

VICTORIAN RELIGIOUS
DISCOURSE
NEW DIRECTIONS IN CRITICISM

Edited By
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FRAMING VICTORIAN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: AN INTRODUCTION

Jude V. Nixon

Religion and religious discourse contributed meaningfully to the formation and definition of British national identity in the nineteenth century. “The center of Victorian discourse, in which all questions were implicated and to which all road led, was religion.”¹ Important to that ideology of Englishness was the cultivation of “Distrust, even hatred, of papist and the papacy,” according to Richard Helmstadter. “In the nineteenth-century, anti-Catholicism was closely bound up with the Irish question, as well as with the tendency of Protestant Britons of all political parties and all denominations to identify their anti-Catholic venom with a self-satisfied celebration of British liberty.”² England’s sense of itself—England’s Englishness—involved the way religion, and especially Protestantism, factored into nationness. “Protestantism was,” Linda Colley writes, “the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible,” forging “an unquestioned equation,” according to Gauri Viswanathan, “of Englishness with mainstream Anglicanism.”³ Not surprisingly, Colley commences her seminal study *Britons* with Protestantism, noticing that what cemented the nation was neither geography nor racial identity but religion, essentially Protestantism: “it was this shared religious allegiance . . . that permitted a sense of British national identity. . . . English Francophobia,” for example, had much to do with the sense that France was a Catholic country.⁴ According to Frank Turner,

Anglican culture first and foremost rested upon a religious definition of cultural identification and political outlook. From the Restoration through the battles over Catholic Emancipation and after, spokesmen for the Anglican monopoly had defined their character and that of the political and social culture that they defended in terms of the dual opposition to Roman Catholics and Protestant Nonconformists. Roman Catholicism was identified with tyranny, potential domination by a foreign prince, superstition, idolatry, and Ireland.⁵

Much of the literature of the nineteenth century reflects “this play of Protestant against Roman Catholic.”⁶ Englishness simply constituted Anglicanism. Thus, when *Jane Eyre* was considered an interloper, as

someone estranged from an essentialized English family, she had to be troped as something entirely Other; and but for a racialized outsider, such as Eliot's gypsy or Thackeray's Sambo, what better assignation than Catholic, an "infantine Guy Fawkes."⁷ Englishness comprises a particular kind of character (istics) and characters. British national identity, like Victorian discourse, is constituted through exclusion, enacted largely around religion.

Because a sense of Englishness meant familiarity with a canon, a set of particular English religious texts, those outside the fold are naturally drawn to heretical or heterodoxical texts; for female prodigals, this also includes a preference for biblical texts thought to be unsuited for their gender. Jane Eyre is vilified by Reverend Brocklehurst for her canonical preferences—her fondness of the Revelation, Daniel, Genesis, Samuel, parts of Exodus, the Kings, Chronicles, Job, and Jonah—and for her aversion to the Psalms, which she finds "not interesting" (*JE*, 26–28). The goal of organized religion, as in putting down social upheavals and all threats to the patriarchal management at Lowood, likened to quelling "the Babel clamour of tongues" (*JE*, 39), was to secure the status of women as social subalterns. This means recommending for Jane a "'Child's Guide' . . . containing 'an account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G—, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit'" (*JE*, 30). Clearly, Jane's canonical preference, in the words of Dorothy Mermin, was a way to "wrench Christianity out of its male-centeredness."⁸ In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Maggie Tulliver, similarly, frequents religious texts considered by men morally unbecoming for women, especially prepubescent girls: Defoe's *The History of the Devil* and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*. To "vindicate the variety of her reading" and to convince her male detractors that she is interested in "prettier books," books that make her appear less of a witch, Maggie cites her familiarity with the Protestant classic, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which, as only the precocious Maggie would have observed, also contains "a great deal about the devil."⁹ In fact, it was this interpretive privilege sponsored and endorsed by *Essays and Reviews* that allowed for different discursive readings of the Bible, including opportunities for women to read the same text more broadly and completely and from a female, if not feminist, perspective. Eliot's other heroine, Dorothea Brooke, as A. D. Nuttall observers, "reads Protestant Jeremy Taylor far into the night, and Anglican Richard Hooker also figures in her misguided girlish dreams of an ideal husband," and "at the same time she reads Catholic Pascal." Dorothea, he concludes, "is a personality stretched, in a rich awareness, between Protestant and Catholic worlds."¹⁰

The Pilgrim's Progress, and especially the episode of the battle between the devil (a representation of Dante's Charon) and Christian, also features centrally in Maggie Tulliver's early religious education. The subsequent Tulliver estate sale, viewed from the loss of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was for Maggie lamentable, something resembling a kind of familial death: "everything is going away from us—the end of our lives will have nothing in it like the beginning!" (*MF*, 197). Eliot, we know, was fascinated by the prophetic tradition, especially by the early Patricians and Scholastics. *The Mill on the*

Floss contains numerous references and allusions to the Great Deluge and Jonah, and Maggie is extremely familiar with the Bunyan text and attracted to sages and poets:

If she had been taught “real learning and wisdom, such as men knew,” she thought she should have held the secrets of life; if she had only books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew! Saints and martyrs had never interested Maggie so much as sages and poets. She knew little of saints and martyrs, and had gathered, as general result of her teaching, that they were a temporary provision against the spread of Catholicism, and had all died at Smithfield. (*MF*, 234)

Later in the novel when she experiences a crisis of faith, Maggie promptly laid aside Virgil, Euclid, and Aldrich, all “wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge,” and took up the Bible, Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*, and John Keble’s *The Christian Year*, which “filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories” and taught her “to see all nature and life in the light of her new faith” (*MF*, 239). In *Great Expectations* (1860), Pip’s return to the marshes, getting lost along the way,¹¹ is troped as an infernal journey meant to analogize “Christian’s pilgrimage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death” where Pip would later encounter the Apollyon, Orlick. “The reliance on recollections of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the recognition of Orlick as performing the part of Apollyon in this scene,” say F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, “are so obvious when one sees it so that one wonders that this is not a commonplace.” To stage Pip’s resolve during the trial scene and after Magwitch’s death, Dickens returned to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the trial of Faithful with Christian in attendance.¹²

Victorian religious discourse, then, locates England’s sense of itself tied inextricably to masculinity, race, and imperialism.¹³ In *The Making of Victorian England*, Kitson Clark claims that in “no other century,” save perhaps the twelfth and seventeenth, “did the claims of religion occupy so large a part in the nation’s life.”¹⁴ More recently, Cynthia Scheinberg has argued that the “engagement with religion has been seen as a central organizing principle for constructing a canon of male English Christian writers.”¹⁵ There is clearly a religious sensibility at work in the literature and culture of the nineteenth century, which necessitates critical consideration. The seriousness, deliberateness, and purpose accorded Victorian science, Turner believes, ought to be directed to Victorian religion, especially its relationship to Victorian secular society. Turner is particularly attentive to the problematics of the nineteenth-century crisis of faith, which superseded intellectual and/or theological factors. “Victorian faith entered crisis not in the midst of any attack on religion but rather during the period of the most fervent religious crusade that the British nation had known . . . indeed during the last great effort on the part of all denominations to Christianize Britain.”¹⁶

Without some acquaintance, then, with nineteenth-century religion and religious discourse, much of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, the Rossettis,

Hopkins, and Swinburne remains inaccessible; so too the essayists (Carlyle, Newman, Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater) and novelists, especially the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, whose entire corpus interacts meaningfully with nineteenth-century religion and religious discourse. Victorian autobiography, the genre of the crisis of faith, and arguably the most representative nineteenth-century literary form, employs structurally plots of religious conversion modeled either after Augustine (Hopkins's "lingering-out sweet skill") or Paul (Hopkins's "át ónce, as once at a crash").¹⁷ In other words, the Victorian *bildungsroman* is structured around a conversion plot—"God's active transformation of the passive Christian. . . Transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one's unique self."¹⁸ Dickens's wonderful opening to *David Copperfield*, "I Am Born," discloses his subtle workings with the Genesis narrative of beginnings: "To begin my life with the beginning of my life."¹⁹ Here as elsewhere in Dickens can be seen a veiled use of biblical allusions, at times for satiric purposes, evidence of a tentativeness toward evangelical Christianity. Just why and how religion and religious discourse matters to Dickens has remained largely elusive, especially for someone who did not ardently embrace Christianity yet whose *Life of Our Lord* (1848), as Zemka has observed, not only participates in "the larger cultural trend of the period" but also "testifies to the strength of the author's belief in the religiosity of childhood."²⁰ And what if any influence Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) had on Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1854) and it on Dickens's own *Little Dorrit* (1855–57) remains intriguing. John Stuart Mill's acknowledged skepticism, Ruskin's systematic rejection of his formative evangelicalism ("From John Bunyan and Isaac Ambrose, I had received the religion by which I still myself lived, as far as I had spiritual life at all"), Newman's religious war with the so-called liberals and subsequent spiritual rebirth, Carlyle's wrestle with the specter of unbelief, Swinburne's religio-politics, and Pater's religious aestheticism all cannot be appreciated unless viewed within the compass of institutional Christianity and its authenticating texts.²¹

The role of George Eliot in lending shape and definition to all that constitutes religious discourse in the nineteenth century cannot be overestimated. Strauss's and Feuerbach's Higher Criticism exerted a powerful influence on her fiction, especially on the legendary and apocalyptic *Romola* (1863) and *Middlemarch* (1872). Additionally, her novels reflect the belief that inherent in this life is the belief that all humans suffer, and some remarkable ones suffer for the sins of others (a belief Dickens shared), dramatize the emerging evangelicalism on England's provincial stage, and biblical or religious chapter titles structure her texts, as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): "The Valley of Humiliation" (Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*), "Wheat and Tares" (Matthew 13), and "The Great Temptation" (Milton's *Paradise Lost*). Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* becomes for a disillusioned Maggie an ascetic or pietistic model of spirituality, both Maggie and Dorothea are made to undergo the same spiritual pilgrimage Bunyan's Christian experienced, and the apocalyptic flood imagery informs *Romola*

and *The Mill on the Floss*. In the Tulliver household, the Bible, a reject from the estate sale, still occupies a critical place, albeit an archival one, a repository of the family's history containing a disastrous fall and an unforgiving spirit; religion fails to play an active or meaningful role in the Tullivers' daily life, a life marked by "no active, self-renouncing faith," "little trace of religion," and "still less of a distinctly Christian creed" (*MF*, 214, 219–22). In an intriguing study, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time*, Mary Wilson Carpenter believes that understanding "traditionally Protestant interpretation of Biblical prophecy" helps us "to better understand George Eliot's 'creation' as a historian." Reading *Adam Bede* (1859) in accord with the Anglican lectionary, and *The Mill on the Floss* as apocalyptic history, Carpenter explores Eliot's formative education in the "School of the Prophets," her interest, that is, in biblical prophecy, especially the millenarian view of prophecy as continuous—"an inspired map of time"—that "reached new heights of scholarly development, as well as popular interest, during the Victorian era."²²

Adam Bede, Eliot's highly religious, dissenter novel, opens with Thomas Carlyle's religion of work, followed by Dinah Morris's Sermon on the Mount, and ends with an upper-room discourse and last supper between Adam, the Man of Sorrows, and Bartle Massey. The novel attempts to marry Anglicanism with a culturally progressive Methodism, a political alliance crucial to an emergent middle class. The third chapter of *Adam Bede*, "After the Preaching," concerns English domesticity and the family. Eliot's coquettish vixen and autoerotic, the lovely material girl Hetty Sorrel, "a perfect Hebe," cared little for "what was meant by the pictures in the Pilgrim's Progress, or in the old folio Bible," "[r]eligious doctrines had taken no hold on Hetty's mind," and she had "never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling."²³ Conversely, Eliot's exemplar of English industry, provincialism, and manfulness, the eponymous Adam Bede "knew no better lyrics than he could find in the Old and New Version and an occasional hymn," and "had read his Bible, including the apocryphal books, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with Bunyan's *Life and Holy War*," books neglected by the mainstream religious establishment against which the novel writes (*AB*, 211–12). The respectable Reverend Irwine, representative of the secular Established Church and model for Eliot of a different kind of spirituality (established order as opposed to evangelical sloppiness), was attracted to the paganism of Sophocles, Theocritus, and Aeschylus, the "savouriness" of which was "quite absent from any text in Isaiah or Amos": "Mr Irwine's recollections of young enthusiasm and ambition were all associated with poetry and ethics that lay aloof from the Bible" (*AB*, 69).

Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), considered by Ruth Y. Jenkins a "revisionist feminist parable" and the "fullest articulation" of a "woman's search for her place in a patriarchal culture,"²⁴ deals profoundly with many of the prevailing questions of nineteenth-century religion, even anticipating the (gender) bias readers bring to biblical interpretation. As Gianni Vattimo

has recently observed, “Beginning with St Augustine and his reflections on the Trinity, Christian theology is in its deepest foundations a hermeneutic theology: the interpretive structure, transmission, mediation and, perhaps, the fallenness do not concern only the enunciation, the communication of God with man; they characterize the intimate life of God itself, which therefore cannot be conceived in terms of an immutable metaphysical plenitude.”²⁵ In the novel, Caroline Helstone observes:

... if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn: to make it say, “Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection”;—“it is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace,” and so on. (*Shirley*, 323)

Like Caroline Helstone, George Eliot’s provincial Lisbeth Bede challenges patriarchal readings of the Bible and calls into question the whole matter of multiple readings of the Bible and perhaps also what has been included and excluded in the formation of the canon. As far as Lisbeth is concerned, “Take no thought for the morrow” could well be applied to Seth’s indolence and irresponsibility, causing his brother Adam to assume the bulk of the family duties: “Why, as Adam has to take thought for thee.” Lisbeth rejects any reading that restricts the passage to the mere sense that it means “we shouldn’t be over-anxious and worretting ourselves about what’ll happen tomorrow”:

Ay, ay, that’s the way wi’ thee: thee allays makes a peck o’ thy own words out o’ a pint [point] o’ the Bible’s. I donna see how thee’t to know as “take no thought for morrow” means all that. An’ when the Bible’s such a big book, an’ thee canst read all thro’t, an’ ha’ the pick o’ the texes, I canna think why thee dostna pick better words as donna mean so much more nor they say. (*AB*, 46)

Employing a clerical plot and making full use of the range of biblical parables, *Shirley* is decidedly religious. It features such chapter titles as “Levitical,” “Noah and Moses,” “Valley of the Shadow of Death,” “Phoebe,” and “Case of Domestic Persecution.” “Brontë’s grafting of Christian imagery onto her secular narrative,” says Jenkins, “signals the larger, Christian context in which *Shirley* must be read.”²⁶ Indeed, the Victorian novel, Valentine Cunningham has observed, is a novel about Dissenters, about separating oneself from the trait group to form new groups.²⁷ In *Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society*, David Sloan Wilson studies religious group identity in relationship to Darwinian thought, a factor crucial to the development of the nineteenth-century novel, which evolved in consort with the emerging Darwinian science.²⁸ That the nineteenth century manifested arguably the most volatile restructuring of religious groups and formation of new ones, all concurrent with the rise of evolutionary biology and

the configuration of new scientific subdisciplines, is hardly coincidental, something Wilson's groundbreaking study only begins to explore. Victorian religious discourse cuts across the entire spectra of mainstream nineteenth-century literature and culture, whether by tacit reference or total engagement. It could be argued that central as it is to the literature, religious discourse in effect legitimized Victorian literature.

The ubiquitous Bible and other standard Protestant apocryphal texts pervade the fictional Victorian home. "In seeking to understand the ahistorical approach to Victorian culture," says Turner, "it is also important not to underestimate the impact made on later generations by the large, well-bound sets of collected works of major Victorian writers."²⁹ So formative is a particular religious tradition to English identity that Aurora Leigh's patrimonial Englishness, forcing her "to speak his tongue," constitutes familiarity with "the collects and the catechism, / The creeds, from Athanasius back to Nice, / The Articles." But to intimate how outdated, in part because they elide the woman question and exclude women from the dominant discourse, Barrett Browning through Aurora considers these supposedly progressive doctrinal positionings "Tracts *against* the times."³⁰ Catherine Earnshaw's library of "antique volumes" (in *Wuthering Heights*) includes a Testament and the printed sermons of the Reverend Jabes Branderham, redactions of Old and New Testament passages, works whose antiquarian effects are of a piece with the wuthering trope in the novel. To Emily Brontë, daughter of an Anglo-English clergyman, institutional religion remains haunting and sepulchral.³¹ And as in her sister's novel, *Shirley*, "[t]he Church does not fare well."³²

In *Olive* (1850), Dinah Craik's clergyman, the secular Harold Gwynne, has a copy of Newton's Sermons covered in dust, and a "large unopened packet—marked 'Religious Society's Tracts'" served as prop for his telescope, testament to Harold's curiosity for science and neglect of his clerical commitment. Relegated to the anachronistic, religion succumbs to a kind of antiquarianism when it, like Edward Casaubon's conservationist and mummified *Key to All Mythologies*, refuses to engage emerging seminal questions.³³ Harold Rothesay's Bible, retired to "the farther shelf" of his library, lacks pride of place, spatially displaced by texts of "all [heterodoxical] faiths," all "variations of sects." Harold Gwynne's secularism, with sermons modeled after Locke or Bacon, "more suited to the professor's chair than the pulpit," along with his peculiar Sunday strictures on his daughter, so concerned his mother that Mrs. Gwynne felt they might imperil Ailie's juvenile faith. She therefore intervened, taking precaution that Ailie "keeps Sunday properly and reverently" by removing "her playthings and her baby-books" and teaching her "a few of Dr. Watts's moral hymns."³⁴ And so too the young Ruskin, whose evangelical mother ensured that his regular diet of Sunday reading avoided most everything but *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Holy War*, and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Similarly, Gabriel Oak's library (in *Far From the Madding Crowd*) contains copies of *Paradise Lost* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which, along with *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, David

Hempton sees as “Britain’s most widely circulating works of popular piety.”³⁵ Hardy’s pious evangelical and provincial voice, Joseph Poorgrass recalled that it was an infirmity that caused him to take up *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: “’Twas a bad leg allowed me to read the *Pilgrim’s Progress*.”³⁶ The strictly evangelical, instead of habituating themselves on Sundays with “light reading and secular entertainment,” often took up *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Paradise Lost*.³⁷

Much earlier than Hardy and other Victorian half-believers, Caroline Bowles Southey (1786–1854), wife to the Poet Laureate, had her poetic persona in her verse autobiography *The Birth-day* (1836) recall how central, foundational, and vital orthodox religion was to that English family. On the “old walnut-tree bureau” in the library of her character Ephraim were books belonging to his intellectually acquisitive wife Priscilla, which on her death were bequeath to the child visitor/poet:

The Holy Bible, cased in green shaloon,
And Book of Common Prayer (a fine black type)
Were laid conspicuous on the central spot,
As first in honour: flanked on either side
By Taylor’s Golden Grove, The Pilgrim’s Progress,
And Fox’s Book of Martyrs. How I loved
To ransack those old tawny, well-thumbed leaves,
Supplying my fill of horrors! Sermons too— . . .
And fifth other rarities and treasures. (2768–851)³⁸

The prevalence of seminal Christian religious texts constituting the fabric, if not plot, of Victorian literature—the novel no exception—underscores the centrality of religion to the dominant ideology. In arguing the importance of poetry to Victorian religious discourse, especially the contributions of women, Scheinberg underestimates the profound though subtle ways the nineteenth-century novel informs the prevailing religious discourse. Scheinberg insists that “the novel has never claimed the deep relationship to religion that poetry has in the English literary tradition.”³⁹ While poetry might well be the site where institutional religion is contested, the nineteenth-century novel, including, and especially, the novels written by women, enacts the complex and shifting role of religion in Victorian culture. In fact, the novel is where religion is most problematically staged.

Indeed, religion was “an inextricable part of the cultural fabric” of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ As Hillis Miller puts it, “God is, in one way or another, a starting place and presupposition,”⁴¹ even for a religious skeptic, hedonist, and profligate as Arthur Huntington, in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1847), who “with a puritanical air of mock solemnity” holds “his prayerbook upside down, or open at any place but the right.”⁴² Any failure, therefore, to recognize religious typology or typological symbolism causes us to “under-read and misread many works” and “deprive many Victorian works of a large part of their context.”⁴³ To Hardy’s Jude Fawley,

“the most real” of the Anglican divines were “the founders of the religious school called Tractarians,” and especially “the well-known three, the enthusiast, the poet, and the formularist”—Newman, Keble, and Pusey, respectively—“whose teaching had influenced him even in his obscure home.” In Jude’s later agnosticism, they would become “Tractarian Shades”: “I seem to see them, and almost hear them rustling. But I don’t revere all of them as I did then. The theologian, the apologists and their kin the metaphysicians, the high-handed statesmen, and others, no longer interest me. All that has been spoilt for me by the grind of stern reality!” At Oxford, Jude caught sight of Newman and cited in detail passages from the *Apologia*. Hardy’s Christminster is Tractarian Oxford “in whose history such men as Newman, Pusey, Ward, and Keble, loom so large.” Jude’s Artizan’s Mutual Improvement Society at Aldbrickham comprises young men “of all creeds and denominations, including Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Positivists, and others.”⁴⁴ Everywhere in Hardy, institutional religion is in decline, and its new fabric cannot replace the spontaneity and vitality of its old forms. A restorer of old religious edifices, Hardy stages this decline using architectural tropes:

Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, or utilized as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood. In place of it a tall new building of modern Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day. The site whereon so long had stood the ancient temple to the Christian divinities was not even recorded on the green and level grass-plot that had immemorially been the churchyard, the obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteenth-century cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years. (*Jude*, 16)

Yet another Hardy novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), discourses meaningfully on religion. In fact, so important is religious discourse in Hardy that his use of the Bible and biblical names, as well as references to Dante’s *Inferno*, is frequent and heavy-handed, even clumsy. Hardy’s religion virtually assaults the reader. Hardy’s heroine, Bathsheba, frequents the Old Testament book Ruth, and even plays the role of kinsman redeemer, a Boaz to Sergeant Troy as Ruth; and religious decay—“worn-out religious creed”—is everywhere in the novel. The new hymn sung by Garbriel’s choir is Newman’s “Lead, kindly Light,” which revives spiritual feelings Bathsheba thought long “dead within her.” Hardy even ridicules the “two religions going on in the nation now—High Church and High Chapel,” the one in which “they pray singing, and worship all the colours of the rainbow,” and the other in which “they pray preaching, and worship drab and whitewash only” (*FMC*, 114, 298, 173).⁴⁵

Similarly, Mary (Mrs. Humphry) Ward’s amiable clergyman, Robert Elsmere, routinely turns to Dante, Virgil, and Milton for spiritual sustenance

and to become intimate with his wife Catherine, the two of them “lost in love and faith—Christ near them—Eternity, warm with God, enwrapping them.” Robert’s Greek New Testament performs a similar relational function. But this confidence is later tested when in his crisis of faith Robert begins to question the authenticity of the Bible. Even John Keble’s otherwise reliable *Christian Year*, given its broad spiritual appeal and popularity, provides assurance only to Catherine.⁴⁶ Protestant religious tomes, chiefly the Bible, the Articles, the lectionary, *Tracts for the Times*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Christian Year*, and *Holy Living and Dying*, are important intertextual sites in Victorian literature, which alter the texts themselves. Lifted out of their host context, reinscribed, and reinterpreted, these sacred texts perform a quite different role and are assigned a differential value. This is especially so in the writings of Victorian women who employ the same religious discourse to query, expand, revise, and/or reject the existing tradition, using the same discourse “in a very different fashion and even appropriating its cultural authority for feminist purposes”; for them, the “patriarchal domination of that discourse does not amount to monolithic control.”⁴⁷ “Through reading or hearing others read Protestant publications like Bunyan and Foxe, through studying the Bible, or listening to sermons, or leafing through the dog-eared pages of almanacs and homily books,” as Colley points out, “Protestant Britons learnt that particular kinds of trials, at the hands of particular kinds of enemies, were the necessary fate and the eventual salvation of a chosen people.”⁴⁸ These tomes served to legitimize a people and authorize their ideology and practices, including the export of Christianity abroad, “the translation of Evangelical faith into a dialect of international commercial capitalism.”⁴⁹ Religion quite often found itself inextricably connected to capitalism, imperialism, and militarism. These “Victorian ‘prophets’ had begun to identify the divine scheme with their own party politics,” wherein “England was specifically commissioned to carry Protestantism to the rest of the world.”⁵⁰ Consequently, “religious questions were necessarily political ones; and political ones . . . were saturated with religious significance.”⁵¹ Through its countless missionary societies, English religion went hand in hand with the nation’s industrial and imperial project, the two inextricable and seamless. The goal was as much to get rich as it was to save souls. “The Bible Society contributed to nineteenth-century imperial ideology by textualizing the world as a Protestant and British totality. The histories that it produced were books [chiefly poetry, the novel, and the essay] that tried to write an empire inspired by, structured by, and composed of the Bible.”⁵² In the “double stratum or the double root” of the word “religion”—“*religio*, scrupulous attention, respect, patience, even modesty, shame or piety”; and “*religare* . . . linking religion to the *link*, precisely, to obligation, ligament and hence to obligation, to debt”—Jacques Derrida sees an “internal splitting . . . peculiar or ‘proper’ to religion, appropriating religion for the ‘proper’ (inasmuch as it is also the *unscathed*: *heilig*, holy, sacred, saved, immune and so on), appropriating religious indemnification to all forms of property, from the linguistic idiom in its ‘letter,’ to blood and soil, to the family and to the nation.”⁵³

Attempts to frame Victorian religious discourse must draw from the disparate ways religion, both as subject and practice, mattered in the nineteenth century. No single critical text, no poetics, really, formulates Victorian religious discourse. "A great critical need of our time," Dennis Taylor has observed, "is for ways of discussing religious or spiritual dimensions in works of literature," and especially, I might add, discussions that situate the religious not as something separate from but connected to an overall interpretation and understanding of the text. In other words, feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial approaches to Victorian literature—to instance but three—are incomplete exclusive of critical considerations of a religious, patriarchal economy. Absent this understanding, and it has largely been absent, "an important part of the literature we read goes untouched by our discourses," says Taylor. "There is a need in our time for religious interpretations that are substantial enough to enter into a productive and competitive relation with the reigning critical discourses."⁵⁴ The absence of a religious literary criticism leaves seismic interpretive gaps in literary works, of the kind Jonathan Culler notices. Missing in the critique of comparative literature, says Culler, is the place of religion, which "cries out for attention, not least because religion provides an ideological legitimation" so much more consequential than "the ideological positions comparatists do spend their time attacking." Seldom has anyone produced "even the mildest critique of religion," which Culler is convinced is the "proudest heritage of comparative literary studies," one threatened to be made defunct through critical neglect. What is especially missing and needed, says Culler, is a legitimate critique rather than a tacit acceptance of religion and religious discourse, "far more important than the popular question of whether deconstruction is politically progressive or regressive," and so should be "as much a subject of debate and critique as other ideological formations and discourses."⁵⁵

Now if, today, the "question of religion" actually appears in a new and different light, if there is an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing, then what is at stake is language, certainly—and more precisely the idiom, literality, writing, that forms the element of all revelation and of all belief, an element that ultimately is irreducible and untranslatable—but an idiom that above all is inseparable from the social nexus, from the political, familial, ethnic, communitarian nexus, from the nation and from the people: from autochthony, blood and soil, and from the ever more problematic relation to citizenship and to the state. In these times [as in all times, really], language and nation form the historical body of all religious passion.⁵⁶

Terry Eagleton expresses the same view—the glaring absence of critical attention to religion—even more succinctly: "Religion has been for most of human history one of the most precious components of popular life, even though almost all theorists of popular culture embarrassedly ignore it."⁵⁷

Indeed, many works of criticism have attended to the influence of the Bible and of religion in general on Victorian writers and texts, and an equal number

has addressed sage discourse in Victorian literature. A valuable and much more recent addition has been studies examining the ways Victorian women writers enter only to rewrite and reauthorize the hegemonic patriarchal discourse, such as Lynda Palazzo's *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* (2002). Palazzo's work undertakes an examination of Rossetti's writings, looking in particular at "the damage inflicted on women by a patriarchal religious system" and how Rossetti attempts "to reconstruct a feminist God-language, by using metaphors, preferably scriptural ones, with which to debate woman's relationship with God." Palazzo finds Rossetti "interpreting the Bible primarily, although not exclusively, for women," and "attempting to formulate a method of interpretation that is distinctly feminine . . . reading consciously for gender" and "developing a way of studying the scriptures which is available exclusively to women." The "historical roots of modern feminist approaches to the problem of gender in Christianity, and in particular of feminist christological inquiry," according to Palazzo, "lie in the nineteenth century."⁵⁸ Largely occluded from that discourse, but for George Eliot, who received "'sage' status . . . largely on the basis of interpretations which reconcile her novels with the values of male-dominated tradition and ignore her female precursors," are the Victorian female preachers, according to Christine L. Krueger, in *The Reader's Repentance* (1992). "Eighteenth-century evangelicalism fostered the emergence of female orators and writers of remarkable authority," says Krueger, "whose legacy shaped social discourse throughout the Victorian period and enabled female novelists . . . to be recognized as social critics." Focusing specifically on Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, Krueger's study examines the empowerment of women in the evangelical tradition and "reconsiders the history of women's social writing in terms of female preaching tradition" calling "on males to repent."⁵⁹

J. Hillis Miller's well-worn *The Disappearance of God* (1963) studies five Victorians as "a set of people living without God in the world." Miller is convinced that the condition of a disappearing God, the sense that "God himself has slipped away from the place where he used to be," a "*Deus absconditus*, hidden somewhere behind the silence of infinite spaces," is a crisis so significant that it simply "must not be misunderstood."⁶⁰ In yet another important work, George Landow's *Victorian Types Victorian Shadows* (1980) observes the prevalence of biblical typology and typological structures in Victorian literature, arts, and culture. Drawing from John Holloway's *The Victorian Sage* (1953) and George P. Landow's *Elegant Jeremiahs* (1986), Thais E. Morgan's *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse* (1990) examines the Victorian sage and its gender relationships—"the power of gender and the gender of power"—the way, for example, "new historicism, reader reception, psychoanalysis, Marxism, semiotics, and deconstruction" can be applied to the mixture of genres that is discourse. "Because of the commanding position it held within the Victorian hierarchy of genres, sage writing provides an exemplary site for analyzing the strategies used by both women and men in the establishment and contestation of cultural power during the 1800s."⁶¹

Similarly, Ruth Y. Jenkins's *Reclaiming Myths of Power* (1995) examines "the conflict between four Victorian women [Florence Nightingale, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot] and their culture, their ethical beliefs, and the limited opportunities to enact their faith." Jenkins believes that the consort of "secular and spiritual ideologies—both exploiting women—limited women's access to power and, subsequently, the requisite authority necessary to evoke substantive change." By "omitting women writers (and consequently female experience) from this inquiry, and thereby assuming a singular perspective, scholars have misconstrued the full scope of Victorian spirituality." In so doing, they have failed to recognize that "many women's spiritual crises and their related writings attribute humanity's apparent falling away from God to a patriarchal appropriation of the sacred, forcing women to become Christian martyrs under androcentric hegemony." All four women, and many of their female contemporaries, "reappropriated the substance and the language of the Judeo-Christian narrative to authorize their subversion of patriarchal institutions."⁶²

George Tennyson's *Victorian Devotional Poetry* (1981) traces the Tractarian heritage in nineteenth-century devotional poetry, and John Maynard's *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (1993) looks at the ways sexuality was negotiated by Victorians, specifically Clough, Kingsley, Patmore, and Hardy; "sexual discourse," Maynard concludes, is "anything but free from religious issues and traces."⁶³ Also negotiating religion and gender, *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* (2000), edited by Andrew Bradstock and others, examines "the complex interrelationship between religion and gender which existed in Victorian society." Social historians, they believe, have failed "to give sufficient weight to the influences of either traditional religion or less orthodox forms of spirituality on men's lives."⁶⁴ In *Word Crimes* (1998), Joss Marsh exposes blasphemy in Victorian literary satire, humor, and culture, and Gauri Viswanathan's *Outside the Fold* (1998) argues that conversion is central to Englishness: "With the departure of members from the fold, the cohesion of a community is under threat just as forcefully as if its beliefs had been turned into heresy." As Viswanathan sees it, in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society, England struggled to install minority religious groups into an ideal of nationhood: "Dissent, as much as assimilation, is the necessary disruptive mechanism for the exercise of tolerance by the state."⁶⁵ Anne Hogan's and Andrew Bradstock's *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture* (1998) investigates the complex cultic image of the domesticated Victorian Angel in the House, especially as that image becomes empowering or debilitating. Additionally, the collection looks at women's missionary activities, women hymn-writers, and the generally neglected obituaries of nonconformist women.⁶⁶ More singular in focus, Michael Wheeler's *Ruskin's God* (1999) pursues the impact of Christianity on Ruskin, whose "remarkable knowledge of the Bible," Wheeler finds, "equipped him with critical tools which . . . were now applied to religious art."⁶⁷ In an even more generic way, two early authorized texts, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an*

Ending (1966), explore the apocalyptic impulse and myth in literature, particularly relevant to Victorian literature, where, as Peter Lineham points out, “Popular apocalypticism” became “a very important factor in the social character of religion in the period.”⁶⁸ Both Thais E. Morgan and Mary Wilson Carpenter pursue similar apocalyptic traces, especially as they relate to women.

The essays represented in this collection, vastly different as they are from each other, “a spectrum of variations within a single tradition” (Hillis Miller), find points of intersection as they address whole or in part issues dealing centrally with nineteenth-century religious forms of expression. In fact, their very difference reveals the protean ways religion was negotiated in the nineteenth century. The goal of this collection, then, is not to re-present Victorian religious discourse as singular but as varied, informing and informed by culture. But the volume does not pretend to tell the whole story, confining Victorian religious discourse largely to Christian and Jewish utterances and expressions, exclusive of other mythologies.⁶⁹ The Volume also ignores the occult in Victorian literature, which, as Gauri Viswanathan observed in the 2003 Modern Language Association conference, not only problematizes belief and unbelief but also demonstrated how colonialism erased only to reappropriate ancient religions. The slight exception to all of this is Nixon’s treatment of *Essays and Reviews*, wherein three of its writers—Williams, Goodwin, and Jowett—insist on the centrality of non-Judaic textual and cultural considerations to any understanding of the biblical canon. There is, in other words, an inescapably racial dimension to religion in the construction of Empire, a point touched on in *Essays and Reviews* in Frederick Temple’s evangelistic appeal for the education of the world, Roland William’s demand that we raise the same degree of critical suspicion about the “Hebrew annals” as we do “Gentile histories,” Baden Powell’s celebration of aboriginal ingenuity, and Benjamin Jowett’s endorsement of Buddhism as a legitimate and comparable religion. Still, readers especially interested in the impress of Judaism on Victorian literature and culture should consider Suzanne Bailey’s treatment of Robert Browning’s “Jochanan Hakkadosh” (1883), an example of Browning’s Orientalism. The poem, says Bailey, is “notable for its foregrounding of the materiality of language through Browning’s use of Hebrew script and supplementary notes, which both mimic the dialogism of Talmudic commentary yet bear an important relationship to the poem’s concern with the nature of knowledge and the role of the scholar.” Readers might also wish to turn elsewhere, to Cynthia Scheinberg’s *Women’s Poetry and Religion in Victorian England* (2002), which examines the way Jewish and Christian women employ “the discourse of the Judaic, Hebraic, and Jewishness in their poetry,” including “the often implicit dialogue about Jewishness that pervades Victorian women’s poets.”⁷⁰ The turn to religious poetry, Scheinberg believes, authorized Victorian women poets. Generally ignored, then, is the Victorian fascination with the other (except with the other as Papist), its obsession, that is, with the exotic, non-Western and non-Judaic cultures, as in Edward

FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. This topic would have been unavoidable in this collection had Max Müller undertaken for *Essays and Reviews* an exposé of Eastern religions. Nor is much attention paid here to sexuality on the borders, practiced by "the other Victorians" (Steven Marcus's term). Attitudes toward racial, religious, and sexual differences have common axes, and crisscross in particularly traceable trajectories—the "playing off of religion against sexuality."⁷¹

There is also a more complex aesthetic dimension to Victorian religious discourse not entirely explored in the collection, but for the quite limited ways Ward explores it in her study on Newman and Higgins in her essay on Pater. Little, for example, but for Bump's passing comments on the Pre-Raphaelites, is said on how Victorian religious discourse is represented in art, Pre-Raphaelite art, such as Hunt's *The Light of the World* (including Carlyle's critique of it), *The Shadow of Death*, *The Hireling Shepherd*, *The Scapegoat*, *Melchizedek*, and *The Finding of Christ in the Temple*, Millais's *The Vale of Rest*, Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini (The Annunciation)*, *The Girlhood of Mary*, and *Christ in the House of His Parents*, Seddon's *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat*, and Madox Brown's *Christ Washing Peter's Feet*. Pre-Raphaelites' typological symbolism acknowledges Ruskin as its foremost theorizer. In *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (1979), George P. Landow shows how the Pre-Raphaelites employed typological symbolism, in which art is at once presentational, representational, and symbolic. Put differently, Pre-Raphaelite religious typology is both metaphoric and metonymic. As problematic is the extent to which Pre-Raphaelite art is religious, satiric, and/or social commentary. "Countless sermons, tracts, and hymns," according to Landow, "taught Victorian worshippers of all sects to read the Bible in search of types."⁷² Also ignored in the volume, but for its brief treatment by Renée V. Overholser in the context of Hopkins's Marian poems, is the iconography of the Virgin Mary in Victorian literature, "too foreign and Catholic, as well as too wholly maternal, for most English to use."⁷³ Yet, images of Mary persist, "symbolically charged and highly visible in Victorian England,"⁷⁴ and especially the way the Victorian idealized woman was frequently troped as a Madonna or Pieta, often better off dead. One can observe this in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), Craik's *Olive* (1850), Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69), and Eliot's *Romola* and *The Mill on the Floss*. The Victorian idealized woman was frequently troped as a Madonna or Pieta, often better off dead.

Finally, I am using the term "discourse" as Hayden White understands it—as a way, that is, of speaking literally and tropically about a specific field and how through that discourse one comes to terms with the things constitutive of the entire cultural milieu. Discourse, says White, engages "problematical domains of experience" and functions as "a model of the metalogical operations by which consciousness, in general cultural praxis, effects such comings to terms with its milieux."⁷⁵ Any treatment, then, of the "relationship between religion and the arts" is bound to be a "promising area of study."⁷⁶ These essays, then, addressing the disparate ways religion

informs nineteenth-century England, attempt to locate the religious discourse operative in Victorian literature, art, and culture, seek to make available new understandings of Victorian literature, and elucidate the extent to which religious discourse is vested in Victorian cultural thought and practice. But there is a sense too in which these essays are not only about Victorian religious discursive practice, but also about what Vattimo sees as “the robust presence in our popular culture of the return of the religious . . . motivated above all by the sense of impending global threats [need I invoke here the apocalyptic, the sense of an ending?] that appear quite new and without precedent in the history of humanity”: “We therefore want to follow this trace of the trace, to take as constitutive for a renewed reflection on religion the very fact of its return, its re-presentation, its calling to us with a voice that we are sure we have heard before.”⁷⁷

The essays are evenly divided. Part I, “The Higher-Critical Debate,” deals largely with historical, critical, and literary responses to nineteenth-century biblical higher criticism. Looking at Hopkins, Pusey, and Müller, Jerome Bump examines the “historical particulars” that “constituted meaning in Victorian England,” locating them largely in “palimpsest,” texts “written over,” “the inscribed surface of events,” as Michel Foucault might say. All the layers, “whether we are conscious of them or not,” Bump insists, “contribute to our experience of reading Victorian religious discourse.” In fact, the essays in the collection, whether dealing with Hopkins, Pusey, Browning, or Pater, focus on the idea of the palimpsest and polyvocality, texts and voices, multiple speaking selves. The history of ideas might well be about things written-over or things over-heard. According to Bump, “the Old Testament is not the only text of the ancient world ‘over which’ or ‘against which’ Christianity has been inscribed. To understand that reading experience we need, at times, to be a geologist of discourses.” Jude V. Nixon offers a reading of the English higher-critical *magnus opus*, *Essays and Reviews*, an archive more disruptive to Victorian culture than its precursor *The Origin of Species* in that it fomented suspicion about authorship, authority, and canonicity that in turn contributed to a plethora of critical theories of reading. Higher Criticism is the precursor to deconstruction and any number of post-critical textual approaches.

Going beyond received histories of “the Victorian Church” as well as “current masculinity studies,” Janet L. Larson examines the “wider discursive battleground of popular biblical and theological debate as a displaced arena of conflict between the sexes and over gender in the writing of women as well as men” at times “breaking into open hostilities, more often carried on unconsciously or in code . . . Besides fending off such threats as the Darwinian view of ‘man’ (*The Origin of Species*, 1859),” Larson argues, “the Essayists’ manly self-idealizations registered anxieties about new challenges to men’s authority being raised by mid-Victorian lady preachers and novelists as well as the organized women’s movement, which emerged just ahead of *Essays and Reviews*.” Larson finds it “striking how often the language of gender appears in the writing of the High Victorian religion wars,” and so

considers a number of individual cases of women's religious criticism: Sarah Lewis's *Woman's Mission* (1839); Frances Power Cobbe's *Broken Lights* (1864) and *Dawning Lights* (1867); Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1860, privately published in *Suggestions for Thought*) and her epistolary debates with Benjamin Jowett; Charlotte Brontë's reinterpretation of Eve in *Shirley* (1849); and, finally, how the widely read novel by Mary Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (1888), reflects the impact of biblical criticism on domestic life and relations. In her essay on Robert Browning, Suzanne Bailey focuses on the poet's obsession with and poeticizing of higher criticism, his preoccupation, that is, both with "text and testimony." Bailey also examines nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century parodies, the "mock-confusion rife in satiric treatments, of higher criticism," whereby, for example, "one humorist uses the higher criticism as a pretext for re-writing Shakespeare, and produces a textual monster, in which Ophelia marries Romeo and Juliet runs off with Hamlet." Such parodies of higher criticism, she argues, "map the contested terrain of a nineteenth-century battle over the nature of fact, evidence, and historical knowledge, pitting the advocates of literal readings of texts against a nineteenth-century version of postmodernist textuality." Of particular importance to Bailey is the way Browning anticipates his "postmodern successors," particularly in his sense of the limitations of textual evidence and the possibility of multiple points of view on factual events." Renée V. Overholser undertakes a historical and critical examination of how the poetry of Swinburne and Hopkins represents "radically opposing alternatives to the Protestant narratives," the one, Swinburne, summoning an all-out assault on Romanism, and the other, Hopkins, dramatizing England's need to return to its formative roots in Roman Catholicism. Overholser elucidates Hopkins's attempts to rewrite Swinburne, that in "framing his own call, Hopkins appropriated . . . elements of Swinburne's texts to the uses of his own religion," and shows how both poets respond to seminal nineteenth-century Catholic manifestos.

Part II, "Religion and The Aesthetic Imagination," pursues the dialogic trace between religion and aesthetics in the nineteenth century and the cultivation of a particular religious aesthetic, one in which aestheticism manifests a religious sensibility. In other words, for a vast majority of Victorians aestheticism became if not a wholesale substitute for at least an essential part of the new religion. Delving into "overhearing," the way Browning's dramatic monologues generate meaning from "listening and deaf spots," Joseph A. Dupras explores the prominence of the "Aural dimension of creativity and religion" ("acoustic markers") in *The Ring and the Book*. Lacking Pompilia's keen sense of hearing, her "experienced ear"—this woman who "carries not only pictorial significance but also acoustic markers"—Caponsacchi (Browning's "Hollow Rock") remains "earthbound and enervated." According to Dupras, "The way Caponsacchi valorizes, or re-peals, his life's most telling experiences can test whether readers are keen enough to learn from Browning's refinement of a psychological branch of otoscopy practiced in numerous poems throughout his career." And it is left to alert reader

“to distinguish acoustical signs of a corrupt Church mimicking Christian values.” Bernadette Waterman Ward, in her essay, shows the transformative effects of storytelling in Newman, how, that is, Newman’s “understanding of the place of story in the spiritual life—‘real’ life—challenges us to confront the narrow, blunting, scorched-earth lovelessness.” Newman, Ward contends, “encouraged the writing of English saints’ lives, just as his hero St. Philip Neri ‘substituted, for the chivalry or the hurtful novels of the day, the true romances and the celestial poetry of the lives of the saints.’ . . . The stories of saints must be told to keep alive the very capacity for understanding virtue: single-hearted chastity, noble humility, firm resolve, joyous endurance, gentle gift, heroic charity.” Looking at the largely unexamined manuscripts of Pater—“Art and Religion,” “The Aesthetic Life,” “The History of Philosophy,” “Thistle,” and “Moral Philosophy”—Lesley Higgins believes that “critical nervousness about the possible role of religious dogma in Pater’s life and texts has occluded the pivotal place of religious discourse throughout his writings.” Most importantly, “such an oversight has obscured the extent to which these discursive practices provided an important response to ‘the conditions of modern life’ as Pater encountered them in the late nineteenth century.” Pater “rethinks and re-imagines religious discourse,” Higgins finds, “similar to the way Foucault, meditating on Nietzsche’s writings, rethinks history.” The fragment “Art and Religion,” for example, “identifies religious discourse as an important site of resistance to the encroaching and often ‘sterile’ scientism of the age,” and “The Writings of Cardinal Newman” remains central to Pater’s own understanding of doctrinal development and the syntax of assent. Pater’s entire career, Higgins insists, discloses a continual “engagement with religious discourse.”

Dickens’s readers catch glimpses of the materiality of religion in his novels, particularly the materiality of the Victorian church. Both Dennis Walder and Janet Larson, says Natalie Cole in her essay, “locate Dickens in relation to Victorian currents and cross-currents of faith, Larson explaining that Dickens ‘deplored the acrimonious religious debates of his day,’ but was well aware of them, and Walder emphasizing Dickens’s Unitarian-inflected, liberal Christianity: ‘[Dickens] strongly supports the basic intention of the liberal Christian manifesto, *Essays and Reviews* (1860), to reconcile Christianity with the intellectual tendencies of the age and so save religion and the Church.’” But no Dickens critic, Cole contends, has meaningfully mapped the contours of Dickens’s faith by considering the fiction in relation to the essays. The essays from *The Uncommercial Traveller* series from the last decade of Dickens’s life particularly demonstrate “the tension that Dickens felt between ‘a nostalgia for the security of knowing’ and his conviction that nineteenth-century churches and the landscapes that contain them had no permanence except in memory.” Finally, in her chapter, Alexandra M. B. Wörn notices a decided link between poetry and theological discourse in Barrett Browning: “Poetry is where God is.” Wörn’s concern in exploring Barrett Browning’s corpus, in particular *Aurora Leigh* and *A Drama of Exile*, is whether and in what manner doctrine and literature can be brought into a creative dialogue;

“for Barrett Browning poetry, nature, and God were interlinked. She understood poetry to be a response to nature, which was created by God. . . . Her poetry reflects the tension between the religious ideas she inherited, particularly from her father, and those she would later hold in more or less conscious opposition to what she had been instructed.” Dorothy Mermin has reminded us that in *The Seraphim and A Drama of Exile*, the latter “a sequel to *Paradise Lost* that centers on Eve’s self-sacrifice, suffering, and love,” Barrett Browning, “more boldly, used Christianity to authorize her entry into poetry at the highest level.”⁷⁸ Women’s religious poetry evidences their “creative and original engagements with religious texts and theology”; and it is in the poetry that “the urgency of linking theological analysis and Victorian women’s texts rises considerably.”⁷⁹ In closing, I return to Culler, who faults critics of comparative literature for working to legitimate rather than criticize and situate religious discourse, demanding that we “turn some of our analytical energies on our reaction to religious discourse and ideology.”⁸⁰ It is my hope that this volume in some small way answers this call, demonstrating that religious discourse, hardly a subdiscipline or an ancillary critical stance, occupies a prominent place in Victorian literature.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Mermin, *Godiva’s Ride: Women of Letters in England, 1830–1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 107.
2. Richard J. Helmstadter, “Orthodox Nonconformity,” in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. D. G. Paz (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 73. See the exchanges between Carlyle and John Forster on Roman Catholicism in Jude V. Nixon’s “‘Return Alphias’: The Carlyle/Forster Unpublished Letters and Re-tailoring the Sage,” *Carlyle Studies Annual* 18 (1998): 83–122.
3. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 54; Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.
4. Colley, *Britons*, 18, 25.
5. Frank Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 46.
6. A. D. Nuttall, *Dead From the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and Popular Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 36.
7. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 21.
8. Mermin, *Godiva’s Ride*, 118.
9. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 16–19. In *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Barry V. Qualls traces the impress of *Pilgrim’s Progress* on Victorian fiction, arguing that Bunyan and Francis Quarles provided “the significant context in which Carlyle and the novelists of this study [Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and Eliot]—and indeed most Victorian writers—worked. . . . Lacking Bunyan’s assurance, readers and writers held all the more tenaciously to his language. They were determined to shape the facts of this world into a religious topography, making a path towards the Celestial City” (ix, 12).

10. Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down*, 40–41.
11. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: Penguin, 1996).
12. F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, *Dickens: The Novelist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 320–23.
13. See, for example, John Maynard's *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and David Alderson's *Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
14. Qtd. in Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 203.
15. Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.
16. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, 75.
17. See especially Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); George P. Landow, ed., *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979); Heather Henderson, *The Victorian Self: Autobiography and Biblical Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).
18. Todd Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre* (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1993), 1–2.
19. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 9.
20. Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 120.
21. John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 455. The novel *Romola*, according to Mermin, "shows how women came literally to be worshipped: how legends of the Madonna . . . were formed. . . Romola is [Anna] Jameson's Madonna: heroic and tender, intellectual and maternal" (121–22).
22. Mary Wilson Carpenter, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), ix, 3–4.
23. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Oxford World's Classic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 101, 142, 384. For additional samples of Victorian religious readings, see George P. Landow, *Victorian Types Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (Boston: Routledge, 1980), 22–23.
24. Ruth Y. Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 72, 89.
25. Gianni Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," in *Religion: Cultural Memory in the Present*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 88.
26. *Ibid.*, 91.
27. Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

28. David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). For more on the impact of Darwinian science on the nineteenth century, see Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985); *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); George Levine, ed., *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Tess Cosslett, *The "Scientific Movement" and Victorian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); Bernard Lightman, ed., *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1997); Peter Allan Dale, *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); and David Cahan, ed., *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
29. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, 41.
30. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 1: 391–94.
31. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 16, 18.
32. Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power*, 91.
33. Eliot's Edward Casaubon is thought to be a parody of the seventeenth-century French classical scholar, Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614). In 1854, Eliot succeeded Mark Pattison as book review editor of the *Westminster Review*. She was obviously aware of Pattison's interest in Isaac Casaubon, of whom Pattison published an 1875 biography, *Isaac Casaubon, 1559–1614*, "concealed autobiography," says Hugh Lloyd-Jones (qtd. in Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down*, 2), three years after Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Eliot, it is popularly believed, used Pattison as model for Casaubon and his wife Emilia Frances Strong as model for Dorothea. "Even today there is no better single study of Casaubon available" (123). Nuttall's recent work, which takes its title from Browning's "A Grammarian Funeral," examines all three Casaubon figures—Edward, Pattison, and Isaac.
34. Dinah Craik, *Olive*, Oxford World's Classic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 89, 170–72.
35. David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 146.
36. Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), 59, 169.
37. Landow, *Victorian Types*, 21.
38. In *Caroline Bowles Southey, 1786–1854: The Making of Woman Writer*, ed. Virginia Blain (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 193.
39. Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry*, 4.
40. Altick, *Victorian People*, 203.
41. J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 15.
42. Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Oxford World's Classic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 167.
43. Landow, *Victorian Types*, 3.

44. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Signet, 1961), 82–83, 387, 85, 105, 300.
45. Hardy's rustics, as well as Housman's poetic characters, as Carol Efrati has noted, quote routinely from the Bible "to demonstrate that the habit of applying biblical quotations to the events of daily life, as well as the propensity for debating the significance of various passages, was pervasive in Victorian England" ("A. E. Housman's Use of Biblical Narrative," in *A. E. Housman: A Reassessment*, ed. Alan W. Holden and J. Roy Birch [New York: Macmillan, 2000], 188). As meaningful are the numerous and often deliberate readings and misreadings of actual biblical narratives (for example, Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi's confusing Herodias with Salome, and the interpretive latitudes Housman took in "The Carpenter's Son" and "Easter Hymn") and what those might constitute in Victorian literature.
46. Mary (Mrs. Humphry) Ward, *Robert Elsmere*, Oxford World's Classic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 269, 315–17. Hardy's Sue Bridehead's landlady, Miss Fontover, with "a dab at Ritual," knew "the Christian Year by heart" (*Jude*, 97).
47. Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6.
48. Colley, *Britons*, 28.
49. Zemka, *Victorian Testaments*, 190.
50. Carpenter, *George Eliot*, 62.
51. Mermin, *Godiva's Ride*, 107.
52. Zemka, *Victorian Testaments*, 221.
53. Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion: Cultural Memory in the Present*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 34–41, 46.
54. Dennis Taylor, "The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism," in *Seeing Into the Life of Things: Essays on Literature and Religious Experience*, ed. John L. Mahoney (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 3. As important as religion and the discourse are to Victorian literature, Herbert F. Tucker's *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) does not grant the topic a section unto itself. But for the very useful "Clerical" section, the topic is largely ignored, even in places where one might ordinarily expect it to be addressed, as in the section "Passing On: Death." Not even a glancing reference is made to Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius*, the metatext, really, of Victorian "Passing On." For more on this, see Geoffrey Rowell's *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Michael Wheeler's *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Alison Milbank's chapter, "Life After Death," in *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
55. Jonathan Culler, "Comparative Literature and the Pieties," *Profession* (1986): 30–32. I owe this source to Dennis Taylor.
56. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 4.
57. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 99.
58. Lynda Palazzo, *Christina Rossetti's Feminist Theology* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), xii, 21, 119, xii.

59. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance*, 3–6.
60. Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, 1–2, 6.
61. Thäis E. Morgan, "Victorian Sage Discourse and the Feminine: *An Introduction*," in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thäis E. Morgan (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 18, 2.
62. Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power*, 18–19, 25.
63. George B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981); Maynard, *Victorian Discourses*, 3.
64. Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan, and Sue Morgan, eds., *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1–2.
65. Joss Marsh, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, xi, 17.
66. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, eds., *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
67. Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 71–72.
68. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Athenaeum, 1969); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Peter J. Lincham, "The Protestant 'Sects,'" in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. D. G. Paz (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 154.
69. None of the essays as such explores the role of Judaism in Victorian literature, which, we know, concerned Victorians, interested as they were in prophetic/sage discourse and in a culture intolerant to the very religion informing sage discourse. See, for example, Eliot's representation of Judaism in *Daniel Deronda*. Carlyle, for another, invents for his fictional autobiographical self a history connected to Talmudic and Rabbinical lore, to say nothing of Teufelsdröckh's obsession with the Hebraic, whether the slough of Despair in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, his connection to Melchizedek, a young Ishmael, Moses's appearing in a basket, his Pisgah speech, and the Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* is a more Hebraic than Hellenic text. And for all of this, Carlyle's anti-Semitic remarks are well chronicled. For useful observations on Victorian reactions to Judaism, see Stephen Prickett, "Purging Christianity of its Semitic Origins: Kingsley, Arnold and the Bible," in *Rethinking Victorian Culture*, eds. Juliet John and Alice Jenkins (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 63–79. See also David J. De Laura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969); and Scheinberg's *Women's Poetry*, and "Victorian Poetry and Religious Diversity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159–79.
70. Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry*, 3, 5.
71. Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down*, 42.
72. George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 7.
73. Mermin, *Godiva's Ride*, 123.

74. Carol Marie Engelhardt, "The Paradigmatic Angel in the House: The Virgin Mary and Victorian Anglicans," in *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House*, eds. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 159.
75. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2-10.
76. D. G. Paz, "Introduction," in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), ii.
77. Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 80.
78. Mermin, *Godiva's Ride*, 113.
79. Scheinberg, *Womens's Poetry*, 3, 15.
80. Culler, "Comparative Literature," 31.