, the speaker's description of winter—"those stark wastes that whiten endlessly/In ghastly solitude about

[55] *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*. ed. Miraim Allott and Robert H. Super (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 135-6.
[56] *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 159-165.

the pole"—echoes Whittier's "Snowbound" and other American winter poems.[57] This solitude, argues Lowell's speaker, is proof of our estrangement from Nature ("I find my own complexion everywhere") and represents for the speaker of *The Cathedral*, as well as that of Arnold's "Stanzas" the unsolved dilemma of the "counter-epiphantic art" of Victorian skepticism: if Nature is more than appearance but exists primarily to show us our own personality, what do we make of religious feelings of transcendence? [58] In *The Will to Believe* (1897), James describes such a dilemma as "a religious demand to which there comes no normal religious reply."[59] "Tied to their senses [and] pent in to the hard facts" of materialism, these skeptics can relieve their spiritual claustrophobia by the study of either natural theology or "the poetry of nature." If relief cannot be found in either of these expressions of human wisdom, their discord can be brought into agreement by taking one of two "levels of escape": either by accepting the "bare facts by themselves" or discovering "supplementary facts" so that the "religious reading" may continue.

Continuing the "religious reading" is an fitting metaphor for the conflict of *The Cathedral's* poet-traveler since he, like James' figure, finds no relief in theology or the natural world, nor can he accept the claims of scientific materialism. Trapped within "the pent chamber of habitual self," the speaker can only move forward by stepping back, and, in the second half of the poem, commits to "forget," an act which Paul Ricoeur called "second naiveté":

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[57] For a brief discussion on the ways in which American winter poems reflect commentary of a religious kind, see chapter 3, 31-3.
[58] The phrase "counter-epiphantic art" is Taylor's. *Sources*, 431.
[59] *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 40-1.

> In every way, something [in modern life] has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of faith. But if we can no longer live the great symbolism of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, as modern men, aim at a second naiveté in and through criticism….We can believe [again] only by interpreting.[60]

The "problem" of *The Cathedral* to be solved, then, evident both in the history of its composition as well as the expression of its ideas, is not the restoration of the author's "original belief" but of his imagination. Having lost the "immediacy of faith" Lowell's poet-traveler seeks to "believe again" for the sake of his poetry, not salvation. If faith in the symbols, not doctrines, of Christian tradition is restored, then the "reading" can continue. Such a restoration, however, involves for Lowell transforming the "skepticism [that has] taken up the room left by the defect of the imagination" back into poetry.[61] Even though (as we shall see) this transformation is largely unsuccessful, the poem reveals that the transvaluaation of religion and poetry, an ideal for many of Lowell's contemporaries, had a darker side.

The Ecclesiastical Imagination

Before Lowell's poet-traveler expels his skepticism and loneliness, he must depart (briefly) from the religious materials of "the usual reign." Putting aside his attack on Puritan roots and the "new objects of worship," he offers his imagination a new "feast":

> One feast for her I secretly designed
> In that Old World so strangely beautiful

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[60] *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 351-2.
[61] "Witchcraft" from *The Writings*, 3:313.

To us the disinherited of eld

A day at Chartres […]

With outward sense furloughed and head bowed

I followed some fine instinct in my feet,

Till, to unbend me from the loom of thought,

Looking up suddenly I found my eyes

Confronted with the minster's vast repose.

The sight of the cathedral fills the speaker with the "shock of novelty," a phrase Melville uses in *Clarel* to describe the Protestant encounter with the Catholic past.[62] Important too is the way in which the speaker "followed some fine instinct," only to be "surprised" by the building and "unbend[ed] from the loom of thought." Here, the speaker sets himself in "the conscious bounds of seeming unconstraint" and, like Nature, "cheats" himself into surprise. His confrontation with the "minster's vast repose" recalls the anti-Catholic literature of antebellum American; it also mirrors Lowell's own comments regarding a trip to Saint Peter's Basilica in 1855: "In approaching…one must take his Protestant shoes off his feet [or] the great Basilica with those outstretching colonnades of Bramante, will seem to be a bloated spider lying in wait for him, the poor Reformed fly."[63] But the speaker of *The Cathedral* is no victim. He has willed himself into a new circuit where (in Melville's words again) "the unexpected intervenes," and no one can "forecast/The novel influence of scenes/Remote from the habitual Past." He describes the cathedral as "graceful, grotesque, with every new surprise/Of hazardous caprices sure to please/Heavy as nightmare…/Imagination's very self in stone!" This sublime confrontation with the

[62] *Clarel*, 1.5.55
[63] *The Writings*, 1:193-4.

past's "monumental pomp" momentarily releases the speaker from himself and "with one long sigh of infinite release/From pedantries past, present, or to come," he experiences peace.

Just as Nathaniel Hawthorne "availed himself of [the] mystical blackness" of Calvinist doctrine, so too Lowell takes up in *The Cathedral* the ecclesiastical element found in the period's Anglo-Catholic literature.[64] As we saw in our first chapter, the ecclesiastical element was important to Anglo-Catholic thinkers and poets, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. Examples include poets Arthur Cleveland Coxe, whose *Christian Ballads* (1847) included poems filled with what one Episcopalian editor called "the Liturgical…feel" of his denominational culture. In the lyrics of "Rustic Churches," "Trinity, Old Church," "Matin Bells," and "St. Silvan's Bells," Coxe meditates on the Gothic architecture of Anglican and Episcopalian churches while exploring the doctrines of orthodox Protestant tradition. "This happy combination," wrote Cox, balances the "paeantry" of Catholicism and the "tawdry pretensions [of] the rustic church; and produces everywhere a uniform propriety of beauty which captivates the imagination without repelling the reason."[65] Another writer, the well-known Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote several "ecclesiastical" poems after her conversion to Episcopalism in the 1860's. Her evocation of St. Peter's in "A Day in the Pamfili Doria" (1867) compliments the poem's natural description and offers stability its expression of religious feeling. This element is further developed in "St. Peter's Church" (1867) in which Stowe depicts the seat of Catholicism as "hung like the firmament with

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[64] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" in Herman Melville and Harrison Hayford. *Pierre; Israel Potter; The Piazza Tales; The Confidence-Man; Uncollected Prose; and Billy Budd, Sailor* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1159.

[65] *Christian Ballads. (Philadelphia: L. Johnson and Co., 1847), vii-ix.*

circling sweep/Above the constellated golden lamps/That burn forever round the holy tomb." Unlike the subordination of St. Peter's dome in Emerson's "The Problem," Stowe's poem raises the building to the same "sublime" level as nature without authorizing its "popish" inhabitants and their creeds.[66] Even though Lowell had little interest for the Thirty-nine Articles or the rituals of Anglo-Catholic worship, his use of Chartres Cathedral recalls that denomination's argument that such religious monumentalism offers stability for "un-bounded curiosity…and morbid eagerness."[67]

Perhaps the ecclesiastical element in *The Cathedral* mirrors most closely those sonnets that preceded the translation of the *Divina Commedia* by longtime friend Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In these six sonnets, Longfellow treats the act of translating Dante as a religious act and imagines his work as worship: " I enter here from day to day,/And leave my burden at the minster gate." His work brings him into contact with the "strange" architecture of the Catholic minster; in addition, he watches worshippers as they participate in the life of the church. "From the confessionals," he writes, "I hear arise/Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies." Each successive sonnets illustrates the nature of Dante's narrative through hell, purgatory, and paradise: *Inferno*'s gloom is transformed into the "elevation of the Host!" in the *Paradiso*. Longfellow's trip through the cathedral is a literary journey, not a religious one and his use of the Catholic furniture of worship and ritual expresses the triumph of literary nationalism. As it was for Longfellow's poem, the value of the ecclesiastical images for Lowell was that it was already part of the past; images such as Longfellow's unidentified minster offered escape

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[66] *Religious Poems* (Boston: Ticknor and Field, 1867), 91-105.

[67] In "Beautification through Beautification: Poetry in *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, 1834-1849" (*Victorian Poetry* Vol. 42, No. 3 Fall 2004, 261-282), Elizabeth F. Gray argues that Tractarian poetics achieved a "far wider public currency and longer effect than Tractarian theology."

and perhaps a moment of peace for those who no longer felt the fires of denominational controversy. But as Jenny Franchot has argued these images of the Catholic past operate as meditation on loss, as well as a conduit for escape, "by which, ironically, we have come to know ourselves; we are *not* belief."[68] *The Cathedral* employs the ecclesiastical element both as a mirror as well as a veil.

After a brief moment of peace, the speaker enters the cathedral (with "worshippers who never came") and offers his impressions of the furniture of worship, those objects that "give the soul a moment's truce of God." However, instead of enacting in him a truce, they awaken the denominationalism of his past and he recalls his "sterner fathers" who held Catholicism and its "ancient rite…idolatrous." In a long passage, the speaker, "tranced in thought," contemplates the cathedral's internal architecture; the peace he experienced at the sight of the cathedral departs, illustrating the subjectivity of Whitman's adage, "All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it."[69] The vaults appear "solemn"; so too is the "solemn…lift of high-embowered roof." Yet these details of the interior—including sections on the ambulatory, nave, choir, aisle, and crypt—all contribute to the "undefined regret" of the speaker, "the irreparable loss." "Was all this grandeur but anachronism," he asks, "A shell divorced of its informing life?" The question recalls the conceit of natural progress raised in "The Problem" as well as Holmes' "The Chambered Nautilus" in which the poet directs the soul to "Leave [its] low - vaulted past! /Let each new temple, nobler than the last, /Shut thee from heaven with a dome vaster." As with those poems, it is difficult to imagine that the

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[68] "Unseemingly Commemoration: Religion, Fragments, and the Icon." *American Literary History*, 9(Autumn 1997): 205.
[69] *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 in *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*(New York: Library of America, 1982), 94.

author thought his readers had not learned yet the Romantic lessons of progress and organic growth. Lowell's treatment of these lessons seems especially disingenuous, particularly after the poem's opening attack on Romantic attitudes towards nature. So too does his characterization of worship and ritual: "Where other worship I but look and long/For though not recreant to my fathers' faith,/Its forms to me are weariness, and most/That drony vacuum of compulsory prayer." But as he aims his attacks at the subject of institutionalized religion ("Is Religion just a spectre now/Haunting the solitude of darkened minds"), he also questions the skepticism that lies at the heart of all such questions: "Is there no corner safe from peeping Doubt?"

The fear that the answer to this question might be "no" haunts *The Cathedral*. It drives the speaker into each "corner" of the building and urges him to contemplate new "religious readings." Having considered (and dismissed) a range of elements important to religious experience, he "turns" to the role of sympathy. In one corner, he discovers a "beldame on her knees/With eyes astray" praying the rosary before a statue of the Madonna. Unable to restrain his own view of the woman's "superstitious" devotion, the speaker rebukes himself and tries again:

> [She] before some shrine of saintly womanhood
> Bribed intercessor with the far-off Judge:
> Such was my first thought, my kindlier soon rebuked,
> […] Was it will, or some vibration faint
> Of sacred Nature, deeper than the will?
> My heart occultly felt itself in hers,
> Thorough mutual intercession gently leagued.

Here, the power of sympathy, a defining element in the discourse of religious experience for spiritually inclined progressives, is diminished to an "mutual intercession" "occulty felt." For the speaker who contemplates the woman of "household faith," the bonds of sympathy are made mysterious by his speculation over their origins: was the speaker's connection with the woman caused by his "will" or was it a "vibration"? Presented in this way, either of these choices, as "supplementary facts" for the speaker's religious experience, offers the absolute minimum value of its respective element. In other words, if the "will" is necessary to counter doubt and continue the work of imagination but cannot verify religious experience and "nature" is little more than a "vibration faint," what satisfaction can either evidence offer? Sympathy alone, will without understanding, the "sweet frauds" of Nature, and Christian doctrine, that "theologic tube, with lens on lens/Of syllogism transparent": not one of these elements can recover "that ancient faith" or "bring it near."

Finally, even the "monumental pomp" of Gothic art—the ecclesiastical element of what James called John Henry Newman's "sacerdotal" imagination—is evidence of God's absence in *The Cathedral*. Such an irony turns the speaker from his ecclesiastical vision of escape back to his fidestic departure point. Lowell's rare use of Biblical allusion near poem's end signals the significance of this transformation, as if the proof of God's absence in the objects of the religious past constituted an epiphany for his poet-traveler:

> We men, too conscious of earth's comedy,
> Who see two sides, with our posed selves debate,
> And only for great stakes can be sublime!

Let us be thankful when, as I do here,

We can read Bethel on a pile of stones,

And seeing where God *has* been, trust in Him.

The poem's conclusion ostensibly offers, in the words of one early critic, "witness to the universal presence of God," but this passage tells the real story.[70] Doubt and unbelief have replaced the rigors of religious belief, but the imagination can only flourish against a background of faith. As it was for Dana and Melville, the Pillars of Bethel—a monument to Jacob's battle with the angel of God—was a potent symbol of faith's struggle against skepticism and the power of poetry to express that struggle.[71] For Lowell, who knew that God was dead years before he wrote *The Cathedral*, that struggle had to be maintain somehow for the sake of imagination.

[70] Henry Ketcham, Preface in *The Poems of James Russell Lowell* (New York: Burt, 1900), xvi.
[71] See chapter 1, 34-37.

Epilogue:

"Perjured Faith": Herman Melville's *Clarel* and the "Religious"

Readers familiar with *Clarel* (1876) by Herman Melville will no doubt recognize an affinity between that poem and James Russell Lowell's *The Cathedral.* Like Lowell's poem, *Clarel* models Matthew Arnold's "Stanzas From the Grande Chartreuse" (1855). Its range of characters both visiting or living in the Holy Land represents the same classification present in Lowell's poem and many Victorian "doubt" poems, putting together those who mourn the loss of faith with the "last of the people who believe."[1] In addition, *Clarel* extensively uses elements of the ecclesiastical to mark the "aesthetics of the not there," a phrase Lawrence Buell used to describe the poem's treatment of Jerusalem.[2] In "The Monument," one of the poem's spiritual malcontents, Ungar, recalls his encounter with York minster, the largest Gothic cathedral in Northern Europe:

> Ah, once in York I viewed through the storms
> The Minster's majesty of mien—
> Towers, peaks, and pinnacles sublime—
> Faith's iceberg, stranded on the scene
> How alien, and an alien time.[3]

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[1] The stanza reads, "But—if you cannot give us ease--/Last of the race of them who grieve/Here leave us to die out with these/Last of the people who believe!/Silent, while years engrave the brow;/Silent—the best are silent now." *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*. ed. Miraim Allott and Robert H. Super (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 162; in "Melville's Reading of Arnold's Poetry" (*PMLA* 69.3. 1954, 365-91), Walter E. Bezanson studies Melville's marginalia in a volume of Arnold's poetry and concludes that Melville's use of iambic tetrameter resulted from his reading of the Victorian poet. Although he did not mark either "Dover Beach" or "Stanzas," Melville was helped by Arnold towards "conceptualization" and allowed him to make "fundamental decisions about the structure and themes of *Clarel*," 391.

[2] "Melville the Poet" in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*. ed. Robert Steven Levine. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 146.

[3] *Clarel*. 4.10.168-172.

For Ungar as well as for the speaker of *The Cathedral*, the monuments of the past represent Faith's iceberg" on which man either gazed at from a distance or, if he got too close, was dashed upon. These "grand minsters in remove" illustrate the disappearing middle ground of religious faith and the remoteness of tradition. But they also offer "[i]magination's very self in stone" and present both pilgrim and poet with the "shock of novelty." "Novelty" was an important reminder how religious belief remained in the past—an important episode in what Jenny Franchot has called " the narrative of Western's culture's birth into the modern"—as well as an essential component in the later religious-themed poetry of American writers such as Henry Adams and Wallace Stevens.[4] To experience it meant that one had gotten *beyond* Christian tradition, though through contact with earlier expressions of religious faith. Once "there," one was compelled to either weep (as Adams' speaker does in "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres") or "wink" (Stevens' "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman"), lament or laugh.

But Melville's poem is more than a bridge between the attitudes towards the "religious" in Romantic and Modern American poetry. It is also a compendium of, as well as a gloss on, them. To show this in any detail is outside this study's scope. But, as a way of concluding, I want to point out three ways in which *Clarel* engages and develops crucial elements of the "religious" that were present within his own local literary culture. These elements—discussed at length in the previous four chapters—include the before mentioned element of "ecclesiastical" found in Anglo-Catholic poetics— and also involve the role of nature in religious experience, the value (and danger) of religious doubt, and the transvaluation of religion and poetry.

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[4] Unseemingly Commemoration: Religion, Fragments, and the Icon." *American Literary History*, 9(Autumn 1997): 205.

If Melville learned anything from *The Cathedral* (and there is no evidence one way or another that he even read it), it was that first-person narrative alone was insufficient for the exploration of religious faith. In exploring the ways in which his pilgrims understand and experienced religion, Melville employed third person narration, a mode that cast a wider net. By doing so, *Clarel* anticipates the *documents humains* of *Varieties of Religious Experience*, presenting several "religious readings" at once, and avoids being overwhelmed by, on the one hand, total skepticism, and, on the other, the "heavy grumbling and complaint" of "religious melancholy." Whatever we call "religious," wrote James, "if glad...it must not grin or snicker; if sad, it must not scream or curse." Full of grins and curses, *Clarel* is balanced by its third-person narration that keeps it from collapsing (as *The Cathedral* does) into neither "curse nor jest." Since, as Stan Goldman has argued, the central concern of the poem is the question of God's presence such middle ground is as important for a poem whose *deliberatio* consists largely in rejection.[5]

Clarel's departure point is the rejection of theology. From there, it finds its "rough standing-ground" on which to evaluate and weigh arguments for the possibility of transcendence and the existence of God. On the first day of his visit to the Holy Land—the Vigil of the Epiphany—the poem's title character asks the question "Theology art thou so blind?" "Theology's scarce practical," admits Rolfe, the American world-traveler, "But leave this: the New World's the theme."[6] William Potter has recently argued that scenes such as these are part of the poem's larger strategy to "move beyond

[5] See Stan Goldman, *Melville's Protest Theism: The Hidden and Silent God in Clarel* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993).
[6] *Clarel*, 4.21.82-3.

orthodox doctrine towards" what he calls the "intersympathy of creeds."[7] However, such a move was neither original nor final. As we have seen, the notion that theology was powerless to offer religious insight was widespread before *Clarel,* present even in so-called "genteel" American lyrics. Melville's poem simply assumes what was already the foundation of most "religious" poems written during the Romantic period. As the pilgrim Celio explains, doubt in the truths of the Christian past is the beginning of authentic religious experience:

> This world clean fails me: still I yearn.
> Me then it surely does concern
> Some other world to find. But where?
> In creed? I do not find it there.
> That said, and is the emprise o'er?
> Negation, is there nothing more?[8]

Celio's problem lies not in the futility of Christian doctrine or creed but the "sweep" of doubt that ends the "emprise" of seeking epiphany in (to use Lowell's words) "*all* outside ourselves." As we witnessed in the iconoclastic poems of John Greenleaf Whittier, negation is a useful tool for exposing the false in religious experience; it could also express well the satirical spirit, the *je m'en fiche* of Lowell's religious attacks. But no "corner" appears at last "safe from peeping Doubt." In "The Sight of the Passion," Clarel recognizes this truth as exhibited in Vine, the poems' sometimes whimsical but isolated genius whose portrayal contemporary critics have often associated with the figure of Nathaniel Hawthorne:

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[7] *Melville's Clarel and the Intersympathy of Creeds* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 61.
[8] *Clarel,* 1.12.95-100.

At peep of that brisk dapper man

Over Vine's face a ripple ran

Of freakish mockery, elfin light:

[…]O angels, rescue from the sight!

Paul Pry? and in Gethsemane?[9]

The half-satirical, half-despairing "grin" has entered the garden of Christ's suffering. Modern pilgrimage, even to the "Gethsemane" which is, as Emily Dickinson described, "but a Province—in the Being's Centre," is ambushed by a skepticism that "unhinge[s] so, that her sway/In minor things even, could retard/The will and the purpose."[10] Skepticism starts with theology but eventually extends to all elements of religious experience.[11]

The poem's treatment of the objects of nature follows in the same path travelled by other American poets who questioned analogical thinking. "The Sparrow" contains passages that resemble the bird poems of Calvinist-Romantic Richard Henry Dana, illustrating a similar language of remoteness and anxiety so characteristic of the fideistic approach to the natural world:

The sparrow…

Plaining upon a terrace nigh,

Was like the Psalmist's making moan

For loss of mate—forsaken quite,

Which on the house-top doth alight

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[9] *Clarel*, 1.31.107-109; 111-12.
[10] *Clarel*, 4.16.109-11.
[11] The role of skepticism in *Clarel* has been examined recently by Zephyra Porat, "Towards the Promethean Ledge: Varieties of Sceptic Experience in Melville's *Clarel* " in *Literature and Theology*. 8.1. (1994): 30-46.

And watches, and her lonely cry

No answer gets.[12]

Like the speaker of "The Dying Raven," Clarel attempts to ground his observations in the analogical world of the Psalmist in which God's presence is made certain by means of his creation. But, instead of offering evidence of God (or, in this passage, love), nature's lessons prove to be remote and threatening, as were the silent activities of Dana's raven.

Perhaps *Clarel*'s most inspired passages of nature's reserve or antagonism towards mankind is in "Nathan," Melville's "case history of doubt and belief." Here, in outlining his "pilgrimage" from Puritanism to Orthodoxy Judaism, Nathan associates the unclear but vaguely malevolent lessons that he finds in nature with the stages of his religious conversions. Against the "prairie twilight" of an Illinois evening, Nathan recalls the night that a New England avalanche killed a family member:

In prairie twilight, summer's own

…came a scene immense:

The Great White Hills, mount flanked by mount,

[…] Where, in September's equinox

Nature hath put such a terror on

That from his mother man would run—

Our mother, Earth: the founded rocks

Unstable prove: the Slide! the Slide![13]

One early critic of Melville called "Nathan" "a remarkable epitome of no small part of America's social and intellectual history."[14] But it also presents natural observation as a

[12] *Clarel*, 1.38.19-25.
[13] *Clarel*, 1.17.78, 84-88.

kind of palimpsest (before taking a turn to consider the reality of romance) on which man continues to read his religious experiences. Appearing early in *Clarel*, the canto serves to introduce several of the poem's most significant themes, namely the tenuousness of religious conversion and the limits of natural theology. A historical narrative of America's own religious conversions, from Puritanism through Transcendentalism and up to its current struggle with religious doubt, "Nathan" establishes the language of "religious feeling" that Melville will employ for the poem—"sway," "mood," "altered," "influence"—while reminding us of earlier American religious poetry, especially William Cullen Bryant; it is difficult to read Nathan's account of Nature's "mausoleum" without thinking of Bryant's "Thanatopsis," one of the century's greatest American poems of consolation and natural description. Unlike that poem, however, *Clarel* offers little consolation, only bewilderment for the man torn between the atheism of Thomas Paine and the "Pantheistic sway" portrayed in the period's Romantic poetry.

The backdrop of the Holy Land supplies Melville's long poem with a chance to explore the entanglement between the objects of nature and those that James (and other Anglo-Catholic poets) deemed the "ecclesiastical" element of religious experience. Several recent studies, including Edgar Dryden's *Monumental Melville: The Formation of a Literary Career*, examine this "monumental" feature of Melville's work.[15] Aside from the "novelty" that such monuments can offer, scenes like that from "The High Desert" registers doubt in nature, biblical history, and organized religion simultaneously, considering (and rejecting) the several attitudes towards the "religious" that James

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[14] Henry W. Wells, *The American Way of Poetry* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1943), 86.
[15] *Monumental Melville: The Formation of a Literary Career* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), esp. 101-147; another notable investigation into the "monumental" in Melville is Sanford E. Marovitz, "Melville's Temples," in *Savage Eye: Melville and the Visual Arts.* ed. Christopher Sten, 77-103. (Kent OH: Kent State University Press, 1991).

associated with "aesthetic ways of feeling" in Protestant imagination. Of the monument to the "burning bush" at Saint Catherine's chapel, the poem's speaker catalogues the "somber vaulted chamber" where a "sunbeam darts" and "slants away…illuming so with annual flash." This light, however, "makes no lasting convenient; /It brings, but cannot leave, the ray."[16] Whether it occurs in the bush, the church, or the reading of the word of God, the epiphany cannot last. Evidence of these various "links" (a word which appears frequently in the poem) that are now severed are only found in the monuments of the Holy Land, where "silence and legend dwell."

Finally, *Clarel* questions the value of religious poetry itself. In one of the poem's most powerful cantos, "In Confidence," Clarel catalogues for the good-natured Anglican priest Derwent the reasons for his despair. The list includes not only the "din of clashed belief" in the Holy Land but the denominational cultures of America "at home" where "the very pews are a sect." Clarel's implicates both orthodox and liberal denominations ("the parlor-chapel liberal"), even using the language of Anglo-Catholic worship and architecture ("behind the mellow chancel's rail/Lurked strife intestine.") After hearing Clarel's account, Derwent encourages him to "have faith":

> Have faith, which, even from the myth
> Draws something to be useful with:
> In any form some truths will hold;
> Employ the present-sanctioned mold.
> […]Verse, popular verse, it charms or warms—
> Belies Philosophy's flattened sails—
> Tinctures the very book, perchance,

[16] *Clarel*, 3.5.1.

Which claims arrest of its advance.[17]

Derwent's is the liberalizing voice of those religious writers who (as we saw in chapter 1), in the face of the decline of religious belief, advocated the transvaluation of religion and poetry. Replace religion with poetry, he says, and step back into the myth that offers material for the imagination. Since he exclaims of Clarel, "Alas, too deep you dive," Derwent also represents (in the words of Walter Bezanson) the poem's chief "meliorist," a rather dubious designation for any character in Melville's work.[18] Is Melville here satirizing the "triumph" of poetry over religion? Or does he share Derwent's concern, illustrated in the priest's plea for Clarel to return to the role to the role of "comforter"?" What else to do," he inquires of Clarel, "Or whither turn, or what to adore?/What but to temporize for him,/Stranded upon an interim,/Between the ebb and flood?[19] The question, asked in language familiar to both British and American poets of the poetry of religious "doubt" assumes mankind's helplessness in the face of a dying faith and the power of "popular verse" to "temporize" what Lowell called the "unstable best." Through Clarel's silence, Melville leaves the question unanswered but, in asking it, he acknowledges one of the many impasses of the age over the question of faith and the role of the "religious" in American poetry.

[17] *Clarel*, 3.21.184-188.
[18] See Bezanson's critical note on Derwent in *Clarel*, 621.
[19] *Clarel*, 3.21.212-16.

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