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The laws of verse : the poetry of Alice Meynell and its literary contexts, 1875-1923

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THE LAWS OF VERSE:
THE POETRY OF ALICE MEYNELL
AND ITS LITERARY CONTEXTS, 1875-1923

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

Like other poets who came to prominence in the nineteenth century but continued to publish well into the twentieth, Alice Meynell's work has come gradually to be occluded by the work of her younger contemporaries, among them T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. The available scholarship records this process of occlusion in the form of an almost complete absence of serious discourse on Meynell's work following her death in 1922 until the beginnings of a modest revival of interest in her writing beginning in the 1980s. This study aims to address that gap by giving a more complete account of Meynell's stylistic development and technical procedures in the field of poetry than has heretofore been available. Examining select specimens of Meynell's verse in the light of prosodic theories current at the time both she and her Modernist contemporaries were writing further allows us to see, in place of the familiar narrative of Modernism's revolutionary break with its immediate literary past, continuities between nineteenth- and twentieth-century understandings of what meter is and how it works. Rather than attempting to catalogue the work of writers producing metrical poetry in the early twentieth century, this project looks to the work of one poet and relies on intensive analysis of only a few of her poems to trace out a literary genealogy between figures who all but never meet in critical discourse. This approach demonstrates how Meynell's poetry, especially in its engagement with prosodic convention, provides a bridge which can link the work, on the one hand, of Victorians like Coventry Patmore and Mary Elizabeth Coleridge to, on the other hand, major architects of Modernism like Pound and Eliot, generating, ultimately, a new and alternative perspective for interpreting poetry as a cultural practice in one of its most contested historical phases.

INTRODUCTION: MEYNELL AMONG THE MODERNS

Behind the great, black capitals of the title running diagonally across its fuchsia cover, the first issue of *BLAST*, dated June 20, 1914, proclaims, “Long live the great art vortex sprung up in the centre of this town!” (Lewis, *BLAST* 17).¹ The new magazine’s appearance had been advertised in *The Egoist* for April 1 with the slogan, “END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA” (Weaver 140). Despite its apocalyptic self-promotion, *BLAST* would not live past its second issue, but the first, in particular, remains a crucial statement of the high Modernist aesthetic just beginning to emerge in London on the eve of the First World War. *BLAST* No. 1 makes its statement most explicitly and forcefully in the series of manifestoes comprising its first thirty pages and signed by its major contributors, among them the magazine’s editor, Wyndham Lewis, and the twenty-eight-year-old poet Ezra Pound. These manifestoes orient *BLAST*’s aesthetic within the literary and cultural milieu of 1914 by means of long and typographically striking lists of persons, things, and ideas arranged beneath the contrasting headings, “BLAST” and “BLESS.” The first item to be blasted is London’s “CLIMATE,” a “DISMAL SYMBOL,” a “VICTORIAN VAMPIRE” that “sucks the TOWN’S heart” (11). Next comes “FRANCE” with her “PARISIAN PAROCHIALISM” (13) and, then, “THE BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE” (15), “HUMOUR” (17), and “SPORT.” And on the last page of this rhapsody of blasts, in a cloud of names presented as almost afterthoughts in smaller type and no particular order, halfway down the length of the page from “Codliver Oil,” we find “Clan Meynell” (21) (see fig. 1).

A reader of 1914 would probably understand the clan to include its patriarch, Wilfrid Meynell (1852–1948), a writer and influential publisher of magazines intended primarily for English Roman Catholics. Wilfrid’s son Francis (1891–1975) makes a likely candidate for blasting as well: not only was he the proprietor of a private press issuing rather precious editions of literary works, but he had also recently gained a certain notoriety for “left-wing opinions” and

BLAST

The Post Office Frank Brangwyn Robertson Nicol
Rev. Pennyfeather Galloway Kyle
(Bells) (Cluster of Grapes)
Bishop of London and all his posterity
Galsworthy Dean Inge Croce Matthews
Rev. Meyer Seymour Hicks
Lionel Cust C. B. Fry Bergson Abdul Bahai
Hawtrey Edward Elgar Sardlea
Filson Young Marie Corelli Geddes
Godliver Oil St. Loe Strachey Lyceum Club
Rhabindraneth Tagore Lord Glenconner of Glen
Weiniger Norman Angel Ad. Mahon
Mr. and Mrs. Dearmer Beecham Ella
A. C. Benson (Pills, Opera, Thomas) Sydney Webb
British Academy Messrs. Chapell
Countess of Warwick George Edwards
Willie Ferraro Captain Cook R. J. Campbell
Glan Thesiger Martin Harvey William Archer
George Grossmith R. H. Benson
Annie Besant Chenil Clan Meynell
Father Vaughan Joseph Holbrooke Clan Strachey

Figure 1. List of blasts from *BLAST* No. 1 (ed. Wyndham Lewis; London: John Lane, 1914; 21).

consorting with socialists (Badeni 231-232). Though Francis might seem like a sympathetic figure for the avowedly revolutionary project proselytized in *BLAST*, the magazine consistently refuses to align itself with revolutionary politics, preferring instead to make its address “TO THE INDIVIDUAL” (Lewis, *BLAST* 17). Its most overtly political statement is a patronizing appeal “TO SUFFRAGETTES” to “stick to what you understand” and “LEAVE ART ALONE, BRAVE COMRADES!” (151–152). Francis would go on to draw public ire for claiming a conscientious objection to serving in the war, and he would tangle with Pound over the title of the *Catholic Anthology 1914-1915*, Pound’s collection of works from leading Modernist poets (Moody 280). But, undoubtedly, the most prominent member of Clan Meynell would have been Wilfrid’s wife and Francis’s mother, the poet, journalist—and suffragist—Alice.

The matron of Clan Meynell’s implicit inclusion among the names of the blasted serves Lewis’s manifesto as a signal of what the London Vortex most assuredly ought not to be. As Alice Thompson, this one among the objects of *BLAST*’s derision had authored, in 1875, a volume of poems titled *Preludes* that early garnered praise for its sensitivity and delicacy of expression. No less a Victorian tastemaker than Ruskin referred to a few of the selections as “the finest things I’ve seen or felt in modern verse” (qtd. in Badeni 52). After her marriage in 1877, Alice Meynell would come to enjoy a considerable reputation as a journalist, political activist, and writer of prose essays. Her next independent volume of poetry, *Later Poems*, would not be published until 1901. Though *Later Poems* exhibits a formal complexity, emotional reticence, and, sometimes, moral ambiguity entirely unlike the verbose and effusive lyrics and dramatic monologues in *Preludes*, Meynell’s reputation as a poet would continue to be conditioned by responses to the earlier work, and, as the years of her hiatus from poetry between 1875 and 1901 wore on, Meynell came increasingly to be invoked as the face of a bourgeois and old-fashioned

aesthetic. By 1914, this face would come to seem to Meynell's younger contemporaries the face of the dead past itself.

When *BLAST* dismisses, alongside Clan Meynell and its matriarch, "THE BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE"—"CREAM OF THE SNOBBISH EARTH / ROSE OF SHARON OF GOD-PRIG OF SIMIAN VANITY"(15)—it is systematically burning its bridges to everything that came before its proclamation of the Vortex, but *BLAST*'s Modernist propagandizing shares with the deliberate offenses against literary propriety perpetrated by the aesthetes of the late Victorian Decadence an anti-establishment bent succinctly described in David Perkins's still-classic *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (1976). According to Perkins, "the avant-garde poets" of the 1890s

have the special interest that, in rejecting the Victorian tradition, they adopted premises and methods which later characterized the Modernist poets. In deliberately violating the governing conventions of nineteenth-century poetry, the Aesthetes were repudiating not merely a poetic mode, but even more an ethos and modus vivendi. (30)

Perkins's Aesthetes and Decadents, through their dedication to "the morality of the artist" (35) and a belief that "Style is a supremely difficult achievement, won by knowledge, calculation, and scrupulous toil against the resistances of language" (34), bequeathed to their Modernist successors a premise that "mid-Victorian ideals could not simply be abandoned and forgotten: they had to be offended deliberately" (31). *BLAST* expresses the Modernist desire to obliterate the immediate literary past most forcefully in a whole page devoted to "years 1837 to 1900" and the period's "abysmal inexcusable middle-class" with "their weeping whiskers," "SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS," and "ROUSSEAUISMS (wild Nature cranks)" (Lewis, *BLAST* 1 18). These are the years in which the respectable, middle-class Clan Meynell comes to prominence and years that would come to be characterized, at least in the popular imagination,

by the religiosity and sentimental preoccupation with nature that Meynell's early poetry exemplifies.

The offhand dismissal of Clan Meynell in *BLAST*'s manifesto constitutes one of remarkably few references in any writing under Pound's name to Meynell, a writer working, at least for a while, in the same place and at the same time as the young Modernist. The others appear primarily in letters where Meynell occupies a place in Pound's critical matrix as a preeminent figure of bourgeois Victorianism. Pound expresses outrage to Iris Barry in 1917, for instance, that the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore had been passed over for consideration by "the British Academy Committee. . . who elected in his stead to their august corpse, Alice Meynell and Dean Inge" ("To Iris Barry" 106).² A 1920 letter to John Quinn recommends a "graceful wreath" for "Mrs Meynell" and compares reading her poetry to a form of "Necrology" ("To John Quinn" 187). However sparse may be the evidence of Pound's engagement with Meynell's poetry, what little there is aptly illustrates the utility of a caricature of Meynell's literary gentility for Pound's revolutionary posturing.

Among the works that have done the most to explain the development of literary Modernism out of Decadent reactions to what Perkins calls "the governing conventions of nineteenth-century poetry," Hugh Kenner's hugely influential *The Pound Era* (first published in 1971) hinges on an argument that the story of twentieth-century literature is, in many ways, the story of Pound's tireless advocacy of the iconoclastic writing by James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and H. D., among others, that Pound saw as the tonic for a literary world mired in the seemingly prescriptive aesthetics of Victorian poetry, poetry that Pound dismissed as hopelessly derivative of what had come before. As Lawrence Rainey explains in a succinct assessment of the influence of a few charismatic personalities on the invention of Modernism, the very title of Kenner's study "implicitly repudiated the widespread belief that Eliot had dominated his age. It was Ezra

Pound, instead, who had reshaped the poetic and literary sensibility of a generation” (87). For Kenner, the genesis of twentieth-century literature lies not only in Pound’s efforts on behalf of the writers he admired but also in Pound’s own peculiar attempts to recapture or reinvent the vigor of a pre-Victorian poetry through formal experimentation and dynamic translations from source texts as various as the ancient Greek of Sappho and the classical Chinese of Li Po. In its phantasmagoric readings of Pound reading Anglo-Saxon laments, Provençal love songs, Chinese ideograms, and economic history, Kenner’s study spins together many and various strands of biography, criticism, and propaganda into the by-now familiar mythic narrative of Pound as the progenitor of Modernism.

While Pound’s influence on and contributions to the writing that continues to dominate accounts of twentieth-century literature cannot be overestimated, the Pound myth itself has a tendency to obscure certain discordant facts about the literary culture that witnessed the rise of Modernism in London in the years before the First World War. In particular, the Pound myth narrates the growth and eventual triumph of a literary culture that has come to be known as Modernism against the decline and death of a kind of shadow culture of conventionality and conformity, a poetic culture that practices, above all, the rehearsal of outmoded styles. Of this shadow culture Meynell seems to serve as a convenient personification, and it is largely because of the Pound myth that Meynell’s poetry, which reaches its most complex and highly developed phase at the same time that Pound is formulating a poetic idiom for Modernism, is not often read in apposition to the early work of Pound and the other members of his coteries.

The shift in aesthetic priorities that we can observe when we compare Meynell’s poetry of the twentieth century with that in which Pound is first beginning to find the language for announcing a Modernist revolution corresponds, on the surface, to a basic premise of academic studies of literary history summarized, for instance, in *The Norton Anthology of English*

Literature's headnote to "The Twentieth Century and After," which opens emphatically with, "The roots of modern literature are in the late nineteenth century. The aesthetic movement, with its insistence on "art for art's sake," assaulted middle-class assumptions about the nature and function of art" and "helped widen the breach between artists and the general public" (Greenblatt 1827). And, as *The Norton Anthology* makes clear, the idea that seemingly respectable, bourgeois poetry like Meynell's cannot address the need for the cultural and aesthetic renovation called for by the avant-garde has yet to become outmoded in discussion of writing at the turn of the century. This is the version of literary history that prevails in anthologies, in classrooms, and in the collective imagination. This is the critical schematic that cannot accommodate Meynell, whose verse, as we shall see, was interrogating aesthetic and cultural convention in the years leading up to 1922—the banner-year that saw the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, the year of Meynell's death.

It is with this critical schematic in mind that Joseph Bristow argues forcefully and in detail, in his introduction to *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s* (2005), for a more comprehensive perspective on the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and a more careful critical attention to its sometimes marginalized writers. Bristow acknowledges the continued importance of Perkins's *A History of Modern Poetry* but argues that it, like Kenner's *The Pound Era*, is partially responsible for the critical narrative, in evidence in *The Norton Anthology*, that causes the work of poets like Meynell "to be valued not so much for its artistic eminence or technical prowess as for the liminal position in which it bears witness to the attenuation of what had been one monumental age (the Victorian) and the consequent need for cultural revitalization by another (modernism)" (1).

For the advocates of cultural revitalization like Pound, Meynell's particular brand of technical prowess is the sign and seal of the bourgeois conventionality from which avant-garde

poetics recoils. Rejecting the technical innovations in prosody advanced by Victorian poetry—for example, Arthur Hugh Clough’s dactylic hexameters in *Amours de Voyage* or the accentual measures with which Francis Thompson and Gerard Manley Hopkins had experimented—Meynell would retain a fierce commitment to very traditional iambic meters to the end of her career. How Meynell deploys those meters in order to interrogate and revise them is the story of the pages to come, but for avant-garde poets at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Meynell’s verse represents the conventionality of bourgeois literature in no small part because of the form in which it is cast.

From the early *Preludes* to her last volume, Meynell’s poems and the prosodic style they develop present an object lesson in the history of English poetry from the high Victorian to the high Modernist period. The arc of her stylistic development responds to all the same historical and literary stimuli as the work of those who can be counted among her contemporaries, from Christina Rossetti to T. S. Eliot. But unlike the poems printed in *BLAST* and the major works of Modernist poetry to be published in its wake, Meynell’s work incorporates a thorough and deft handling of conventional prosody to posit as part of a literary-historical continuum much of what avant-garde poetry chooses to reject. The defining act of Meynell’s poetry, when it has reached its consummation, is a synthesis that responds to the twentieth century’s call for aesthetic renovation without losing sight of the nineteenth-century context from which it springs. Reading Meynell as a reference point, a central figure in the history of poetry will allow us to see the often obscured continuities between poetic styles that are rarely, even now, brought into serious conversation with one another—those, for examples on the one hand, of Coventry Patmore and Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and, on the other, of Eliot and Pound. The question of what a post-Victorian poetry might look like that foregoes the revolutionary ethos of the contributors to

BLAST and their fellow travelers and embraces a sense of continuity with its immediate literary past, is, at least in part, answered by Meynell's later poems.

In his recent biography of Pound, A. David Moody has made significant efforts to deconstruct, though not to debunk, the myth that continues to drive the voices of an older dispensation into shadowy depths beyond the light of Modernism, and, like biographers before him, Moody cites as one of the impetuses to Modernism's characteristic rebellion against conventionality a personality trait in Pound that impacted not just his writing style but the way he dressed. For an illustration of Pound the brash, young American making a name for himself among the respectable London literati, Moody draws on the memoirs of Pound's friend Ford Madox Ford (at the time, his last name was Hueffer):

Ezra . . . would approach with the step of a dancer, making passes with a cane at an imaginary opponent. He would wear trousers made of green billiard cloth, a pink coat, a blue shirt, a tie hand-painted by a Japanese friend, an immense sombrero, a flaming beard cut to a point, and a single, large blue earring. (qtd. in Moody 113)

If we compare this striking, colorful, animated image of the young Pound to any of the photographs of Meynell printed in the biography by her daughter Viola (see fig. 2) or the sketch by John Singer Sargent reproduced as the frontispiece to the *Complete Edition* of her poems (see fig. 3), we can begin to appreciate the mythic import of Ford's characterization. In pictures, Meynell is always dressed at the height of fashion—and she is never smiling. For Ford, the brightly costumed Pound clearly represents a force, playful but dangerous in his own way, threatening to break open the gray world around him.

Moody emphasizes the mythic dimension of Ford's portrait by juxtaposing to it a variant draft of the same passage, in which Pound wears a "black velvet jacket" and "a purple hat." As Moody notes, "Those variations are a caution to the historian eager for the lowdown on Ezra. Ford's sketches should be taken simply as shining additions to the myth and legend of Pound"



Figure 2. Alice Meynell, frontispiece to *Alice Meynell: A Memoir* by Viola Meynell (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).



Figure 3. Alice Meynell, frontispiece to *The Poems of Alice Meynell: Complete Edition* (London: Burnes Oates & Washbourne, 1923). “From a drawing by John S. Sargent, R. A.”

(113). But as far as attempts to form a picture of the young Pound in London go, one detail from the first description Moody cites is fairly well documented in the biographical discourse. In *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (1988), Humphrey Carpenter relates an anecdote about the piece of jewelry that is, perhaps, the most outlandish part of the costume Ford describes. As Carpenter tells it, Pound “had been at the Shakespears’,” the home of his future wife’s mother, Olivia,

when the veteran Decadent poet Arthur Symons called, accompanied by his American friend Alice Tobin. Symons presented Olivia with a single red rose, and Tobin, not to be outdone, plucked from her ear a turquoise earring and gave it to Ezra. For some months he wore it in public, feeling that it gave the final Whistlerian touch. Edgar Jepson describes him turning up at the ultra-conservative Square Club wearing “a velvet coat and one turquoise ear-ring.” (133)

Both Carpenter and Moody note the incident only in passing and as a small, vivid example of Pound’s deliberate offenses to propriety in areas other than the printed page. And both Carpenter and Moody refer back, for the source of the anecdote, to an earlier biography, Noel Stock’s *The Life of Ezra Pound* (1982).

Stock’s ur-text, as it were, of the anecdote concerning Pound’s first meeting with the venerable Decadent was “remembered by Dorothy Pound in 1966 when she described to me Symons arriving for tea at the Shakespear home accompanied,” again, “by his American friend Alice Tobin” (71). All three biographies—Moody’s, Carpenter’s, and Stock’s—belong to a current flowing out from the memory of Pound’s wife, and the current is flowing away from the late Victorian literary culture represented by Symons. By the time of this meeting of a leader of the Modernist avant-garde and a “relic of the Rhymers’ Club”—Stock dates it to sometime in 1909 or 1910—Symons had already suffered and begun a lengthy recovery from the total nervous breakdown chronicled in his idiosyncratic and sometimes incomprehensible *Confessions* (1930). Though treated as a distinguished elder statesman of letters, Arthur Symons was widely

regarded, in 1910, by the friends and companions who knew him both before and after his breakdown, as a ghost of his former self. In this way, Symons, though still alive, had already receded into the oblivion shared by other prominent Decadents like Oscar Wilde, Ernest Dowson, and Lionel Johnson, who died young and drunk or in shame.³ This one brief, vivid moment when Pound receives from Symons's companion a light-hearted gift becomes, for the Pound myth, a symbol of the changing of the guard, a moment when the history of modern literature breaks off into a new current, leaving the specters of the nineteenth century to fade away into irrelevance and bearing up new voices to articulate the experience of the twentieth century. It is all the more telling for histories of modern poetry, then, that Pound's biographers consistently err in referring to Symons's "American friend" as Alice Tobin.

Though the Pound myth does not record the name of its earring-bearer correctly, the other strand of literary biography that intersects with the Pound myth in this moment preserves the name of not Alice but Agnes Tobin as the dedicated and self-sacrificing friend who collected the pieces of Symons from the site of his mental collapse in Italy in 1908. It was Agnes Tobin who, taking turns with Symons's wife Rhoda, shepherded the broken poet through outings that included Pound, the lawyer and literary patron John Quinn, and the artist Augustus John where, as the editors of Symons's selected letters record, "they dined at the Café Royal, Claridge's, Trevoglio's or the Carlton, and visited theatres and art galleries" (Beckson and Munro 201). But Tobin's contributions to literature extend beyond her tender mercies to an ailing friend. A poet in her own right, Tobin had gained a modest celebrity for her translations, titled *Love's Crucifix* (1902), from the Italian of Petrarch's sonnets. Yeats, according to Karl Beckson's biography of Symons, described Tobin's translations as "very beautiful, with a curious poignant ecstasy" (238). Beckson adds that "Yeats described Agnes Tobin as the greatest American poet since Walt Whitman."

Having received so little attention in critical discourse, it is worth observing, if only in passing, the striking similarities that Tobin's translations from Italian share with those published by Pound only a decade later. Such a comparison also urges us to consider the crucial importance that formal and technical decisions in constructing poems bear on any attempt to understand the evolutionary development of poetry as a cultural practice, and it is precisely these kinds of formal and technical decisions that allow us to engage and to question the narratives of literary history that frame all of our discussions about that history, our teaching of it, our writing about it, and our freedom to insist on a perspective regarding it not fettered by often misleading paradigms of literary change and growth. We may note, then, how Tobin's translations most certainly demonstrate the intensity of emotion felt by Yeats, an intensity effected especially in the handling of rhythms tempered with a sometimes disquieting formality of diction, as in the sestet from a sonnet called "Recognition":

Years I went singing of you up and down,
Now I go mourning for you through the land
In heavy loneliness. My Day, my Crown,
One splendid joy great sorrow cannot drown:
That when you come I know and understand
Your walk, your voice, your face, your hair, your gown. (9-14)

The formal idiom that Tobin uses to translate Petrarch is one that, in many respects, her poems share with Pound's nearly contemporary translations of Guido Cavalcanti's sonnets. Pound's *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (1912) emphasize the tension between the emotional intensity and the high artifice native to the sonnet form through the deliberate use of archaisms, as in the sestet of Sonnet IX:

For when I look in her direction,
She turns upon me her disdeigning eye
So harshly that my waiting heart is rent

And all my powers and properties are spent,
Till that my heart lieth for a sign ill-seen,
Where Amor's cruelty hath hurled him down. (9-14)

In translating Cavalcanti's thirteenth-century sonnets, Pound, like Tobin, employs the English iambic pentameter as an equivalent for the Italian hendecasyllabics. And, like Tobin, Pound employs an elevated diction and a formal, slightly archaic vocabulary. For his later translations, especially his translations from Chinese in *Cathay* (1915), Pound would employ a much different strategy. The translations in *Cathay* strive for an intensity and immediacy of expression in contrast to the formality of the Italian translations. In service to those ends, the translations in *Cathay* employ a much less regular metric, and, on the whole, a more familiar syntax and vocabulary. But in dealing with Italian, Pound chooses many of the same strategies as Tobin, strategies which place both sets of translations in the midst of a critical conversation about how best to render the music of certain foundational lyric poems into English. When we read Tobin's translations in connection with Pound's, we can see both poets working in the same environment, engaged in the same conversations, and actively constructing what they understand to be an appropriate vehicle for bringing Petrarch and Cavalcanti into the stream of twentieth-century poetry; when we overlook the ultimately less influential of the two twentieth-century writers, we contribute to the process that obscures names from history as well as the continuities of a narrative so often presented as straddling the cataclysmic event prophesied in Tobin's gift of an earring.

The name over-written and effectively erased from the Pound myth—Agnes—occupies, in the discourse on Symons, a place of some influence and importance. The Pound myth can look to Symons as a representative of a dying and increasingly irrelevant generation whose main significance to twentieth-century literature is a kind of ritual passing of the torch, or the earring, to the next generation. In contrast, the Pound myth can look on Yeats, also a member of the

Rhymers' Club, with a greater reverence, seeing in Yeats's forays into Symbolism a harbinger of Pound's high Modernist aesthetic. But this selective picture of the literary culture through which Pound was moving in 1909 or 1910 takes no note of Tobin's literary project, one which, in interesting ways, corresponds to Pound's own. Thus, the Pound myth also erases a suggestive material connection between the young iconoclast and another member of an older generation who had only just re-entered the literary culture of Edwardian London with an aesthetic as radically different from the poetry of her early youth as Pound's was from the Victorianism he deplored.

In fact, it was only a few years before the handing off of the blue earring that Agnes Tobin invited Meynell on a three-month tour of the United States. Meynell would travel from New York to Tobin's home in San Francisco, giving lectures along the way. One of the fruits of this intimate friendship was the introduction Meynell would write for Tobin's *Love's Crucifix*. If we attempt to recover from the linear force of the Pound myth something of the complex interactions and relationships of literary London before the First World War, Agnes Tobin's blue earring, in itself a relatively unimportant artifact, becomes a symbol of the discursive mechanisms by which one current of literary history flows out into the shadowlands and another is drawn off, tended, and forgotten as anything other than an organic phenomenon. Tobin's first name has been erased from the widely propagated myth of Modernism's genesis, perhaps because that name is irrelevant to the subject matter of the narrative. If we take no interest in Symons or Meynell, we might blithely forgive the omission, but the failure to maintain the intersecting lines and channels of literary history epitomized in the loss of Agnes Tobin's name points directly to the success of a highly orchestrated effort to re-engineer subsequent generations of readers' understanding of what kinds of writing should be read, taught, remembered, and valued.

With a signifying force that, on a doorstep, in an instant, calls our attention to a point where currents of history diverge, Tobin's earring serves, for the student of early twentieth-century poetry, as something very like what Pound himself, trying to reclaim the various, shadowy tributaries of history, economic and aesthetic, termed a "luminous detail." In his early series of prose essays titled "I gather the limbs of Osiris" and published in 1911 and 1912, Pound cites a sentence from the historian Jacob Burckhardt as an example of a "new method" for interpreting developments in the history of ideas. Burckhardt writes of a particular instance when "the Venetians refused to make war on the Milanese because they held that any war between buyer and seller must prove profitable to neither," and Pound sees the Venetians' priorities shifting to the economic as "a portent, the old order changes[;] one conception of war and of the State begins to decline. The Middle Ages imperceptibly give ground to the Renaissance" (22). The Venetian refusal, in itself only a small thing, provides insight into a much broader shift in social priorities, and for Pound, "A few dozen facts of this nature give us intelligence of a period—a kind of intelligence not to be gathered from a great array of facts of the other sort" (22-23). He had earlier suggested that little real knowledge about history can be gained by learning the dry dates of elections or assassinations. Pound continues, "These facts are hard to find. They are swift and easy of transmission. They govern knowledge as the switchboard governs an electric circuit" (23).

Tobin's earring is not exactly the kind of thing that Pound had in mind when he was advancing a theory of historical interpretation based on the luminous detail. At least with regard to the history of the arts, Pound cites as examples of luminous details the works of the most influential painters and poets as well as the authors of a few of Pound's more particular interests. Rembrandt, Monet, Dante, and the Provençal troubadours, to name only a few of the artists whose works provide Pound with luminous details, occupy places of importance in the history of

the arts because of their influence on subsequent art. They change the way people think, and they change the way art is made. If it changes anything in the history of ideas, Tobin's earring only changes, and only for a little while, the ideas of literary Londoners about Pound's habits of dress. And yet, the earring's appearance in a few brief flashes of memory, collected, preserved, and passed down by successive generations of commentators engaged in constructing the myth of Pound, progenitor of modern poetry, marks the divergence of two currents in literary history. The earring is a small thing. It doesn't really matter for the study of poetry who Pound got it from or whether he ever had one at all. What is troubling, however, in the erasure of Agnes Tobin's name from the myth of Modernism's rise, is the implicit insistence that with Pound in London in the first decade of the twentieth century something old comes to an end and something new begins.

The connection between Meynell and Pound represented by Tobin's earring offers a tantalizing glimpse at the material world where two currents in the history of poetry meet that almost never intersect in critical discourse. The increased attention to Meynell as a poet in the last few years is almost entirely oriented toward Meynell's participation in a Victorian literary culture, but Meynell's work as a poet makes for interesting comparisons with the early Modernism of Pound in terms of the theories both advance about art and history and the practical extension of those theories in their interrogations of poetic form. Some of the correspondences to be observed in the literary careers of Meynell and Pound, like their association with Agnes Tobin, are matters primarily of biography and of fate: for a while, they lived in the same place at the same time. They share, in the same way, the distinction of having lived long lives and of having written and published poetry until the very end. For both poets, the work of their old age, if it has not always garnered the critical attention and praise of their earlier work, may safely be said to exhibit a high degree of intellectual interest and an aesthetic cultivated over the course of

a lifetime. Pound differs from Meynell in having written and published volumes of poetry unceasingly from the beginning of his career with the self-published *A Lume Spento* in 1908 through the *Cantos*, the last *Drafts & Fragments* of which would be issued in 1969, three years before Pound's death. In contrast, Meynell's body of work in verse bears witness to the long hiatus in which she had devoted her efforts primarily to prose between the publications of her early *Preludes* and her *Later Poems*. The second volume evinces a radical shift in the aesthetic of Meynell's poetry made all the more dramatic by its following on a long silence. In many respects, the changes in Meynell's poetry exemplify larger trends in the writing of poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though Meynell's poetic style has often been characterized as conservative, a close examination of the shift evidenced in her second volume reveals a greater sympathy with Modernist concerns about poetic form than has generally been appreciated.

In contrast to the poetry Meynell would write in the twentieth century, *Preludes* includes a large proportion of long, meditative poems involving a significant element of narrative exposition. But even the shorter lyrics usually revolve around an effort to represent the speaker's experience of intense emotion. The most common theme, appearing again and again in *Preludes*, concerns the speaker's dealing more or less productively with the loss of or separation from loved ones. In this meditative and elegiac mode, Meynell's early poetry lays claim to a distinctly Romantic aesthetic, a premise that the central function of poetry is the expression of emotion. And the emotions Meynell's poems represent, grief and yearning most characteristically, because they are put forward as the most important part of the work her poems perform, are allowed to expand, to circle back on lines of thought and to explore them through multiple, successive perspectives. Unlike those in *Preludes*, the poems in Meynell's second volume are terse and compact. They tend to represent emotion obliquely through symbolically charged imagery and

religious and literary allusion. The melancholy, grief, and sense of loss moving through *Preludes* are largely displaced in *Later Poems* by other emotions—in particular, the anxieties of motherhood and a psychomachy of frustration and affirmation surrounding the submission required of religious faith. Though emotion remains a guiding principle in Meynell’s later work, the idiom used to depict these emotions has altered dramatically. In a very real sense, the language in *Later Poems* as compared to *Preludes* is condensed, intensified. It moves from the explicit to the implicit. The poems argue that poetic language loses something in expansiveness, that the language must be contained, reserved.

Even though there is no such similar hiatus in Pound’s poetry, the same period of time when biographical criticism records both Pound’s and Meynell’s interactions with Tobin also bears witness to a shift in Pound’s style from his first, early rehearsals and impersonations of a late Victorian poetic to the something new and surprising in poetry for which he is arguing in “I gather the limbs of Osiris.” Pound’s early, apprentice style, exemplified in *A Lume Spento*, differs considerably from the kind of poetry he would be writing only a few short years later, as the first lines from one of the first volume’s poems, entitled “Mesmerism” show:

Aye you’re a man that! ye old mesmerizer
Tyin’ your meanin’ in seventy swadelin’s,
One must of needs be a hang’d early riser
To catch you at worm turning. Holy Odd’s bodykins! (1-4)

Though the poem is addressed to Robert Browning and alludes to Browning’s poem of the same title, the energetic, if slightly awkward, triple rhythm, its bombastic tone and use of dialect are especially reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads*, published in 1892.⁴ In contrast to the heady love lyrics and philosophical soliloquies of the rest of the volume, “Mesmerism” adopts a clearly ironic and humorous tone; nonetheless, all of the poems in *A Lume Spento* operate according to the formal conventions of late nineteenth-century verse and,

like Meynell's *Preludes*, in primarily meditative and dramatic modes. But with the completion of his translations from Cavalcanti, Pound seems to have considered that he had achieved mastery of his medium, and his next volume after the translations, *Ripostes*, published in 1911, serves as a pivot in the development of Pound's modern poetry. Moody notes that *Ripostes* "was definitely modern in its tending toward a contemporary idiom and a more natural syntax" and, as "a work of transition, . . . Pound thought so well of it that he kept it virtually intact in his later collected poems" (178).

Thus, in addition to the common ground they share in long and productive literary careers, both Pound and Meynell announce new styles in the years between 1901 and 1911 as a response to the perceived inadequacies of nineteenth-century poetry. In both *Later Poems* and *Ripostes*, Meynell and Pound are striving toward a new poetic idiom that will pare away extraneous detail and focus the reader's attention on the words themselves, on rhythm, and on symbolic charge. In doing so, they both reach toward what Peter Nicholls has formulated as one of the defining characteristics of the poetry that would eventually come to dominate critical accounts of twentieth-century literature: "the idea of ceding authority to 'the words themselves,' which would then meet not in purposeful sequence but in some kind of unexpected 'collision,' would constitute one of the deepest unifying strands of modernist poetics" (55). In the new styles that Meynell and Pound develop in the first decade of the twentieth century, poetic form occupies a place of the utmost importance, and both *Later Poems* and *Ripostes* favor short lyrics with a kind of restricted vocabulary, characterized, in many places, by the almost hypnotic repetition of words, of syntactical structures, and of lines. The short and repeated words and lines of short poems seem to speak to a kind of anxiety about the referential power of language. The poems are compelled to reiterate and reconfigure, again and again, their constituent linguistic

units, and they routinely defer to the symbolic and ambiguous in preference to the narrative and meditative.

The anxiety these poems exhibit might be described as a fear of something like poetic entropy, a fear that too many words or too many syllables in a metrical foot, that linking verbs or prepositions might somehow damage a poem by drawing off its source of energy, by burning up a stock that can never be replaced. Though Meynell would never publish a poem in a triple meter like that of Pound's "Mesmerism," the poems she publishes in the twentieth century eschew all but iambic meters and go even further in rejecting the characteristically Romantic license of the trisyllabic substitution—a three-syllable foot freely employed as a variation in otherwise iambic meters. In developing his new style, Pound leaves behind the meter of "Mesmerism" as he would most regular meters, but when he practices them, they are, like Meynell's, almost always iambic. In "I gather the limbs of Osiris" and elsewhere, we may observe Pound describing poetry as a kind of radiant energy to be captured and directed. We might speculate about the sources of anxiety that drive Meynell and Pound, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to emphasize the importance of power and control in their poems. We do not have to speculate, however, about the way that this anxiety displaces poetic significance from words to meter and rhythm. Meynell's and Pound's technical strategies in constructing forms focus attention on rhythm as the substance of whatever it is that a poem transmits no less than the impressions generated by its words. For Meynell, as for Modernists after Pound, the non-referential aspects of form become a primary field of signification, and it is exactly this impulse toward abstraction that Meynell's poetry shares with Modernist writing. By deliberately foregrounding patterns of linguistic features that, like prosodic rhythm or the modulation of vowel and consonant sounds, do not directly contribute to the development of narrative or imagery, Meynell's poems of the twentieth century quite clearly participate in a much wider conversation about what linguistic rhythm and

verse structure can do in relation to the words of a poem. Any attempts that we make to understand that conversation today remain incomplete if we do not include the forceful and imaginative defense of meter related in Meynell's practice, but they are deeply compromised if they do not take account of the contexts that Meynell's work provides for Modernist writing and that Modernist writing provides for Meynell's work.

To be sure, Meynell was not the only poet writing metrical verse in the first decades of the twentieth century, but her technical extensions of metrical theory into metrical practice and the peculiar idiom into which those extensions are cast place her among a relatively small company of elder poets exploring the potential of prosodic convention during the early years of the Modernist movement. That company would include, with perhaps a few additions, Robert Bridges, Thomas Hardy, and Edmund Gosse. Each of these writers, none particularly closely associated with the others, also share with Meynell the distinction of having received the dedication of a volume in the *Georgian Poetry* series.⁵ Dedicated to "the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty" (Marsh v), the popular series presented a direct challenge to international, literary Modernism in its earliest days by publishing poems that were supposed to exemplify the ideals of a specially English literary style—that is, the Georgian poems were rhymed, mellifluously metrical, and characterized by landscape portraits of the British countryside. In her recent study *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*, Meredith Martin explores in detail the relationship of Georgian poetry and its proto-types to the growth of a sense of militant English nationalism in the years leading up to the First World War, but she cites Robert Ross's *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, 1910-1922* for a definition of what, in essence, the revolt apparent in the *Georgian Poetry* series was meant to accomplish. Georgian poetry, for Ross, was part of a "larger twentieth-century revolt against Humanism; . . . the poetic phase of a

widespread revolt against Academicism among all the arts; and, specifically in the field of poetry, a reaction against the dead hand of the Romantic-Victorian tradition” (qtd. in Martin 145). Insofar as Ross’s assessment can be deemed just, then Georgian poetry was involved in much the same project as the Modernist poetry published during Meynell’s lifetime. While it is true that Meynell’s verse shares with Georgian poetry a commitment to composition in meter, the theoretical justifications and ultimate aims of those commitments are, in fact, quite different from one another. As we shall see, meter occupies a quasi-mystical status in Meynell’s work, providing the ground for both an intricate exploration of religious motifs and a dedicated effort to exploit the full signifying potential of literary conventions. The status given meter in Meynell’s work stands in direct contrast to the political orientation implicit in Georgian poetry as the product of what Martin calls a “military metrical complex,” itself the impetus for a gradual process by means of which “The stigma of meter becomes, at the end of the First World War, a stigma about militarism and its strong association with verse for England’s sake” (144). Bridges, Hardy, and Gosse, like Meynell, all composed poems with technical procedures and philosophical commitments that might certainly provide fruitful perspectives on the contemporaneous ascendancy of Modernist verse. The present study, nonetheless, strives for a fuller understanding of the perspective provided specifically by Meynell’s verse, a perspective which has not received anything like the critical attention directed toward the male poets mentioned above and a perspective that differs fundamentally from the philosophical underpinnings of the Georgian movement and its technical procedures, which, as Martin elucidates them, bear witness to the conception of “‘meter’ losing its variety and complexity and marching to a very distinctive, yet still very English ‘beat.’”

Beginning from the proposition that a more detailed account of the development of Meynell’s poetic style than has previously been available can shed light on an important stage in

the development of English poetry generally, this study addresses two critical narratives that continue to exert a significant influence on the way that poetry from the first decades of the twentieth century is read, interpreted, and taught. Both narratives have conditioned responses to the texts with which they are respectively concerned, and they continue to limit critical examination of those features of poetry which most clearly exhibit practical links in the stages of its development. As a cultural practice, poetry's constant self-revision and re-invention depend on the inter-penetration of sometimes mutually incompatible sets of aesthetic priorities, but the web thereby suggested has a temporal, or perhaps narrative, dimension as well. We can chart the growth and development of poetry, but without a third axis any such picture will be warped in the way that a wall map displays a warped earth. The narrative axis reveals to us poetry in a historical context with historical commitments, but it also shows us the extent to which poetry generates its own historical contexts. Even when poetry is not talking about history, it is always talking about its own history.

As the brief vignette of Tobin's earring suggests, the first and broader narrative under consideration here concerns the genesis and growth of a set of aesthetic priorities that would eventually come to be the most powerful influence on twentieth-century literature. Though those priorities issue from various sources, they are often understood now to constitute together literary Modernism. The impulse to classification and periodization imposed by the institutional realities of literary study at times distracts critical analysis from the more substantive objects of its scrutiny, and the term "Modernism" is dangerous in this respect because, unlike, for instance, "Romanticism," it can seem to advance an argument that every artistic epoch prior lacks evidence of modernity, belongs to the archaic and the obsolete. Though Eliot and Pound, the principal architects of Anglo-American Modernism, would have to work out complicated relationships over the course of their careers to the literary traditions in which they claimed

participation, the argument latent in the term “Modernist” is advanced explicitly in the various, early Modernist propaganda. As the following pages will demonstrate, these claims of a strikingly new or perhaps revived perspective on the relationship of art to life become less persuasive when they are brought into conversation with the formal and critical meta-commentaries available in contemporary idioms external to Modernism. Nonetheless, the term remains useful for naming an objectively identifiable set of practices and procedures. Among the procedural developments that contribute to the appearance of narrative discontinuity at the rift where nineteenth-century literature meets twentieth, the rise of free verse marks this period as one of the most hotly contested in literary history because free verse calls into question the value of a practice that, with few notable exceptions to challenge it, had been considered fundamental to the act of writing poetry. We may point to prototypical instances of free verse composition in English before the Modernist moment—the psalmic rhythms, for example, of Walt Whitman or of Christopher Smart well before him—but these works represent departures and anomalies in the temporal fabric of poetry, and it is not until the area of narrative convergence occupied by Tobin’s earring that composition in meter becomes really separable from the composition of poetry.

The second, and more specific narrative running alongside, crossing through and over the first concerns Meynell’s role in the rapidly evolving literary culture that she shared with Pound in the earliest phases of his career. Though the scholarship cited in this study bears witness to a recent increase in the attention paid to Meynell’s writing, that interest follows a long period in which Meynell’s writing virtually disappeared from critical discourse. Like earlier appreciations, even this recent criticism revolves around a fossilized account of the stylistic development in Meynell’s work. According to this account, Meynell first appeared on the Victorian literary scene, with the publication of *Preludes*, as a prodigy. Following *Preludes*, Meynell’s reputation

as a poet increased considerably, though her output was reduced to no more than a few poems over the years she spent as a journalist and editor of a number of short-lived periodicals. Toward the end of her life, Meynell reorients her literary activities toward poetry. Her new poems exhibit a high degree of philosophical complexity and finesse, but they adhere to an outward form and to cultural commitments, especially with regard to their preoccupation with religion, that make them seem like relics of a bygone age. In effect, Meynell masters Victorian poetics just as they are being superseded by a revolutionary Modernist poetics. This widely assumed outline of Meynell's career and place in literary history—the narrative of Meynell's belatedness—enforces the same narrative of the rise of Modernism promulgated by the Modernists themselves and embedded in so much of the critical discourse attending to poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially as concerns Pound's role in shaping it.

Notwithstanding the vastly more expansive reach of criticism dealing directly with Pound than of the criticism dedicated to Meynell, these and the discourses touching them seem to place the two poets, in their work and in person, at opposing poles in the culture of this critical point in literary history. But it would be inaccurate to suggest that, together, Meynell and Pound serve criticism as reference points on a scale from reaction to revolution. Though they frequently perform this function in the discourses surrounding them, their names are all but never to be met with on the same page. Despite the very real network of associations that seem to radiate out from Tobin's earring to link two poets of similar interests, similar preoccupations, and similar commitments in the same place in the same time, there is no intercourse between writing about Pound and writing about Meynell. The narrative disjunct that removes Meynell and Pound to separate universes indicates less a lingering, uncritical faith in a myth that has outlived its usefulness than evidence of discursive compartmentalization. Meynell is discussed with reference to and included in anthologies of Victorian poetry; Pound belongs with the other

Modernists, and the mythic narratives attaching to both become like half-remembered legends of the shadow kingdoms from which each have been banished.

Though a variety of factors—institutional curricula, professional specialization, and the requirements of textbook publishers, among others—contribute to make the compartmentalization of figures like Meynell and Pound both efficient and necessary for the study of literature, such a procedure obscures those specific features of the poetry it deals with that most clearly bear witness to the subtle variations in that poetry's evolutionary progress. Prosody, in particular, becomes arcane when critical analysis separates theories of poetic rhythm constructed in support of the first considerable bodies of poetry in free verse from principles charted out in a different body of writing about metrical verse structure that was hugely influential, highly developed, and widely circulated during the early years of Modernism. Extensive prosodical treatises, like those by Patmore, Bridges, and George Saintsbury, discussed in the pages to follow, have mostly become a thing of the past, a phenomenon that Martin explores in detail in *The Rise and Fall of Meter*. Though Martin describes a number of factors contributing to both the extraordinary proliferation of studies in prosody in the nineteenth century and the gradual waning of prosody's importance as an academic discipline, we may observe, at least, that the trajectory of prosody's fortune as a discipline corresponds to that of Meynell's reputation as a poet and represents the inverse of Pound's. Modernist poetry is by no means coextensive with free verse—in addition to the many Modernist poems written in some form of meter, there are any number that adhere to principles of rhythmical regulation that occupy a twilight space somewhere between the metrical and the non-metrical. But it is important to note that as free verse becomes a more and more popular option for poets writing in English, so too does critical interest in prosody begin to fade. Given the tremendous influence exerted by the Modernists on subsequent literary discourse, readers of the present risk losing

sight of how important theories of prosody were, of how much they conditioned responses to and influenced the composition of poems at this time. But if we neglect theories of prosody current among poets working in the early twentieth century, including the prosodies implicit in examples of contemporary practice, we lose tools for reading the overlaid plane of signification toward which Meynell's work, like Pound's, strives. Ultimately, Meynell's work and Pound's invite comparison most forcefully because both place such an emphasis on the interplay of language and meter.

The present study aims to challenge specific elements of the narrative concerning the development of Meynell's mature style as a poet and to bring into conversation, through the conduits provided by Meynell's work, bodies of poetry that have been segregated by the broader narrative of the rise of Modernism. In contrast to the account that has Meynell writing essentially the same kind of poetry from the beginning of her career to the end, this study will show that Meynell's later poetry represents a significant departure from the style cultivated in her earliest phase. The reformulated aesthetic of Meynell's later poetry generates a body of work especially apt as a guide for understanding developments in the cultural practice of poetry-writing at the beginning of the twentieth century because it combines philosophical commitments and technical priorities characteristic of much Modernist poetry with a formal vocabulary reaching back in the most abstract terms of prosodic rhythm to claim a genetic relationship with poetry across a wide range of literary history. Specifically, Meynell's later poetry deploys explicit markers of its participation in metrical culture as a way of exploring a much larger theme concerned with the question of the relevance of convention to the making and reading of poetry. This anxiety about how to negotiate traditions of artistic making is certainly something that Meynell shares with the most influential of the early Modernist poets, Eliot and Pound, but Meynell's poetry offers an interesting contrast to Eliot's and Pound's in looking to convention, especially prosodic

convention, as the fundamental principle guiding the evolution of a shared poetic culture and not as a superimposed obstacle to the full exercise of poetic agency.

In order to observe the complex interactions between Meynell's poetry, a wide range of prior texts, and the poetries that share its historical moment, this study adopts a method of analysis that cannot claim to give either a comprehensive or an exhaustive account of Meynell's achievement. However, the approach by which a relatively small number of poems are examined in intimate detail in the pages to follow allows for an analytical depth and focus that would be unwieldy for a more general account. Each of the chapters in this study is anchored by extended readings of one or two poems by Meynell. Each of these readings is supplemented and contextualized by reference to others of Meynell's poems that demonstrate affinities in technique or subject matter to the central readings. While these readings require us to narrow our critical focus, the poems with which they are concerned have been chosen precisely because they provide trenchant examples of textual features that can help us understand Meynell's work more broadly. The extended readings allow us to observe the range of Meynell's engagement with literary history and convention; they often involve analysis of Meynell's use of allusion and symbolism, especially when those are drawn from the more esoteric corners of her religious practice, but the readings always return to an examination of Meynell's prosody for the reasons that have been outlined here and because the prosody of Meynell's poems characteristically overlays their content in a way that seems to multiply the signifying valences of the words on the page.

The first chapter picks up the narrative strand developed in the first pages of this introduction by focusing attention on the consummate realization of Meynell's distinct poetic idiom as it appears in the last volume of new poems that she would publish before her death in 1922. These poems have tended to receive less critical attention than the more popular poems of

Meynell's earlier phases; however, two poems from the last volume, "The Laws of Verse" and "The English Metres," have come to serve as touchstones in some of the most recent scholarship on Meynell's poetry because they deal explicitly with the idea of prosodic convention as a kind of principle governing the life and motion of poetry. In line with the themes articulated in these two poems, the volume to which they belong represents Meynell's final attempt to put into practice a prosodic theory, what her poems call a "law," abstracted from the same historic exemplars as those forming the basis of much contemporary discourse on the academic study of prosody. Reference to the treatises of Bridges, Patmore, and Saintsbury elucidates the links between Meynell's practice and a contemporary discussion about the nature and history of meter, but even more recent works in prosody are as useful for understanding the relationship of Meynell's poems to the historic exemplars themselves. Together, these poems and prosodies provide us with a vocabulary, of concepts and of features, that we can use to analyze a body of poetry in which meter itself is as active and as highly developed as any other aspect.

The second chapter contrasts the late poetry discussed in the first chapter with the poems in Meynell's *Preludes*. The differences in the style and subject matter of this first of her volumes with her last are the most dramatic evidence of the shift in Meynell's aesthetic at the turn of the nineteenth century. This chapter traces, in particular, the legacy of early nineteenth-century Romantic poetry on Meynell's verse and looks to a poem that would eventually be excluded from later collected editions of Meynell's verse as an encapsulation of the traits that Meynell actively selects out of her later attempts to exemplify an abstract law of verse. As the poem was effectively suppressed during the later years of Meynell's life, it has received virtually no critical notice since its publication, but it does exhibit the pervasive legacy of the Romantic poets that it shares with the work of Meynell's Victorian contemporaries.

The third chapter turns to Meynell at the end of her long hiatus from poetry after *Preludes*. Looking at Meynell's first poetry of the twentieth century, we are looking at the moment when Meynell's writing redefines its priorities from a Romantic preoccupation with the dramatic expression of emotion to the meditations on law and convention that characterize her later work. By positioning Meynell's work between representatives of the slightly earlier work of Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and the slightly later work of Pound, we can most clearly see how Meynell's poetry provides a useful context for talking about how technical approaches to meter develop in this contested period. Like the other chapters, this chapter sacrifices a broader survey of the bodies of poetry it discusses for a detailed examination of a few representative texts, but notwithstanding their narrow focus, the readings in this chapter exemplify the present study's fundamental concern to bring to the surface of a conversation about a crucial stage in the development of English poetry the progress and interactions of poetic cultures that have too often been kept apart from one another by critical discourse itself.

When we have charted the philosophy and theory of prosody developed in Meynell's later poetry, recognized the stark contrast such theorizing reveals between that later verse and Meynell's more widely appreciated early verse, and observed the impulse toward formal abstraction that drives Meynell's later verse as surely as that of her Modernist contemporaries, we will have prepared the groundwork for a reading of one of the war poems in Meynell's third independent volume that makes one of her work's most potent arguments for deliberate artifice as literature's most intimate register for talking to history. The conclusion to this study turns to Meynell's poem about the first salvos of the Great War, "Summer in England, 1914," as a way of bringing full circle the narrative that begins in this introduction with the June 1914 number of *BLAST*, attempting, in effect, to delimit an ever-expanding nexus of literary interactions issuing from the body of Meynell's verse. Concluding with "Summer in England" further urges a more

nuanced reading of what has often been glossed as a rehearsal of patriotic platitudes, a reading that comprehends the formal complexity and profound irony generating in this poem as searching and as dark a vision of postwar Europe as that recorded in *The Waste Land*. Reading Meynell's poem from such a perspective requires all of the technical and contextual information that will have been explored in chapters prior, but it will also go a long way toward casting out the ghost of prim, devout Mrs. Meynell still hovering over most accounts of her writing. Should we cast her out or learn, at least, to ignore her, we will have answered Bristow's call for a more comprehensive approach to poetry written near the beginning of the twentieth century; we will have brought to critical scrutiny a myth about the rise of Modernism persistent in academic discourse today despite its lack of either accuracy or utility for the study of poetry, and we will have followed a line of reasoning about the morality of poetic technique and the fundamentally communal nature of the poetic act that makes a significant contribution to a discussion raging in its historical moment about what the future of poetry would be and argues, perhaps, as forcefully even now for what poetry might be.

That we can achieve these critical insights through intimate engagement with a single poem also demonstrates the validity and effectiveness of the analytical method pursued in this project. While neither prosodic analysis nor formalistic approaches to literary criticism enjoy the vogue today that once they did, wherever the tools provided by these methodologies have been put away, their absence makes it impossible to understand the full aesthetic force of poems operating as intensively in patterns of sound and rhythm as in theme, narrative, and imagery. The concluding reading of "Summer in England," as an exercise in the critical approach to Meynell's poetry articulated throughout this project, asks us not only to reexamine certain features of poetry often left dormant in current academic discourse but also to recognize the potential that analysis of these features has to more accurately assess a poem's relationship to its literary

contexts and to multiply the dimensions in which we are able to watch poetry moving, living, and growing.

Notes

¹ Wyndham Lewis's "Editorial" to the second issue of *BLAST* refers to the visually striking first issue as a "puce-coloured cockleshell" (5). Writing to Lewis in 1924, Pound would remember it, with the idiosyncratic emphasis characteristic of his correspondence, as "the great MAGENTA cover'd opusculus" ("To Wyndham Lewis," 261). *The New York Times* for August 9, 1914 announces, somewhat incredulously, the publication of "a Cerise Magazine Called Blast" by "the Latest Cult of Rebel Artists" ("Vorticism"). "Fuchsia" is merely descriptive but avoids, at any rate, choosing between the painter's eye and the poet's (or journalist's) vocabulary.

² In her memoir, Viola Meynell writes that "at the end of 1914" her mother "was elected to the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature, when Sir Henry Newbolt delivered an address to her in which he spoke of her poetry having a 'union of wit and religious emotion as rare now as it was characteristic of the seventeenth century in England'" (304). William Ralph Inge, widely known by his title as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, was the author of several studies of Christian mysticism. Pound's reference to Tagore reflects a fluctuating interest in the Indian poet's work. Stock reports that, though initially enthusiastic, by 1914 Pound "was beginning to grow tired of [Tagore's] cadenced prose" translations of his Bengali poems "and also of his philosophy which was too passive and too consistently and vaguely optimistic for Pound who thrived on activity and liked occasionally a dash of realistic pessimism" (138). Thus, it may not be surprising to find the name "Rabindranath Tagore" listed right beneath "Codliver Oil" on the same page of *BLAST* where "Clan Meynell" appears. In his letter to Iris Barry, Pound seems to have recovered some of his earlier appreciation for Tagore but is characteristically more excited that Tagore's 1913 Nobel Prize served as "a damn good smack" to the stodgy Academic Committee that had rejected him.

³ Pound references the slide into ignominy of the Decadent generation in the seventh section of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* when the poem's parody of a musty old littérateur reports "how Johnson (Lionel) died / By falling from a high stool in a pub." The lurid and pathetic stories perpetuated, however ironically, in Pound's poem share much with the gossipy reminiscences of the "The Tragic Generation" in the section so titled of Yeats's *Autobiographies*. Though much of that gossip lacks historical accuracy, the objective facts remain that Dowson, Johnson, and Wilde all died sick and destitute victims of the various tragedies that plagued their short lives. Pound's gossip serves more as a comment on those who tell tales than on those about whom they are told, but it also solidifies a narrative that would have far-reaching implications for Pound's entire literary and critical project—the story of how a debased moral order resulted in a debased literature in desperate need of revolution and renovation.

⁴ Though Moody insists on "Mesmerism" as an example of Pound's "virtuoso versification" (52), the metrical rhythm of the lines quoted above only becomes apparent by deliberately distorting the lexical stress pattern of some of the poem's polysyllabic words and forcefully suppressing the speech emphasis of several others. The metrical theory of the poem's

eleven-syllable lines would seem to be best described as dactylic tetrameter catalectic (i.e., missing the unstressed syllable that would complete the last dactylic foot in each line). The first line should scan thus, with each subsequent line following the same pattern:

/ • • / • • / • • / •
Aye you're a man that! ye old mesmerizer.

⁵ The first volume of *Georgian Poetry* was dedicated to Bridges and published in 1912, the third to Gosse in 1917, the fourth to Hardy in 1919, and the fifth and last to Meynell in 1922.

CHAPTER 1. "THE LAWS OF VERSE":
RHYTHM AND SUBMISSION IN MEYNELL'S *LAST POEMS*

Though the canons of taste promulgated by Pound and Lewis in *BLAST* and elsewhere consign Meynell to the crowded, irrelevant ranks of the bourgeois and counter-revolutionary, and though those canons of taste continue to exert tremendous influence on the study and teaching of early twentieth-century literature today, Meynell was not without her defenders in the battles that would eventually determine what post-Victorian poetry was supposed to have looked like. Translator of Ibsen and influential critic William Archer, for one, numbered Meynell among the voices surveyed in his *Poets of the Younger Generation* (1902), identifying in her poetry an "unobtrusive grace—a quality which, if the word could be divested of its unfortunate eighteenth-century associations, one would like to call elegance" (267). Terms like "delicacy," "grace," and "elegance" are imbedded in the discourse surrounding Meynell's poetry from the beginning, but more and more, toward the end of her life and after, the language of elegance comes to describe less the person and habits of the poet or the affective potential of her subject matter than the form and style of Meynell's poems. In fact, discussions of her poetry come increasingly to begin by observing elegance in the thorough polish of her versification. John Drinkwater's eulogizing headnote to a 1929 anthology of *Twentieth-Century Poetry* is typical:

In her small testament of poetry there is hardly a line of waste tissue, hardly one that is not lovingly wrought into a simple and abiding perfection. Underneath the aristocratic calm of this verse, is an emotional power that is apt to escape the casual reader. An active life of domestic cares and humours did not forbid a long and serene dedication to poetry, and of no poet's art might it be more truly said it "nothing common did, or mean." (33)⁶

More recent commentators, when they have turned their critical gaze from what Drinkwater calls a "no less exactly modulated prose" to the slim volume of those poems she wished to preserve, have tended to narrow their focus onto Meynell's politics, her suffragism, her pacifism, and what evidence of these may be gathered from her lines. Even so, assessments of Meynell's style as

careful and complete, the work of a master craftsman, are as a characteristic of commentary from Meynell's sympathetic contemporaries as they are of the limited critical attention Meynell has received in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Meynell's career as a writer of poetry shares the interesting parallel with her reception as a figure of critical interest in that it spans a long period of silence. Like the quarter-century between the publication of Meynell's *Preludes* and her *Later Poems*, critical attention to Meynell's poetry drops off sharply within a decade of her death. By the time that Drinkwater's brief note appears, the first generation of Modernists had produced the texts that later anthologies would record as the dominant achievements of early twentieth-century literature. As *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *The Waste Land*, Imagism and *vers libre* gain the prominence that Drinkwater's anthology denies them, Meynell's near-contemporary work gradually comes to seem obsolete. When Beverly Ann Schlack pronounces Meynell "Rediscovered" in an article for *Women's Studies* in 1980, she resurrects not only the long-marginalized "poetess of poets" but also the language of elegance and reserve that Meynell's earlier critics had used for talking about her poetry. Schlack writes that "Meynell's style is indeed characterized by perfection of form. Terse, scrupulous, symmetrical, austere and elegant, misleadingly "simple" and ambiguously compact, her manner has classic severity" (112). Critical interest in Meynell has slowly but steadily increased since the 1980s, but commentators after Schlack will always have to contend with an absence of serious scholarship on Meynell from the years when canons of modern literature were being fixed. Whether Meynell's marginalization results from Modernism or patriarchalism, critics of the present are always looking at a body of work that slipped out of literary discourse for decades. For Drinkwater and Archer, by contrast, though Meynell may never enjoy a particularly wide readership, she is, without question, a major figure in the history of poetry.

Any claims that Archer's prose or Drinkwater's advance for Meynell's place among great English poets are, of course, colored by their own subjective assessments and the implications of their critical apparatuses, but Meynell's fame as a poet, while it lasted, is an objective fact. The dedication to Meynell of the fifth volume in the *Georgian Poetry* series, mentioned in the foregoing introduction to this study, testifies to that fact in the twentieth century just as the the very public discussion regarding Meynell as a possible Poet Laureate after Tennyson's death, to be discussed in the pages to come, demonstrates the currency of Meynell's work in the literary culture of the nineteenth century and the high regard in which it was held. Whether Meynell should occupy an equally important status in the critical discourse of the present day is a question for debate, but that her work enjoyed such status in certain versions of literary history current at a certain point in time is beyond doubt. Meynell's gradual disappearance from canons of twentieth-century literature bears witness to the success of the Modernist project, but it also presents significant difficulties for any attempt to understand what Meynell's poetry seemed to represent to critics writing about it before that disappearance. If we can navigate the silences in the critical discourse treating Meynell's verse, we can learn something of the mechanisms of literary history; however, such an enterprise risks losing its way entirely if it does not observe the divergent points of reference that Meynell's work marks out in older and latter-day criticism, respectively. Given that her critics, early and late, are looking at Meynell from very different perspectives, it is worth asking in just what lies the "perfection" and "elegance" that both groups identify as the hallmark of Meynell's style.

What does it mean to say that Meynell's verse is polished or elegant? In part, it seems to mean that her verse style is orderly and that it eschews the prosodic variety enjoyed by many poets of the nineteenth century.⁷ With the exception of a handful of poems in trochaic meters in *Preludes*, the body of Meynell's work and all of the verse published in her last three volumes is

composed in iambs and adheres to an increasingly strict decorum. The decorum she observes is not Meynell's innovation; rather, from extensive reading of the canonical poets in iambic measures like Shakespeare and Milton, she abstracts what one of the *Last Poems* of 1922 formulates as "The Laws of Verse":

Dear laws, come to my breast!
Take all my frame, and make your close arms meet
Around me; and so ruled, so warmed, so pressed,
I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat.

Dear laws, be wings to me!
The feather merely floats. O be it heard
Through weight of life—the skylark's gravity—
That I am not a feather, but a bird.

The poem presents two, quite different metaphors, but both represent the metrical framework on which they are arranged as a source of life and freedom. "The Laws of Verse" are the laws the poem ecstatically obeys. Neither generalizations nor constraints, they offer the intimacy of a lover; they defy gravity.

If the eroticism and physicality of these lines are atypical of Meynell's poetry, the overwhelmingly monosyllabic vocabulary and the sensitivity to rhythm such a vocabulary demands from reading are not. Because of the carefully maintained iambic context, we can hear the heavy breaths and feel the heart beating in the evenly spaced stresses at the end of the first stanza. The bringing together of urgency and control here point to a favorite paradox at the center of Meynell's practice, and, for these reasons, "The Laws of Verse" frequently functions as a touchstone in latter-day analyses of Meynell's use of meter both as organizing principle and as trope.

Describing "The Laws of Verse," Vanessa Furse Jackson has identified the marriage of law and agency, creative or otherwise, as the unifying theme of Meynell's writing and of her life:

It may seem ironic that this, one of her most overtly passionate, even sensuous poems, should be devoted to an expression of her poetics, but implicit also in the poem is Meynell's belief in the need for laws in all aspects of life. Indeed, she had joined the Catholic Church in large part because she saw it as the sole administrator of a moral legislation that to her was even more important than its guiding her to faith. She believed that laws gave one the freedom to choose right from wrong, and that liberty unbound by law was mere slavery. (455-456)

Reading "The Laws of Verse" in this way exposes a philosophical seam, running the length of Meynell's writing, where aesthetics and religion merge. Meynell's writing commits to a creative process with distinct moral implications, but if Meynell's sense of poetry as something defined by law is predicated on the analogy to her religion as something defined by doctrine, it is also, in more readily observable patterns, a product of Patmore's influence, who was her mentor both in Catholicism and in verse structure.

In a short entry on Patmore, written as her contribution to *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1911, Meynell, while predictably sympathetic to a writer who, for decades, was her closest friend and constant correspondent, foreshadows her own disappearance from the canon in an efficient summary of Patmore's decayed literary reputation. "His unique lot," as Meynell puts it, "was to be at first the most popular, and later the least popular of poets" ("Patmore, Coventry" 546-547). The change that Meynell notes in Patmore's critical fortunes corresponds to the striking stylistic shift between Patmore's two most ambitious volumes of poetry, *The Angel in the House* (1854) and *The Unknown Eros* (1878). The first has, rightly or wrongly, become a byword for institutionalized Victorian misogyny; in the first chapters of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), for instance, the title of the earlier and immensely more popular poem is invoked as an epithet for its central female character, Honoria, who "has no story except a sort of anti-story of selfless innocence based on the notion that 'Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure'" (23). Notwithstanding the incriminating passages cited at length in the first chapters of Gilbert and Gubar's study, *The Angel in the House* is less concerned with the

definition of gender roles than with an attempt to explore the cosmic valences of erotic love from within the carefully circumscribed and, as many early readers recognized, highly artificial confines of a happy, bourgeois marriage. The image of Meynell as herself a submissive, retiring, domestic angel would serve as a powerful indictment of Meynell's poetry for most of the twentieth century, and her association with Patmore, author of the premier Victorian kitsch-epic, would corroborate suspicions that her writing belonged to a florid and frivolous detour in literary history.

In what still counts as one of few post-Victorian assessments of Patmore's work in verse, J. C. Reid describes how the readers to whom Patmore owed his first popular success "accepted the poem for what, on the surface, it was—a pleasant novelette in verse in which a conventional love-story ran a conventional course" (149). Readily acknowledging these limitations, however, Reid's *The Mind and Art of Coventry Patmore* (1957) goes on to make the important argument that *The Angel in the House* represents a first limited attempt to treat the single overriding theme of Patmore's entire *œuvre*, and it is this theme, driving Patmore's work, that resonates in the erotics of Meynell's "The Laws of Verse." In his transition from popular bard of domestic bliss to the stance he would take as mystic and prophet in his last major volume, "Patmore's doctrine," Reid argues, "is esoteric, not only in *The Unknown Eros*, where the removal of the period details shows the philosophy naked, and where the shift of emphasis has markedly changed, but in all his major poems" (150). Because of its high rhetoric and sometimes shocking sexual frankness, *The Unknown Eros*, Patmore's last volume, substantially finished in 1878 but edited until his death in 1896, would ultimately prove unable either to capitalize on or to rehabilitate the reputation of the author of *The Angel in the House*, and, as a result, the coherency of Patmore's project has tended to fall by the wayside. Reid's statement of the theme binding Patmore's major works together is succinct: "Patmore set out to show that, within the limitations of Christian

Marriage was to be found the most rapturous joy and the fulfillment of all human passion” (150), and, especially in its challenges to the sometimes pessimistic view of marriage to be found, for instance, in the epistles of Paul,⁸ Patmore’s work looks to “the dignity of wedded love as both symbol and prophecy of the love between Christ and the soul” (152). In Patmore’s preoccupation with the earthly limitations that give life to human love and make it a conduit of Christ’s infinite, cosmic love, we can begin to see the influence of the elder poet on Meynell’s conflation of law and erotic abandon in “The Laws of Verse.” Some account of Patmore’s ideas about love, sex, law, and their relation to art, as well as the influence of these ideas on his younger protégé, may be readily gleaned from his last and strangest volume of poetry.

Reid is careful to note that the central theme of erotic communion with Christ, increasingly apparent in Patmore’s later work, participates in a tradition of writing about human and spiritual love that occupies a somewhat tenuous relationship to the Pauline call to celibacy. In the mystic tradition of writers like St. John of the Cross and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, God’s love for his Church is frequently figured “in terms of the language of human love” (152). For Reid, Patmore’s signal contribution to the literature of love is a movement away from the idea of human love as a metaphor for God’s love and toward the idea that what happens between lovers is an analogue to and type of participation in what happens between humans and the God who loves them. Though Patmore’s erotic conception of human and spiritual love connects his earlier and later works, it would reach its fullest expression only on the other side of the life-changing events that would give rise to *The Unknown Eros*. As Meynell’s brief encyclopedia entry notes, it was shortly after the completion of *The Angel in the House* and its sequel *The Victories of Love* that Patmore would lose his legendarily perfect wife Emily, become a convert to Roman Catholicism, and remarry. “As happy love had been his earlier, the grief of loss became in great measure his later theme,” and this period of transition becomes the genesis of what Meynell

describes as Patmore's most powerful work: the "poignantly touching and also most sublime thoughts upon love, death, and immortality" which "are presented under greatly poetic imagery in the odes of *The Unknown Eros*" (547).

Meynell's hopeful prediction that, in 1911, *The Unknown Eros* was "only beginning to take its place as a great English classic in the minds of students," has proven shortsighted. Aside from those few of the volume's poems included in anthologies for their direct and affecting treatment of the thematics of grief, most of *The Unknown Eros* has been forgotten. As John Maynard argues vigorously, in the chapter of his *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (1993) that constitutes the most recent detailed treatment of Patmore's work, the reasons for this gradual disappearance from the canon are not due to a lack of aesthetic interest or value; rather, *The Unknown Eros* has suffered, on the one hand, for the sins of *The Angel in the House* and, on the other, somewhat paradoxically, from the "almost schizophrenic shift in style and statement" from Patmore's earlier work. Echoing Meynell's assessment of Patmore's career, Maynard traces the evolution of Patmore's celebration of earthly love in *The Angel in the House* to the "conclusion" in *The Unknown Eros* that "sexual desire is both the source of man's humanity, the essence of human nature, and also the connection to the divine" (143). Insofar as Maynard's assessment is correct, it is easy to see why Patmore's last major volume would have some difficulty finding readers in the literary and cultural environment of the later nineteenth century.

While certainly tame by any twenty-first-century standard, *The Unknown Eros* is often quite vivid in its discussions of sex and sexuality. The poem entitled "Sponsa Dei," in particular, offers perhaps the volume's most explicit, even shocking, vision of cosmic eroticism. Having presented its reader with a love lyric about a "Maiden fair, / the laughing of whose eye / is in man's heart renewed virginity" (1-3), the poem goes on to challenge its reader's preconceptions

about amatory poetry with the vital question that will call *The Unknown Eros*'s metaphysical project to the fore:

Who is this only happy She,
Whom, by a frantic flight of courtesy,
Born of despair
Of better lodging for his Spirit fair,
He adores as Margaret, Maude or Cecily? (30-34)

To this point, the poem has assumed the typical stance of a lyric troubadour enumerating his lady's virtues, but the question these lines ask indicates a reordering of the rhetorical dialectic in such a way that the beloved of the poem's first half is revealed as only one among a host of such beloveds—a symbol for the language of transcendent emotion. By the same logic, the singer of the beloved's praises becomes a figure for the mechanisms by which God's love transmits itself through the transcendent emotion of erotic love. The extent to which we can accept the poet's vatic answer to this question is the extent to which we have been prepared by the carefully orchestrated metaphysics of *The Unknown Eros* to think of ourselves as the all-too-often wanton lady-loves of God himself. The answer to the question of whom Margaret, Maude, and Cecily might really be completes the poem's dramatic vignette with a potentially unsettling suggestion of God lingering at the bedroom door, admiring our bodies in the reflection of a mirror:

What if this Lady be thy Soul, and He
Who claims to enjoy her sacred beauty be,
Not thou, but God; and thy sick fire
A female vanity,
Such as a bride, viewing her mirror'd charms,
Feels when she sighs, 'Ah these are for his arms!' (45-50)

We are warned that only "His immense desire" (52) can satisfy "our secret, hopeless longing" (55), "Not by-and-by, but now, / Unless deny Him thou!" (56-57), and here it begins to come clear that Patmore's preoccupation with sex in *The Unknown Eros* is no metaphor but the stuff of a religious experience, unavoidably sexual in nature. Insofar as "Sponsa Dei," the central

statement of Patmore's erotic metaphysics in Book II of the two-book volume, takes up those themes which warrant Maynard's writing of Book II that "Patmore openly seeks to find religious experience through the sexual" (231), we have the explication of a coded language presented obscurely thus far in Book II and only as part of the the desperate search for meaning in grief presented through the personal narratives of Book I. Appropriately, the poem carries over important terms for Patmore's project. As a crucial but not easily definable descriptor for God's elect, "virginity" grows in complexity and importance as the volume moves forward, but even words like "sick fire" chime across the pages of *The Unknown Eros* to strike a chord with "The Contract," a re-imagining of the myth of Adam and Eve that precedes "Sponsa Dei" by two poems.

In the closing lines of "The Contract" we are presented with another "sick fire" in the wake of the first parents' failure to maintain those strange "virgin spousals" that constitute Patmore's most glaring emendation to the biblical story:

Whether She kept her word, or He the mind
To hold her, wavering, to his own restraint,
Answer, ye pleasures faint,
Ye fiery throes, and upturn'd eyeballs blind
Of sick at heart mankind,
Whom nothing succour can. (86-91)

The "mutual free contract" (82) enacted by Patmore's Eve and Adam as a way to stoke the fires of their sexual passion through abstinence has no corollary in the book of Genesis, but the poem operates in a distinctly scriptural mode when it connects the failure of this contract to the sin and sadness of later generations: the "pleasures faint" of human sex witness to the inability of the first parents to resist what the poem suggests that Genesis represents obliquely as a fruit. While the poem adheres to Genesis's basic outline of temptation and fall, it elaborates the theme of Eve's enticement of Adam so far as to construct an entire sexual ethic from the paradigmatic

moment when “Man first met woman.” When for instance, Eve in the Bible, “took of the fruit thereof” and “gave also unto her husband with her” (*King James Version*, Gen. 3.6), the drama unfolds, without discounting Eve’s traditional role as temptress, from a deception planted by the Serpent, a being of malevolence whom prelapsarian Eve and Adam could never have understood. By contrast, Patmore offers us a “mutual free contract” which is pointedly “unobliged” by God or, for that matter, incited by a malevolent spirit. Adam and Eve’s fall, however ambiguously it might be stated, is their own work. These emendations to the scriptural narrative function as prime examples of the literary method undertaken by *The Unknown Eros*. The Adam and Eve figures of “The Contract” invite critical scrutiny of the received narrative of the fall of man and thereby invite contemplation of the elements of religious faith, but they also point to those places where sacred texts intersect with profane and generate the language for talking about God.

In any attempt to rewrite the biblical story of Adam and Eve, for instance, it is probably safe to say that one writes always in the shadow of Milton. Patmore’s “The Contract” is no exception, and in fact, Patmore’s use of the myth to illustrate his vision of cosmic eroticism explicitly echoes *Paradise Lost* in a number of significant ways. Like Patmore’s, Milton’s Eve passes by Adam in all her radiant beauty and draws him to the bridal bed laid out in his “bower” (4.690). She “lean[s]” (4.494) against his body in what may be sweet affection or something like seduction. In addition to its echoes of Milton, “The Contract” includes a perhaps surprising allusion to Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” in its two references to a “Mount Abora,” which does not exist in the Bible. In fact, the only literary Mount Abora appears to be the one mentioned when Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes of

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora. (36-41)

If we read Patmore's "Abora" as a reference to Coleridge's poem, "The Contract" becomes a substantially more complicated nexus of allusions and misquotations. After all, any good anthology will tell us, in a footnote, that the only literary source for Coleridge's topography to suggest itself so far is the "Mount Amara" in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*.⁹ In such a way, "Mount Abora" becomes, in "The Contract," a literal as well as literary signpost by which we are able to identify the first parents' "Abyssinian vale" as, not the Eden of scripture, but an imaginary realm called into being by *The Unknown Eros*. It is in this realm that Patmore proposes to show us a kind of truth which transcends the objective referents of salvation history and demonstrates how this truth becomes manifest only through the creative act of Adam and Eve or of the poet. Reid argues that "The Contract" "is not to be taken as a serious exegesis of the first chapters of Genesis, but as a parable, using the story of Adam and Eve to describe the difference between pure love and lust, and to point up the weakness of man's flesh inherited from the choice of Eve" (293). To the extent that we recognize Mount Abora as a fiction, we are able to read Patmore's Adam and Eve according to the literary method that requires us to navigate an infinitely expanding universe of intersections between literary and religious conventions, revisions of those conventions, the supposed *données* of religious faith, and allusions to prior texts. Even these few examples from a complex and challenging volume of poetry demonstrate features of the literary method that Patmore would bequeath to Meynell, among them a ubiquitous interest in the erotic potential of Christian symbolism and a moral imperative to challenge the power of those symbols by evoking them in juxtaposition to extensive allusions to other, less overtly religious, bodies of writing.

Inseparable from this intertextual method that Meynell adapts from Patmore are the theories of verse form that drive the movements of *The Unknown Eros* as a whole. Looking back to the poem that serves as a central statement of Meynell's ideas about how verse form interacts

with the erotics of submission and locates in the constraints of literary decorums the very power of aesthetic agency, Yopie Prins has observed in Meynell's later poetry, and specifically in "The Laws of Verse," the pervasive influence of both *The Unknown Eros* and Patmore's *Essay on English Metrical Law* (1857), written in large part as a defense of the "catalectic" verse in which Patmore's last volume is composed. Though in its strictest definition, "catalexis" denotes the absence of a syllable from the end of a metrical line, Prins explains, in her essay, "Patmore's Law, Meynell's Rhythm" (2005), that Patmore's idiosyncratic usage of the term identifies catalexis as a structural principle of silence, a rest. Catalexis accounts for the irregularly varied line-lengths of the odes in *The Unknown Eros*. Though they vary in number of metrical feet, the lines in Patmore's odes are held to be isochronous—occupying an equal duration in time. Patmore imagines silent feet keeping time at the ends of lines shorter than a—mostly hypothetical—metrical norm. Patmore's theory fosters what Prins calls a "poetics of pauses" (264), a verbal textile of presence and absence, sound and silence, with a simultaneously sonic and graphic existence. The empty spaces at the right margin of Patmore's odes share a substance with the pauses of a voice, even an internal voice, reciting. For Prins, the indented, metrically shorter lines at the beginning of both stanzas of "The Laws of Verse" evidence Patmore's influence as does the careful management of punctuation and repetition within lines like "I breathe, aware; I feel my wild heart beat." These technical features are governed by law. Prins cites a dictum from Patmore's "Essay" intended to guide aesthetic evaluations of poetry: "the language should always seem to *feel*, though not to *suffer from*, the bonds of verse" (Patmore, *Essay* 8). Prins identifies the concept of freedom incarnated by law as a common preoccupation shared between Meynell and Patmore and an abiding influence on what is, nonetheless, the very unique and very different practice of the younger poet. "Willingly," Prins writes, "Meynell

submitted to Patmore's metrical law, allowing her language to feel the bonds of verse, and herself to love them" (264).

Patmore asserted that only strict adherence to such laws could give him the paradoxical freedom to write the sinuous variable lines of the catalectic odes in his last major volume. As he explains in a preface to the third edition (1890), the meter of *The Unknown Eros* is "catalectic *par excellence*, employing the pause (as it does the rhyme) with freedom only limited by the exigencies of poetic passion" (v). Patmore couches his brief explication in the familiar terms of law and propriety: only those "unlearned in the subject of meter. . . have objected to this kind of verse that it is lawless." The many "abortive" examples of catalectic verse in English literature are the result of attempts "to adapt it to purposes with which it has no expressional correspondence; or to vary it by rhythmical movements which are destructive of its character." This prefatory note, though brief, provides some of the key terms for understanding Patmore's theory of poetry and the influence of that theory on Meynell. "Passion" and "freedom," "law" and expression define a poem's movement toward aesthetic unity.

If passion limits freedom, so freedom limits passion. The freedom of Patmore's lines to expand and contract, to fill their metrical length with words or with pauses, is limited by their appropriateness to the performance of a certain kind of aesthetic emotion. Patmore justifies his use of a relatively unusual meter and the existence of *The Unknown Eros* as poetry only in the achievement of poetic passion. Without passion, the poems of *The Unknown Eros* are purposeless and meaningless. But passion requires discipline, and Patmore places specifically rational limits on the expression of emotion in his poems. Patmore's preface provides an elaborate explanation of what the poet understands the metrical line employed throughout *The Unknown Eros* to be, but, for simplicity's sake, we may note that the lines themselves, though varied in length, observe a consistently iambic rhythm. Patmore's catalectic meter is iambic

without the fixed number of feet that is usually identified in the second term of the binomial nomenclature for naming meters. Though we may find hexameters or pentameters or tetrameters in *The Unknown Eros*, the poems employ none of these measures consistently. Propriety to passion circumscribes Patmore's choice of catalectic verse, the way iambic variations are deployed in his meters, and the frequency and patterning of rhymes. By this logic, giving free reign to the expression of emotion, releasing the emotional performance from the bonds of meter or the context established by the ode form as Patmore configures it can only result in an incoherent and lifeless progression of emotional outbursts. For Patmore, catalexis and poetic passion depend for their mutual coherence on the laws of verse.

In a manner consistent with classical conceptions of generic propriety, Patmore thought of the ode as the loftiest and most magisterial register of lyric expression and the catalectic measures of his own poems as potentially "inexhaustible" in their "expressiveness." But, as Patmore argues in his preface, on some level at least, "Nearly all English metres owe their existence as metres to 'catalexis' or pause." The share of other meters and other modes of poetry in the aesthetic power of the catalectic ode is one of register and not of kind. The simple diction and hymn-like tetrameters of *The Angel in the House* celebrate a joyful and orderly domestic life as appropriately as the meters of *The Unknown Eros* present their metaphysical phantasmagoria. In both works, formal control symbolizes directed power, a value consistently affirmed in the extended meditation on art and law that runs through Patmore's work and into Meynell's.

The idea that aesthetic agency depends on a poem's acceptance of a kind of formal bondage is probably most famously and most succinctly expressed, not by Meynell's Victorian mentor, but by an architect of Modernism whose most influential work was published contemporaneously with Meynell's most sophisticated. In his lecture on "The Music of Poetry," Eliot tells us, simply, "No verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job" (31). The

observation comes late in Eliot's career, but it echoes earlier statements in his 1917 "Reflections on Vers Libre," where, arguing against the conceptual underpinnings of some schools of free verse, Eliot states, bluntly, "there is no freedom in art" (32). Though Eliot's essay demonstrates a philosophical sympathy with Meynell's work and shares with Meynell and Patmore the metaphor of poetic law, these "Reflections" nonetheless describe the place where Eliot's aesthetic diverges from Meynell's—in the realm of meter. Eliot's prose and Meynell's practice both argue for the centrality of certain kinds of recognizable, rhythmic patterns to the act of writing poetry. Eliot's essay describes a less strictly observed metrical framework than Meynell would ever employ, but it shares with Meynell's poetry the sense of received forms as fundamental rituals of the poetic act: "the ghost of some simple meter should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest' verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation" (34-35). Eliot describes here the verse style he is himself developing in 1917—a kind of free verse punctuated with lines in more or less regular meters. More than one critic has identified the ghost of, for example, an iambic pentameter or an alexandrine in *The Waste Land*. In the same vein, G. Burns Cooper's *Mysterious Music: Rhythm and Free Verse* (1998) uses extensive linguistic analyses to demonstrate how Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1936-1943) employs a modern variation of the four-beat accentual meter of Anglo-Saxon poetry, but Eliot, in his most powerful and most influential poems, is not the poet of metrical decorums, and his "ghost of a simple meter" is very unlike the mathematical precision of even Meynell's most innovative and virtuosic verse performances. Working under the influence of Patmore and with aesthetic commitments that mirror Eliot's, Meynell develops a verse style that, by the publication of her final volume in 1923, represents a wholly different art from that recorded in *Preludes*, the early volume most directly responsible for her rejection by the emerging Modernists.¹⁰

First published alongside “The Laws of Verse” in Meynell’s *Last Poems*, “The Threshing Machine” exemplifies the prosodic techniques that Meynell cultivates in her verse practice after *Preludes* as well as many of the themes and philosophical preoccupations that dominate Meynell’s later poetry. Addressing the rapid and thorough industrialization of the European landscape over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “The Threshing Machine” begins with something like a lament for a simpler time to arrive at a perhaps surprising affirmation of modern ingenuity:

No “fan is in his hand” for these
Young villagers beneath the trees,
 Watching the wheels. But I recall
 The rhythm of rods that rise and fall,
Purging the harvest, over-seas.

No fan, No flail, no threshing floor!
And all their symbols evermore
 Forgone in England now—the sign,
 The visible pledge, the threat divine,
The chaff dispersed, the wheat in store.

The unbreathing engine marks no tune,
Steady at sunrise, steady at noon,
 Inhuman, perfect, saving time,
 And saving measure, and saving rhyme—
And did our Ruskin speak too soon?

“No noble strength on earth” he sees
“Save Hercules’ arm”; his grave decrees
 Curse wheel and steam. As the wheels ran
 I saw the other strength of man,
I knew the brain of Hercules.

The poem is composed in iambic tetrameter—one of Meynell’s most characteristic meters.

Unlike “The Laws of Verse,” with its heterometric stanza, or the varied line-lengths of Patmore’s odes, a single meter is used throughout. Without the variety provided by a heterometric stanza structure, the poem’s form enforces a sense of continuity, from beginning to end, that its meditation on industrialization only gradually reveals.

The poem's affirmation of technological advancement surprises, in the first instance, because it sets its reader up to be surprised. The ancient drudgery of the threshing floor is presented in the tones of wistful memory and with metaphors that make of human labor a "rhythm" and a "tune" of immemorial beauty. The poem makes threshing a "sign" and "pledge" of continuity broken by the ugly and recent interruption of "unbreathing," "inhuman" machinery. It validates the tremendous significance assigned this agricultural practice with, not simply a brief quotation, but a vocabulary drawn in large part from John the Baptist's admonitions to the crowd gathered before him at the river Jordan. In Luke's gospel, John says,

I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. (*King James Version*, 3.16-17)

The poem cites the bible for an endorsement of manual threshing. The act itself prefigures Jesus' "Purging" of "the harvest" at the end of time. Threshing is beautiful and symbolic. To replace it with a machine is almost a violation of holy writ—blasphemy. The poem calls on Ruskin—Victorian prophet of industrialism's evils—to lend weight to its characterization of the machine as demonic. By means of this complex of religious and aesthetic objections to mechanized labor, Meynell's poem positions itself within the anti-industrial discourse shared alike by William Blake and William Morris. The line from Blake's *Milton, A Poem* asking whether Jerusalem had been "builded here,/ Among these dark Satanic mills" (7-8) has long been a touchstone for writers recoiling from the ugliness of an industrialized landscape. Like Ruskin's, Morris's project, as a writer and aesthetic reformer, consistently contrasts the hand-fashioned beauties of a romanticized medieval society with the wage-slavery and monotonous precision of a world dominated by factories. But "The Threshing Machine" accomplishes its rhetorical flourish by moving out of this familiar discourse and toward the more nuanced assessment typical of

Meynell's writing. Without exactly affirming the beauty or utility of agricultural machinery, the poem can praise the power and ingenuity of the mind that created it.

Rather than emphasize a catastrophic break between the more humane, if more technologically primitive past and an alienating, wholly mechanized present, Meynell's poem imagines a continuous, unbroken progress toward the more efficient and directed use of human power. Though "fan" and "flail" give way to the threshing machine, all are symbols of human industry. Recognizing their common function and value is poetry's job, and Meynell's poetry routinely advances this synthetic work, striving to reveal the connections between changing worlds and changing attitudes, as its primary goal. The poem finds this common ground by rejecting narratives of industrial evil. As it moves toward a reconciliation of past and present, agrarian and industrial, the poem makes increasingly apparent that its synthesizing work is accomplished through the laws of verse. By adhering closely to specific and sometimes very nice conventions of literary prosody, "The Threshing Machine" presents poetry and its rules as a constant, a guide for rediscovering the continuity threatened by historical and technological upheavals.

The first half of the poem signals the continuity underlying what seems to be a catastrophic break by adhering closely to a principle of what David Keppel-Jones, in a slightly different context, has usefully termed "strict syllabic integrity." Each line of a poem observing this principle contains a fixed number of syllables, avoiding the syllabic irregularity permitted by some schools of metrical composition.¹¹ The term is useful as a descriptor for lines that, in "The Threshing Machine," contain neither more nor less than eight syllables. Moving into its second half, Meynell's poem complicates the idea of strict syllabic integrity in interesting ways, a point to which we shall return. As its title indicates, Keppel-Jones's *The Strict Metrical Tradition: Variations in the Literary Iambic Pentameter from Sidney and Spenser to Matthew Arnold*

(2001) deals exclusively with lines a foot longer than those currently under discussion. All the same, and notwithstanding the specific, theoretical requirements for his microscopic scrutiny of a systematically limited sample of verse, Keppel-Jones is careful to note that “The variations characteristic of the strict iambic pentameter are also to be found in iambic lines of other lengths” (18). Keppel-Jones’s project attempts to codify iambic variations in such a way that metrical analysis can then use this code to identify the places in which poems depart from convention for purposes emphatic or expressive. By identifying many of the metrical features that Meynell writes of as “laws,” Keppel-Jones provides useful illustrations of the prosodical heritage informing Meynell’s meters.

The most famous and most influential attempt at this kind of metrical codification is undoubtedly Robert Bridges’s *Milton’s Prosody*, a work that, in its several editions, would prove seminal for understandings of literary prosody during most of the period when Meynell was writing poetry. First published in 1889 and revised for an edition of 1921, Bridges’s slender volume collates a vast assemblage of lines from Milton’s epics—with lines from a variety of other poets providing points of comparison—to illustrate the specific variations allowed by Milton’s practice and the influence of that practice on the technical understanding of iambic pentameter for poets ever since. Observing many of the same metrical phenomena that Bridges describes, Keppel-Jones is particularly concerned to give as full as possible an account of iambic conventions as they develop up to the moment in literary history when free verse becomes a practical option for poets writing in English, but Keppel-Jones’s work also serves as a thorough example of the continued usefulness of scanning metrical poetry using the same analytical apparatus that Bridges employs.¹² Though the binary of stress and unstress and the division of metrical lines into the units conventionally called feet have sometimes been called into question by more recent, linguistic theories of prosody, Keppel-Jones and Bridges, among other

prosodists working with a foot-based metric, provide illustrations of rhythmic patterns observable in Meynell's poetry, patterns that are, moreover, obscured by other systems of scansion.

Meynell's verse has sometimes been characterized as old-fashioned for the very reason that it persists in observing these conventional ways of organizing poetic rhythm after the first Modernist generation begins to advocate free verse as a revolt against stifling and artificial limitations imposed by traditional metrical composition.¹³ Though Meynell's verse does have the classic quality of embodying a mastery of the techniques and conventions handed down to her from previous generations, it is, as the following pages will demonstrate, innovative and forward-looking in its own way, and it contrasts with the poems of her contemporaries among the emerging Modernists in maintaining a firm claim to its place in an unbroken progression of poetic voices. This commitment to an almost familial relationship to the poetry of her predecessors makes Meynell's artistic stance different from that of Pound who, as John Hollander puts it, moved "early in his career . . . to throw off the pressures of the parental generation, the still-living and the recently dead, by submitting to the control of venerable ghosts" (240). For Meynell, there is no sense of a lost poetic heritage to be reclaimed. Though she, of course, belongs to the parental generation that Pound felt compelled to "throw off," Meynell's poetry at the end of her life represents the result of constant cultivation; it is neither the rehearsal of a style learned in youth nor the willful parroting of one outmoded. Comparison between Pound and Meynell is interesting less because the two poets occupy opposing sides of a generational dispute that will eventually come to dominate accounts of early twentieth-century literature than for the depiction it provides of two writers acutely concerned about how to respond to their predecessors. Prosody and the technical manipulation of meter offer an especially poignant way of making this comparison and of identifying the continuities, where

they exist, between Meynell's work and that to which she is always responding, as well as to the work of those who come after her.

Of "The Threshing Machine" as an initial example, we may note that "strict syllabic integrity" accurately describes the first half of the poem, those stanzas depicting the manual labor of threshing: the technical variations in the meter all play out in the context of a tightly controlled eight-syllable line—with two possible exceptions. The first exception concerns the use of the word "rhythm" in the fourth line of the poem's first stanza: "The rhythm of rods that rise and fall." As the *Oxford English Dictionary* testifies, it is common enough, even in the context of a British pronunciation, to pronounce the word "rhythm" with two syllables, a pronunciation which would introduce an extra unstressed syllable, yielding a nine-syllable line. Though an extra syllable is not itself a particularly remarkable deviation from the norm in iambic meters, "strict syllabic integrity," in lines uncomplicated by other traditional structuring devices, is one of the laws of verse that Meynell's later poetry regularly endorses.

In its fourth line, Meynell's poem places the word "rhythm" in the position of a single metrical stress between the unstresses "The" and "of." In some introductory remarks to a pamphlet privately printed in 1916 and titled *The Art of Scansion*, Meynell describes a standard of pronunciation that would have regarded the "m" at the end of "rhythm" as forming a consonant cluster with the preceding "th" and the whole word as comprising a single syllable. The substance of the pamphlet is a letter written in 1827 and addressed from a young Elizabeth Barrett (afterwards Browning) to an older correspondent on the subject of classical prosody and pronunciation. Meynell's remarks are brief, but they include some interesting observations on the discrepancies between a cultivated, urban, twentieth-century pronunciation of English and that of the cloistered and mostly rural Elizabeth Barrett:

It is noticeable that she writes of the word “patriotism” as generally pronounced in five syllables. The accepted way is to sound it as only three—crowded ones, it is true, but only three, and any other way would seem to us provincial. Especially would an educated ear resent the pronouncing of the last three letters in “patriotism” in two syllables. (viii)

As with “patriotism,” the “m” at the end of “rhythm” follows a voiced consonant sound (the “s” in patriotism pronounced like “z,” and the digraph “th” as the single sound in “then” or “thus” rather than in “both” or “breath”). In these remarks, Meynell accurately identifies a linguistic phenomenon whereby voiced consonants blend into the sonorant “m” without the need for a medial vowel and insists on a definition of the term “syllable” that mandates for each a full vowel. Her insistence on categorizing syllables and non-syllables makes sense for a poet writing in meters themselves defined by number and arrangement of syllables. The impulse to classify in this way, moreover, corresponds to Meynell’s overarching theory of poetry as something governed by law. The observation highlights the importance Meynell assigns to even the most basic linguistic units of which her lines are composed. Her sense of a correct or “accepted” pronunciation goes hand in hand with her sense of the laws governing poetic composition. It is by means of examples like this one that we are able to see the poet at work, calculating the values of syllables as they fall into place.

The other possibility of a potential metrical irregularity comes with “visible” in the fourth line of the poem’s second stanza: “The visible pledge, the threat divine.” Scanned as three syllables, “visible” threatens the “strict syllabic integrity” of the line. However, the lengthy tables in Bridges’s *Milton’s Prosody* provide numerous examples of the “poetic elision” of words ending in *-ible* and *-able*. Poetic elision is one of the primary tools that Bridges identifies in Milton’s practice for manipulating the syllabic components of a line to make them conform to a prosodic norm. Explication of Milton’s rules of elision is a major part of Bridges’s project and is indispensable for understanding the prosodic architecture of the kind of poetry both Milton and

Meynell wrote. Though a modern reader might tend to elide the the second “i” in “visible,” yielding a pronunciation like “vis’ble,” Bridges makes clear that Milton’s intention with regard to words ending in *-ble* was to elide the schwa sound between “b” and “l” in a way that corresponds to Meynell’s handling of the word “rhythm.”¹⁴ In both instances—“rhythm” and “visible”—the two voiced consonants at the end of the word blend together without the need for a medial vowel and without creating another syllable. According to this principle, a prosodic accounting of Meynell’s lines finds one syllable in “rhythm” and two in “visible,” the final four letters of the latter forming a single syllable. Bridges is careful to show that the elision of the final syllable of words ending in *-ble* is not a phonetic mandate but an option available to the poet in constructing meters. Sometimes Milton employs it and sometimes he does not. But the option is governed by phonetic context. When Milton must decide whether to assign a word like “visible” the metrical function of two or three syllables he chooses from among the options available to him in accordance with specific rules in the same way that Meynell invokes the laws of verse in counting the syllables of her lines. The point is not that Meynell distorts ordinary words to fit a metrical pattern but that she observes certain conventions for counting syllables. The process of counting, laid out in detail by Bridges, constitutes another of the laws of verse.

Understanding these laws of verse is indispensable for making sense of the way that Meynell’s prosody interacts with the paraphrasable content presented in her poems. “The Threshing Machine” is characteristic of Meynell’s mature verse in that it works toward the ideal of a text in which content—in this case her assessments and observations of grain harvesting—is revised and complicated by the prosodic form in which it is cast. The poem begins by demonstrating a mastery of iambic conventions, introduces a disruption with both conceptual and rhythmic incarnations, and moves to reconcile the disruption with convention by means of an adapted metrical structure.

In order to appreciate the way in which Meynell’s poem reconciles disruption and convention we have to recognize the specific iterations of those conventions in the first half of the poem. As a poem composed in iambic tetrameters, “The Threshing Machine” posits a metrical paradigm of eight syllables in which each unstressed syllable is followed by a single stressed syllable. We might notate it thus: • / • / • / • / .¹⁵ The paradigm serves as a rule or norm in terms of which rhythmic divergences and variations can be assessed. As prosodists including Bridges and Keppel-Jones routinely note, the most common variation to the iambic paradigm in English verse written since at least the time of Milton takes the form / • • / at the beginning of a line (i.e., the first two iambs in the line are replaced by a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed and a fourth stressed syllable). This pattern may be observed twice in the first stanza of “The Threshing Machine”:

/ • • / • / • /
 Watching the wheels, but I recall

and

/ • • / • / • /
 Purging the harvest, over-seas.

Different prosodists use different terms to identify the phenomenon. Though their differing terminology refers to the same metrical figure, their choice of terms implies distinct theories of how iambic meters are constructed. Because Meynell’s metrical practice, exemplified in “The Threshing Machine,” depends so much on conscious arrangement rather than on the organic felicities of rhythmic language, some account of these differing theories and their related terminology is useful for understanding how Meynell’s meters accomplish their rhetorical goals.

Operating on the premise that this metrical figure (/ • • /) comprises a four-syllable unit occupying the space of two iambic feet, Keppel-Jones employs the traditional analogy for naming accentual-syllabic meters in English with terms from Greek and Latin prosody to call the

figure a “choriamb.”¹⁶ In contrast, Hollander’s *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (1985) describes the phenomenon using the generative theories of meter advanced by Morris Halle and Samuel Jay Keyser as a displaced “stress maximum.” That is to say, the second stressed syllable in each of the lines cited above from “The Threshing Machine” occupies its theoretically appropriate place in the metrical line while the first does not. Though their approaches to meter, as these terms suggest, differ considerably, both Keppel-Jones and Hollander attempt to describe the features of metrical language using a theory designed to accommodate a wide variety of very different kinds of poetry from very different historical contexts. While their analyses illuminate discussion of meter as a linguistic phenomenon, they tend to deemphasize the importance of historical theories of prosody for shaping the metrical practice of poets writing in those distinct historical periods. It is for these same reasons that Prins, “[r]ather than assuming a transhistorical definition of meter, or presuming an ahistorical grammar for metrical analysis,” prefers to situate “debates about meter within their own historical context in order to emphasize the cultural significance of formalist reading” (“Victorian meters” 110-111). Prins writes specifically of Victorian poetry, a historical group to which some of Meynell’s poems undoubtedly belong, but the prosodies she cites, including Patmore’s *Essay* and Saintsbury’s monumental *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*—first published in 1910 and reprinted in 1923—would remain hugely influential accounts of metrical composition throughout the period in which Meynell was writing her most sophisticated poetry. Indeed, these accounts, owing much to Bridges’s tabulations in *Milton’s Prosody*, constitute some of the most thorough and current analyses of the metrical tradition available at the time that the Modernist poets were beginning in earnest their challenge to that tradition. Thus, the prosodic theories implicit in Bridges’s and Saintsbury’s

choices of terminology more accurately describe the conscious manipulation of meter in Meynell's poems than an "ahistorical grammar for metrical analysis" likely could.

Notwithstanding their historical contemporaneity, Saintsbury's and Bridges's terminologies have their differences. Saintsbury generally describes the phenomenon that Keppel-Jones calls a "choriamb" as a "trochaic substitution." That is to say, the first iamb in a line like "Watching the wheels. But I recall" has been replaced with a trochee, the inverse of an iamb. But apart from the variation in this first foot, the rest of the line maintains the pattern specified by the metrical paradigm. Generally wary of terms like "iamb" and "trochee" because of their imprecise analogy to the quantitative meters of classical verse, Bridges describes the "trochaic substitution" as an inverted foot. What both theories emphasize, however, is the importance of the foot itself as not simply an analytical convenience, a unit of measurement, but a structuring device for the metrical line. Both prosodists assign as much significance to the unstressed syllables in the line as to the stressed, and their accounts of poetic rhythm depend on both. Of the vocabularies available to her for describing meters, we can be sure that Meynell was accustomed to using the traditional names of English metrical feet and thinking of them as rhythmic units from her introductory remarks to *The Art of Scansion*, in which she asks,

And what is so exciting to poets as these questions of their technique? If I ever had a fierce passage of arms with Francis Thompson (but I never had) it would have been on the question of trochaic endings, and whether one might pause on them before carrying on the weak syllable to the next line. (ix)

She would also have been familiar with the terminology of "inversions" from, at the very least, her reading of Patmore, whose "Essay" echoes Bridges's analyses of iambic pentameters in noting that "Milton, who first taught us what this kind of verse ought to be, is careful to vary the movement by an occasional inversion of the iambic accentuation in each of the five places" (48). For Saintsbury, Bridges, and Patmore, the reversed stress and unstress at the beginning of

Meynell's "Watching the wheels. But I recall" occupies the same space and fulfills the same function in the metrical line as the regular iamb by which it is followed. What is important to note is that, for all of these prosodists, the inversion in the first foot of the line serves primarily as a way of introducing rhythmic variety. It is a commonplace in iambic verse and should not, by itself, be construed as a significant rhythmic disruption. The use of inverted feet becomes more interesting and more important for analyzing the interaction of meter and language in Meynell's poem when it occurs at more than one place in the line to create a distinct and noticeable rhythmic effect, different in character from the metrical norm of the majority of the poem's lines.

The first line of "The Threshing Machine" to exhibit multiple metrical inversions occurs in its third stanza. Aside from the previously noted instances of elided syllables, this is also the first line to challenge the poem's principle of strict syllabic integrity. Two inversions and an extra syllable mid-line mark this line as an important turning point for the poem. The laws with which it began are not discarded, but they are revised and reinterpreted to provide the language for talking about a new set of images. Marking foot divisions in addition to the stressed and unstressed syllables, we can scan the line in question like this:

/ . . / . / . . /
 Steady | at sunrise, | steady | at noon.

According to this scansion, the first and third feet are inverted, and the second foot includes an extra unstressed syllable. We might, it is true, count the second syllable of "sunrise" as part of the third foot and locate the extra syllable in the last foot of the line, thus:

/ . . / . / . . /
 Steady | at sun- | rise, stead- | y at noon.

Using Saintsbury's terminology, we could then identify the last foot of the line as an "anapaestic substitution," but this scansion would tend to deemphasize the caesura imposed by the comma in the middle of the line. Given that the comma also marks the end of a phrasal pattern repeated in

the second half of the line, it is more helpful to think about how the meter is manipulated to create a rhythmically symmetrical line, a line in which language and rhythm correspond as closely as possible. The comma enforces a syntactic break that makes reading “-rise, stead-” as constituent parts of a single foot feel peculiarly unnatural, even if we insist on the metrical foot as nothing more than a descriptive fiction. The syntactic break produces the symmetry of the second line in the stanza and establishes a grammatical and rhythmic structure that will be repeated in the fourth line: “And saving measure, and saving rhyme.”

Because it is a structural device used in a systematic way to mark these lines’ division into rhythmic units larger than a foot but smaller than a whole line, the grammatical and rhythmic complex signaled by the comma may more accurately be described as a “caesura” than with the more general term, “pause.” Because Meynell’s formulation of the laws of verse values precedent and convention as the manifestations of a poem’s participation in a larger poetic culture, the way we choose to scan lines like “Steady at sunrise, steady at noon” reveals, not an occasional irregularity in Meynell’s versification, but her poem’s allusions to precursor texts. Thus, the unstressed syllable preceding the punctuated break in this line and in “And saving measure, and saving rhyme” recalls the feminine caesura as it appears from time to time in Shakespeare’s dramatic verse.

In his *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art* (1988), George T. Wright produces a number of examples of the “more than sixteen hundred lines with an extra syllable before a midline pause” (165), among them:

• / • / • • / • / • /
 Must I | remember: || why, she | would hang | on him (*Hamlet* 1.2.143)

and

• / • / • • / • / • /
 That my | youth suffer’d. || My sto | ry be | ing done (*Othello* 1.3.158).

In these examples, as in Meynell's line, the unstressed syllable functions like a feminine line-ending, and, like a feminine ending, it introduces to the line an extra syllable that seems to belong to the last foot before the break. This kind of caesura has sometimes been called an "epic" caesura after nineteenth-century statistical analyses of Old French epic and lyric poems determined that the former allow for an extrametrical syllable before the mid-line caesura and the latter do not. Though these conclusions have been called into question by modern scholarship, the term remains and is the one Wright uses to describe the kind of break we may observe in Meynell's line. Looking at the unstressed syllable in the middle of the line this way helps us to hear the echoes of the wide range of technical influences resounding through Meynell's work, but, more immediately, it allows us to see the third foot of the line as an inversion parallel to the first foot. The two inversions generate the distinctive rhythmic character of the line in the form of two of Keppel-Jones's "choriambs." By means of the technical variations allowed by convention and precedent, Meynell's poem generates a rhythm different enough from the normative iambic tetrameters of the first half of the poem to emphasize the conceptual shift effected by the poem's encounter with the threshing machine as a metonym for industrialization. The grammatical and rhythmic parallels of the line merge in recognition of the threshing machine as operating within the context of something very different from the organic patterns of traditional agricultural labor. It repeats its functions in cycles, at sunrise and at noon, over and over, just as the line cycles through its distinctive rhythmic figure twice.

As we have noticed, the grammatical and rhythmic repetition of "Steady at sunrise, steady at noon" hinges on a feminine caesura that divides the line in cyclic halves, and this hemistichal pattern reiterates in the fourth line of the same stanza. Observing the comma in the middle of this line as the marker of a feminine caesura, we may scan the line thus:

• / • / • • / • /
And sav- | ing measure, || and sav- | ing rhyme.

This line avoids metrical inversions and, aside from its extrametrical syllable before the caesura, conforms much more closely to the iambic paradigm than does the stanza's second line. The parallels between these lines depend in part on their repetition of key words—"steady" and "saving," respectively—and phrasal patterns, but they also share an important rhythmic parallel. Though the fourth line employs no inverted feet, its extra syllable mid-line effects an echo of the choriambic rhythms in the second line. We can hear the same swinging cadence of "Steady at sunrise" in "measure, and saving" as the two halves of the fourth line cleave together. In the two metrical stresses separated by two unstressed syllables, we can hear the poem's rhythmic formula for the Industrial Revolution contrasting to the normative paradigm it assigns to manual labor.

It is tempting to imagine that the choriambic rhythms of these lines are somehow more like the spinning wheels and chug-chugging of a steam-driven thresher than the movements of human bodies pounding the ground with flails. But we might just as easily say that a choriamb seems to evoke the arc of a threshing flail swung down and across the body. Rather, the rhythms of these lines with their odd extra syllables represent a contrast, an antithesis that necessitates a reconfiguration of the poem's metrical paradigm in the same way that the poem's speaker reconfigures her concept of what makes agricultural labor beautiful to accommodate the threshing machine.

The poem changes; it grows and becomes more complex as it turns to face the threshing machine and deals with this strange disruption by reinterpreting its own language and poetic conventions. The first half of the poem establishes a metrical thesis for its presentation of the cultural significance of manual threshing. The third stanza introduces a metrical and conceptual antithesis in the form of the choriambic movements of the threshing machine. The final stanza

then is left with the job of synthesizing past and present, manual and industrial, form and content.

The repetition of the word “Hercules” in the last stanza emblemizes the synthesis at which the poem aims. Assigned two contrasting metrical functions, the word serves as a token of the speaker’s coming to grips with the threshing machine’s implications and of the poem’s integration of rhythmic disruption into an aesthetic whole. Like “measure” and “sunrise” in the third stanza, the first iteration of “Hercules” introduces an extra unstressed syllable to a line broken in half by a punctuated caesura:

• / •• / • / • /
Save Her- | cules’ arm”; || his grave | decrees.

In this line, a stress falls on the last syllable before the caesura. The resultant masculine caesura thus differs significantly from the feminine caesurae we have observed in the third stanza while still echoing the hemistichal pattern of “Steady at sunrise, steady at noon” and “And saving measure, and saving rhyme.” Rather than falling at the end of the first hemistich, the extra syllable occurs before the stress in the second foot, substituting, as Saintsbury would describe it, an anapest for an iamb. Owing to the metrical function of the word “Hercules,” this line is the only one in “The Threshing Machine” to incorporate an extrametrical syllable that cannot be accounted for as part of a feminine caesura or by the conventions of poetic elision. The first iteration of the word “Hercules” is a metrical anomaly but one for which the poem has fashioned its own precedent from the hemistichal lines of the third stanza. It may seem like a small thing, but the single extrametrical syllable in “Hercules” demonstrates how the laws of verse provide a context for reading metrical disruptions and a mechanism for developing new precedents within the framework of convention.

The first iteration of “Hercules” paradoxically contributes to the poem’s close observation of the laws of the verse by introducing a metrical anomaly, but the anomaly exists for the purpose of being reconciled to the laws exemplified by the poem’s iambic paradigm. “Hercules” must be brought back into the fold, but this reconciliation is a process that the whole poem undergoes symbolized in a single name. As the poem works toward a rhythm that more and more closely adheres to the paradigm of its first line, an important moment in this transformative process occurs at the end of the line immediately following that in which “Hercules” first appears. The doubled unstresses that we have observed in all of the poem’s hemistichal lines recur here, this time balanced by two contiguous stressed syllables:

• / • / • • / / /
Curse wheel and steam. As the wheels ran.

The pattern in the last four syllables of this line is significantly less common than the various configurations of inverted feet but a recognized permutation of iambic meters nonetheless. Wary, as always, of the Greek-to-English analogy traditionally used for naming prosodic units and unsure of the mechanism by which this four-syllable pattern comes into existence, Bridges notes:

It is common in Milton’s early verse, which is much influenced by the verse of Shakespeare’s first style; and he always made use of it. Whatever the account may be, it is pleasant to the ear in the smoothest verse, and is so, no doubt, by a kind of compensation in it. (71)

Thinking of it, like the choriamb, as a single four-syllable unit occupying the time and function of two feet, Keppel-Jones calls it a “minor ionic” and argues that it “is perceived as a single whole, a kind of double iamb, with a pair of subordinate syllables introducing a pair of beat-syllables, the whole then being identified as a double foot” (77). In Meynell’s poem, the figure continues a project of using recognizable, conventional permutations of the iambic norm to achieve a distinct and contrasting rhythm.

Situating the words “As” and “the” before a noun and verb that direct rhythmic emphasis to the end of the line echoes the contiguous unstresses in the hemistichal lines preceding it. Unlike the first iteration of “Hercules,” the two unstresses in the antepenultimate line of “The Threshing Machine” point back to a precedent established in the choriambic rhythms of “Steady at sunrise, steady at noon” and continued with the feminine caesura in “And saving measure, and saving rhyme” and the extrametrical syllable in the first appearance of “Hercules.” Referencing this precedent in the unstressed syllables of “As the wheels ran,” the meter of Meynell’s poem accomplishes a transition to its last two lines where the theoretical iambic paradigm is reestablished without inversions, substitutions, or extra syllables:

• / • / • / • /
I saw the other strength of man,

• / • / • / • /
I knew the brain of Hercules.

The last word in the poem maintains the stress pattern of the iambic paradigm by altering the metrical function of the single word “Hercules” from what it had been in its first iteration.

In the first instance, “Hercules” introduces an extra syllable to the line. With, as Hollander notes, “the normal iambic option for trisyllables,” a word like “Hercules,” which is normally pronounced with a stress on the first syllable, may be stressed in the context of a line of verse, thus: / • • or / • / (54). The second scansion describes what Bridges sometimes calls a “conventional accent” or stress, one that “does not occur in the speech but in the metre, and has to be imagined because the metre suggests or requires it” (88).¹⁷ Metrists following Otto Jespersen’s 1900 formulation of the “relative stress principle” have often described this phenomenon as an instance of “promotion.” In *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (1982), Derek Attridge provides a useful definition of the idea in the form of a “Promotion Rule” by which “an unstressed syllable may realize a beat when it occurs between two unstressed syllables, or with a

line-boundary on one side and an unstressed syllable on the other” (167). Attridge quotes from *Paradise Lost* by way of example:

• / • / • / • / • /
Here swallowed up in endless misery. (I. 142)

In this illustration, the last syllable of “misery,” though unstressed in ordinary speech, is so positioned as to occupy the place of a metrical beat and tends, thus, to be charged with a greater rhythmic prominence. Whether “conventional” or “promoted,” the result is a lexically unstressed syllable that functions as a metrical beat, and this is precisely what we may observe in the last line of Meynell’s poem. As “Hercules” morphs in its metrical role from, in the first instance, part of an anapestic substitution to, in the second instance, two metrical beats with the promoted syllable necessary for the completion of a masculine rhyme with “decrees,” we may observe a token of the poem’s change and growth. As the stress contour of a single word changes to accommodate developments in the poem’s rhythmic structure, so the poem’s tone and imagery change to accommodate the steam-driven thresher and the industrial world it represents as sources of poetic inspiration.

Analyzing the meter of “The Threshing Machine” allows us to see one instance of Meynell’s mature verse achieving one of its most consistently validated aesthetic goals—a symbiotic relationship between words and the prosodic systems by which they are organized. Verse form, as Meynell exploits its potential in the “The Threshing Machine,” serves as neither a mere temporal vehicle for language nor an expressional body, the outgrowth of something that the poem’s form contains, but another plane of signification. Through a careful observance—and reinterpretation—of the laws of verse as Meynell would come to understand them, “The Threshing Machine” directs the reader’s attention to that same multi-dimensional space occupied by Patmore’s *The Unknown Eros*. Like her allusions to and revisions of scripture and aesthetic

discourses, Meynell's meter simultaneously draws on the power of canonical poetry and pushes against the formal constraints that canonicity itself demands.

Additionally, reviewing the metrical theories that best describe Meynell's practice provides us with a convenient vocabulary for describing her techniques. Though some of these prosodies, like Wright's or Keppel-Jones's, do not belong to the historical period that Meynell shares with Bridges and Saintsbury, they nonetheless describe the poetry that was clearly influencing Meynell's technical procedures in terminology that she would have understood. Rather than positing the "ahistorical grammar for metrical analysis" that Prins shies from, calling into service more recent prosodic surveys can provide us with more and fuller examples of the same technical variations catalogued and explicated by Bridges and Saintsbury—so long as we bear firmly in mind the points where more recent prosodies diverge in analytic or theoretical approach from the commentary on prosodic convention to be observed in Meynell's practice.

It is important to note that Keppel-Jones and Wright share the distinction of employing a system of scansion that corresponds substantially to that used by Saintsbury and Bridges. Hollander and Attridge, on the other hand, sometimes depart from these more traditional methodologies in favor of systems derived from the academic study of linguistics. All of the prosodists in question, old and new, each essentially posits an "ahistorical grammar for metrical analysis," but those grammars are the outward expression of theories that attempt to explain, more-or-less scientifically, what meter is and how it works. By contrast, Meynell, whenever she discusses meter explicitly, presents it as an object of almost mystical veneration. Her engagement with the linguistic mechanisms that constitute meter end in recognition of and submission to the laws of verse. Thus, by employing the vocabulary that she would have understood for describing her own verse forms coupled with the latter-day observations that can sometimes be helpful for understanding that vocabulary more completely, we can arrive at an

idea of what the laws of verse meant for Meynell as they evolve over the historical period in which her poetry was being written and published. To the extent that all of these prosodies help to reveal the features that Meynell's poetry shares with Shakespeare, Milton, and, as we shall see, poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson, they will provide us with the apparatus that we need to understand the radical shift in aesthetic that Meynell's poetry undergoes as it crosses over from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Notes

⁶ Drinkwater cites Andrew Marvell's "An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return to Ireland," (57) first printed in a 1681 collection and possibly written as early as 1650. The quoted line refers to King Charles's ascent to the chopping block where he would be beheaded at the urging of the revolutionary forces assembled to overthrow the monarchy in the English Civil War. By means of allusion, Drinkwater rather subtly evokes the familiar narrative of Meynell as one among a class of the last traditionalists falling before the growing momentum of literary revolution.

⁷ In addition to experimental meters like the Virgilian hexameters of Clough and the accentual meters of Hopkins, Victorian poets routinely employed a much wider variety of meters than did either their predecessors in the eighteenth century or their successors in the twentieth who, after the widespread adoption of free verse as a recognized mode of poetic composition, would tend to prefer variations on blank verse and other iambics when writing in meter. As Prins notes in an essay on "Victorian meters,"

In Victorian poetry, we see a proliferation of poetic forms, departing from eighteenth-century heroic couplets and neoclassical odes, and further developing the Romantic revival of ballads, sonnets, and blank verse into increasingly refined and rarefied metrical experiments. (89)

These experiments would include the Sapphic stanzas employed by Hardy and Swinburne, the quantitative meters constructed by Bridges on models derived from Greek and Latin poetry, and the anapestic meters of Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" or Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break."

⁸ For example, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (*King James Version*, 1 Cor. 7.1-2) and "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (8-9).

⁹ To quote a footnote in a footnote, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* gives this at line 41 of "Kubla Khan": "Apparently a reminiscence of *Paradise Lost* 4.280-82: 'Where Abassin Kings their issue guard / Mount Amara (though this by some supposed / True Paradise) under the Ethiop line'" (Greenblatt 448).

¹⁰ As Badeni notes, Meynell's "early poems differ from all that came afterwards in being much more personal; they reflect her life, her heart can here be seen, and it was never so again; her later poems were more intellectual than emotional, born of an idea rather than a feeling" (53). The focus on processes of solitary intellection and the experience of emotion in *Preludes* is due in part to their taking as models the poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others of the Romantic movement. Meynell's engagement with her Romantic predecessors is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

¹¹ In particular, "strict syllabic integrity" precludes the use of extrametrical, unstressed syllables in the middle of the line. In *Preludes*, Meynell, following the practice of Wordsworth and Coleridge, had sometimes allowed her meters this liberty. The importance of this practice to Romantic prosody is mentioned briefly in discussion of the second half of "The Threshing Machine" and in more detail in the next chapter.

¹² Although Christopher Smart's eighteenth-century *Jubilate Agno*, with its organization into incantatory, non-metrical antiphons is sometimes held up as a kind of proto-free verse, and though Matthew Arnold and Walt Whitman were both experimenting with unconventional ways of organizing poetic rhythms throughout the nineteenth century, the aesthetics of free verse would only come to be a significant force in poetry and free verse would only begin to be practiced widely right around the turn of the century in the works of the first generation of Modernists—Eliot, Pound, H.D. and the others. This is, of course, the same historical moment when Meynell's first volumes of poetry after *Preludes* were first appearing in print.

¹³ Pound's 1913 manifesto, "Imagisme," provides one of the most blunt assessments of traditional metrical composition, arguing that the free verse he and the other Imagists were writing was composed "in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (210).

¹⁴ Meynell's metrical handling of both "rhythm" and "visible" applies the same phonetic principle, but coincidentally enough, the poem printed facing "The Threshing Machine" in the *Complete Edition* provides even more convincing evidence that Meynell's meters observe much the same accounting of syllables as Bridges observes in Milton. "Time's Reversals" employs a complex stanza pattern and a full range of metrical inversions, but its seventh line is one of only two to present even the possibility of an extrametrical syllable: "Impossible things that Nature suffers not." Having observed the metrical accounting of *-ible* in "The Threshing Machine," we can see how this line functions as an iteration of the poem's normative, iambic pentameter paradigm—a line of ten syllables beginning with an unstressed syllable and alternating regularly thereafter. The other instance of a potential extrametrical syllable comes with "offering" in the line immediately preceding: "Time soon will promise, threaten, offering me." But this word, too, is covered by Bridges's tables of Miltonic elisions, under the "Rule of R": "If two unstressed vowels be separated by *r* there may be 'elision'; that is, the two syllables may count for one, the syllabic loss falling on the first of the two" (29). The pronunciation described by Bridges's rule would be like "off'ring." As the discussion to follow will explain, it is important to bear in mind that what Bridges describes as "Rules" are, in fact, options available to a poet writing meters like Milton, and a word like "offering" might have a different function in a different metrical context.

¹⁵ This and the scansion of metrical lines throughout the current study employ the notation used by John Hollander in *Vision and Resonance* where [•] indicates an unstressed syllable and [/] a stressed one. Hollander's notation avoids some of the ambiguities resulting from the traditional use of the breve to indicate unstressed syllables. Hollander's symbol for unstressed syllables is, moreover, better represented in modern digital typefaces, which do not, as a rule, contain anything like the large breve used for scanning in older texts. The most common alternative to the traditional breve for indicating unstressed syllables is a lower-case "x." This is the notation used throughout *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), but the "x" notation has its shortcomings as well in being somewhat counterintuitive. "X," after all, commonly functions as an emphatic marker, like the symbol for buried treasure on a pirate's map.

¹⁶ Keppel-Jones's terminology is susceptible to the objection that "choriamb," in the classical prosodies from which the term is derived, properly refers to the metrical foot of which choriambic meters would be constructed. Keppel-Jones uses the term in a highly specific and idiosyncratic sense to mean a particular kind of variation in iambic meters. The term is, nonetheless, convenient for identifying this metrical phenomenon concisely and unambiguously. As a kind of shorthand, Keppel-Jones's term dispenses with the qualifications and explanations sometimes necessary with the language of "inverted" feet favored by Bridges, further discussed in the following paragraph.

¹⁷ We may observe another instance of promotion or conventional stress in the second line of "The Threshing Machine": "Young villagers beneath the trees." The last syllable of "villagers" takes on the role of a metrical stress because it falls between two unstressed syllables.

CHAPTER 2. THE EXPRESSIVE AND THE FEMININE: MEYNELL'S EARLY POETRY

For today's reader, who will encounter the majority of Meynell's poems only in long out-of-print collected editions, the publication history of her work in verse can be confusing. Issued in 1923, a year after her death, the *Complete Edition* of Meynell's poems brings together several slimmer volumes of verse produced over the course of a long and various literary career. A whole series of collected editions was being published more or less concurrently with the smaller, independent volumes which they would eventually replace. In addition to the volumes put out by major publishers Henry S. King, John Lane, and Burnes and Oates, Meynell arranged to have two collections of poems privately printed and another published in an extremely short run through the art press operated by her son, Francis. These minor editions generally contain about half the selections of a volume to appear shortly thereafter and were produced for a limited distribution. The variety of editions in which Meynell's verse appears testifies to her active participation in the publishing industry centered in London at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries but can also serve as a distraction from the reception history of Meynell's poetry, which is embodied substantially in only four separate volumes. Because the influence exerted by the first of these has been so great on both the canon of Meynell's verse and the critical discourse dedicated to it, the stark shift in aesthetic priorities that Meynell's later verse shares with the most influential writing of the twentieth century becomes almost entirely occluded in commentaries that do not account for the narrative of stylistic evolution recorded in Meynell's four major volumes.

A "Bibliographical Note" printed immediately after the dedication to the *Complete Edition* fixes the list of Meynell's major volumes. The "Bibliographical Note" simplifies a complex publishing history, but it accurately represents the way in which Meynell's poems were

consumed by the majority of readers, including critics, who encountered them anywhere other than, one at a time, in newspapers and magazines. The “Bibliographical Note” establishes this list of volumes: *Preludes*, published in 1875; four distinct editions of her collected poems between 1893 and 1919; *Later Poems*, published in 1901; *A Father of Women, and Other Poems*, published in 1918; and *Last Poems*, published in 1923. Each of the collected editions absorbs, with some revisions and omissions, the one before and any independent volumes issued since the last collected edition. Of the four independent volumes listed above, none reprints poems from any of the others. Thus, these four volumes contain all of Meynell’s poems at four distinct stages in her career: *Preludes*, *Later Poems*, *A Father of Women*, and *Last Poems*.

Despite the totalizing implications of its title, the *Complete Edition* of Meynell’s poems is complete only in that it contains the poems Meynell wished to preserve. Some of her earliest efforts, particularly those from the first volume, *Preludes*, do not share space with the accomplishments of her artistic maturity. The memoir of Meynell’s daughter, Viola, recounts how the legacy of *Preludes* remains in the later collected editions due only to the urging of those nearest the poet. “For in maturity,” Viola writes, “she liked in her own work only that which had more compact thought in it; her mind used itself later on harder thoughts in her poetry, as it had always been apt to do in her prose” (53). Viola recalls only one poem from that early period, “Renouncement,” as “never specifically banned in my hearing.” This one exception—which, interestingly, had not been printed with the rest of her early poems in *Preludes*—seems to have met Meynell’s poetic standard. “Not one of the other early poems,” according to Viola, “would have been even preserved if she could have had her way.” Reprinting, in its first pages, a selection from *Preludes*, the *Complete Edition* gives the reader a sense of how Meynell’s poetry evolved over the course of her long life, but it also tends to obscure just how significant was the

shift in style and substance from the poetry Meynell had written as a young Victorian to that which appeared in her three small volumes of the twentieth century.

Meynell's latest poems couple what Viola calls "compact" and "harder thoughts" with, as we have seen by analyzing the meter of "The Threshing Machine," a mastery of the conventions of literary prosody. The ideal poetic style, for Meynell, reaches toward what Badeni describes as "greater economy of words, greater discipline in her use of language, leaner and sparer flesh upon the bones of her thought" (52-53). Meynell's poems after *Preludes* observe, with a much greater precision, the technical conventions that she would come to formulate as the laws of verse. In addition, these later poems are more complex with regard to their subject matter and thematics, and they are more nuanced in their navigation of artistic traditions. But if Meynell saw in her *Preludes* something incomplete, something premature with regard to the body of work she wished to leave behind her, she would also have been able to observe, from their beginning, the changes in taste that would make the mid-Victorian aesthetic of her first volume seem the ghost of a bygone age.

As indicated by the notice that selections from *Preludes* received from Ruskin, Meynell's poems have the odd fate of having early become a part of the Victorian literary establishment and then almost to have disappeared under the sheer mass of prose journalism and scholarship that she accumulated over the middle decades of her life. When poetry again assumes a prominent place in her work, the literary marketplace has entered one of its most hotly contested phases. Aestheticism and the Decadence had issued challenges to the art-world that Modernism was shortly to take up and reformulate in the pages of *BLAST* and elsewhere. And, despite an aesthetic that sympathizes with the preoccupations of twentieth-century poetry in many and surprising ways, Meynell's genteel reputation and the formal idiom of her verse has meant, from that time to this, that she is routinely identified with a period in literature and in her career from

which she seems to have shied. Because the body of her published work in verse comprises fewer than a hundred and fifty poems and because a preference for full rhymes, iambic meters, and, sometimes, formal diction marks her work as out-of-sync with the avant-garde writing that would come to dominate critical accounts of poetry at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, Meynell was, for a long time, relegated to the status of minor poet, a figure of limited interest whose poems, however complex and nuanced, were at home neither with the literature of the late Victorian age nor with that of an emerging Modernism. Such a fate is all the more surprising for a poet who was, for a time, accounted a major literary voice among her contemporaries, and, as later commentators have noted, a potential nominee for the post of Poet Laureate after Tennyson.

At the time of Tennyson's death in 1892, Meynell's reputation as a poet would have been based entirely on the early *Preludes* and, the next year, on seven poems appended to the first collected edition of her poetry. A note printed after the last selection in *Poems* (1893) reads:

Most of these verses were written in the author's early youth, and were published in a volume called 'Preludes,' now out of print. Other poems, representing the same transitory and early thoughts, which appeared in that volume, are now omitted as cruder than the rest; and their place is taken by the few verses written in maturer years. (73)

The passive verbs in this brief notice misdirect the reader's attention. They imply the presence of some impartial editor with impartial criteria for judging the crudeness of the poet's "early and transitory thoughts." In fact, Meynell exercised authorial control over most aspects of her books' production, from content to type and binding, but the submissive role she suggests for herself here is an integral part of the sometimes paradoxical public persona Meynell cultivated for herself. To Eliot, reviewing her prose in *The Egoist* in 1918, she is Mrs. Meynell; hers is the work of a well-read dilettante, "But in its peculiar anti-style, Mrs. Meynell's book, like all her books, is extremely well-written, and she can incidentally pick out good bits from authors"

(Apteryx 61).¹⁸ She is Mrs. Meynell on the title page of a book-length guide to the collected works of John Ruskin (1900). She is Mrs. Meynell in the notices and reviews and, for most of her readers, always would be.

Mrs. Meynell managed to write and to assist her husband in running several magazines. She became the focus of sometimes unsettlingly ardent devotion from the male poets with whom she was most closely associated: Patmore, Francis Thompson, and George Meredith. And she did it all while raising a family and keeping house. These are the reasons for which she is so often figured in terms derived from Patmore's most famous poem. In her study of the *Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, Talia Schaffer points to this persona as a major factor in Meynell's disappearance from the canon:

The life her readers wanted her to live was, most often, the Angel in the House of Victorian legend. The term conveys Meynell's Catholic piety, her semidivine status as the "muse" to her poet admirers, her apparent dissociation from mundane concerns, and her role as the presiding genius of the home. (163)¹⁹

The persona suggested by Meynell's prose and early poetry would come to dominate accounts of her place in literature. For Schaffer, "The very ladylikeness that had made her so revered at the turn of the century ironically marked her as too hopelessly genteel for the modernist generation. She sank under the weight of her own success" (161).

So, when her name was brought forward as successor to Tennyson's, it carried with it a freight of associations that all but obscured anything she might actually have committed to verse. After detailing her accomplishments as a journalist and critic in a letter to the editor of the *Saturday Review* for October 21, 1895, her friend and mentor Patmore pays her the dubious compliment of remarking, "No competent judge of poetry will maintain that any woman has ever surpassed, if any woman has ever equaled, Mrs. Meynell as a poetess" (rpt. in *Courage in Politics* 202). She is recommended on the basis of her appeal to "men among my friends and

acquaintance whose taste is of the rarest and finest.” These praises echo remarks in Patmore’s earlier essay on “Mrs. Meynell’s Poems” which give a fair indication of how seriously a female Poet Laureate might have expected to be taken; the poems

breathe in every line the purest *spirit* of womanhood, yet they have not sufficient force of that *ultimate* womanhood, the expressional *body*, to give her the right to be counted among classical poets. No woman ever has been such a poet: probably no woman ever will be. (*Religio Poetae* 202).

Patmore goes on to speak of Meynell’s “virile intellect” and to praise her poems as “full of delicate and original thought, for the most part faultlessly expressed” (202) but insists that “It does not strain to rival man’s work” (203). This is Mrs. Meynell: too womanly and not womanly enough. She possesses an almost threatening erudition and talent for verse but lacks the ability or the strength to build up coherent structures from well-chosen words.

At the end of her life, when the poems of her maturity could be seen contrasting with her earlier work, G. K. Chesterton would challenge Patmore’s assertions but without challenging Patmore’s gender dynamic:

She never wrote a line, or even a word, that does not stand like the rib of a strong intellectual structure; a thing with the bones of thought in it. There is a melancholy amusement in remembering how indignant she would have been that this merit should be called masculine. Nobody could possibly call her masculine, yet it was exactly the sort of merit that she had. (3)

One account of Meynell’s artistic development, then, would seem to have it that she moved from a feminine to a masculine style. Another might begin by noting how the familiar tropes of Victorian lyric—graveside laments for dead lovers, for instance—are replaced in the later poems with, among other things, a conscious political edge and a more thorough engagement with religion. But these two statements, Patmore’s and Chesterton’s, make clear that, whatever her artistic development, Meynell would never get very far in the course of her own life from the gendered expectations that have colored the public reception of her work.

Patmore's recommendation for the Laureateship on the basis of his intimate friend's work as a journalist and critic "with a subsidiary or accidental claim of being a poet" (*Courage in Politics* 201) strikes one as disingenuous. The entire letter is steeped in a kind of disgruntled verbal irony from a writer with his own considerable reputation and who may well have thought himself the more deserving candidate; in that respect, it probably makes more interesting reading as an exercise in rhetoric than as a testimony to Meynell's talents. Nonetheless, Patmore's letter bears witness to the currency of Meynell's name and reputation in the contemporary literary marketplace and to the typology of her Victorian womanliness already in full-flower in 1895, but as Meynell aged, as poems accumulated in the back pages of her collected editions before the publication of only her second wholly new volume in 1901, another typology begins to haunt criticisms of her work. The feminine angel is displaced by an aristocrat of letters. We have seen Meynell the aristocrat hovering over summaries of the "elegance," "perfection," and "classic severity" of her verse in the criticism of Archer, Drinkwater, and, much later, Schlack. For critics with different analytical preoccupations, however, this elegance and perfection become signs of a quality much more difficult to approach objectively, a quality which has done its share to shift the focus of discourse on Meynell from her art to a type that she seems to represent.

In 1912, before the publication of Meynell's third and fourth independent volumes, the rhetoric for talking about Meynell mutates into a particularly overwrought species of hagiography in Katherine Brégy's *The Poets' Chantry*. Brégy's book collects essays originally written for the *Catholic World* magazine, and her primary interest in Meynell is as a Catholic writer. Brégy emphasizes, in particular, the religiosity of Meynell's poetry, arguing that "She has elected all along to speak in a deliberately vestal and cloistral voice" (159), but even as Brégy reaches for an image of Meynell as a poet-saint, the personal and literary characteristics that she identifies echo the language that dominates most introductions to Meynell's work. Like Schlack,

who finds Meynell's verse "scrupulous" and "austere," like the "aristocratic calm" Drinkwater notes or the "unobtrusive grace" of which Archer writes, Brégy identifies the dominant impression of Meynell's poetry as a kind of intellectual purity and precision and connects this explicitly with the religious faith that informs so much of Meynell's writing. For Brégy, Meynell has become a bodiless intellectual force calling out from the empyrean for the benefit of our deepest spiritual selves:

Remote as the mountain snow, yet near as the wind upon our face, is her song. It is seldom sensuous, the very imagery being evoked, in the main, from the intellectual vision; and there are moments when "amorous thought has sucked pale Fancy's breath." Yet these tremble with a deep and impassioned emotion—emotion which seems aloof because it is so interior. (159-160)²⁰

Brégy's characterization demonstrates two tendencies of early criticism on Meynell: it venerates her almost-mythical genius and, in the same breath, obliquely criticizes an apparent lack of human feeling in her poetry. Requiring a remedy for the incongruities she notices in her portrait of a great soul, Brégy settles on language that presents Meynell in deific terms. She is elegant, but she is also powerful. The texts that she creates from nothing range round about her like a heavenly host. Her poetry "is definite but intangible. It creates an atmosphere of angelically clear thought, of rare delicacies of feeling, and speaks with perfect reticence" (164). Brégy is unconcerned to dissociate Meynell's poetry from Meynell's personality. In both may be observed "her sympathy and her eternal rightness of vision. . . in which we rejoice, humbled" (168). For Brégy, Meynell becomes an object of veneration because of the moral goodness that makes her poetry possible in the first place.

Though Meynell's commentators, on the whole, have not shared the theological inflections of Brégy's assessment, they do, as we have seen, locate the source of Meynell's artistic agency in a complex of stereotypes revolving around the poet's presumed femininity, delicacy, and moral rectitude. In the critical discourse on Meynell, these characterizations are

frequently supported by reference to the early poems that both set the conditions for reception of Meynell's later work in verse and continue to dominate a body of work that, in the *Complete Edition*, opens with an extensive selection of just those early poems from which, as Viola Meynell reports, the poet had desired to distance herself. We must, therefore, look to *Preludes* to understand what Meynell's later poetry is reacting against, and we can find the root of her desire to reinvent her art most particularly in the poems she chose explicitly to reject from the final canon constituted by the *Complete Edition* she would leave behind her.

Of the poems from *Preludes* by which the typology of Meynell's Victorian femininity and preciosity would have been inspired, "To the Beloved Dead: A Lament" exemplifies a set of stylistic and thematic tendencies purged away from the poet's later work. Excluded from the *Complete Edition*, "To the Beloved Dead" bears witness, in particular, to Meynell's inheritance from an earlier generation of Romantic poets. Though in a more modest register, "To the Beloved Dead" shares with major statements of the Romantic aesthetic by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats a preoccupation with emotion and introspection, and like its Romantic precursor texts, identifies the climactic moment of poetic introspection as when private emotion delivers the subject to a more comprehensive understanding of his or her place in the universe. The technical features distinguishing Meynell's statement of a Romantic theory of mind from most of her later work are more than merely incidental to the realities of a Victorian literary climate in which the Romantics were still regarded as the deliverers of English poetry from the bondage of eighteenth-century wit and its lockstep couplets; rather, they signal a sympathy with the Romantic aesthetic that extends to the young poet's whole art. The conventions to which Meynell adheres in constructing the meters of "To the Beloved Dead" and the diction she assumes provide reference points for a reading of this early stage in her career, a formal barometer for assessing Meynell's engagement with literary culture just as her subsequent

revisions and reinterpretations of poetic convention point to what she perceived as the shortcomings of the Romantic aesthetic in her later work. In this sense, the trajectory of Meynell's artistic development originates in a poem Meynell would reject in later formulations of her stylistic persona.

"To the Beloved Dead" develops a theme observable elsewhere in *Preludes* and not uncommon in nineteenth-century poetry—a meditation on grief and mourning that, conducted at graveside, turns eventually to an almost grotesque fascination with the figure of the body in the grave. Throughout the poem, the speaker will struggle to reconcile the metaphor she establishes in the first stanza of the poem with the disturbing corporeality of the beloved's dead body. Like all the other poems in *Preludes*, the first word of Meynell's lament is printed in small capitals, a typographical detail that, though primarily decorative, introduces some interesting prosodic complications to the poem:

BELOVED, thou art like a tune that idle fingers
 Play on a window-pane.
The time is there, the form of music lingers;
 But O thou sweetest strain,
Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain. (1-5)

The song that, here, is a sweet and strange reminder of the beloved's absence will, as the poem progresses, become a torment to the speaker. The song will fill the speaker's consciousness until she is crippled with grief and led, inexorably, to a life of waiting for a next life in which to rejoin the beloved, but the speaker's own song strikes an awkward note in its first measure, a note that reverberates through the whole poem and clashes with the aura of precision generated by those of Meynell's poems we have been examining.

The first word of this first stanza reappears in the lament's last stanza but with the addition of a grave accent instructing us to read the word's preterit ending as a full syllable: "Poor grave, poor lost belovèd" (26). In both instances, the word serves the same grammatical

function as a name identifying the addressee of the poem. If a grave accent were typographically incompatible with the rendering, in small capitals, of the first “Beloved”—in the same way, for instance, that diacritical marks have traditionally been omitted from capital letters in printed French—we might read both with the same number of syllables. The trisyllabic pronunciation of “beloved” is, for that matter, the first given in the *OED* and, as even a casual survey of metrical contexts reveals, the most common encountered in English verse.²¹ Reading “beloved” with three syllables in each of the instances where it occurs in Meynell’s poem suggests a scansion of the first line with six metrical stresses. With the stresses arranged as six iambic feet, the line scans thus:

• / • / • / • / • / •
 BELOV- | ED, thou | art like | a tune | that id- | le fingers.

But the rest of the poem follows a regular pattern in which each stanza begins and ends with a five-stress line—a pentameter—and each pentameter, except the last, is followed by a three-stress line—a trimeter. A six-stress line—an alexandrine—as the first line of a poem where there are no other alexandrines is out of place. It has no context in which to function as a marker of particular significance; the context has not been created. It cannot be a matter of improvisatory variations on a theme; there is no theme. It can serve only to muddle what Hollander calls the “metrical contract” in the moment of its enactment.

We may, instead, strive to scan the first line of the poem with the five stresses appropriate to its counterpart pentameters by reading “Beloved” as a disyllable and allowing the stress on “thou” to recede:

• / • • / • / • / • / •
 BELOVED, | thou art like | a tune | that id- | le fingers.

The resulting scansion better preserves the metrical contract governing the rest of the poem, but it still presents one small departure from an iambic norm—an extra unstressed syllable between the first two stresses. This departure is small but significant.

In the first place, the extra syllable establishes a kind of addendum to the metrical contract that will be invoked at several places further on in the poem. Unambiguous instances include the second stanza's

• / • / • / •• / • /
For his | own soul | is full | of it, so, | my Fair, (8)

with its extra syllable between “full” and “so,” and the extra syllable between “dawn” and “wild” in the fifth stanza's

• / • / •• / • / • /
At win- | dy dawn, | with a wild | heart beat- | ing time. (18)

The poem claims an extra syllable as an ordinary variation to its normative meter. Once we recognize this, we can read the first line of the poem in a way that is less pointlessly disruptive than an alexandrine would be, although such a scansion requires observing two different pronunciations for “beloved” despite the identical grammatical function of both instances and involves trying to settle a metrical stress on one of three words—“thou,” “art,” and “like”—for which there is very little to recommend one over the others for special prominence. Whether we read it as a pentameter or as an alexandrine, the line is rhythmically confusing and especially so at the beginning of the poem where no context guides our reading. Given the moral and aesthetic significance that Meynell would come to attach to strictly regulated meters in her later verse, it is not surprising that she would have found this poem less than representative of her work.

In addition to its significance for the rhythmic consistency of one poem, the extra syllable as a metrical variation performs another important function by gesturing toward the technical features of certain precursor texts. Though extra syllables will continue to appear in Meynell's

verses all the way through the *Last Poems* of 1922, the later work will use extrametrical syllables systematically—as a way, for instance, of marking the caesurae we have observed in “The Threshing Machine”—but even these instances will be very occasional exceptions to the rule of a prosodic program that observes very strict decorums with regard to the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables. In contrast to the incorporation of extrametrical syllables as structuring devices in the later poems, “To the Beloved Dead” employs them as routine variations, and, in so doing, exemplifies a characteristic feature of Romantic poetry that Saintsbury terms a “trisyllabic substitution.”

In the third volume of his *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (completed in 1910), Saintsbury identifies “the principle of free substitution of trisyllabic for disyllabic feet, in meters disyllabic in staple” (48) as a signal fact in “the mighty change which came upon English poetry about the meeting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (47). Recognition of the trisyllabic substitution’s special virtue, by an almost clandestine brotherhood of anti-establishment poets counting among its members William Blake and Robert Burns, comes to a crest in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a poem which, for Saintsbury, marks a sea-change in English literature. Saintsbury looks to the very first stanza of *The Ancient Mariner* for the examples that will inaugurate his extended discussion of the felicities of the trisyllabic substitution:

It is an ancient Mariner
And he stoppeth one of three.
“By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?” (1-4)

Though the first line of the stanza, and of the poem, would get along comfortably enough among more conventional iambic tetrameters, the second line introduces an extra syllable at its

beginning. Following that precedent, the third line introduces two additional unstressed syllables, in effect, using anapests to replace two of the iambs in the line:

• • / • / • / • • /
By thy long | grey beard | and glit- | tering eye.

Coleridge's meter allows for extra syllables in the line, echoing thereby the rhythms of the older folk ballads and even that of their ancestors in the alliterative and accentual verse tradition running from *Beowulf* to *Piers Ploughman*. But Coleridge's poem differs from these precursors, and from his own attempt at a purely accentual meter in *Christabel*, by admitting one, additional, unstressed syllable in any given foot rather than allowing an unregulated number of unstressed syllables to fall between the stresses. By echoing older, even ancient, and non-literary poetic technique while simultaneously introducing a principle that, from the 1798 publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's co-authored *Lyrical Ballads* onward, would have a profound influence on English poetry, the first stanza of *The Ancient Mariner* becomes, for Saintsbury, the very moment when a new era begins.

As a critical account current through most of the nineteenth century and apparent in Saintsbury's early twentieth-century prose has it, literature at the end of the eighteenth century turned to introspection, the supernatural, and nature-worship in response to neoclassical tastes for the rationality, proportion, and restraint described in Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* as the fundamental signs of the artist's engagement with the world around him. Pope draws an analogy between his own metrical practice and the structure of a Newtonian universe by arguing,

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
By the same laws which first herself ordained. (88-91)

Prosodically, the first Romantic generation breaks its ties with the age of Pope by breaking the rules of meter to admit anapests in place of iambs, not as occasional exceptions, but as regular

variations. In Saintsbury's account, the trisyllabic substitutions of *The Ancient Mariner* are at once the sign and the fact of a rule broken and thereby constitute "the match that kindled the torch of revived true English prosody, the knife that set the prisoner free, the mallet that knocked the block from the dog-shores and sent the ship careering into a sea hitherto silent, soon to be full of magical voices" (60-61). Whether or not we accept Saintsbury's subjective valuations of the trisyllabic substitution's power to free a poem from the bondage of monotonous regularity or to excite its spirit with the unexpected, the trisyllabic substitution presents an observable variant in iambic meters that increases in frequency from the beginnings of the Romantic movement.

And just to the extent that the trisyllabic substitution characterizes Romantic poetry, its presence in Meynell's poem signals that poem's aesthetic sympathies. Saintsbury's entire work is designed to show how prosody dwells at the heart of the poetic dialectic. Much more than the sum of a writer's technical choices or the generically appropriate vehicle for poetic ideas, prosody gives to the reader an accounting of a poem's engagement with prior texts. Prosody reflects a poem's artistic lineage, and, by observing the signs of that lineage, we can identify the points where a poem is interacting most closely with its models. It will not be surprising to find, then, in a poem with a Romantic prosodic heritage, images and themes that recall the preoccupations of Romantic poetry.

"To the Beloved Dead" is very different from the kind of poetry Meynell would write after the long hiatus following *Preludes*. Like the later poems, Meynell's lament employs a regular meter and a formal stanza pattern. Unlike the later poems, it admits a higher frequency of trisyllabic substitutions, but perhaps the most immediately visible difference between this poem and Meynell's later verse is the typographical marker of poetic elision staring back at the reader from the end of the first stanza: "Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain." Such an apostrophe would be at home in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—both the marker of an absent

consonant and the address to a figure incapable of physical response. Of the images graven on the urn, Keats's speaker predicts,

And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return. (38-40)

The transcription of the phonemic absences in "i' the" and "e'er" belongs to a formal idiom from which Meynell, along with most poets to write in the twentieth century, would distance herself. The legacy of these traditional contractions remains in certain places where Meynell's meters seem to call for the elision of, for example, the "e" in "the" before a word beginning in a vowel, but the visual manifestation of these elisions is wholly absent from her later work.

As we should expect from two poems that share the intimacies of a specialized language, both "To the Beloved Dead" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" share certain thematic concerns—chief among them, an intense preoccupation with the explicit representation of emotion. The primary activity of Meynell's graveside mourner is to catalogue the ways in which she is tortured by the absence of her beloved. Her inability to put the beloved out of mind drives her from monotony to exhaustion:

Oh, for a strain of thee from outer air!
Soul wearies soul, I find.
Of thee, thee, thee, I am mournfully aware,
—Contained in one poor mind,
Who wert in tune and time to every wind. (21-25)

The flat note struck by the off-rhyme in "wind" at the end of the stanza effectively joins the poem's prosodic structure to its narrative of emotional exhaustion. Having been unable or unwilling to arrive at the climactic rhyme in its penultimate stanza, the poem completes a narrative arc that is only as conclusive as the vague hope proffered in its last three lines:

As he that played that bootless tune may turn
And strike it on a lyre triumphantly,
I wait some future, all one lyre for thee.

As Meynell's mourner progresses through the stages of a private grief, so the viewer of Keats's Grecian urn uses his stanzas to relate phases in his emotional apprehension of the timeless truths the urn seems to represent. The function of the urn is the same as the function of the dead beloved: it provides the stimulus for a thoroughgoing emotional self-analysis. To the extent that this self-analysis is the subject of both poems as well as the motive force animating the speakers' structured representation of emotion, "To the Beloved Dead" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" epitomize the radical shift in aesthetic theory from the neoclassicism of the eighteenth century to what later generations would learn to call Romanticism. The shift is famously formulated in M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* which explains how, for the Romantics, "The paramount cause of poetry is . . . the impulse within the poet of feelings and desires seeking expression, or in the compulsion of the 'creative' imagination which, like God the creator, has its internal source of motion" (22).

But "To the Beloved Dead" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" share more than a preoccupation with the process of introspection; they share a metaphor. Both poems figure the process by which experience of the external world becomes private emotion and then poetic expression as soundless music. Silence issues from the pipers and the instruments limned on the surface of the Grecian urn, yet their music attends the meditations of Keats's speaker. And their music is the more beautiful for having no aural dimension:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone. (11-14)

Shared privately with the speaker and communicating powerful emotion to him, the urn's music typifies solitary intellection. For Meynell's speaker, on the other hand, soundless music replaces the body of the beloved, gone to earth. At first, the speaker carries the beloved's song with her as

a sentimental reminder, an intangible mourning brooch, but the grief it magnifies thrives until grief has consumed the speaker's emotional life. By the poem's third stanza, the song's grasp has extended from the realms of memory into the speaker's future:

Thou song of songs!—not music as before
Unto the outward ear;
My spirit sings thee inly evermore. (11-13)

Like the imaginary music generated by Keats's urn, the metaphor of the beloved as song puts forward a kind of art where emotion is both the subject and a central criterion of value.

Unlike the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," however, "To the Beloved Dead" figures emotional expression as a process synchronized to the movements of an empathetic natural world. The urn is a timeless reminder of the human search for ultimate answers, but the living world the urn creates and fills with music is entirely contained within the speaker. In Meynell's poem, the elements offer not only a pathetic reflection of the speaker's emotions but a chief set of metonyms for external reality. As her interior world is consumed by the music of grief, as she is progressively isolated in grief, she checks the sky for signs of weather. She turns for an instant to ascertain her position in a world that continues to move even as her body assumes a stylized posture of grief:

Thou silent song, thou ever voiceless rhyme,
Is there no pulse to move thee,
At windy dawn, with a wild heart beating time,
And falling tears above thee,
O music stifled from the ears that love thee?

Standing or kneeling at the beloved's graveside, her face turns so as to water his resting place with tears, and, just as she does, she remarks of dawn, almost incredulously, that it is windy. The wind motif, after having fallen away, picks up from the apostrophe at the end of the first stanza, which we have already noticed: "Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain." What, there, had been an expression of compassion for a body that, till recently, the speaker had been

accustomed to think of as susceptible to wind and rain is, here, a reminder of a world that, impossibly, continues to produce wind and rain despite the total end the beloved's death has seemed to represent. The life of the world is incompatible with the death of the beloved, and the speaker reconciles these primary facts by constructing a pathetic fallacy. Wind and rain mean nature mourning the beloved, and its grief is impossible to escape.

The penultimate stanza collapses all differentiation between the world and the beloved into a single figure of loss:

Of thee, thee, thee, I am mournfully aware,
—Contained in one poor mind,
Who wert in tune and time to every wind.

The wind and the beloved form a singularity in the speaker's memory. From hence, the wind is a sign with no referent. By losing her connection to the beloved, she loses the ability to recognize in the natural world any meaning. By saying goodbye to one, she is effectively saying goodbye to the other. In the last line of the stanza, the poem's principle motifs are brought together: the wind and music. To the extent that the poem looks to the natural world as a sympathetic participant in human emotion and as a source of poetic inspiration, the poem recalls that central Romantic symbol for the artist's mind, the Eolian harp, and Coleridge's poem about it.

Turning to that part of "The Eolian Harp" given special prominence on the page by its being set apart from the rest of the text as one short, self-contained stanza and encapsulating the ideas around which the poem moves, we may observe, lodged in the poem's very heart, another poetic contraction:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each, and God of All? (44-48)

It is not as if “o’er” and “e’er” and “i’ the” are integers in a secret code through which we might read some other theory of mind and affect than that offered by the poems’ less specialized vocabulary, but they are the outward signs of participation in a verse culture that accepts certain conventional deviations from standard orthography as legitimate means of manipulating the rhythmic structure of a line of poetry. These contractions belong to a specific register of poetic diction that later generations of poets would actively reject. To the extent that Meynell’s poem, like Keats’s or Coleridge’s, admits of these conventional contractions, it signals its adherence to a hierarchy of poetic values endorsed by the writers of the Romantic movement.

Chief among these values is an emphasis on the primacy of non-rational ways of knowing. Each of the three poems—Meynell’s lament, Keats’s ode, and Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp”—depicts the unfolding of complex emotions in time. They recall, thereby, Wordsworth’s definition of poetry, in his preface to the 1802 edition of the same watershed volume that first saw the publication of Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, as “emotion recollected in tranquility” (“Preface” 273). And each of the three poems figures the processing of these powerful emotions in the same way, as listening to a kind of imaginary music. Music is a particularly apt metaphor for Meynell’s speaker because, without any corporeal existence at all, it has the power to dominate her mind. Just as she cannot lose the memory of a tune, the memory of the beloved haunts her till she can think of nothing else.

In her very lack of perspective, in her fixation on the lover’s absence, she projects her thoughts into the future and imagines for herself a more perfect consummation with the beloved than was ever really possible in the past, saying, in the last stanza, “I burn/For some more vast To be” (26-7) and “I wait some future, all one lyre for thee” (30). Meynell’s speaker adopts, or she affirms, belief in a next life. The personal emotion she has experienced for the sake of the beloved leads her, through grief, to the recognition of a kind of spiritual truth. Belief in

resurrection or a next life, obviously enough, forms part of the creed Meynell publicly endorsed, first as an Anglican in her youth and then as a convert to Roman Catholicism, but the religious elements in this poem, as with most of the poems in *Preludes*, are subdued. For the speaker, what is much more important is her personal apprehension of a foundational myth for lyric poetry—that erotic love lasts forever. The movement from private grief to faith in love is like a religious conversion in that both processes begin with the interior experience of emotion and arrive at a greater sympathy with the vicissitudes of the universe.

For Keats's speaker, the private, aesthetic enjoyment of a decorated urn leads him through meditations on the value of human emotion to the totalizing, if perhaps ambiguous, dictum " 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). Summarizing a lengthy debate over an aphorism that may or may not have ironic value and that may or may not issue from the speaker or from the urn, Kenner has described the rhetorical gesture into which beauty and truth collapse as "almost intolerably enigmatic" (26). Whether we sympathize with Kenner or with any of the other critics involved in that debate, we can recognize in the aphorism the culminating point of the poem's movement from a private, emotional experience to a realization with universal implications. Whatever "Beauty" and "truth" and their relationship to one another might potentially be, they occupy a place in the speaker's meditations that clearly belongs to an attempt to synthesize the foregoing experiences in order to make them intelligible. Though the formula the speaker arrives at may not make sense to the reader, it means something to the speaker. If not, the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" does no more than satirize, in the darkest and most cynical way, the process of Romantic intellection that we have observed in Meynell's poem and in "The Eolian Harp."

By the last stanza of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats's speaker is no longer simply enjoying an exercise in imagination but has come to see the urn as an emblem of the affective

capacity shared by all people for all time. Like Meynell's speaker imagining "some more vast To be," Keats's speaker prepares himself for whatever it is that he will learn about "Beauty" and "truth" by fixing his mind on an image persisting into the future indefinitely: "When old age shall this generation waste,/Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe" (46-47). Ultimately, both Meynell's poem and Keats's reach toward an idea of emotion moving through an individual mind and putting it in communication with something greater than itself—the process exemplified by Coleridge's central metaphor. Coleridge's speaker shies immediately from the uncomfortable implications of his pantheistic statement, returning to earth and "pensive Sara" (1) in the last stanza:

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God. (49-52)

Even so, the idea of a single spirit uniting all intellects is clearly accorded pride of place in this poem as a major statement of a defining Romantic theme.

Its excision from the *Complete Edition* makes clear that Meynell did not regard "To the Beloved Dead" as equal to the best of her poems; nonetheless, this lyric of love and mourning, with its distinctly Romantic tendencies, epitomizes the features of most of the poems in *Preludes*. The first in the volume, "In Early Spring," uses the same meter as "To the Beloved Dead" to arrive in its last lines at the same familiar figure for the poet's art. Having gradually revealed herself as the lovelorn admirer of a poet absorbed in his creative meditations, the speaker asks a question and resigns herself to waiting:

Who shall foretell his songs, and who aspire
But to divine his lyre?
Sweet earth, we know thy dimmest mysteries,
But he is lord of his.

“To the Beloved Dead,” as a lament, depends on the physical distance between the speaker and her beloved, but the narrative structures of both poems run parallel. Lovesickness generates meditations on the titular early spring’s “leaf-folded violet” (4), “cuckoo’s fitful bell” (6), and a catalogue of other observable details of the natural world to arrive at the figure of the poet’s lyre and a resignation to the emotional distance that persists between the speaker and her beloved. The very next poem in the volume, “Parted,” develops further the theme of distance between lovers: “Farewell to one now silenced quite,/Sent out of hearing, out of sight” (1-2). And as we might expect, the speaker’s lament for her distant lover is couched in terms of a pathetic fallacy:

The morning crowns the mountain-brim;
Joy is not gone from summer skies,
Nor innocence from children’s eyes,
And all these things are part of him. (17-20)

The importance Meynell assigns to the visual imagery of the natural world and its relationship to her speakers’ emotions is clear evidence of her commitment, in this early work, to the Romantic aesthetic typified by “The Eolian Harp” and Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” poems in which nature is a stimulus to profound thoughts as well as a spiritual restorative.

Like Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s poems, Meynell’s seldom lose sight of the act of creating poetry. “To the Beloved Dead” and “In Early Spring” are both concerned to explore where poetry comes from. The language of “songs” and “lyres” is as pervasive in both as details of the natural world unfolding in time. Nature and poetry, absence—whether through distance or death—and resignation are the chief themes of *Preludes* and an important part of the reason why the volume won such effusive praise from its nineteenth-century readers. Its poems are, in so many instances, perfectly suited to a literary climate where Romanticism still represented the fresh wind that blew away the stodgy reserve and detachment of the eighteenth century. These early poems focus on lyric effusions rather than narration; they are often highly decorative in

their careful selection of particularly attractive details from the natural world; they are, in fact, more than a little reminiscent of the near-contemporary work of another poet who is still generally regarded as being among the greatest and the most representative of Victorian women writers.

Christina Rossetti's preoccupations with death, nature, and emotion come together in the justly famous "Song" first collected in 1862's *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Though it emphasizes, from the first, acceptance of death rather than the excruciating mourning process that Meynell's speaker must undergo in "To the Beloved Dead," Rossetti's poem prefigures Meynell's lament in both its resignation to the inevitable and its fixation on the body in the grave:

When I am dead my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget. (1-8)

Rossetti's poem contains, in a less exclamatory form, all of the features we have noticed connecting Meynell's "To the Beloved Dead" to its Romantic precursors. Though it contains no metrically convenient contractions, Rossetti's archaic vocabulary claims a special register of diction for poetry. The "Song" focuses on the solitary acts of intellection by which the addressee of the poem may "remember" or "forget" the dead speaker. It shares with Meynell's poem the image of rain falling over a grave, and, though it admonishes the addressee to forego mourning, it circles cautiously around the idea of the addressee joining with nature to shed tears over the grave: the addressee is invited to become one with "the green grass above me" and to share its "drops" of dew and rain.

“To the Beloved Dead” and its many parallels in *Preludes* demonstrate Meynell’s early commitment to a Romantic aesthetic in terms of their choice of subject matter, execution through an introspective point of view, and certain of their technical features, especially with regard to meter. The poem makes a place for itself in the Victorian literary climate by adopting topoi characteristic of Victorian women’s writing. *Preludes* differs in terms of subject matter, technique, and its various philosophical commitments from the poetry Meynell would write later in her career; however, *Preludes* enjoyed a significant currency in 1875, and the parts of it that would survive into later editions of Meynell’s poetry dominate those editions. The section entitled “Early Poems” in the *Complete Edition*, which reprints material from *Preludes*, comes first and comprises forty-seven pages in a one hundred-forty-four-page volume. It is on the basis of the reputation of *Preludes* and the expectations created by these early poems, that Jerusha McCormack argues, “[A]lthough Meynell did move ahead technically as her mode of expression matured, her poetics of reserve, intellection, and detachment remained intact, preventing her from accepting, or being accepted by, the modernists” (61). The Modernists did reject Meynell, for reasons, it would seem, having more to do with her public persona than with anything she actually wrote, but in order for her poetry to move ahead “technically” while simultaneously being held back by the “poetics” established in *Preludes*, we must largely disregard the performative aspects of this same technical sophistication and the divide it marks between the early *Preludes* and Meynell’s later mature verse.

“To the Beloved Dead” brings together themes and motifs that reveal the young Meynell’s commitment to a Romantic aesthetic, but the poem epitomizes *Preludes* as a whole in more than just its approach to subject matter. At six stanzas and thirty lines, “To the Beloved Dead” is a poem of average length for *Preludes*, but compared to “The Threshing Machine” or anything else in Meynell’s twentieth-century volumes of poetry, the early lament is lengthy and

verbose. In fact, *Preludes* contains the only truly long poems Meynell would publish. These include the nineteen stanzas of “A Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age” and the 107-line “Sœur Monique,” a series of imaginary vignettes from a nun’s life inspired by a piece of music and something of a formal anomaly in Meynell’s work: it is almost completely alone in employing a trochaic meter. Both “A Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age” and “Sœur Monique” involve lengthy meditations on death, the nature of art, and the passage of time. The first culminates in an anticlimactic turning-away from a moment of confrontation the speaker had designed to initiate. As the present confronts the future, she condemns the words she has written:

Pardon the girl; such strange desires beset her.
Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter
That breaks thy heart; the one who wrote, forget her. (52-54)

In the act of committing her hopes and fears for the future to a written form, she finds herself suddenly and surprisingly compelled to look into a magic mirror. She shifts from fear to a resigned self-pity still echoing admonitions that her future self “forget her:”

The one who now thy faded features guesses,
With filial fingers thy grey hair caresses,
With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses. (55-57)

“A Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age” thus shares with the rest of *Preludes* an explicit treatment of emotion and an understanding of art, figured in this poem as a young girl’s letter, as a conduit to the interior self, a mode of achieving greater self-knowledge.

Similarly, “Sœur Monique” uses a tune and the aestheticized image of a nun to pose questions about where artistic inspiration comes from. Speculating about the relationship of the composer to his subject, the speaker asks:

But two words, and this sweet air.
Sœur Monique,
Had he more, who set you there?

Was his music dream of you
Of some perfect nun he knew,
Or of some ideal, as true?

These poems, about corresponding with oneself and meditating on a tune, explicitly develop the theme of solitary intellection as the defining activity of the artist. The respective lengths of these poems make them oddities in any collection of Meynell's verse, but their thematics and comparative verbosity belong, nonetheless, to Meynell's early period. Both survive in the *Complete Edition* as touchstones for the artistic phase they represent. The last and longest poem in *Preludes* does not.

The style developed in *Preludes* culminates in a poem unlike any other Meynell would publish. Printed at the end of *Preludes* and titled simply "A Study: In Three Monologues, with Interruptions," the poem shares much with those that precede it—intensive introspection, a melancholy tone, and the displacement of the speaker's emotions onto the physical landscape—but differs strikingly from the rest of Meynell's work, early and late, in the narrative mode and use of blank verse that sustain by far the longest of Meynell's published poems. "A Study," presents the somewhat oblique narrative of a shamed woman faced with deciding whether or not to reveal herself to the son she had been compelled to give up. She has to make the decision on the night before her son is set to sail for America, forsaking England forever. The narrative unfolds in three dramatic monologues and runs to thirteen pages. The mother's sin and the circumstances of her public disgrace are never really explained because, as with most of the other poems in *Preludes*, the main activity of these monologues is to depict the mind at work processing emotion. "A Study" is an interesting anomaly that serves a specific goal for *Preludes* as a volume—an anomaly made not less interesting by its subsequent exclusion, with "To the Beloved Dead," from all collected editions of Meynell's poetry.

“A Study” is so placed as to emphasize, after pages of Petrarchan sonnets; laments from a distance, before a grave or a mirror; and lyrics on the emotional apprehension of nature’s beauties, the range and achievement of a voice adept in the poetic sensibilities promulgated in the most influential writing of the nineteenth century. Like the other poems in *Preludes*, “A Study” wears the mark of its aesthetic sympathies in the way it handles meters. Making free and liberal use of the trisyllabic substitution, “A Study” reads more like the blank verse of Wordsworth and Coleridge than anything Meynell would publish after *Preludes*. Venerating Romanticism in the practice of its meters, “A Study” joins with the spirit motivating the exploration of complex emotion in so much of the narrative verse published contemporaneously with Meynell’s early work. At thirteen pages, the length of “A Study” allows *Preludes* to demonstrate its fluency in contemporary poetics by coupling its meditations on nature and emotion with enough narrative exposition to constitute a cycle in the popular Victorian mode of the dramatic monologue. Using a meter that invites extra syllables to the line and eschewing the stanzaic structures that characterize most of Meynell’s poetry, each page of “A Study” is densely packed with text. The narrative ranges over a lifetime and a whole spectrum of emotions, and *Preludes* closes with a crescendo, commemorating the first efforts of a poet fully steeped in the Romantic ethos and versatile in the forms and rhetorical modes of the nineteenth century.

Though offered as a kind of diploma piece—evidence of the young poet’s command of narrative, the expression of emotion, and modern verse form—“A Study,” tellingly, belongs to that group of early poems that Meynell refused to include in later collections. The profound shift in aesthetic values between Meynell’s early work and late cannot be more plain than in the contrast between the last poem of her first volume and the first poem of her second wholly new and independent volume. “The Shepherdess,” initiating Meynell’s 1901 *Later Poems*, shuns the verbosity and narrative exposition—as well as the trisyllabic substitutions—of “A Study” and the

poems that lead up to it. “The Shepherdess” serves as a major statement of the way that Meynell’s poetry charts the intersections of literary tradition and religious belief, and it is as a statement of Meynell’s poetics that “The Shepherdess” can claim the distinction of being one of few of Meynell’s poems to have been the subject of extended critical discussion. But the power of “The Shepherdess” as a sign of a starkly executed and intellectually rigorous new poetry from the author of *Preludes* is sometimes lost in assessments that operate independently of the narrative of artistic development presented in Meynell’s four major volumes of poetry. To understand what “The Shepherdess” means for Meynell’s work and how the poem bears witness to her navigation of artistic traditions, we must first direct our attention to the poem that marks the beginning of the long hiatus between *Preludes* and *Later Poems*.

Cast in a loose blank verse that Meynell would never use again, “A Study” recalls the meter of Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*—published six years before *Preludes*. And like *The Ring and the Book*, though on a much smaller scale, Meynell’s poem presents an often melodramatic narrative in a series of monologues that gradually, teasingly, reveal bits of narrative information that pose more questions than they answer. Presented obliquely by means of remembered fragments appearing in the gaps where the fabric of melancholy meditations breaks down, the narrative of “A Study” concerns a woman living in seclusion, perhaps in a convent, because of a “crime” so terrible that she had been forced to leave her home. Her exile rather than, presumably, active persecution is made possible by a man identified only as “kin to my son” (I. 48) who, knowing her crime, “stayed me with calm hands and hid the thing” (I. 50). In addition to securing her a place to die in shame, the man assumes guardianship of the woman’s small son and takes him away. The language of the poem certainly suggests that the woman’s guilt stems from a sexual indiscretion, although her son, the reader is given to understand, is already too old to have been the direct evidence leading to his mother’s

condemnation. Mother and son are estranged five years when, as the poem opens, we learn the woman has been summoned by her son's guardian in a letter of grave portent. After travelling to meet the guardian in person, she learns what has prompted the unusual communication: her son has inadvertently learned of his mother's crime; horrified, he resolves to leave England for a new life in America; he has agreed to see his mother once before he departs. With this narrative frame in place, the main action of the poem involves the woman's recounting certain aspects of the life that ended in her crime while she makes the journey to the guardian's house on foot and, then, her wrestling with the question of whether or not to see her son.

Though she is completely isolated from other people and makes her meditative journey alone, without auditors, the mother's thoughts are clearly structured like a dramatic monologue. Pausing in the middle of the poem's second section, at the point in her journey where the familiar landscape falls away and she looks from the hilltop down to her destination and the unresolved future, she assumes the rhetorical stance of a defendant at trial:

And I, being what I am, and having done
What I have done, look back upon my youth
—Before my crime, I mean,—and testify. (II. 31-33)

Without challenging the charges before her, she feels compelled to make a clean breast of the sad history that led to her crime. She presents the narrative of her life as to a jury even though there is none, and the stance she occupies differs, thereby, from that of the witnesses to the crimes committed in *The Ring and the Book* because all of the testimony is sealed within the speaker's heart.

Though it will not right the wrongs of the past, the speaker's meditation on the history of her crime seeks to relate the narrative of her life from her own perspective, unmediated by the judgment of those others who have so circumscribed her life as to leave it wholly contained within the solitude of "this grey town of undesigned grey lives" (I. 53). Powerless to reclaim her

life, the speaker nonetheless asserts her subjectivity through the act of telling her story, if only to herself. Through this act of self-definition, she engages in a project not unlike that of the rebellious, intellectual heroine of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Aurora becomes a Victorian sage; Meynell's criminal suffers an existence of quiet ignominy, but both women tell "my story," as Aurora puts it, "for my better self":

As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
Long after he has ceased to love you, just
To hold together what he was and is. (4-8)

Aurora writes her story as a kind of key to the works of art she has produced and the work she hopes to do in the future. The monologue produced by Meynell's criminal has an altogether more private existence, but both texts—the one written by Barrett Browning through Aurora Leigh, the other written by Meynell and unwritten in the mind of her character—attempt to connect present and past by constructing a coherent narrative from the circumstances of their lives.

For Meynell's criminal, that narrative begins with a youth that was somehow both vicious and ignorant. She figures her youthful vanity and foolishness as a kind of decadent Hellenism:

It was not happy, no, it was not white,
It was not innocent, no, the young fair time.
The people and the years passed in my glass;
And all the insincerity of my thoughts
I laid upon the pure and simple Nature
(Now all the fields and hills are free of me),
Smiling at my elaborate sigh the smile
Of any Greek composing sunny gods. (II. 34-41)

The mother will repeatedly insist that she is guilty, without question, of the crime, and a central rhetorical goal of the poem seems to be to repudiate the kind of solipsistic pleasure-kingdom that the mother describes. But one cannot help thinking of Hardy's Sue Bridehead who, in *Jude the Obscure*, suffers the symbolic loss of two statues of pagan gods to the social pressure of her community's conventionalized Christianity. She had been in Arcadia. And when her crime

violates the blissful oblivion of Arcadia, a whole world shatters, and the speaker has found herself alone in the hard knowledge that life is suffering and that only through suffering can she expect to find anything like forgiveness or redemption for her sins.

The criminal mother of “A Study” tries to give an idea of the drastic change in her life and way of thinking brought about by the mysterious crime with a metaphor that reveals deeper sympathies with the work of Barrett Browning than even Meynell’s commitment to a self-defining, female voice like Aurora Leigh’s. In an echo of Barrett Browning’s poem “The Dead Pan” and the tradition behind it, Meynell’s speaker compares the loss of her Arcadian idyll to the fate of the pagan gods after Jesus’ death:

And now begins my one true white child-time,
This time of desolate altars and all ruins.
For Pan is dead and the altars are in ruins. (II. 42-44)

The thirty-nine stanzas of Barrett Browning’s poem each culminate in a variation of the phrase “Pan is dead” (“Pan, Pan is dead,” “And Pan is dead,” “Let Pan be dead,” etc.). The unifying theme of the poem is expressed most forcefully in its thirty-first stanza:

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore!
And I dash down this old chalice
Whence libations ran of yore.
See, the wine crawls in the dust
Wormlike—as your glories must,
Since Pan is dead. (XXXI: 1-6)

To the 1844 edition of her poems, Barrett Browning appended a note which concisely surveys the origins of the phrase her poem uses as title and refrain and explains the phrase’s significance to her as an artist. She writes that the poem was

Excited by Schiller’s *Götter Griechenlands*, and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour’s agony, a cry of “Great Pan is dead!” swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners,—and the oracles ceased.

It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonoring to poetry than to Christianity. (*Complete Poetical Works* 188)

Harriet Waters Preston, the editor of a 1900 edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of Mrs. Browning* adds to the poet's own note an observation that "It seems to have been as a distinct and solemn public profession of Christian faith triumphant over pagan fancy that she insisted on having it stand last in the collection of her poems published in 1844" (188). Thirty years later the young poet who was soon to become Mrs. Meynell would end her first volume of poetry with an echo of Mrs. Browning's "solemn public profession."

In the end, despite her former wickedness and present failure to find peace in exile, the criminal professes an entirely orthodox faith in the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice and trusts that the mercy of God will, in time, bring her into the fold of the righteous:

Failing in penitence, I, who fail in all,
Leave all my thoughts alone, and lift mine eyes
Quietly to one who makes amends for me.
Peace, O my soul, for thou has failed in all:
(One thought, at last, that I might take to Heaven!) (III. 55-59)

The speaker berates herself for an inability to fully submit to the spiritual conditions of penitence for her crime though we have already observed her shedding "penitential tears" (III. 36) and, of course, making the difficult pilgrimage to meet her sin face-to-face. The narrative trajectory of "A Study" with its allusion to the tradition evoked in Barrett Browning's poem serves as a formal commitment to a poetics infused with faith in God the creator as the ultimate poet of the world. This commitment would prove to be no vain promise as the overwhelming thematic concern of Meynell's later poetry would be a fascination with the nuance and mystery of her chosen Catholicism. As Catholicism comes to the fore in Meynell's poetry, the love laments and introspective monologues of *Preludes* come more and more to embody those "transitory and early thoughts" from which Meynell, against the prevailing wishes of her readers, sought to

distance herself. The radical aesthetic shift evidenced between the end of *Preludes* and the beginning of *Later Poems* extends well beyond a commitment to religious faith, but the commitment announced in “A Study” serves as one of the abiding links between a quintessentially Victorian volume of poetry and one that will inaugurate a new and strikingly different formal idiom for exploring the relevance of religious faith to the web of literary and cultural allusions that characterize Meynell’s verse of the twentieth century.

Notes

¹⁸ Eliot’s review of Meynell’s *Hearts of Controversy*, a collection of essays on literature published in 1917, is signed with the pseudonym Apteryx. As Craig Raine notes in his biography (*T. S. Eliot*, 2006), the pseudonym was only used for one other review in *The Egoist*, that of Edward Marsh’s *Poems: 1916–1917*. Raine cites a letter to Eliot’s cousin Eleanor Hinkley that suggests as the inspiration for the name a visit to the London Zoo where Eliot “gave the apterix a bun” (qtd. in Raine 41). The corrected spelling that Eliot uses in *The Egoist* is the Latin name designating the kiwi, a flightless bird native to New Zealand. Summarizing C. K. Stead’s novelization of the life of Katherine Mansfield during the First World War (*Mansfield*, 2004), Raine speculates that Eliot chose the pen-name because the kiwi “is a flightless bird—and therefore anti-romantic” (Raine 41).

¹⁹ As noted previously, “the Angel in the House,” a term derived from the title of Patmore’s once-popular domestic epic, is employed in Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) as a descriptor for a certain type of submissive, Victorian femininity. Despite the efforts of commentators on Patmore’s poem, like J. C. Reid, whose attempt to deal with the concept is discussed in the previous chapter, to explain that the Angel is, in context, an angel of love inspiring the actions of both the hero and heroine of Patmore’s poem, Gilbert and Gubar continue a usage derived from Virginia Woolf’s essay on “Professions for Women” (1942), wherein Woolf speaks of “The Angel in the House” as

she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her — you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. (2153)

She was a type, in short, that Meynell would have recognized in her roles both as a mother and as a writer of texts signed publicly, “Mrs. Meynell.” The sheer mass of literary work completed by Meynell and her political activism, at least, would seem to indicate that the character type identified by Woolf’s choice of terminology was either a source of strength to Meynell or a useful pose in Meynell’s construction of a public persona.

²⁰ Brégy quotes from “Her Portrait,” by Francis Thompson, another of the Catholic poets surveyed in her volume and, for most of his troubled life, a virtual ward of Meynell and her husband.

²¹ The thirty-second section in James Joyce’s *Chamber Music* furnishes an apt example of the trisyllabic pronunciation of “beloved” indicated by metrical context rather than, typographically, by a grave accent. Its second and last stanza runs thus:

Staying a little by the way
Of memories shall we depart.
Come, my beloved, where I may
Speak to your heart. (5-8)

Published in 1907, Joyce’s short, stylized love lyrics belong to a literary context somewhat different from that of Meynell’s mid-Victorian poem. But, as the title suggests, and as subsequent settings of the lyrics to music demonstrate, Joyce’s poems adhere, for the most part, to the very strict metric most often encountered in hymns. They evince a much lower frequency of metrical variations than most literary poems and observe a fairly strict ratio of stressed to unstressed syllables. The poem’s use of the word “beloved” is merely one example, ready to hand, of the trisyllabic pronunciation implied by the metrical context despite the absence of a grave accent mark.

CHAPTER 3. USES OF METER ACROSS THE TURN OF THE CENTURY:
MARY COLERIDGE, MEYNELL, POUND

Part I: Tradition

Even now, with the increase in critical attention paid to Meynell's writing, only a few of her poems have been the subject of extended analysis. One of these, "The Shepherdess" was first collected in book form in *Later Poems* of 1901. As the first poem in the first volume to be published independently of the successive collected editions Meynell had been assembling, editing, and adding to since 1893, "The Shepherdess" both sets the tone for the poems to follow it and represents a significant departure from the aesthetic that garnered so much praise in *Preludes*. As we have explored in the previous chapter, the last poem in Meynell's first volume, "A Study," emulates its Victorian models through, for instance, a faceted narrative reminiscent of Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and a rebellious and conflicted narrator like that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. And like these model texts, "A Study" plays out in blank verse but a blank verse more liberal of trisyllabic substitutions than even the pentameters of "To the Beloved Dead." Each line runneth over with syllables. Each page is densely packed with text. But over the course of the twenty-five years between *Preludes* and *Later Poems* the verbal bounty of "A Study" would become alien to Meynell's aesthetic. To the elaborate monologues of the last poem in *Preludes*, compare the first poem of the first volume of Meynell's twentieth-century verse:

She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep;
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Into that tender breast at night

The chastest stars may peep.
She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.

The shepherdess walks through a landscape depopulated of distracting visual details. It is enough that we see her surrounded by the whiteness of her sheep. Rather than the pentameters of love sonnets and dramatic monologues, the poem uses a variety of ballad meter—tetrameters followed by trimeters—taking advantage of its associations with folk music and rustic simplicity. The same associations inform the choice of tetrameters in Christopher Marlowe’s well-known “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.” Of course, however much the simplified diction and song-like meter of Meynell’s pastoral recalls Marlowe’s, they are very different poems. Marlowe’s is a celebration of an aestheticized erotic love while Meynell takes the very conventions of Marlowe’s poem to create a kind of alternative, feminized pastoral.

With this songlike and incantatory revision of preconceptions about what a pastoral should be, Meynell begins the careful navigation of the intersections of literary tradition and religious symbolism that will characterize her poetry of the twentieth century as a whole. As recent critics have shown, the poem offers multiple possible interpretations based on just how we chart these intersections of symbol and allusion. Schaffer describes the central interpretive ambiguity of the poem in terms that provide a telling account of why Meynell was largely rejected by the literary generation emerging contemporaneously with the publication of *Later Poems*, but Schaffer’s argument also points to a complexity in “The Shepherdess” that the Modernist detractors of Clan Meynell’s matron seem not to have appreciated:

These lines seem to praise the propriety of female repression, as a virtuous Victorian lady ought to do. However, the verse is susceptible to a very different reading. Meynell juxtaposes the “little thoughts” which are visible and joyful, with the whole “soul,” which the shepherdess “keeps” private. Although this verse can be read as a precious Victorian effusion about girlish little thoughts, it actually says that these frivolous thoughts contrast with the darker soul the poet cannot reveal—and in that sense it is a quite un-Victorian exposure of the shallowness and insignificance of the conscious, and consciously feminine, mode of self-expression available to women writers. (“A Tethered Angel” 54).

In addition to the challenges that “The Shepherdess” presents to the traditional gender dynamic of the pastoral mode, Maria Frawley notes a broad formal ambiguity that further complicates attempts to identify the symbolic value of the titular figure. The poem, Frawley writes, “is an intriguing study of self-control and regulation of thought whose ambiguity lies in the fact that the relation between the poem’s subject—the shepherdess—and the poet/narrator is not made clear” (“The Tides of the Mind” 68). Through this formal ambiguity and a potentially politically-charged statement about representations of women in literature, Meynell’s poem engineers something like a circuit-board for processing, evaluating, and interpreting the currents of cultural and literary data that flow into and out of it.

Ultimately, as Sharon Smulders has argued, “the poem vacillates ambiguously between overt collusion with and covert criticism of conventional representations of femininity” (36). “The Shepherdess” thus assumes a potentially self-contradictory stance in its engagements with literary convention and religious symbolism. To the extent that the poem presents a challenge to the expected gender dynamic of amatory verse, it invokes a set of allusions that transpose the action of the poem from the Arcadian key of Marlowe’s lyric to the distinctly different pastoral mode embodied in the language of Christian scripture. Despite the overt primness of the poem, Schlack argues forcefully that

“The Shepherdess” asserts the primacy of the female vision by reversing our stereotypic expectations of male lyric poets who address shepherdesses as the ladies of their delight. Meynell’s shepherdess is not a love object but a protector-

figure of symbolic dimension. The resonance of the Lamb-of-God analogy is behind the poem's metaphors, as is the suggestion of the pastor or Lord himself as the Good Shepherd. Meynell's shepherdess is a figure of mind whose flocks are thoughts. Those thoughts may be little, and their shepherdess circumspect, but *she has her soul to keep*. The sudden evocative depth of that spare line has precisely the same power as Robert Frost's "simple" lines, "But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep. (114)

Schlack recognizes the poem as a political act, the laying claim to full participation in a literary tradition, an act of aggressive revision effected through the, for Meynell, empowering language of Christianity. It is through the language of Christian symbolism that Meynell makes a critical intervention into a body of literary texts.

In addition to the scriptural allusions that complicate the poem's invocation of the amatory mode of the pastoral lyric, "The Shepherdess" juxtaposes its religious language to a different species of canonical text by inviting comparison, as Smulders argues, to two particularly well-known and well-loved lyrics: Byron's "She Walks in Beauty" and Wordsworth's "She Was a Phantom of Delight." By constructing a poem that praises the grace and beauty of a beloved who remains, despite the superlativeness of her virtues, nameless, a distant and immaculate abstraction for her poet-lover, Meynell operates within the conventions represented in Wordsworth's and Byron's poems to challenge their assumptions through mastery of them. Smulders has noted how, in "Attempting to accommodate a distinctly feminine perspective, 'The Shepherdess' parodically engages the conventions of lyric verse" (36). To the extent that Meynell's poem "not only opens up ellipses in her predecessors' work, but imposes her voice and vision over fragments of phrases and ideas therefrom derived" (45), Smulders qualifies her assessment of the ironic function in Meynell's poem by suggesting that it "engages not so much in parody as in what Luce Irigaray calls "*mimicry*" (37). Citing Schlack's observation of the poem's use of Christian symbols "to subvert expectations typical of amatory lyricism" (Schlack 114), Smulders goes on to demonstrate the empowering potential of

Christianity for Meynell's efforts to claim a place for herself in the literary community of the canonical poets. Smulders notes how, in a pivotal instance,

the poem, at its richest intertextually in the central stanza, clearly echoes Psalm 23. . . . Uniting "dark and bright" in its reference to "the valley of the shadow of death" and "that tender light" of "She Walks in Beauty," "The Shepherdess" conceals therefore a surprising complexity of thought beneath its seemingly simple, even puerile surface. By renovating and feminizing traditional Christian images, Meynell implicitly criticizes the valuation of physical beauty and feminine passivity in Romantic poetry. (41)

Like Schlack, Smulders recognizes "The Shepherdess" as more complex than a praise of the presumably ladylike values of chasteness and circumspection. The poem makes an active bid to challenge literary stereotypes by reimagining them through a critical vocabulary suggested by the pastoral typologies of the Bible. But Smulders also emphasizes how the poem potentially calls into question its own project of feminized or Christianized rereading in the thoroughness and subtlety with which it mimics the language, form, and rhetoric of its ostensible models. "[T]he poem's very resemblance to its precursory texts," Smulders writes, "jeopardizes its achievement" (38). In its deft handling of the conventions of the amatory lyric, the poem ends up, in Smulders's terms, "Looking around, synthesizing and playfully repeating the ideas adumbrated in the masculine discourse of desire," and, as a result, "the shepherdess exhausts her models, but suffers by virtue of her own modest accomplishment" (42).

For Smulders, the aspect of "The Shepherdess" that most calls into question the effectiveness of its revisionary project concerns the extent to which the shepherdess figure is sexually objectified by the language of the poem. Because the shepherdess "acts as a figure for feminine emulation rather than an object of masculine desire," Smulders points to the significant contrast and challenge the shepherdess presents to "the Romantic beauties of Wordsworth and Byron" (41). But Smulders is careful to point out that, "like her male precursors, Meynell eroticizes her version of the lady of the lyrics," particularly through a vocabulary that works to

“convey a topography of the female body.” Smulders has in mind, in particular, the “maternal hills,” “deep valleys,” and “tender breast” of the poem’s second stanza. To the extent that the poem colludes with the gendered dynamic of the amatory lyric, its attempts to challenge that dynamic with allusions to the language of scripture, for Smulders, risk failure. But the political act Smulders so carefully extracts from the poem’s network of allusions, if it falls short of full commitment to a feminist reclamation of the amatory lyric, forms, in fact, only one aspect of a highly complex and perhaps quite ambiguous engagement with the threads of text it draws to itself and weaves together.

Rather than reading “The Shepherdess” as an attack on a poetic mode formed and dominated by a distinctly masculine perspective, we might instead consider the poem as a kind of meta-commentary attempting to dramatize the quandary faced by a poet who understands and honors the conventions of her art while simultaneously recognizing a need to renovate those conventions in specific ways. As the representation of a troubled attempt to come to terms with contrary aesthetic impulses, “The Shepherdess” speaks to two of Meynell’s most intensely held philosophical commitments. Smulders’s attention to the potential for a feminist reinvention of the amatory lyric in “The Shepherdess” points to a deeply held commitment to the political liberation of women—a commitment with which caricatures of prim Mrs. Meynell are rarely credited. But just as importantly, we must not underestimate the extent to which this text argues for a lyric poetry intimately engaged with Christian belief and practice. As much as anything, and perhaps less ambiguously than as a feminist poem, “The Shepherdess” directs our attention to the language and symbolism of Christianity as a powerful source of aesthetic agency for the renovation of poetry. The necessity of aesthetic renovation signaled in “The Shepherdess” may appear surprising from a poet known for her mastery of convention, but “The Shepherdess” appears at the beginning of *Later Poems* for just this reason: it announces the adoption of a new

set of aesthetic priorities in Meynell's work and acknowledges, in the same way that early twentieth-century Modernist poetry does, the importance to poetry of a constant challenge to and reinterpretation of the received wisdom of the art. Crucially, "The Shepherdess" provides a model of constructive, participatory reinterpretation that stands in stark contrast to the wholesale vandalism proselytized, if playfully, in the pages of *BLAST* and given the status of an artistic creed in much of the work Pound would write in the days of his contemporaneity with Meynell.

With its layered revision of the conventions of the amatory lyric, Meynell's poem uses a subtle irony to perform the anxiety of occupying mutually contradictory stances with regard to the rules that circumscribe both life and art. On one level, the poem seems genuinely to celebrate the gendered virtues of a Victorian domestic angel, but it also indicts canonical representations of those virtues—humility, chasteness, uprightness—as fictions of an idealized femininity. That the virtues of femininity might be idealized in poems like Meynell's models, of course, works to perpetuate the kind of stereotypical expectations of women that Meynell herself would have found objectionable, but in addition to the challenges it presents to stereotypes of femininity, the poem is driven by an incredulity that ideal virtues like those the shepherdess embodies might ever be construed as exclusively or even particularly feminine. We recognize the shepherdess as the more or less impersonal object addressed in certain kinds of poetry, a figure for wooing. If we see her, also, as a figure of the Good Shepherd, her gender becomes an aspect of her representation rather than its determining condition. We might also recognize, in one of the first poems published after their acquaintance, the influence on Meynell of Patmore's cosmic eroticism. The shepherdess comes to life in the lines of her poem both through the power of her sexuality and through her commitment to religious virtue.

The first poem of Meynell's first twentieth-century volume, therefore, bears witness to the single greatest influence on Meynell's poetry after the publication of *Preludes*: her

conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1868. Though she was confirmed a Catholic prior to the publication of her first volume, the poems in her early collection provide little indication of the influence that years of study in the belief and practice of her church would bring to her later verse. “The Shepherdess” does not deal as directly with distinctly Catholic imagery as do some of Meynell’s later poems, but its subtle investigation of the language of faith makes it part of a larger project that sets Meynell’s later work apart from her earlier. In the elaborate complex of Catholic ritual, art, and symbolism, Meynell seems to have found a living connection to historical modes of expression. This dedication to a network of inter-related concepts makes of Meynell’s later creative efforts a fundamentally critical and intertextual endeavor, an endeavor more than a little reminiscent of the process by which the “individual talent” negotiates and revises the “tradition” of T. S. Eliot’s crucial Modernist formulation.

First published in 1919—two years after the appearance of Meynell’s volume of war poems, *A Father of Women*—“Tradition and the Individual Talent” posits a transhistorical literary community where “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it” (38). Though it was not until later in life that Eliot would come to conceive of a distinctly Christian basis for the European Tradition, the philosophical principle of a literary Tradition provides an apt explanation for Eliot’s densely allusive poetic style as well as for Meynell’s. In this way, both Eliot’s work and Meynell’s prefigure in some interesting ways the linguistic universe theorized in Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* where “statements,” we learn

are not, like the air we breathe, an infinite transparency; but things that are transmitted and preserved, that have value, and which one tries to appropriate; that are repeated, reproduced, and transformed; to which pre-established networks are adapted, and to which a status is given in the institution; things that are duplicated not only by copy or translation, but by exegesis, commentary, and the internal proliferation of meaning. Because statements are rare, they are collected in unifying totalities, and the meanings to be found in them are multiplied. (120).

Much of Meynell's later poetry shares with *Preludes* the interest in depicting solitary acts of intellection that her first volume inherits from its major influences, the introspective lyrics of Romantic poets like Keats and Coleridge. But the creative possibilities of these themes are multiplied by Meynell's engagement with Catholicism, not simply as a matter of her own devotion, but as the key to a network of "statements." It is a mistake, therefore, to view the later poems as permutations of a conceptual vocabulary and procedure exhausted in *Preludes*.

The result of Meynell's careful engagement with religious texts, in terms of both form and content is a poetry constantly questioning its own assertions on multiple levels. However orthodox Meynell's religious faith may have been, this highly self-conscious procedure makes it difficult to characterize her poetry as comfortably devotional. As we have seen in "The Shepherdess," the critical intertextuality of Meynell's engagements with religious language and symbol generate a rhetorical situation that allows the speaker to occupy potentially incompatible positions with regard to the subject matter. In several ways, then, "The Shepherdess" serves as effectively to announce Meynell's twentieth-century poetic as "A Study" demonstrated Meynell's prowess in the modes of nineteenth-century poetry. In addition to its commitment to the thematics of Christian faith, "The Shepherdess" exemplifies the rhetorical ambiguity characteristic of much of the poetry that would follow it. "The Shepherdess" also introduces a new formal aesthetic for Meynell. In comparison to the Wordsworth and Byron poems to which it alludes, "The Shepherdess," as Smulders observes, "is rigidly circumscribed by the poet's restraint in her choice of diction, in her use of rhyme, and in her repetition of the two opening lines as a closing refrain in the second and third stanzas" ("Looking 'Past Wordsworth'" 39). We might also note that the poem presents almost no prosodic departure from its iambic paradigm, with the exception of an anapestic substitution appearing once in each iteration of the repeated

refrain. When Meynell's poetry enters the twentieth century, it does so bearing an almost mystical commitment to faith in a discursive communion and to an intensely controlled prosody.

This intensely controlled prosody differs, as we have seen, in significant ways from Meynell's metrical practice in *Preludes*, but her commitment to it, at the turn of the century, would serve to mark her as the voice of what Furse Jackson calls "a more conservative readership" by whom "Meynell was esteemed as a poet who reassured and reinforced cherished, threatened values" (460). This, of course, is the aesthetic stance that "kept her from accepting, or being accepted by, the modernists." Furse Jackson argues that "Meynell moved ahead technically, and her ideas and mode of expression matured, but her concerns would vary little, and she remained forever wedded to the poetics of her youth." But in the same way that Meynell's most sophisticated poetry operates according to principles surprisingly similar to those formulated in Eliot's verse and prose, and to the extent that Meynell's later work reinvents itself with a new prosodic idiom, it is possible to read Meynell, after *Preludes*, as a writer with aesthetic values more characteristic of Modernist writing than of most of the Victorian models on which her earlier work was based.

In fact, Meynell's work has more in common with Eliot's than a general theoretical interest in cultural archaeology. In addition to a taste for dense and often subtle allusion, Meynell's work shares with Eliot's a commitment to the ideal art as a communal, transhistorical project. *The Waste Land*, published the same year as Meynell's *Last Poems*, may imagine a disintegrating modern world, a world where fragments of poems and myths have detached from the cultural context that makes them intelligible, but only that grieved-for cultural context can measure the disintegration of the present. Benchmarks for assessing twentieth-century culture are everywhere in Eliot's poetry. The learned and copious allusion characteristic of Eliot's poetry extends from his theories about tradition. Comparisons to Hamlet in "The Love Song of J. Alfred

Prufrock”; citations from Ezekiel, Ovid, and Baudelaire in *The Waste Land*; and the “Multifoliate rose,” imagined in “The Hollow Men” and drawn from Dante’s vision of Paradise, accomplish a direct and intimate link between the voices of the past and the literature of the present. Eliot consistently affirms this linking function of art, and he accords it a significance not unlike that assigned the dead in the “Little Gidding” section of his *Four Quartets*:

And what the dead had no speech for when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. (51-53)

It is by means of of this interaction with disembodied voices that “the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere. Never and always” (54-55).

The context of this extract from “Little Gidding,” however, deals not with the disembodied voices of Ovid or Virgil but with the devotional practice of praying to the dead. Eliot describes an activity characteristic of the kind of high-church Anglicanism practiced by the seventeenth-century religious community at Little Gidding, but invoking the saints remains a defining activity of the Roman Catholic faith to which Meynell adhered as well as for the particular strand of Anglicanism that Eliot claimed for himself as “anglo-catholicism.” Imagining a kind of spiritual pilgrimage through the landscapes of England, Eliot’s speaker locates the “intersection” of “Never and always” in a church. He addresses his auditor, or perhaps himself, in the second person:

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying. (45-50)

In this place, “Where prayer has been valid,” kneeling and speaking through the formulae of liturgical prayer, Eliot’s speaker experiences life moving through the external forms of devotion.

Though it comes in the context of a sedate and sometimes melancholy description, there is no reason to read the phrase “Where prayer has been valid” as an indication that prayer at the titular Little Gidding is no longer valid; rather, the speaker thinks of praying here because there is such a tangible sense of the tradition of praying here. It is easy for the speaker to imagine joining with a community of the living and of the dead who speak to one another and offer their prayers here in “the timeless moment.” As self-professed Catholics, albeit of different stripes, Meynell and Eliot locate in their religious practice a vital connection to the past. In this respect, the voices of the literary past speaking to and evoking responses from the present become analogous to a communion of saints. By invoking the voices of the past, especially through allusion, Eliot’s poetry, like Meynell’s, asserts for itself, at least in the literary realm, something very like a sacramental function.

In the same way that Meynell’s poetry demonstrates significant parallels to Eliot’s sense of the tradition and the poet’s role in the literary community by which tradition is embodied, Meynell’s twentieth-century verse shares much with the work of Pound, the other architect of Anglo-American Modernism, especially in terms of prosodic technique. Despite the consciously crafted public personae that have placed Meynell, conservator of the laws of verse, and Pound, liberator of poetic form, in radically different camps with irreconcilable differences, attention to their respective technical procedures in the years leading up to the First World War reveals sympathies that the poets themselves and many of their readers would disavow. To expose these sympathies in the analytical language with which their authors would have understood them has the potential to significantly destabilize the history of poetic form and with it the history of modern literature. Though they were born on different continents and belonged to different generations, both became masters of their poetic idiom in the literary culture of London at the beginning of the twentieth century. By historicizing their approaches to prosody, as we have

done by reading Meynell's work in connection with the metrical treatises of Saintsbury and Bridges, and examining closely their specific technical choices, we can begin to see Meynell and Pound—sometimes antagonistic, sometimes unwittingly sympathetic—at the center of an emerging poetry for the modern age.

For attempts to understand the work of poets who, like Meynell and Pound, present themselves quite consciously as masters of the art, formalist reading is both an absolute necessity and a line of inquiry that leads to some of the most complex and interesting features of these poets' work. As we have seen, texts like Meynell's "The Laws of Verse" invite us to formalist reading, if in terms that must to some degree be recovered through reference to historical theories of prosody. Faced with the vatic force and lasting influence of Eliot and Pound's prosodic sensibilities, it can be easy to forget that the compendious studies revised and published by Bridges and Saintsbury well into the twentieth century would have continued to provide the dominant accounts of what meter was and how it worked in the nineteen-tens and -twenties. Viewed in historical context, the prosodic rebellions of early Modernist poetry play out on fields delineated by contemporary theory. Thus when Pound's early work shifts into an aesthetic preference for free verse—around the time of the publication of *Ripostes* in 1911—even that free verse functions as a series of systematic variations on recognizable, conventional metrical forms. These features of Pound's early free verse can only be brought into focus by a historically informed formalist reading. But the practice of formalist reading faces significant, potential limitations. They are, not coincidentally, the same limitations faced by metrical artists and a focus of critical thought in the literary moment that Meynell and Pound share. Chief among the obstacles faced by formalist reading and formalist writing alike is a tendency to look at meter as merely a way of mimicking, or perhaps more neutrally, reflecting the verbal content of a line of poetry—the effect that Saintsbury calls "suiting sound to sense." Saintsbury cites, as a

masterpiece of the technique, Tennyson's "The Dying Swan," in the third stanza of which "we come to the death-song itself, and the metre lengthens, unrolls, is transformed by more and more infusion of the trisyllabic foot, till the actual equivalent of the 'eddy song,' the 'awful jubilant voice,' the 'music strange and manifold,' is attained" (193).

For Saintsbury, "The Dying Swan" coordinates its sonic and verbal effects across lines and stanzas by means of an elaborate metrical schema. A more modest example of "suiting sound to sense," but one more efficiently isolated, occurs in a poem of Bridges's included in the volume *New Verse* (1925). The fourth stanza of "To His Excellency," a barrack-room ballad in trochaics telling the story of a low-ranking officer in the First World War, runs thus:

Stiffly fought he through the onset
Undishearten'd by defeat;
Held the rear from dawn to sunset
Through the long days of retreat. (13-16)

For its lines in praise of the vigor and bravery of a cavalry commander, the poem adopts a heavy, charging rhythm and mostly avoids the subtle technical variations in meter characteristic of verse that claims for itself a place in the high literary tradition, as, indeed, do the bulk of Bridges's poems. The notes appended to the end of *New Verse* include an off-hand dismissal of the poem as having originally appeared in "some War album" (89). As this remark suggests, *New Verse*, as a whole, toys with a kind of elaborate, self-deprecating irony, and it is not necessarily the case that Bridges would have regarded, or that his readers should regard, the piece as a throwaway, beneath the master's skill. In fact, "To His Excellency" evinces the master's command of the energetic and unvaried rhythms appropriate to hymns and popular song. With a consistency evident in the quoted stanza, the poem eschews the ordinary literary license of using feminine and masculine rhymes more-or-less at will by means of a stanzaic structure that requires a

feminine rhyme in the first and third lines of every stanza and a masculine in every second and fourth line.²² The structure of the poem, then, reflects Bridges's studies in English hymnody.

Singers of hymns and those who set their words to music know what students of literary verse do not always know—that the appropriateness of a hymn for congregational singing and thus for its inclusion in hymnals of similarly rhymed and metrical compositions is directly proportional to the regularity of its alternation between stressed and unstressed syllables and the regularity of the number of syllables in each of its lines. While a feminine rhyme is usually understood to place an “extrametrical” unstressed syllable at the end of a line of literary verse, there are properly no extrametrical syllables in hymns, but with the mastery of this regulated rhythm fully in evidence, Bridges's poem can incorporate the very occasional variation for the purpose of bringing into relief certain parts of the narrative. Though the last line of the stanza quoted contains the same number of syllables as the second and fourth lines of every other stanza and certainly might be chanted rhythmically in the same trochaic pattern without significant distortion of either emphasis or syntax, we are probably more likely in reading to scan the line's stressed and unstressed syllables thus:

/ • / / • • /
Through the long days of retreat.

Though Bridges's own prosodic theories and the others discussed in this study complicate our understanding of the way that lines like these are composed of constituent rhythmic units—in fact, they often ask us to question the value of the metrical foot as a concept at all—we may note simply that Bridges's line varies from the trochaic norm at work in most of the lines of the poem by placing next to one another two monosyllables that seem to call for greater emphasis than the article and preposition on either side of them. The line thus generates, in deliberate contrast to

the metrical thesis embraced by the overwhelming majority of its lines, the contiguous pair of stressed syllables sometimes called a spondee.

As Paul Fussell demonstrates in his influential study, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (1965), the expressive effect of a “spondaic substitution” in place of the ordinary foot called for by the meter of a poem results from “A succession of stressed syllables without the expected intervening unstressed syllables” and is frequently employed to “reinforce effects of slowness, weight, or difficulty” (42). In the line from Bridges’s poem, the juxtaposition of two stressed syllables where we would be accustomed to expect the regular alternation of stress and unstress in the trochaic meter works to emphasize the dreariness of an extended march away from the front, in the sense that it seems to produce a hitch in the poem’s rhythmic momentum. Of course, it is worth asking how this spondaic variation and its associated effects of “slowness” or “weight” contribute to a line of verse that makes clear, in black and white, that the march away from defeat was “long.” One answer is that this technique of “suing sound to sense” is simply pleasurable and a way of appealing to as wide an audience as possible. As mentioned in the introduction to the present study, Martin’s *The Rise and Fall of Meter* argues that the marching-cadence or sing-along style of poems like “To His Excellency” served during the years of the First World War as a way for poets accustomed to a more literary readership “to participate in a collective national identity” (139), and in this context Bridges’s approach to metrical variation in this poem does seem like a kind of textual play reminiscent of drinking songs or even nursery rhymes in which rhythmic disruptions serve as signals for a cycle of well-rehearsed, interactive gestures and to trip up the uninitiated. But the technique of suing sound to sense offers more solitary pleasures as well and is as commonly to be met with in popular song or imitations thereof as in verse of a more self-consciously literary cast.

Prins has traced the suiting of sound to sense in, for instance, Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (1848) through the decidedly scholarly meter's manipulation of pauses. Like his more widely read *Amours de Voyage*, Clough's *Bothie* is composed in his own unique interpretation of the meter of classical epic. Clough's lines translate the quantitative lengths of syllables in the dactylic hexameters used by Homer and Virgil as stressed and unstressed English syllables and observe, like their classical models, a caesura between their first and last three feet. Prins notes that a particular caesura in the *Bothie*, lodged in a line describing a woman stepping across a stream, is marked by a comma dividing one of the three-syllable dactyls into the practical equivalent of a trochee and a dangling unstressed syllable.²³ The caesura, Prins writes, "recreates a narrow passage across the water, a lady's foot-crossing over the final trochee... where the turbulent dactyls subside briefly enough for us to cross to the next line ("Victorian meters" 105). Undoubtedly, these mimetic effects—technical manipulations that attempt to "recreate" features of the observable world in the binary code of stress and unstress—are part of the formal power that poets like Bridges and Meynell, both writing meters amidst the rise of free verse, are loath to part with. But if these kinds of mimetic effects are all that meter does, or even the chief power that meter gives a poet, a metrical reading can do little more than point out correspondences between patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables and a narrative or lyric text already capable of transmitting its content without the interesting, even pleasurable, but redundant emphasis that meter provides. Tracing these correspondences can be exciting, and they challenge the reader's critical sensitivity, but insofar as mimetic meters do not complicate a poem or bring to a poem something not already lodged in the denotations and connotations of its words, they represent an endpoint for practical discussion of the role of prosody in constructing a poetic whole. This limitation can be a problem for formalist reading, but it is also a problem—

especially at a point in literary history when the value of meter is being questioned more vehemently than it had ever been before—for metrical art.

Bridges sought an escape from the potential limitations of meter in original and antiquarian experiments. *New Verse* itself is divided into four sections by prosody. Part I contains poems in the “Neo-Miltonic Syllabics” that Bridges extrapolated from his study of Milton’s metrical practice. Part II uses the accentual meters favored by Bridges’s friend and correspondent, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Part III includes with “To His Excellency” poems in a variety of more familiar, accentual-syllabic meters, and Part IV comprises attempts to construct meters in English on a quantitative scheme adapted from Latin and Greek. A distinguishing characteristic of Meynell’s work in verse, as a body, is its lack of this kind of prosodic variety. As we have seen, Meynell’s meters, however subtly they may be varied and manipulated, observe with almost no exceptions a highly technical fidelity to the set of formalized practices that Saintsbury and Patmore would call iambic verse and that Bridges, however uncomfortable with standard prosodic nomenclature, describes in *Milton’s Prosody*. In contrast to Bridges’s exploration of strange and various meters, Meynell’s metrical practice offers an alternative mode of grappling with the question of meter’s relevance: that of intimate, specialized mastery. Poems like “The Laws of Verse” show Meynell deeply engaged with metrical composition as a cultural practice and as a kind of spiritual discipline.

Included with “The Laws of Verse” in Meynell’s *Last Poems*, “The English Metres” addresses the specific challenge to the metrical artist posed by mimetic prosody and gestures toward an aesthetic ideal in which rhythm and language exist in complete conceptual symbiosis. “The English Metres” compares the various characteristics of metrical feet, using their conventionalized Greek names, to the four seasons, and describes their flexibility for expressive purposes as “Not Common Law, but Equity” (13). In its praise of the variety and flexibility of

metrical feet, the poem assumes a didactic stance pointing out what each rhythmic unit should be able to do. Contrasting Meynell's poem with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Metrical Feet. Lesson for a Boy"—a short, slight poem that illustrates uses of the various metrical feet, as, for instance, "Iambics march from short to long; / With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng" (5-6)—Martin notes, "it is not, though it seems like it almost should be, a lesson in expressive reading" (202). Instead, the poem presents its characterizations of the metrical feet in a steady, mostly unvaried iambic meter, for example:

Redundant syllables of Summer rain,
And displaced accents of authentic Spring;
Spondaic clouds above a gusty plain
With dactyls on the wing. (9-12)

In so emphatically divorcing the content presented in her poem from the mimetic potential of its form, Meynell's poem makes an argument that mimetic or illustrative prosody is not a particularly desirable goal for the artist. The stanza does contain a mimetic variation in its second line. The word "displaced" is positioned in just such a way that its ordinary lexical stress is unavoidably displaced by a metrical stress on its first syllable. The mimetic instance belongs to the same class of metrical variations as the spondaic substitution we have observed in Bridges's "To His Excellency," but in the context of a poem so obviously and so carefully avoiding the mimetic potential of a subject matter ready-made for it, the particular instance of the displaced accent on "displaced" serves an ironic function—a wink at the potential impossibility of the ideal for which the poem strives.

Despite its antipathy to mimetic prosody, the ideal for which "The English Metres" strives requires a mutually reinterpreting interaction of meter and language. By bringing meter and language face to face with each other, even in contrast or disagreement, "The English Metres" causes the dimensions of its performance to depend on one another for the completion

of the poetic act. The poem praises metrical variety without using it at all. Though the poem's characterizations of its subject matter reflect the preoccupations with language, law, nature, and their interdependence characteristic of Meynell's work in verse, it argues most clearly that the purpose of poetic form is neither illustrative nor supportive. Neither form nor content communicate the whole statement that the poem has to make about English prosody, and in this way, the poem identifies its aesthetic ideal as an ongoing process of critical self-definition embodied in the interaction of words with the prosodic structure into which they are organized.

Meynell's poetry provides much more complex examples of the interaction of form and content than the rhetorical contrast presented in "The English Metres," but it is important to recognize how even the aesthetic argument advanced in "The English Metres" demonstrates a sympathy with Modernist poetics that differs powerfully from the meditations on form evident in Meynell's *Preludes* and that volume's efforts to construct an appropriately expressive poetic vehicle with tools derived from Romantic and Victorian prosodic methodologies. In a 1921 essay on the sculpture of Constantin Brancusi, Pound identifies the common goal in Modernist visual art and literature when he writes, "T. J. Everets has made the best summary of our contemporary aesthetics that I know, in his sentence 'A work of art has in it no idea which is separable from the form'"(441). As Pound goes on to explain, this principle guides the "vorticist" literature proclaimed in *BLAST* as thoroughly as the quasi-representational "masses in relation" posited by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in theorizing about his own sculpture. Though the immediately obvious differences in Pound's poetic idiom and Meynell's—above all, Meynell's commitment to working in conventional meters—has often obscured the deep sympathies in the work of both twentieth-century poets, a close examination of the way that Meynell's verse strives for the same aesthetic convergence that Pound identifies as a "Vortex" shows both the profound shift in aesthetic priorities from *Preludes* to Meynell's later verse and the complex relationship of the

Modernism Pound helped to create to the conventions and expectations of the contemporary literary climate that so much of the propaganda of Pound's early Modernist coteries strives to disavow.

Part II: Abstraction

For Meynell, the mimetic potential of meter represents a source of poetic anxiety. Just as Meynell's "The English Metres" tiptoes through a linguistic minefield in attempts to escape the technique of "suiting sound to sense," Meynell's later work as a whole represents a sustained effort to discover agencies of meter stripped to its most basic components. A method for exploiting the performative potential of meter alternative to the mimetic prosody praised by Saintsbury may be observed among the economical and intricately structured lyrics of Mary Elizabeth Coleridge. Coleridge's handling of meter anticipates, by a few years only, strategies Meynell would use in her twentieth-century verse, and the short lyric "Blue and White," in particular, furnishes an impressive example of meter becoming something more than a vehicle for poetic thought, something that comes very close to the Modernist ideal that Ira B. Nadel has called "meaning expressed by form" (352). Nadel's formulation describes "The Return," one of the most widely praised poems in Pound's *Ripostes* and an exemplar of Pound's approach to *vers libre* in the years when his modern literature contested with Meynell's. Unlike the examples we have noted in poems by Bridges and Clough, and foreshadowing the prosodic techniques of Meynell and Pound, Coleridge's "Blue and White" invokes the representational potential of meter not as an incidental complement to its narrative action but as a meta-discursive principle connecting and reconfiguring assumptions about the agency of the poem's words and rhythms.

First published under the pseudonym Ανοδος in 1896, "Blue and White" employs a narrative frame reminiscent of the Victorian medievalism of William Morris's romances or of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott."²⁴ In Coleridge's poem, the speaker is a medieval lady-love

who addresses her absent knight-at-arms with the promise to wear a highly visible and symbolically freighted love-token to boost his morale in battle:

Blue is Our Lady's colour,
White is Our Lord's.
To-morrow I will wear a knot
Of blue and white cords,
That you may see it, where you ride
Among the flashing swords.

* * *

O banner, white and sunny blue,
With prayer I wove thee!
For love the white, for faith the heavenly hue,
And both for him, so tender true,
Him that doth love me!

The aestheticized universe of courtly love and high adventure provides the poem with a symbolic vocabulary drawn from the iconography and ritual of pre-Reformation Christianity. From its initial invocation of “Our Lord” and “Our Lady”—conventional terms of devotion for Jesus and Mary—the poem will go on to construct a symbolic matrix simultaneously held together and embodied in its careful adaptations of an equally conventional lyric form.

The majority of the poem's lines employ a specific regular meter. In a few of the lines, the stress pattern is ambiguous, but the alternation of iambic stresses and unstresses in “Blue and White” offers the possibility of multiple simultaneous realizations of the iambic meter rather than a rhythm so ambiguous as to suggest a metric based on either iambs or trochees, anapests or dactyls. Its meter is iambic, but because “Blue and White” leaves its stress contour open to interpretation in a higher degree than one usually expects from a poem in a relatively simple meter, it tends, like some of Meynell's poems, toward a syllabic metrical basis. That is to say, the poem adheres to a strict and formally significant program of syllabic line lengths even when its alternation of iambic stresses and unstresses is somewhat ambiguous.

The most regular feature of the poem's meter is an eight-syllable line followed by a five syllable line. With the exception of three important irregularities in its first, second, and ninth lines, the poem employs a variation on ballad or "common" meter, a form strongly associated with narrative in verse and romantic subject matter. A term derived from hymnody, "common meter" indicates an eight-syllable line followed by a six-syllable line in a strict and unvaried iambic meter. The practical considerations of hymn-writing are different from the conventional constraints of iambic meters in literary verse; hymns do not, on the whole, allow for the inversions and substitutions we have been observing in iambic meters, but as Attridge notes in *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (1982), this term, like the names of the other hymn-forms, provides "a convenient label" for an iambic tetrameter followed by an iambic trimeter (86). The common meter shares its pattern of four beats followed by three beats with the "ballad meter." The terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but traditional ballads usually employ a more heavily stress-timed meter that allows for a greater degree of syllabic irregularity than either hymns or literary verse in iambic meters, a situation which, notwithstanding the metrical ambiguities we are examining, does not accurately describe the adaptations of iambic meters in "Blue and White."

In Coleridge's version of the familiar common meter, a long line of eight syllables and four stresses alternates with a short line of five syllables and a sometimes ambiguous stress pattern. The third and fourth lines are exemplars of the pattern:

To-morrow I will wear a knot
Of blue and white cords.

The first line in this pair is an unambiguous iambic tetrameter, but the second employs five syllables which might be scanned a few different ways. Given that the short line ends with a rhyme for the earlier "Lord's," the most natural scansion may well be

• / • / /
Of blue and white cords,

retaining the three beats appropriate to the short line of common meter but omitting the unstressed syllable between “white” and “cords” that would fulfill the pattern. It is important, nonetheless, to acknowledge how the poem’s simple diction and repetitive vocabulary offer at least one other rhythmic possibility for reading the line.

If we read “blue and white” as a self-contained adjective phrase, itself the heraldic icon of the poem, we might scan the line thus:

• / • • /
Of blue and white cords.

It should be noted that this scansion would mirror the stress pattern of other short lines in the poem. In the second stanza, for instance, the lines “With prayer I wove thee” (8) and “Him that doth love me” (11) are linked by a strange kind of double off-rhyme that works to emphasize a recognizable metrical figure weaving itself through the poem from beginning to end. Insofar as “wove thee” and “love me” are plausible slant rhymes, they tend to present a scansion for the last line like this:

/ • • / •
Him that doth love me,

with emphasis on the beloved “Him” and on “love” itself. The falling movement effected by an unstressed monosyllable at the end of the line echoes (or rather reflects, for in such a case it would in fact be a metrical mirror image) the similar structure of the poem’s fifth line in that both contain two stresses among their five syllables and, reading across foot boundaries, the rhythmic figure / • • /, a figure that, as we shall see, is established in the first lines of the poem.

Because “Blue and White” actively cultivates the rhythmic ambiguities we have observed in its creative adaptation of the common meter, it is all the more surprising that the full iambic

pattern of a tetrameter followed by a trimeter is maintained only in the pairing at the end of the first stanza: “That you may see it where you ride / Among the flashing swords.” In terms of technique, the filling-out of this metrical pattern at the end of the first stanza contributes a sense of completion or closure highlighted by the poem’s division into two stanzas marked typographically by a row of dots. The completion of the metrical pattern at the close of the poem’s first stanza marks the completion of the lady-love’s vigil as the second stanza opens with an image of the knight in battle on the next day.

Unlike the filling-out of the common meter at the end of this first stanza, however, the poem’s first two lines present significant irregularities with implications for the structure of the poem as a whole. In contrast to the other long lines of the poem, the first line contains only seven syllables and concludes, moreover, with a feminine ending. If we allow the poem to place emphasis on “Blue”—one of the two most important words in the poem’s symbolic program—and accord the phrase “Our Lady” the same stress contour it would receive in prayer or even ordinary speech, the result scans thus:

/ • • / • / •
Blue is Our Lady’s colour,

a line with seven syllables and three stresses, a foot short of the corresponding long lines in the rest of the poem. Likewise, the second line echoes the first, both in vocabulary and rhythm as

/ • • /
White is Our Lord’s

contains four syllables and two stresses. Read thus, these lines establish a rhythmic precedent that, as we have seen, complicates our scansion of some of the other short lines in the poem and calls attention to the technique of rhythmic ambiguity that pervades the poem as a whole. But more importantly, their metrical variations, parallel grammar, and symbolically charged

vocabulary mark these first two lines off from the poem and foreshadow their structural function in the second stanza.

Like the first, the second stanza uses two pairs of lines in an adapted common meter. As with the earlier line, “Of blue and white cords,” the short lines in this second stanza employ end-rhymes to leave open at least the possibility of a line with three beats in five syllables. Unlike the first stanza, these pairs are separated one from the other by the poem’s most obvious anomaly: a single eleven-syllable line. As an outward sign of the transmutation wrought by the poem’s movement from the first day to the second, the second stanza, despite keeping the meter of the first, occupies five lines to the first stanza’s six. This, of course, is because the anomalous ninth line effectively splices two lines together, condensing an otherwise six-line stanza into five. The point of interest, however, is that the ninth line does not bring together theoretical eight- and six- or eight- and five-syllable lines. Rather its eleven syllables correspond directly to the strangely abbreviated lines at the beginning of the poem.

The relationship between the ninth line and its counterparts in the first and second lines is further emphasized by the comma-imposed caesura that holds the line together as two distinct but inseparable parts: “For love the white, for faith the heavenly hue.” The four syllables and two beats of love’s white echo the four syllables and two beats of Our Lord’s. In the same way, the seven syllables and four beats of heaven’s blue recall the seven syllables and four beats of Our Lady’s. The internal consistency of the poem’s syllabic program is potentially undermined if we assign a different numerical value to the word “heavenly.” To the extent that, for poetic and especially hymnodical purposes (where the metrical function of the word is usually emphasized typographically with the spelling heav’n), the word “heaven” is sometimes pronounced as a monosyllable, it is certainly possible that “heavenly” in line nine could be assigned the value of a disyllable. As Bridges notes in *Milton’s Prosody*, however, “*heaven* is freely used in all verse

both as disyllable and monosyllable” (27), and the prosodic architecture of this very measured poem seems clearly to regard the sometimes elided middle syllable of “heavenly” as a metrical unit in its own right. Arranged in a tightly controlled pattern that generates the rules for our reading of it, the poem weaves together its symbolic elements as simultaneously the speaker constructs a love-knot to be the symbol of her devotion to the beloved knight-at-arms. The first line of the poem begins a strand of symbolic logic that is laid beside its complement in the second line, and the two are plaited together in the ninth line drawing the disparate parts of the poem together into a formal singularity.

White is Our Lord’s color because white is the liturgical color appropriate to Christmas and to Easter, to celebrations of Christ’s birth and resurrection. Blue is the color associated with liturgical celebrations of the Virgin Mary, and it is, moreover, inseparable from the conventional iconography of Christ’s mother. Both colors, like the figures of devotion with which they are associated, represent fidelity and purity. Jesus and Mary would be understood by the medieval Christians that Coleridge imagines in addition to the nineteenth-century Roman Catholics and Anglicans among whom she moved as figures of perpetual virginity. Devotion to either Christ or the Virgin Mary are common enough among the characters of chivalric romance. Gawain, for instance, carries an image of Mary painted inside his shield when he goes in search of the Green Knight.²⁵ For Gawain, this image is an aid and constant reminder to maintain his vow of chastity, but for “Blue and White,” Our Lord and Our Lady, corresponding to white and blue, to love and faith, are symbols binding the speaker and her knight in the erotic devotion of earthly love.

Within this symbolic matrix, then, the poem’s first line is the blue cord; its second is the white, and its ninth is the knot. But as readers, we are not privy to the actual weaving of the knot. Rather, the speaker tells us, in the first stanza, about the knot she “will wear,” and, in the second

stanza, shifts from the future tense to the past in describing the knot that she “wove.” The weaving, we are given to understand, takes place in the night between the two days represented by the poem’s two stanzas. The weaving takes place in the space on the page between the stanzas. Thus, the dots dividing the stanzas are more than a simple marker in time or space. They stand for the act of weaving itself, the act that binds two lovers together in the night and which cannot, or ought not, be put into words.

“Blue and White” makes use of the mimetic potential of meter to the extent that the third line of its second stanza effects the verbal equivalent of the knot it describes. But just as it signifies a moment of erotic connection prior to the moment when it appears in the poem as a material artifact, the knot and the line in which it is embodied serve to draw the iconic elements of the poem into a formal whole. The knotted line asks the reader to consider the way that meter is manipulated throughout the poem to create the necessary conditions for the formal climax it represents. As the set of conditions that make this climax possible, the meter of the poem as a whole provides information that is not already present in the language itself. Rather than generating an instance of “suited sound to sense” for the purpose of producing emphasis or the kind of incidental charm we have observed in the line from Bridges’s poem, Coleridge’s use of metrical mimesis asks us to think about what the poem leaves unsaid. Coleridge’s late nineteenth-century poem anticipates the way that Meynell, in her twentieth-century verse, will use meter to direct the reader’s attention to empty space, to the sonic and graphic pauses that characterize poems like “The Laws of Verse,” and it also points to the way that a holistic awareness of the entire metrical context of a poem is necessary for understanding the individual metrical effects that characterize Meynell’s later verse.

Coleridge’s “Blue and White” uses the representational potential of meter to establish the context in which its rhythmic abstractions will morph into the signature of its speaker’s unique

emotional experience. The poem depends for its rhythmic affect on the conventions of metrical composition in iambic meters toward or away from which it is constantly moving. In its use of meter, “Blue and White” corresponds to the formal project that Prins has identified as guiding the technical strategies in Meynell’s “The Laws of Verse.” Noting the potential ambiguity of Meynell’s title, Prins asks if it is

announcing the law of versification or the versification of the law? Should we read “The Laws of Verse” as subjective or objective genitive? The poem does not simply propose a grammatical inversion or pose a rhetorical question; it suggests the possibility of reading meter nonmimetically and nonexpressively: not as the metrical embodiment of its meaning, not as the metrical expression of the poet’s feeling, but as the performance of affect produced by formal abstraction. (276)

Prins’s observations describe a poem that functions in Meynell’s *Last Poems*, published at the end of her life, as a statement of the poetics she developed gradually over the course of a career that, as we have seen, began in a very different idiom with the effusive monologues and looser meters of *Preludes*. Among the distinguishing features of Meynell’s later poetics is the concern with the potential for meter to function as a reflexive commentary on the structure and paraphrasable content of a poem as a whole. In this respect, Meynell’s later verse exhibits features that make it a link between the Pre-Raphaelite idiom of Mary Coleridge and the self-consciously revolutionary style of Pound’s Modernist free verse. One of the ways in which Meynell’s verse accomplishes this linking function is through its deep suspicion of the mimetic potential of meter. In avoiding rhythmic mimesis, Meynell’s work strives for a high degree of formal abstraction and foregrounds the artifice of the poetic act.

Nowhere is this formal abstraction more apparent than in the deceptively simple lines of “I Am the Way.” The second poem in *Later Poems*, printed following “The Shepherdess,” “I Am the Way” brings together the most important themes of Meynell’s work as a whole by joining a

simultaneously affirmative and questioning exploration of religious faith to a form and vocabulary purged of representational detail:

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

I cannot see—
I, child of process—if there lies
An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies,

I'll not reproach
The road that winds, my feet that err.
Access, Approach
Art Thou, Time, Way, and Wayfarer.

It would certainly be appropriate to scan this brief poem as composed in iambic dimeters alternating with tetrameters, but it would be more precise to say that the poem places lines of exact syllabic lengths (four syllables and eight syllables) in contrast to a highly ambiguous stress pattern. We can read the first line of this poem in a couple of different ways that would be amenable to the prosody of Meynell's mature verse. We might, that is, read the line as either two ordinary iambs, or with its first foot inverted:

• / • /
Thou art the Way

or

/ • • /
Thou art the Way.

Aside from the pleasant symmetry suggested by reading this line's two capitalized words with metrical emphasis, the poem's overwhelmingly monosyllabic vocabulary leaves its stress contour to the interpretation of the reader. In the first half of the poem at least, its rhythm, the

specific realizations of its metrical structure, remains ambiguously encoded in the short, sparse lines.

The result of the poem's rhythmic ambiguity is an illustration of Patmore's assertion in the *Essay on English Metrical Law* that the metrical beat or ictus "*has no material and external existence at all*, but has its place in the mind, which craves measure in everything" (15). Prins has shown the influence of Patmore's prosody on the work of his intimate friend and colleague, and the rarefied linguistic environment of Meynell's "I Am the Way" accomplishes, perhaps more starkly and immediately than Patmore's own verse, a realization of the elder poet's highly formal theories. Though it exhibits none of those rolling, sensuous lines that Patmore would come to favor later in life, the poem's fastidious construction allows it a paradoxical freedom of emotional force and generates that "perpetual conflict between the law of the verse and the freedom of the language" (9) where Patmore locates the supreme agencies of metrical composition. "I Am the Way" multiplies its simultaneously possible prosodic realizations by retaining a rigid syllabic structure. These multiplying metrical possibilities are present as well in the poem's fourth line and in its reflection at the beginning of the second quatrain. Here we are invited to read "I cannot say" and "I cannot see" as parallels to the first line of the poem: as either two iambs or a trochee and an iamb. In either case, these lines present the reader with options for a collaborative relationship with the text, to choose, that is, among its possible realizations.

These freedoms are raised to the next magnitude by the rhythmically confusing punctuation of the second stanza's second line: "I, child of process—if there lies."

Though the syllabic structure of this line remains consistent, one is tempted to observe a pause with the comma between "I" and "child" by reading a full stress onto both words. If however, we read the line with two full stresses on its first two syllables, we are left with an extra stress that

significantly disrupts the apparent pattern of alternating dimeters and tetrameters. While an additional stress in the line is not necessarily demanded by the poem, and though the line can be read without violating the decorums of a conventional prosody, the long vowel-sound of “I” and the pause following it are more than a little suggestive of a functional trochee where the pause takes the place of an unstressed syllable. This reading is probably more natural in recitation than trying to pronounce “I” as a metrical unstress, and in any case, reading the line in this way lends a considerably greater rhythmic force to the speaker’s evaluative epithet for herself as “child of process.” With both possibilities before us, the poem reaches a critical moment of formal self-definition, asking us, in effect, to question the status of “I” with all the philosophical significance that question implies. Ultimately, the question that the speaker asks us to entertain is something like, “If ‘I, child of process,’ am changing and growing everyday, and if I do not know what will be the end of my process, how can I really know *who* I am, or *what* I am?”

Any totalizing answer to this question would be contrary to the poem’s conceptual program; instead, we are invited to contemplate the question itself as the poem moves into a field of rapidly multiplying interpretive possibilities. The poem embodies the speaker’s movement from spiritual confusion to mystical resignation by asking the same question of its own form. To scan the last line of “I Am the Way” in accordance with a four-beat iambic meter, we must recognize the last syllable of “Wayfarer” as a metrical stress, emphasized by its position in the stanza as a rhyme for “err.” We might then scan the line as

• / • / • / • /
 Art Thou, Time, Way, and Wayfarer.

This reading would place “Time” in the position of a metrical unstress, highlighting the possibility that “Time” may serve a different grammatical function than the other nouns in the poem’s last sentence. “Time” may in fact be read as an apostrophe to the addressee of the poem,

a possibility more apparent if we rewrite the sentence as “Access, approach art thou, Jesus, way and wayfarer.” Of course, a less programmatic recitation is apt to locate a full stress on “Thou” and each of the nouns following it, retaining the meter’s eight syllables and four beats and ending on an unstressed syllable without recourse to an extrametrical feminine ending. If, as we have noted, the poem’s sixth line presents us with the possibility of a fifth stress, then such may also be true of its last syllable, and the result would be something not unlike the phantom “hovering stress” posited in Hopkins’s theories of accentual verse. However we scan its final line, the poem closes with a list of nouns and a copula that identify Christ as present at every point along the speaker’s spiritual journey. The speaker has come to recognize Christ as the “Way” as well as a “Wayfarer” upon it. If we read the line in sympathy with Meynell’s scrupulous attention to the conventions of iambic verse, we are struck by the possibility of Christ’s being equivalent to all of these things, and something more in relation to time—the possibility that Christ may be consubstantial with “Time” itself. As the speaker moves with Christ and toward Christ through the temporal medium of her life, “I Am the Way” unfolds, in the language of religious paradox, a complex meditation on the life and movement of poetry. The poem’s expressive variety depends on the bonds of formal restraint, and preceding from the title’s citation of Christ’s own words, “I Am the Way” takes the form of a prayer and becomes an encapsulation of Meynell’s defining aesthetic preoccupation—it identifies the struggle toward restraint and willing submission as itself a creative act.

The epistemological ambiguity of “I Am the Way” requires a non-literal mode of expression with which to harness and direct the escaping referentiality of its words and, like Coleridge’s “Blue and White,” finds this source of affective agency in the manipulation of metrical conventions. Though both Meynell and Coleridge have tended to be read in the context of the Victorian aesthetic that emerging Modernists would discredit as obsolete, “I Am the Way”

and “Blue and White,” with the bodies of work they exemplify, engage in a critical discourse with the history of poetic form. It is exactly this discourse that underpins Modernist attempts to find sources of poetic agency outside of a historically recognizable understanding of meter. The critical discourse in which Meynell and Coleridge’s meters engage, therefore, is not unlike that informing the early free verse of Pound. We have noted that Pound’s *Ripostes* was published within a decade of Meynell’s *Later Poems* and represents a stylistic turning point in the work of a poet fast becoming a principal architect of twentieth-century aesthetics. Among the poems in *Ripostes*, “The Return” most clearly epitomizes that stylistic shift with prosodic strategies strikingly similar to those worked out by Meynell and Coleridge. Like “Blue and White” and “I Am the Way,” “The Return” struggles with mimetic prosody to arrive at an ideal in which the non-literal aspects of poetic rhythm perform the nuances of an affective state in a way that words alone cannot.

In “The Return,” Pound contraposes an impossibly oblique narrative with a driving rhythm that effectively replaces the confused and almost hysterical account of the speaker as the main activity of the poem:

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
 Movements, and the slow feet,
 The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
 Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,
 With fear, as half-awakened;
 As if the snow should hesitate
 And murmur in the wind,
 and half turn back;
 These were the “Wing’d-with-Awe,”
 Inviolable.

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
 With them the silver hounds,
 sniffing the trace of air!

Haie! Haie!
These were the swift to harry;
These the keen-scented;
These were the souls of blood.

Slow on the leash,
pallid the leash-men!

Introducing “The Return” in his 1936 edition of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Yeats writes, “one gets an impression, especially when [Pound] is writing in *vers libre*, that he has not got all the wine into the bowl, that he is a brilliant improvisator translating at sight from an unknown Greek masterpiece” (10). Though impressionistic, Yeats’s observations call attention to the tone of obscurity, the willful obfuscation of an intelligible narrative context moving through “The Return.”

Despite its tantalizing title, any attempt to pin an allegorical system of correspondences to the poem is doomed from the outset. Pound’s abstract landscape is populated by an undisclosed number of ethereal beings tentatively identified as “gods,” some hunting dogs, and little else. The hounds are “with” the gods (13), but the poem never makes their relationship entirely clear. In addition, the poem employs a distinct speaker who addresses the reader, or perhaps a group of observers standing in the snowy fields of the poem, with the imperative of “See, they return” (1). The snow falls over a strange and carefully observed procession of enigmas. Their “Movements” (2) are watched and catalogued, but the poem leaves the causes and conclusions of this procession to the past and to the future. Instead of a meaningful narrative, we are offered a kind of tableau staged in an eternal present. Though “The Return” does not exhibit the hard-edged and static description of Pound’s more famous Imagist poem, “In a Station of the Metro,” first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1913, it nonetheless corresponds directly to his definition of an “image” in the early essay “Imagisme,” also published in 1913, as “an intellectual and emotional complex” presented “in an instant of time” (253). In the absence of an allegorical narrative, the

poem's aesthetic power seems to radiate from the dread and apprehension generated by its mysterious pageantry and incantatory rhythm, the dread and apprehension shared by both groups on either side of the pack of potentially blood-thirsty dogs.

With its gods in “wingèd” shoes and pack of hounds, the poem flirts with a few different sets of classical allusions. One thinks immediately of Mercury's winged sandals. Even Perseus, who was only half a god, wore winged shoes to do battle with the Gorgons. In neither case do the correspondences seem explicit enough to warrant identifying in the poem the narrative of any one god. In one of few extended discussions of “The Return,” Blake Leland reminds us that Pound, for what it is worth, wrote of gods as “eternal states of mind manifested by artists possessed of virtuous technique” (179), the naming of whom is not in itself significant. But we must also remember the story of Actaeon, torn apart by the hounds of hunter-goddess Diana for violating her virginal propriety. In the kernel of this story, we have a dynamic that seems to illuminate the action of the poem. In the myth's pageant of gods and men, violence, dismemberment, and the hunt, there is a kind of ecstasy to be found in blood-drenched submission to the will of the gods. But as the poem will intimate, these allusive gods “return” to a world changed utterly by a disruption in the primal relationship of gods to men.

Though sketchy, the narrative frame provided by Pound's speaker intimates that some terrible, cataclysmic event has disrupted the cosmic order and thrown it into reverse. Those gods who “return” in the present tense “were . . . Inviolable” (10-11) only in the past tense. They return “Wavering” (4), as if drunk or wounded. They return “With fear” (6), watching the patterns of the snow falling, like frightened animals while the men, who should have their been quarry, observe the movements of the gods with an ambiguously charged “ah” (1). The “silver hounds” have travelled with these weary deities from some distance into the crystallized moment

of the poem, but who can say for sure whether they move alongside their masters as dutiful adjuncts to the hunt or follow them as killers on the scent?

The ambiguity of this central dynamic functions as the vestiges of a kind of lost, misplaced narrative, and Donald Davie is right, in his *Studies in Ezra Pound*, to challenge the possibility of a coherent allegorical reading. Do the poem's weary but unvanquished classical gods, Davie asks, point to:

The decay of classical studies? The etiolation of Hellenism as an intellectual and artistic stimulus? The virtual extinction of any sense of retributive justice in the frame of things, such as the ancients figured by the avenging furies? Even the etiolation of the Sapphic stanza, considered as the classical vehicle of sexual passion. These ideas or some of them (and certainly others) are part of the "complicated sort of significance" Pound was to claim for the poem" (36).

The poem is "complicated" to say the least, and its tempting allegorical possibilities lend "The Return" suggestion, color, and gradation rather than parables. But if the poem signifies anything at all, it does so in terms of form.

In his brief explication in *The Pound Era*, Kenner writes convincingly that, in "The Return," "rhythm defines meaning" (189). Throughout, the language of "The Return" embraces and releases, approaches and circles round a single rhythmic figure which becomes, in Leland's terminology, the poem's linguistic "icon." Repeated three times without variation only in the ecstatic pronouncements of the third stanza, this figure takes the shape / • • / • /, a pattern that, for the sake of convenience in analyzing this free verse poem, might be described as a dactyl followed by a trochee and a single final stress:

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air! (12-14)²⁶

Concentrating its lyric intensity in the structural climax of these lines, the rhythmic figure echoes through every other line of the poem. While "The Return" and its central rhythmic figure

constitute, for Yeats, “the most beautiful poem that has been written in the free form, one of the few in which I find real organic rhythm” (qtd. in Ruthven 204), it is important to recognize that, however innovatively it may be used, this rhythmic figure is readily described in the terms of traditional prosody and is a commonplace of poems in a three-beat iambic meter. An iambic trimeter with what Bridges would describe as an inversion in the first foot, the same rhythm is apparent in especially the last two lines of the following quatrain from Robert Browning’s “Ben Karshook’s Wisdom,” where the stress pattern is emphasized by the poet’s own italics:

“Son, there is no reply!”
The Rabbi bit his beard:
“Certain, a soul have *I*—
“*We* may have none,” he sneered.

The rhythmic variations of recognizable metrical structures in Pound’s poem radiate out from this crucial third stanza to accomplish a performance of the tensions between the relatively new techniques of free verse and the conventions of metrical prosody that Meynell and Coleridge examine more explicitly.

As the focus of this performance, the enigmatic gods come to inhabit the poem’s linguistic body, and so, as “they return” with “tentative / Movements” (1-2), the falling dactyl at the end of the first line and the enjambment separating the adjective from its noun enact their halting pace. Similarly, the second line uses the two diphthongs in the monosyllables “slow” and “feet” to effect both a heavy end-stop as well as the rhythmic inverse of the light syllables trailing off from the first line’s “tentative,” all to the performance of a shuffling, degraded gait. This rhythmic performance is developed further in the third line where the unstressed syllable in “trouble” is followed by a preposition and an article—function words that tend to be unstressed in metrical as in non-metrical contexts. The same pattern is repeated in reverse in the last five syllables of the line leaving the noun “pace” in the syllabic center of the line surrounded by

unstressed syllables and producing what one might call a rhythmic palindrome:

• / • • • / • • • / •
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain.

As such, the line enacts the gods' broken-down movement into the speaker's field of vision.

Their pace is indeed troubled, but the uncertainty of their wavering points to a central conflict in "The Return."

The poem is not metrical. It does not use a single metrical line throughout, nor does it employ a repeated, metrically heterogeneous stanza. The extent to which we can accurately scan its rhythm in terms of feet is debatable; however, as Kenner's scansion shows, the repetition of regular rhythmic features is obvious and susceptible to notation in the most basic terms of stress and unstress. Moreover, in her study, *The Ghost of Meter: Culture and Prosody in American Free Verse*, the title of which refers to T. S. Eliot's formulation of the way that a poem in free verse interacts with the traditions of metrical composition, Annie Finch demonstrates how "numerous lines of free verse can be read fruitfully in terms of the metrical code" (30). As she goes on to explain,

This should not be astonishing. Writers obviously absorb the regular rhythms of their literature. Quotations of metrical patterns are ready tools for heightened expressiveness, intensity of emotion, assertiveness, or closure. For some free-verse poets, the metrical code adds no more than these to a poem. But for poets like Dickinson who interact intimately with the history of poetic conventions, the metrical code adds a level of profoundly allusive, yet wordless, meaning to poetry.

The poetry of Emily Dickinson furnishes many of the examples for Finch's investigation of "the metrical code" because of the way that Dickinson's work interrogates the prosodic conventions it evokes, but what she says of Dickinson may be as accurately applied to Pound. We have seen how the third line of "The Return," considered as a species of free verse, might scan in terms of the metrical code. Insofar as the poem eschews a strict meter, such a scansion will reflect

primarily what feels natural to the speaking voice or what the mind regards as the words and syllables most deserving of emphasis. But if we read this third line as the work of a poet who, like Dickinson, consistently demands from readers a heightened attention to poetic form, it is important to recognize that the line comprises eleven syllables, the last of which is inarguably unstressed. As a result, the line would fit more-or-less comfortably into any poem written in blank verse as an iambic pentameter with a feminine ending.

Given the absolute centrality of the iambic pentameter to the verse tradition in English and Pound's own self-conscious stance as a master of the poetic arts—"I resolved," as he puts it in the 1913 essay "How I Began," "that at thirty I would know more about poetry than any man living, that I would know the dynamic content from the shell, that I would know what was accounted poetry everywhere" (213)—it would be a mistake to regard the third line's eleven syllables and feminine ending as nothing more than an accident of free verse. In fact, the poem as a whole adheres very closely to the conventions of an iambic metric notwithstanding its varied line-lengths. If we contrast the more impressionistic scansion given above with one based on the conventions of iambic pentameter, the line in question would scan comfortably, if not with the polish one might expect of a master technician, thus:

• / • / • / • / • / •
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain.

The result is a relatively ordinary iambic pentameter but one liable to at least two distinct aesthetic objections.

The first objection relates to placing a metrical stress on the preposition "in." As the previous scansion indicates, the three syllables between the first in "trouble" and the single word "pace" tend to blend together into a string of unstresses reflective of the gods' irregular, troubled progress. That pace is perhaps a little less troubled if we scan the line as an iambic pentameter,

but the tension between a more regulated meter and a more intuitive rhythm is central to the activity of this poem. Precedents for a relatively unemphatic word like “in” occupying the place of a metrical stress are everywhere in English verse. These lines from section 4 of George Meredith’s sequence of modified sonnets, *Modern Love* (1862), provide an example of the same thing happening in Pound’s line:

Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars. (4.11-12)

Meredith’s lines are pentameters; the first provides an example of a metrical situation very similar to that in the pentameter scansion of Pound’s line. Sandwiched between the unstressed syllable of “dying” and the almost universally unstressed definite article, “in” occupies the place of a metrical stress. This technique is simply one of the ways that poets working within the constraints of a metrical framework are able to vary the stress contour of individual lines. More importantly, such a technique would be immediately familiar to the readers of 1912, schooled in the poetics of Meredith or Browning or Tennyson and their predecessors reaching all the way back to the pentameters of Chaucer. The metrical phenomenon by which a relatively unemphatic syllable takes on the role of a stress in the context of a metrical line is functionally very similar to the instance of “promoted” stress that we have observed in Meynell’s “The Threshing Machine,” and this correspondence in metrical technique is one of the ways that both Meynell, arch-conservative prosodist, and Pound the revolutionary engage the conventions that provide their poems not simply with a formal framework but with another level of signifying agency.

The other objection to a pentameter scansion of Pound’s line concerns what seems to be a metrical stress placed on the article before “uncertain.” While scansion is not a science, one of the few constants is that “the” is almost never stressed. We might consider at least one other alternative scansion to avoid locating a metrical stress on “the.” Just as Bridges’s *Milton’s*

Prosody provides the historical observations about metrical form that can illuminate the structure of Meynell's lines, Bridges's work provides clues about the way that Pound is evoking poetic convention in "The Return." As we have noted, *Milton's Prosody* offers a comprehensive study of the conventions of iambic pentameter, specifically as they apply to Milton's blank verse in *Paradise Lost* but supported by extensive citation of lines from poets as various as Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Shelley. Part of Bridges's purpose in providing these examples is to show how Milton's use of the iambic pentameter is a kind of culminating point for the tradition in which he is working and foundational for poets coming after him. Of "the" preceding a word beginning with a vowel, Bridges writes, "In English verse when there is poetic elision of the terminal vowel of one word before the initial vowel of the next word, the sound of it is not lost, the two vowels are glided together, and the conditions may be called synalœpha" (9). Following Bridges, we can consider Pound's line to create a kind of elision between "the" and "uncertain," forming three syllables where we might otherwise expect three. For the sake of analytical convenience the phrase might be rewritten as "th' uncertain." On this basis, we can scan the line, awkwardly, as

• / • / • / • / • /
The trouble in the pace and th' uncertain.

This scansion preserves the rhythm of the pentameter but requires contorting the lexical stress pattern of "uncertain."

The question may be fairly asked as to what profit can be got from subjecting an apparently irregular poetic line to the metrical conventions of a kind of poetry that Pound would spend most of his career actively challenging. But it is important to understand that, despite the more adventurous rhythms of the first stanza of "The Return," the poem will go on to use consistently several entirely common variations of common iambic meters. It would be a mistake, then, to miss how deeply this single line, with its echoes of iambic pentameter, is

implicated in a meditation on what iambic meters are and how they work. What narrative the poem offers is only misleadingly allegorical. The real project of this poem with its “tentative / Movements” and “slow feet” is to demonstrate, in the most basic terms of stress and unstress, how the marriage of words and rhythm in a poem can carry the aesthetic “charge”—to use one of Pound’s terms—of that poem into the next order of magnitude. It is entirely unclear what primal event has left Pound’s gods “tentative” and “Wavering.” They are “uncertain” not because of anything that we can name or identify but because the scansion of the line they inhabit is itself uncertain.

Though for Yeats “The Return” seems to provide some vindication of “the free form” in its “real organic rhythm,” what that rhythm accomplishes depends entirely on the prosodic conventions it evokes and frustrates. In the first stanza of “The Return,” this metrical meta-commentary serves to generate an instance of the same kind of mimetic meter that we have observed in Bridges’s lyric, “To His Excellency.” The hauntingly incomplete narrative of “The Return” begins with the artful reimagining of metrical constraints. Appropriately for a poem that occupies a transitional place in Pound’s career, the rhythms of “The Return” function as a theoretical exploration of what “the free form” might be and how it might be distinguishable from less free forms. For this early example, free verse means an absence of rhyme. It also means the possibility of certain rhythmic arrangements that were not necessarily available to poets like Meynell or Coleridge. But free verse does not, in this instance, signify the absence of the long familiar metrical binary, stress and unstress. That stress and unstress commingle and threaten to disappear in the echoes of iambic pentameter in the first stanza does not, as we have seen, make them any less conscious of what an iambic pentameter is and how it works. In fact, as Kenner’s scansion makes apparent, it is entirely possible to read the rhythmic movements of this free verse poem in the familiar terms of a foot-based metric. Applying the conventional

terminology of stress and unstress to the poem's rhythmic movements as a whole, it is possible to recognize a tension between conventional metrical structures and innovative free verse techniques forming the central conflict of the poem.

The second stanza follows the rhythmic ambiguities of the first by invoking one of the most conventionalized and, in fact, common of English meters. Like Coleridge's "Blue and White," the remainder of "The Return" grounds its formal experiments in the eight- and six-syllable lines of the common meter. The first four lines of the second stanza, though eschewing rhyme, present no significant challenge to the traditional decorums of iambic verse written in the common meter. If the first of these scans as two repetitions of the rhythmic figure / • • /, it also scans as an inversion in the first foot and another in the third foot:

/ • • / / • • /
See, they return, one, and by one.

The next line smooths over these inversions by means of a paradigmatic iambic trimeter with a feminine ending:

• / • / • / •
With fear, as half-awakened.

The two lines following repeat the pattern of a tetrameter followed by a trimeter, the only potential irregularity being the the ultimate, lexically unstressed, syllable in "hesitate" falling in the position of a metrical stress. But in the context of recognizable lines in the common meter, this irregularity is merely another instance of promotion and would be quite at home, for example, among the tetrameters of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, as "Paradise" in these lines from section XXIV:

If all was good and fair we met,
This earth had been the Paradise.

Whether we uses Bridges’s terms and describe the final syllables of either “hesitate” or “Paradise” as “conventional” stresses or as promotions, the regular progression of disyllabic feet is not, in any case, impaired.

The metrical ground of “The Return” is perhaps emphasized by the capitalization of most of its lines, a feature of this early free verse that would eventually fall away in Pound’s *Cantos*. But the structural function of this capitalization is more readily apparent in the fifth line of the second stanza. Preceded by a blank space typographically equivalent to about one half of the poem’s longer lines, “and half turn back” is curiously uncapitalized. The line falls in a place where, given the formal constraints of the second stanza as they have been presented, we expect another tetrameter. Instead, we are given four syllables that, in the established metrical context, would comfortably scan as two iambs—exactly half of an iambic tetrameter:

• / • /
and half turn back.

The result, of course, is half a metrical line that tells of an emotional reticence, projected on the landscape, a momentary desire to arrest the progress of the poem and, perhaps, to settle into the comfortable rhythms of the first half of the second stanza.

In part, the next line indicates the poem’s conquest and rejection of the impulse to “turn back.” Like the rhythmic repetitions of the central third stanza noted above, the line scans perfectly well as a conventional variation on an iambic trimeter and, moreover, falls into position in the stanza where a trimeter should be in a poem composed in the common measure. It is this variation that becomes the poem’s rhythmic icon, and this line is the first complete iteration thereof:

/ • • / • /
These were the “Wing’d-with-Awe.”

In this second stanza, the gods and their emotions, in something along the lines of a pathetic fallacy, become of a piece with nature. Nature shares the uncertainty of these fallen gods, and the line above functions as a foreshadowing of the crucial third stanza in which the poem's rhythmic icon will be repeated three times without variation. As this line and the hemistichal "Inviolable" lead into the third stanza's grammatically fragmented depiction of the gods' former greatness, we can imagine even them, in their winged shoes, bowled over by a thunderbolt of rhythmic memory. But the third stanza is not just a momentary lapse into the fragmented memories of an inaccessible past. There is no escaping the present moment of the poem, for, even here, the dogs loom ominously, as cosmic hunters, "sniffing the trace of air." At the end of the third stanza we are left with the reminder that, at least in the present, the relationship between the dogs and the gods is unclear. They are potentially hunters as well as hunted, predators and prey.

The full force of the gods' mythic past and their strangely unsettling status in the present comes home with the speaker's epigrammatical observations in the fourth stanza:

Haie! Haie!
 These were the swift to harry;
These the keen-scented;
 These were the souls of blood.

No poet so careful as Pound would give us gods with "souls," and certainly not with startlingly mortal "souls of blood." As if standing in the field and naming the things he sees, Pound's speaker tells of the ancient, cosmic order to which this "return" is pitiful—an impotent reflection of a dead past. He points to the once-powerful gods who were "swift to harry," to sic their dogs on powerless men. He points to the "keen-scented" dogs, without a verb, perhaps eternally ready to sniff "the trace of air," but for what quarry? He points to himself and others like him who "were" formerly "souls of blood" but who are now changed in some obscure and intensely significant way.

Excepting the first line with its strange, emphatic commands, the fourth stanza comprises three permutations of the poem's iconic rhythm. The first retains Kenner's scansion with the conventional metrical license of a feminine ending:

/ • • / • / •
These were the swift to harry.

The second lacks the terminal stress present in every line of the third stanza with its depictions of the gods' former greatness and generates, thereby, the same metrical pattern as the last line of Coleridge's "Blue and White." We can observe an echo of Coleridge's "Him that doth love me" in Pound's:

/ • • / •
These the keen-scented.

The third is the last iteration of the iconic rhythm of the poem:

/ • • / • /
These were the souls of blood.

If "These were the swift to harry" points to the gods of the past, the conclusion of their line with a feminine ending points to their failure to attain the unchanging perfection of the past. Instead of progressing in fearsome lockstep to the terminal stress that represents their essence and reality, they falter and stumble at the end of the line. If "These the keen-scented" points to the dogs, they are missing something. They are missing the direction of masters who can themselves no longer maintain the order by which their own lives and the lives of their adjuncts are constituted. But the third line does maintain the iconic rhythm. It is also the line that points to the men and their past as "souls of blood."

If the speaker and those whom he addresses in the imperative are no longer "souls of blood" and have no living blood-scent to trace, their relationship to the dogs has certainly

changed. Perhaps the gods are simply irrelevant to them and their observation of the gods is nothing more than observation, but the very last lines of the poem provide a compelling summation of what has happened in the moment of this return:

Slow on the leash,
pallid the leash-men.

Those holding the leash are “men” and “pallid,” bloodless men, languidly holding back dogs who have yet to recognize the scent of their quarry. And yet, the quarry approaches, tentatively, uncertainly, fearfully “as half-awakened,” unaware of the danger awaiting them. With their confiscation of the iconic rhythm at the end of the fourth stanza, the men—or whatever they are now—displace the gods and take control of their dogs, inaugurating an age of reversal. These former souls of blood have no need to co-opt the gods’ rhythm and carry it forward to the end of the poem. It is enough that they have attained to it and, in the act, cursed the gods and made ready to destroy them. This is the cataclysmic trauma, the profound blasphemy to have turned the poem’s abstract world upside-down. The “return” is no slow valorous, hopeful procession of the scorned muses, but a return of the damned to earth. Their feet fall heavily, and we know, even without reference to the meaning of the words, that their age has come to an end in the last line where

/ • • / •
pallid the leash-men

very nearly retains the perfection of the iconic rhythm but fails to achieve closure in the absence of a final stress.

Much of the formal work in this poem constitutes the kind of mimesis that Saintsbury would call “suiting sound to sense,” where the “slow feet” of gods correspond to the slow feet of the quasi-metrical line or in movements that are “uncertain” because the scansion of their line is uncertain. But by the end of the poem, rhythm has become something else. Though meter is

never incidental to the content of the poem, by the end of the poem, content has become almost incidental to rhythm, and we are able to see in the dance of stress and unstress an unparaphrasable content working toward the performance of a strange and unsettling emotional progress.

Comparison of “The Return” to “I Am the Way,” two poems published in the first decade of the twentieth century and representing transitional phases in the careers of their authors, illustrates succinctly the aesthetic differences that have precluded these two poets from ever being seriously considered in relation to one another. Meynell’s poem is overtly religious, even devotional. It uses the highly formal and slightly archaic vocabulary of liturgy and prayer as a sign of deference to the poem’s addressee without a hint of irony. And it is, moreover, neatly arranged in stanzas marked by full-rhymes and lines of fixed syllabic lengths. By contrast, “The Return” employs varied line-lengths and eschews a fixed stanzaic pattern. It seems to describe the end of mythology, a world where the gods have been hunted down and driven away. But the two poems also exhibit some striking similarities. Though Pound’s poem is written in free verse and Meynell’s in a meter that is perhaps most accurately described as syllabic, they invoke the conventions of literary iambic meters as a ground on which to work intricate rhythmic patterns. Through their adaptations of iambic meters, the texts announce their claim to participation in a larger poetic culture, but they also advance, in common, an aesthetic argument about the agency of poetic rhythm. Both poems argue for a non-representational, reflexive interaction of form and content, and both poems strive to achieve this formal ideal by moving beyond the limitations imposed by mimetic meter.

Notes

²² As a merely descriptive term, feminine usually describes the end of a line of poetry when the last metrical stress of that line is followed by an unstressed syllable. Masculine describes a line that ends on its last metrical stress. Broadly then, a feminine rhyme comprises

two syllables of the pattern stressed-unstressed in each of its iterations, a masculine line one stressed syllable. The first stanza of Bridges's poem uses "commanders" and "Flanders" as feminine rhymes, "friend" and "end" as masculine rhymes.

²³ The line in question appears in Book III of Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*. Prins scans it thus:

/ • • / • • / • • / • • / • • / •
Forces its | flood through a | passage, || so | narrow, a | lady would | step it. (qtd. in
"Victorian meters" 105)

²⁴ "Blue and White" was first published in *Fancy's Following* under the pseudonym Ανοδος in 1896 by the Daniel Press. Theresa Whistler's *The Collected Poems of Mary Coleridge* gives the date of composition as 1887.

²⁵ The late medieval author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* depicts the hero's dress and armor in rich detail, including a glimpse of the "heven quene" painted inside his shield:

. . . the knight comlyche hade
In the inore half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted,
That quen he blusched thereto his belde never payred. (648-650)

²⁶ In scanning the poem's rhythms, Kenner uses an idiosyncratic notation where "o" indicates an unstressed syllable and an acute accent mark indicates a stressed syllable. The notational system used here has been normalized to be consistent with the scansion provided elsewhere.

CONCLUSION: "SUMMER IN ENGLAND, 1914"

Few of Meynell's early critics share Anne Kimball Tuell's praise of the work eventually gathered under the heading "Later Poems" in the posthumous *Complete Edition* of Meynell's verse. In *Mrs. Meynell and Her Literary Generation* (1925), what still counts as the only book-length critical study of Meynell's writing, Tuell argues that these poems, dating mostly from the period 1895 to 1916, represent "Mrs. Meynell's best poetry achieved under her most conscious impulse" (211). Notwithstanding an off-hand admission in 1929's *Twentieth-Century Poetry* that "Much of her best work was done after 1900" (33), Drinkwater's more considered assessment of Meynell's later poetry in *The Muse in Council* (1925) has proven a greater influence on subsequent criticism. "[O]f the work after 1875," argues Drinkwater in the earlier text, "there is little essential to be said that might not well have been suggested by the first volume," Meynell's *Preludes* (238). Among her more recent commentators, Furse Jackson cites Drinkwater's assessment in support of an argument that "Meynell moved ahead technically, and her ideas and mode of expression matured, but her concerns would vary little, and she remained forever wedded to the poetics of her youth" (460), and the same idea is at work in McCormack's writing that "Meynell did move ahead technically as her mode of expression matured," but "her poetics of reserve, intellection, and detachment remained intact, preventing her from accepting, or being accepted by, the modernists" (61). We have noted reasons more various for Meynell's exclusion from Modernist coteries and canons, but we have also observed the evolution in Meynell's poetics that exposes this narrative of her imprisonment in some musty past as a myth almost as pervasive and distracting as the myths of Pound's deific role in the rise of literary Modernism. For Tuell, in contrast to the majority of Meynell's critics, "The earlier promises but does not reveal her stronger art" (210), and among the specimens of this "stronger art" are "The Shepherdess," which inaugurates both 1901's *Later Poems* and the "Later Poems" section of

Meynell's *Complete Edition*, "I Am the Way," and the war poems first published together in the slim volume *A Father of Women and Other Poems*.

For Meynell no less than for the authors of *The Waste Land* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, the First World War seemed to violate the most cherished ideals of progress and civilization in a way no other conflict had. In one of the first serious reconsiderations of Meynell's verse after her slide into obscurity, Schlack cites, in particular, "The devastating anti-war poem, 'Summer in England, 1914'" as a challenge to "those critics who accused Meynell of being shallow and politically unaware" (121). The poem is in some ways typical of a strain in literature about the war that Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) identifies with the generation of male poets who served in the trenches along the western front:

The point is this: finding the war "indescribable" in any but the available language of traditional literature, those who recalled it had to do so in known literary terms. . . . Inhibited by scruples of decency and believing in the historical continuity of styles, writers about the war had to appeal to the sympathy of readers by invoking the familiar and suggesting its resemblance to what many of them suspected was an unprecedented and (in their terms) an all-but-incommunicable reality. (174)

Fussell describes a common feature of this project as a "Recourse to the pastoral," an attempt to establish through reference to the English countryside a "standard of measurement" (236), a way to "make sense"(121) of the horrors of trench warfare. "Summer in England" accomplishes a similar effect in mirror-image by trying to imagine the front from the perspective of an increasingly and frighteningly unreal pastoral landscape. By dramatizing the disconnect between a still peaceful homeland and a growing knowledge of the grisly battlefields of France, "Summer in England" reaches for a key to unlock the incomprehensible mystery of the first really modern total war and ends with highly ambiguous echoes of commonplace consolatory rhetoric.

In contrast to Schlack's assessment of the poem's political orientation, Smulders has found in its antithetical placement of "nature's bounty" against an "uncompromising vision of slaughter and corruption" (165-6) the opposite response to war:

The elision of the two seemingly separate contexts, the peaceful English summer and the carnage of the battlefield, captures the sense of surprise engendered by the beginning of the war. Moreover, this shocking juxtaposition precisely reproduces the violence of war as well as Meynell's abhorrence of such violence. As a result, Schlack erroneously (but understandably) describes "Summer in England" as an "anti-war poem" ("Feminism, Pacifism" 166).

But when we examine its powerful manipulation of form and its dense network of allusions, neither summation gives an accurate account of the strange and very modern process at work in the poem. Offering neither a "pacifist" nor an "anti-pacifist" summation of the Great War's epistemological significance, "Summer in England" plots the disintegration and recombination of these conventional ways of understanding history by tracing their obliteration along points defined by literary tradition and religious faith to their convergence at a specific moment in time that subsequent generations have come to identify as the birth of a modern consciousness.²⁷

As a poem treating a defining moment of early twentieth-century history, a moment that coincides with the publication of the first issue of *BLAST* and the beginnings of the Modernist narrative, "Summer in England" encapsulates the features of Meynell's poetry that we have been discussing as that poetry responds and adapts to the changing literary climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: it emphasizes, like Eliot's theory of Tradition, the centrality of a transhistorical, aesthetic community to the performance of the poetic act; it wrestles, as bitterly as *The Waste Land* and *Mauberley*, with a loss of faith in that community's power to rescue humanity from self-destruction; and it shows how deeply implicated are the conventions of literary form in generating the existential conditions for literature itself. Meynell's view of convention as the life of art and of community may stand in stark contrast to

certain premises of the Modernist project—those, specifically, which *BLAST* has served to emblemize—but “Summer in England” shares with these a fixation on the power of formal conventions to control language and even to animate it, whether by fostering growth and adaptation or by provoking revolution.

The first stanza of “Summer in England” establishes the poem’s literary orientation by means of a direct citation from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*. The reference asserts the poem’s claim to a particular literary genealogy, but it also gestures out into the network of religious symbolism that serves Meynell’s later work as the typological structure of the aesthetic community it imagines. “Summer in England” begins,

On London fell a clearer light;
 Caressing pencils of the sun
Defined the distances, the white
 Houses transfigured one by one,
The “long, unlovely street” impearled.
O what a sky has walked the world! (1-6)

The “long, unlovely street” belongs to the “Dark house” section of Tennyson’s poem (VII), in which the grief-stricken narrator confronts his memories of the dead beloved in the form of an address to his friend’s now-empty home. James Kramer has usefully demonstrated echoes of the third and fifth chapters of the biblical Song of Solomon in the broken-hearted, nocturnal wanderings of Tennyson’s speaker for whom, like the female narrator of the Song, “the sudden awareness of absence occurs in a city during the night and the love is moved to rise and search the streets for the beloved” (94). Much like Tennyson’s, the biblical narrator finds herself “standing outside a door in inclement weather, while the frustration of absence is expressed by the impossibility of reaching through a door to grasp a hand.” Its biblical resonances are only part of what the citation from *In Memoriam* brings to Meynell’s poem, but they effectively signal the program of religious symbol and imagery developed gradually as “Summer in England”

awakens to the implications of its engagement with religion. We need not evaluate the quality of Meynell's own religious faith or the theology of her poems to appreciate the function of Christian symbolism in "Summer in England." The language of religion works in concert with the pastoral mode, the meter, and the rhyme scheme to create a textual order that the poem will thrust before the slings and arrows of history.

Working toward that order by means of a strategy increasingly common at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, "Summer in England" renders the urban setting of London as a kind of pastoral landscape. Like the "urban pastorals" of Amy Levy, Meynell's poem invokes the conventions of the pastoral lyric to describe, in this instance, the play of light across city streets, but it is less concerned to revise the conventions of pastoral verse than to use these conventions as a way of setting up a series of oppositions between form and content more than a little reminiscent of Modernist complaints about the applicability of established verse-forms to the representation of life in the twentieth century.²⁸ For "Summer in England" the most important function of the pastoral mode is to represent a kind of poetry that, if not easy to write, is coherent, comprehensible, interpretable—poetry that makes sense at every level.

The interpretability of such a poetry depends on a consistent and authoritative key to its language, and, for "Summer in England" the ultimate referent for that key is Christ. Christ's presence in the "England" of Meynell's poem is indicated by allusion to and association with language drawn from scripture and Catholic liturgy. For Smulders, the poem uses this language to construct a religious "apology for war" ("Feminism, Pacifism" 166), and though any such "apology" is couched in a highly dubious rhetoric, Smulders is right to note how "Images of harvest prosperity give place to natural images—the rose and the sun—suggesting eucharistic ritual and anticipating the final identification of the soldiers' sacrifice with Christ's." Laid over

and against its literary contextualizing, the poem's pastoral imagery works to identify those points of contact where literature, history, and religion intersect. Working in this conventional pastoral mode, the poem organizes its description of the landscape into tidy rhymes that, even when not fully end-stopped, comprise complete grammatical units and modifying phrases. So framed, the radical enjambment of "white / Houses" linking the poem's third and fourth lines throws the houses into relief as they are "transfigured" by the play of light across their surfaces, provoking the speaker's sense of pleasant surprise.

Analogously, the enjambment's syntactic emphasis brings into verbal relief a symbolically-charged vocabulary recalling the Transfiguration of Christ in the New Testament. In the synoptic gospels, the Transfiguration is recounted as a mystical revelation of Christ's divine nature to the apostles Peter, James, and John. The version given in Matthew's gospel describes the moment with a language and imagery apparent in the first stanza of Meynell's poem: "And he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. . . . While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them . . ." (17:2, 5).²⁹ What the 1911 *Catholic Encyclopedia* describes as "the culminating event of His public life, as His Baptism is its starting point, and His Ascension its end" (Meistermann 19), has been celebrated as a major liturgical feast of the Roman Catholic Church since at least the fifteenth century and has been the subject of religious art and iconography for much longer.³⁰ Meynell's "Caressing pencils of the sun" invoke these traditions by recalling the stylized sunrays emanating from Christ's body as it hovers above the ground in conventional depictions of the Transfiguration. The same visual attributes may be observed in, for instance, Gustave Doré's treatment of the subject (see fig. 4), but the more striking resemblance to Meynell's image is readily seen in Byzantine icons and mosaics, like the miniature twelfth-century specimen now housed in the Louvre (see fig. 5).



Figure 4. Gustave Doré, *The Transfiguration* (1866; rpt. in *The Bible in Pictures*; New York: William H. Wise, 1937; 355).

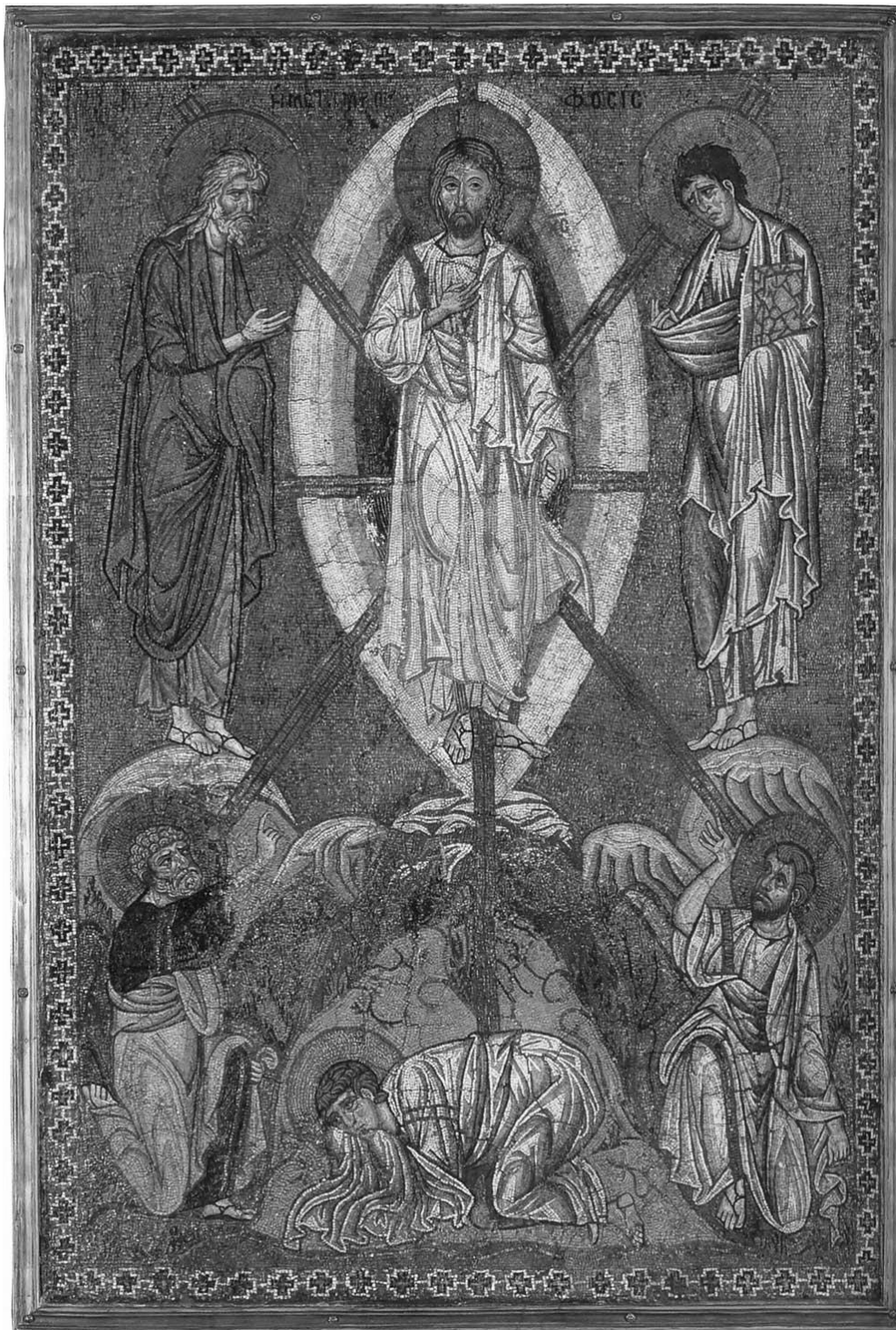


Figure 5. Icon with the Transfiguration, mosaic, late twelfth century (Musée du Louvre, Paris; rpt. in *The Glory of Byzantium: art and culture of the Middle Byzantine era, A.D. 843–1261*, ed. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006; 130).

Meynell's knowledge of Byzantine art and its importance as a paradigm for her own creative efforts is attested in the book-length essay, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*. First published in 1912 and then in a revised edition in 1923, the volume begins by collating the biblical fragments that mention Christ's mother and proceeds to examine the influence of Mary as a literary and artistic trope in works as various as the Renaissance paintings of Tintoretto and the odes of Patmore. Though Meynell would never write her own prose *ars poetica*, her study of Mary, in many ways, encapsulates her ideas about how poetry inhabits tradition as effectively as any direct statement. Her discussion of a mosaic representation of the Blessed Virgin provides grounds for a far-reaching criticism of both religious and artistic mores and introduces a key term for making sense of the theoretical nexus in which Meynell's writing operates. Of the Byzantine mosaicist, Meynell writes,

who worked in the incomparable spirit of those great ages, who brought no negligible part of Athens through Byzantium to Venice and Ravenna, and through those Adriatic cities to the Mediterranean, and into Romanesque and Gothic Italy—he was one who thought. His symbol, his "convention," was a decision of high and memorable intellect. The word convention, used yesterday as an insult to art, and used to-day as an insult to morality, resumes all its dignity in relation to the mosaic art. The artist of mosaic had a convention with his fellows, with all his fellows; the thirteenth-century designer agreed not only with his contemporaries; he respected the best consensus of eight centuries past, eight centuries that were learning and changing and proving, and increasing in all divine and human knowledge and in all human dexterity; in spite of change and development, his work is a sign that the thirteenth century did not despise the sixth. Not for him—whose name is lost, whose dust, whose ashes, have been the dust and the ashes of other men many times, not for him, in voluntary oblivion, was any share of the self-worship that insists upon the value of this man's view or that man's emotion, or the other's temperament, and finds in these separations all the value of human art. Would he have thought it worth while to assure us, like a post-impressionist, of his own sincerity? Not he. He did himself and the world the honour to take his sincerity for granted, and for something that did not need announcing; we do not use the word in regard to him, as we do not praise an honourable woman with the name of her honour. (71-72)

This relatively brief digression points to a number of the basic principles guiding Meynell's work as a whole. For Meynell, convention is the foundation of artistic freedom. By active and critical

participation in a transhistorical and communal effort, the maker of mosaics, the artist, the poet builds on the past and simultaneously maintains those links to the past for future generations. Meynell's "convention" issues a vigorous challenge, in the heady days of early Modernism, to an aesthetic that would seek to reclaim the masterpieces of an antique world by forsaking those of the more recent past.

Looking toward its own immediate past, the Victorian literary context from which Meynell's later poetry emerges, "Summer in England" invokes *In Memoriam* as an exemplar, a masterpiece of lyric poetry and an important precedent for the urban pastoral mode. While Tennyson's work as a whole does not embrace the city as an important subject in the way that Levy's does, the combination of a lover's lament with tetrameter quatrains and a simplified poetic diction evokes the same conventions of pastoral verse as, for example, Wordsworth's Lucy poems. The literary genetics signaled by this citation, in any case, connect "Summer in England" to exemplars extending through Tennyson's masterpiece and well beyond.

While "the long, unlovely street" provides the reader with a specific point of reference, Meynell's poem pays homage to *In Memoriam*, more importantly, through evocation of its setting and by means of the iambic tetrameter line that both poems employ. Thematically, the poem engages with *In Memoriam* to draw an analogy between Tennyson's grief over Hallam and the emotional response to the outbreak of the First World War that will come to dominate "Summer in England": the speaker's grief for the dead English soldiers. It is through this direct citation of Tennyson's language that we understand what is being "transfigured" in the first stanza: through the agency of the sun, associated with Christ, the "Dark house" of Tennyson's Wimpole Street is reinvented as the "white / Houses," a figure for the transfiguring potential of a lyric poetry that can celebrate natural beauty and the bounty of God's creation in an urban setting.

The second stanza follows on the first's engagement with the conventions of the pastoral lyric by inhabiting them as fully as "The Shepherdess" inhabits the conventions of the love lyric: it constructs a vision of the English countryside's bucolic splendor from end-stopped, unvaried tetrameters, and it is only in the third stanza that we begin to find the poem struggling to contain its subject matter within the lyric mode it has established. As the speaker begins to imagine scenes from the battlefield, her pastoral lyric is profoundly disrupted by horrific imagery, and from this central moment, the poem will chart the speaker's attempt to draw from these interpolating images a meaningful conclusion. The disruption of these images is signaled in the third stanza by an abrupt change in tone:

And while this rose made round her cup,
The armies died convulsed. And when
This chaste young silver sun went up
Softly, a thousand shattered men,
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
After a league-long throb of pain. (13-18)

Janet Montefiore has identified the stark shift in tone and imagery in the first two lines of this stanza as the speaker's articulation of a patriotic sentiment common to women's poetry of the First World War, a sentiment that emphasizes "home and beauty as that which made the war worth fighting," and in that context "tended to emphasise the feminine as peacefully distant" (53). For Montefiore, the "rose" is a figure for the poet-speaker as she confronts the painful realization that soldiers are suffering and dying for precisely the beauty and prosperity of the pastoral landscape she had been enjoying. In this way, the contrasting images underline the speaker's conflicting emotions: pride for the sacrifice of the valiant soldiers and guilt or frustration at the inability to participate in that sacrifice.

The third stanza is dominated by horrific images; they tumble one after the other through unsettling enjambments and staccato descriptions as the speaker finds it almost impossible to

contain their “league-long throb of pain” within the stately progression of her poem. The fourth stanza responds to the interpolation of these images by attempting to integrate them into the poem’s program of scriptural allusions and religious symbolism, but in the process, the stanzaic structure that has defined the poem up to this point begins to decay. This decaying stanza becomes the vehicle for the speaker’s increasing disillusionment, and it conditions whatever conclusions the speaker is able to reach at the end of the poem:

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
 And berries; and benignant skies
 Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.—
 Yonder are men shot through the eyes
 Love, hide thy face
 From man’s unpardonable race. (19-24)

The first line of this stanza pulls out all the lyric stops—the imagery drawn from nature, the repetition of long, open vowels, the double alliteration of “f” and “l” sounds, and the “b” sounds that carry over into the next line. In effect, all the lyric agency of the poem’s pastoral mode is drawn together in these few lines of unobtrusive meter and mellifluous sounds. The technique produces something that feels like an attempt to correct the horrifying interpolation of the previous stanza’s battlefield imagery—or a last lyric stand against the onslaught of distinctly un-pastoral subject matter. In such a way, the poem’s attempt to save its own lyricalness is blown to bits by the interpolation of the of the stanza’s fourth line and the unexpected inversion of the third metrical foot:

/ • • / / • • /
 Yonder | are men | shot through | the eyes.

Though the metrical line represents a fairly ordinary permutation of conventional iambic tetrameter, the full stress demanded by the evocative monosyllabic words “men” and “shot” creates an emotionally charged pause in the middle of a symmetrical line, as if the poem has itself been shot and crumples, folds in on itself. This specific metrical tactic bears witness to the

continued utility, for Meynell, of the kind of mimetic prosody discussed in the previous chapter, but the fact that mimetic tactics like this are eschewed as the poem changes and moves forward, grasping for a different mode of rhythmic arrangement, also speaks to the anxiety about the limitations of mimetic meter apparent, especially, in Meynell's "I Am the Way."

The result is a broken, wounded poem; the four syllables of "Love, hide thy face" are difficult to scan in accordance with the conventional metric the poem has employed thus far. It would be hard to read them as iambic, but whether we read them with three stresses or as some hemistichal variation on the poem's established meter, the line is missing at least one metrical foot. In the formal context established, it must be read as a disruption. It engages with the enemy of horrific battlefield imagery and returns wounded (one cannot help saying, with a foot amputated) and collapses in a renunciation of its entire belief-structure: faith in a Christian redemption fails in the knowledge that the "race" of men has become "unpardonable." Though the later authorized printings of this poem all give the fourth stanza in the form we have been discussing, the first printing of "Summer in England" in the *Times of London* incorporates a significant difference that highlights the dramatic function of its amputated line. In the *Times*, the fifth line is printed as "and children crushed. Love hide thy face," filling out the metrical line, offering a line that can be scanned as an ordinary tetrameter. While the offending reference to crushed children may have been excised in later printings for any number of reasons, the fact remains that a conscious artistic choice has presented us with an unavoidable metrical anomaly that asks us to consider the poem formally, as a performance of the distinctly physical horrors of warfare.

The fifth and final stanza of "Summer in England" is separated from the rest of the poem typographically by a row of dots in most later printings, and more pointedly in Frances Meynell's edition of his mother's *Ten Poems* (1915) by the subheading "A Reply." In either

case, the typographical division emphasizes the last stanza's function as a kind of answer or conclusion to the problem articulated in the poem's formal breakdown. In this way, the final stanza serves as something like an envoi—as the speaker's attempt to reintegrate the broken parts of her poem and assemble them into a meaningful conclusion. Of particular interest for a poem that begins in such a self-assured conventional meter, the stanza's attempt at meaningful closure entirely avoids the poem's established iambic tetrameter. Instead, the poem uses the trimeters and pentameters resulting from its doomed engagement with horrific imagery in the fourth stanza:

Who said, "No man hath greater love than this,
To die to serve his friend"?
So these have loved us all unto the end.
Chide thou no more, O thou unsacrificed!
The soldier dying dies upon a kiss,
The very kiss of Christ. (25-30)

The poem makes its reply through an appeal to the authority of scripture. As the only other lines presented as a direct quotation in the poem, the first two lines of this stanza balance the dialectic of sacred and secular established through the first stanza's reference to *In Memoriam* with a rendering into verse of Jesus's words in John's gospel: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*King James Version*, 15.13).

Ultimately, whatever closure this poem can offer to its moral perplexities rests in the "kiss" which marks both the end of the poem and the soldiers' passing from life. The consolatory potential of this final kiss is summarized by F. Elizabeth Gray as "a non-pacifistic acclamation of the soldiers' Christ-like heroism" (173), a sign "that these soldiers have met his standard (174), but Gray also identifies a grammatical ambiguity in the last two lines of the poem that suggests a layered interpretation of the kiss: the soldiers "are received by Christ, 'dying [...] upon a kiss.' Alternately, they may also be read as *giving* that kiss, participating to the utmost in

Christ's action of loving redemption for humankind." Coming on the heels of what is figured in the fourth stanza as an emotional and moral breakdown, however, this patriotic "acclamation" is apt to seem a little disingenuous. Expressed through the breakdown and reassembly of the stanzaic pattern, the poem's emotional trajectory tends to indicate that the consolatory potential of the conclusions reached in the last stanza are forced or cobbled together, as if the speaker finds it all but impossible to draw a meaningful interpretation from the unfolding of these events. To put it another way, the speaker's conclusions are announced less as an increased appreciation for complex moral truths than as the conclusion to a logical proof, a conclusion stated with such detached self-assurance that it is difficult to read as anything but ironic: "So," concludes the speaker on the basis of a moral logic she has just denied, "these have loved us all unto the end."

The extent to which these conclusions are problematized by both the poem's emotional trajectory and the detached tone of this last stanza is identified by Montefiore as "the repressed knowledge that the dead soldiers are killers as well as killed," and this knowledge "is apparent in the poet's perhaps unconscious echo of a very different text, namely Othello's last speech over his wife's murdered body: 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee, no way but this / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss'" (63). The poem's "perhaps unconscious echo" of Shakespeare's play is perfectly in line with the program established in the first stanza of juxtaposing religious and literary rhetoric to discuss the emotional experiences of grief and the horrors of history, but in the context of the poem's careful network of allusions, the reader is being asked to consider what "the very kiss of Christ" might actually be. Thus, for a literate audience, and one, at least, familiar with the narrative of Christ's death, "the very kiss of Christ" cannot fail to recall the sign by which Judas betrays Jesus into the hands of those who would call for his crucifixion. Following immediately from that "Judas kiss," the narrative reaches a crisis point, related in Matthew's gospel, thus:

And behold one of them which were with Jesus, stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. (*King James Version*, 26.51-52)

Importantly, the narrative goes on to report that Judas, stricken with remorse, commits suicide in a place that would come to be known as “the field of blood.” Pointing to this moment in the narrative of Christ’s Passion, Meynell’s poem complicates its more immediately apparent consolatory reading with a lament for the monstrosity of warfare encoded in its metrical presentation of a scriptural proverb. Specifically, the poem asks us to consider the disturbing parallel to the gospel suggested by the possibility that soldiers dying on the field of battle, soldiers who have lived “by the sword,” participate in a typological betrayal of Christ and thus are doomed to death in a “field of blood,” recalling the “wet corruption” that previously in the poem has “heaped the plain.”

In the poem’s interpretively ambiguous summation in this final stanza, the conclusion to its moral quandary remains unarticulated. It may be “A Reply,” but it is not an answer. Both the consolatory and the cynical, the pacifistic and the anti-pacifistic interpretive possibilities are reasonable, and in this way, the poem effectively pursues its moral quandary to arrive at no solution. “Summer in England” makes an especially poignant illustration of Meynell’s mature poetics, a poetics not simply of “introspection,” but of affective performance accomplished through intensely self-reflexive form. While a kind of poetry that seems to gesture out from subject matter into the realm of abstractions has generally, and accurately, been regarded as a signal preoccupation of the early Modernists, and sometimes as the ideal of an earlier generation of Decadents and aesthetes, Meynell’s poetry stands apart from its contemporaries of either generation, in large part because of its commitment to working from within a living tradition of verse composition, in thematics as in technique.

Nonetheless, Meynell's work bears important similarities to the literary movements of her own time. It is more than simply "refined" or "polished," it is reaching through established modes to a kind of highly intellectualized and rarefied universe of text. Pound's earliest grasps at this same realm take as their paradigms the ancient Chinese of Li Po, the medieval Provençal of Arnaut Daniel, and the Latin of Sextus Propertius. Eliot's *The Waste Land* scours the earth for scraps from Jacobean drama, fertility rites and legends, for Sanskrit and for the teachings of the Buddha. Pound's fellow imagist H.D. travels, in *Sea Garden* (1916) and other early volumes, to an imaginary landscape of classical gods and their worshippers. In the same historical moment, Meynell looks to Tennyson and Patmore for the tools to interpret texts that, like the Gospels and Catholic liturgies, need no recovering, that are a living and a very real part of her community. While her younger Modernist contemporaries are looking, in one form or another, for a Tradition, a place in the literary continuum that links ancient authors to their modern counterparts across a vast wasteland of Victorian poetry, Meynell engages, vigorously criticizes and, certainly, adapts the monuments of what would come increasingly to be derided as an outmoded literary heritage. This makes her work valuable for the light it sheds on the changing literary landscape of the early twentieth century, and it is also what makes her difficult to place in any history of modern poetry.

Notes

²⁷ *BLAST*, of course, heralded its own appearance in 1914 as the "END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA" (Weaver 140) and Virginia Woolf famously dated a change in "human character" to "on or about December 1910" ("Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown" 4). Neither statement lacks irony, but the root conviction in both underlies, as we have seen, a larger critical narrative that sees Meynell as a vestigial Victorian.

²⁸ The development of the "urban pastoral" as a genre is treated in detail in Linda Beckman's contribution to *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem* (2005) and Ana Parejo Vadillo's study, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (2005).

²⁹ The quotation is from the Authorized or King James Version of the Bible. The Bible in use by most English-speaking Catholics of Meynell's time would have been Challoner's revision of the Douai-Rheims Version. Unlike the Authorized Version, the Douai Bible is a translation from the Latin Vulgate, St. Jerome's ancient translation of Greek and Hebrew source texts into the most widely used language of his day. Published over a period spanning the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, the Douai Bible was one of the English translations consulted by the scholars who would produce the Authorized Version. The Douai Bible was also widely criticized for its elaborately Latinate diction and vocabulary. Bishop Challoner's revision, first published in 1750 and then in a second edition of 1752, was meant to rectify the shortcomings of the original Douai text by producing a more readable translation. The resulting Challoner-Douai version (still usually called simply the Douai Bible) adheres closely to the diction of the Authorized Version as a model text and is, in many places, almost indistinguishable from it. The Douai Bible's version of the quotation from Matthew differs from the Authorized Version mostly in its punctuation and use of the word "raiment" in place of "garments." Where it differs from the Authorized Version, however, the Douai Bible differs to its detriment in poetry and *gravitas*. Or, at least, that seems to have been Meynell's feeling on the subject. Writing as a devout Catholic for an audience of Catholics in *Mary, the Mother of Jesus* (1912), Meynell quotes from the Authorized Version, giving variant readings from the Douai Bible in footnotes. The present discussion follows her practice.

³⁰ It should be noted that this extensive reference work represents a major achievement of the Catholic intellectual community in which Meynell lived and worked. Meynell herself contributed the entry on Coventry Patmore discussed in the first chapter of this study.

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