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Religion and realism in late nineteenth-century American literature

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RELIGION AND REALISM
IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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
Doctor of Philosophy

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by
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ABSTRACT

A critical approach to understanding the analytical power of realism and its representational claims in the late nineteenth-century is to examine the relationship between realism and a common cultural concern that opposes the very tenets of realism, one that necessarily pervaded all aspects of class, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation, or other classifiable subsets of society typically linked with various schools of literary theory: the subject of religion. In fact, religion, with its disembodied immaterialism, surely the antithesis of realism, represents a unique cultural problem that tests the conceptual biases of the realist mode. One basic issue is that religion itself is a nebulous concept that resists neat explanation in American culture. One might ask what are the ways in which religion was perceived, whether it be considered in relation to a system of ethics, law, or religious practices, or more abstractly, in relation to spiritualism, idealism, or supernaturalism? Can such a metaphysical concept even be located in realist writing and how do realist writers materialize it, particularly in relation to social ethics, an inherent concern of realist writing? Changes in economics, industry, race, and immigration necessarily affected the religious culture of America, and realism, as a literary mode, should be well-suited to capturing such sociological changes; nevertheless, religion in realism is intensely problematic, particularly since realist writers were reacting against earlier modes of sentimental and religious fiction. Examining how prominent practitioners of realism dealt with the religious subject will shed a new understanding on the practice of literary realism as a critical mode and address competing claims of textual authority in relation to the Bible and the realist text in the mediation of social ethics.

This project comprises six chapters, which are: 1) Introduction to Religion and Realism: “Let Fiction Cease to Lie”; 2) Rebecca Harding Davis and Sentimental Literary Realism; 3) William Dean Howells as Writer and Critic of American Literary Realism; 4) Mark Twain and

the Bible: “I See It Warn’t Nothing but a Dictionary”; 5) Harold Frederic and Realism: The Damnation of Religion; and 6) Conclusion.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND REALISM:
“LET FICTION CEASE TO LIE”

Realist writers of the nineteenth century grappled with a method of writing that purported to be both new and more truthful than previous modes of literary representation. This is a paradoxical classification because it assumes there are degrees of realness or truthfulness, categories that should be absolute, and that superior literature is that which comes closest to representing the tangible world. Closely connected to the belief in the relative superiority of realist literature is the aesthetic implication that literature has a transformative capacity in relation to social behavior and ethical practices. Not surprisingly, in realist lingo, one frequently finds an attempt to assert such literary authority by suggesting that the writer functions as a social scientist looking for truisms in culture, which is really an attempt to narrow the conditions of certainty regarding that which is knowable. Such a claim shifts the philosophical focus of the pursuit of truth and knowledge from an intuitive grasp of the ideal realm to the immediate physical world and the experience of interacting with the world of objects and things. For example, when comparing the observational skills of the writer to the expertise required of the natural scientist, William Dean Howells writes: “But let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires” (*Criticism and Fiction* 104). In other words, realist writers began to base their literary authority on the assumption that what they produced was more real, more truthful, and more authoritative than the work of their predecessors, and they tried to develop literary paradigms that reinforced this ideology. What we are left with today is the attempt to locate such paradigms in the various texts of the writers who styled themselves as realists or at least those who published in the same company with those since labeled as realist writers.

One elusive subject that realist writers must confront in order to offer accurate depictions of nineteenth-century social mores is the subject of religion. Religion crosses lines of wealth, gender, geography, race, and any other identifiable subset of humankind. In short, religion is a subject that cannot be avoided, particularly in a mode of writing that aims to offer truthful and comprehensive portraits of these same social groups. At the same time, in a style that privileges tangible objects, locations, and “things,” metaphysical subjects like religion offer inherent resistance to the realist’s preference for materiality and empirical experience. Religious culture in late nineteenth-century America is a complicated issue due to the fluidity and splintering of the many religious sects; however, like realism, religion is a subject that touches on all aspects of American social life, and like realism, it is a subject that has both an abstract ideology as well as a material expression with a certain gap existing between the elusive idea of spirituality and specific cultural institutions such as church buildings, congregations, and influential ministers exerting power over social policies. Much as we might ask today what exactly is meant by “religion,” so realist writers had to ask and answer the question of what exactly is meant by religion and how might religion best be represented in textual constructions. What begins to happen is that different writers engage with the religious subject in vastly different and very distinctive ways; some deal with transcendent notions of spirituality and mystical concepts of divinity while others begin to examine religious practices and their effects on culture and ethical behavior. As realist writers attempt to represent the religious subject as a material practice, we can then examine the limits of literary realism in order to help us identify some of the more obscure aspects of the realist paradigm to understand better how realism operates as a cultural influence.

Howells’s concept of the realist text offering a new method for viewing a previously inaccessible or unidentified aspect of society suggests that realism is as much a philosophy about social values as it is a literary style. This assumption is closely aligned with realist rhetoric

assessing the importance of fiction in instilling and reinforcing ethical behavior; however, we are not left with a clear paradigm explaining what it means to the construction of a realist text. One important reason for this is that Howells himself aimed to work against the conventions that readers would recognize and associate with specific types of texts. In her revisionist cultural study, *Writers in Retrospect*, Claudia Stokes writes: “Realists deplored what they believed to be the imitateness of American fiction, which, they argued, took its cues less from the immediate conditions of late-century American life and culture than from the conventions popularized decades before in British and Continental fiction” (28). Stokes’s assertion suggests that realist writers were trying to work in both a literary and a philosophical manner; they were trying to establish a narrative approach that was defined by its avoidance of identifiable conventions, and they were trying to do so because the underlying historical impulse valued a literature more directly related to the material conditions of the Industrial Age. What they sought was a literature that did not cue a specific framework but seemed instead to offer a mimetic analogy between the constructed textual reality and the reader’s own experiences in the world.

Realist writers engaging with social concerns and cultural disparities between various social groups inherit highly formulaic forms of discourse that have already linked religion and ethics, such as sermonic discourse, religious tracts, and sentimental fiction, and these writers must now engage with these discourses and these subjects as they attempt to locate their own literary authority. What distinguishes realism from other types of earlier reform fiction and from religious fiction such as Oriental or visionary literature is an intense focus on aspects of religion and religious practices in relation to cultural ethics via positivism, which is a critique of religion primarily as a social institution with varying degrees of authority. In this way, the religious subject is the catalyst in both the formation and the eventual decline of American literary realism. Ultimately, what we find is a discourse about authority itself, particularly authority in the administration of ethics and morality. Finally, by the turn of the century, we begin to see

such elusive subjects as religion and ethics and eventually psychology begin to undermine the practice of literary realism because of their very intangibility. Uncertainty about that which cannot be known begins to trouble writers who examine material experience to represent what can be known with certainty.

The realist credo calls for a verisimilitude that allows the textual representation to serve as an analogy for the reader's own experience with his or her social world. In order to construct the religious subject within the fictional world of the text, writers must conceptualize abstract notions of spirituality and try to make these abstractions tangible. To do this, they draw on various representational strategies such as symbolism and allegory, social dimensions such as architecture and religious habits, and reading strategies involving hermeneutics. On one level, religion might be constructed as the institutional church, which is no small problem to conceptualize in a rapidly-changing American religious culture. On another level, religion must be represented more broadly in terms of its cultural function and ultimate purpose, yet in a way that acknowledges its phenomenological dimensions. What this means is that the role and even the value of religion must also be conceptualized by weighing competing notions of the salvation of the soul versus the suffering of humans and the conditions imposed on one's fellow man that might prevent ultimate salvation. Often the first premise, that is, ultimate salvation, is called upon to draw attention to specific immediate concerns that writers perceive to be dangers to society suggesting a collective culpability in the saving of souls. For example, as writers introduce issues such as slavery, alcohol consumption, and prostitution as risks of eternal damnation, the idea of a greater social responsibility begins to take root, and eventually we see the central concern shift away from salvation to explicit social and ethical practices and concerns for such a collective responsibility.

Reading religion in realism is no easy task, for a variety of reasons. Religious culture has changed dramatically in the past century, and some of the textual cues are easily overlooked or

even misunderstood in today's culture. There are important instances of ambiguity in realist texts, and such oversights bear investigating, but identifying vague referents should not be viewed as an attempt to critique realism itself as a literary success or failure. Looking for a consistent system of signifiers that can withstand the test of time is a sure technique for locating flaws in realism, but such scrutiny displaces the act of reading realism onto an overly semiotic study that simply proves language systems are fluid while it ignores the relationships between other cultural systems such as religion, sociology, and science. There are deeper issues at stake, and honing in on problems with the subject of religion allows us to learn a great deal about how realist writers attempt to deal with the intangible nature of religion and spirituality while simultaneously trying to maintain a philosophical stance that values materiality. The subject of religion plays a unique role in realist texts, particularly in the consideration of how ethical principles are enacted in late nineteenth-century American society. Literary realism has a complex function; it is simultaneously a process of viewing, a mode of representing, and an act of constructing aimed at producing a different social outcome. In the words of Eric Sundquist: "No genre—if it can be called a genre—is more difficult to define than realism, and this is particularly true of American realism" (*American Realism* vii). It should be evident that different writers embraced realism in very different ways, which Sundquist describes as a series of eclectic responses aimed at exposing rather than subverting the "'real' structures [such texts] claim to represent" (viii). Recasting realism as a value system that is concerned with complexities such as how authority is exercised in culture rather than as a strictly literary practice allows for a consideration of realism in the context of social thought and cultural response, as opposed to a more traditional dialectic that examines realism in relation to its juxtaposed styles of romanticism and sentimentalism on the one end and naturalism and modernism on the other although these remain useful dialectics.

Realism is so strongly associated with the late nineteenth century that it tends to represent the age, itself becoming a literary symbol of industrial economics, labeled by many critics as a middle-class institution. It is important to remember that any literary form is always working either in tandem with or against alternative forms of discourse. The socially conscious aim of realist writing does allow a comparison to other types of discourse with a shared ethical mission, such as sermonic discourse and educational discourse. When critics evaluate realism solely as a narrative style or a mode of representation, they limit the possibilities for understanding it in relation to a larger cultural context such as competing claims to cultural authority. This limitation may be an inherent flaw in the history of literary criticism that ignores alternative discourses against which realist writers styled their texts. More precisely, it has proven to be nearly impossible to offer a consistent paradigmatic description of realism, and the reason for this is that other important expressions of literary and cultural authority are overlooked in the attempt, and part of the paradigm of realism is the deliberate omission of well-understood conventions relative to these other modes of discourse dealing with ethics.

Scholars are now beginning to examine realism in new ways. Recent works such as David Shi's *Facing Facts* and Philip Barrish's *American Literary Realism* present arguments that realism is an idealistic sensibility and a critical mode, respectively. David Shi writes: "A realistic outlook seeped into every corner and crevice of intellectual and artistic life during the second half of the nineteenth century" (3). In Shi's model, a realistic sensibility is not so much produced as it is itself an impetus for the production of various forms of expression. This begs the question of its origins although Shi believes idealism was the impetus for realism.¹ Shi's argument that, generally speaking, ideology begets materialism is explicitly opposed by Nancy Glazener who reverses this cause-and-effect sequence, as we will see below. Barrish's position is less focused on the idea of a larger cultural sensibility than is Shi's although Barrish does view realism as an expression of a "paradoxical relationship" between man and culture (*American*

Literary Criticism 3). Barrish aligns this paradoxical relationship with other attempts to assert specific critical views all having to do with providing access to the real. He writes that the very act of realist writing comprises “a unique degree of emotional and cognitive intimacy with, yet also controllable distance from . . . whatever category of experience a literary work posits as the most recalcitrantly *real*” (3). His explanation of realism as a critical mode advances any discussion of realism into a discussion of social, ethical, and textual authority, and it allows us to examine realism as a means of discerning how realist writers try to locate and appropriate the most tangible evidence of social authority and the way authority operates within culture or even civilization itself. At the same time, his argument is somewhat dismissive of realist practitioners’ claims to provide truthful social access and scrutiny because he argues that such claims of intellectual prestige are typical of the rhetoric found in nearly all schools of critical theory.

A recasting also allows us to examine realism across several literary styles and not solely in the traditional novel. A cultural focus on material evidence privileges the terrestrial realm of experience over the metaphysical unknown, and a similar shift can be seen in the dozens of religious biographies that appeared in print between 1870 and 1910, many of which emphasize the life of Jesus as a giver of laws and ethics as opposed a spiritual Jesus who is the author of salvation.² Even the foremost advocate of American realism, William Dean Howells, engaged with the idea of materializing Jesus in *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894). While many scholars view Howells’s utopian fiction as a departure from his realist principles, this impulse might more aptly be understood as an attempt to actualize a spiritual figure and to reify the person of Jesus as he might be understood in contemporary culture and in relation to the ethical challenges believed to be unique to the Industrial Age. In many ways, Howells’s utopian fiction clearly embodies his realist philosophy; he wants to take the notion of divinity out of the intuitive realm and examine how such a notion might be received or even constructed in his own culture.³ While an

examination of other literary forms such as biography is outside the scope of this project, it is important to note that several writers of fiction, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Lew Wallace, utilized the religious biographical form, which indicates the many ways in which religion and fiction overlapped and were in dialogue with each other during the late nineteenth century. Howells's *A Traveller from Altruria* demonstrates that realist writers were also preoccupied with this overlap, and even Henry James's character in *The American* (1877), Christopher Newman, can be read as an attempt to enact a Jesus figure in the guise of a modern industrialist. Newman demonstrates his turn-the-other-cheek model of ethical behavior by refusing to follow through on his revenge plan against the Old World European Catholic Bellegarde family. Honing in on the subject of religion allows us to examine these other forms of discourse, and examining the innate tension between the abstract and the material is a good place to begin.

In addition to the allegorical Jesus, the Adamic figure emerges in American literary culture. A close scrutiny of American realism reveals a clear tension between the humanistic considerations inherent in the socio-ethical aspects of religious discourse. In constructing a positivist model of how religion might best operate in late nineteenth-century culture, realist writers frequently draw on these Biblical figures to present competing ideologies that are linked specifically to Liberal Protestant hermeneutics. Adam, as an Old Testament archetype, offers a primitive model of humankind that is unfettered by creed or culture. Jesus, the New Testament embodiment of humanity, represents social progress and intuitive spirituality that can transcend Hebraic Law and reinterpret ethics for the given age. Writers embed these figures in their realist fiction frequently, suggesting the extent to which realism borrows from religious allegory. As we deconstruct specific texts and examine realism as a discourse, with various writers responding to a changing religious culture, we can see the extent to which religion, spirituality,

and hermeneutics inform this new literary genre with roots going back to German Romanticism and a tension between Hebraism and Hellenism.

It should also be noted that the religious sects in question, particularly the Calvinist denominations that are associated with the earlier reform literature, were hardly stable fixtures in nineteenth-century American culture, and that the relationship between various types of discourse was a fluid and reciprocal one making some of this fiction even harder to comprehend given the changes that have continued to occur in American religious culture. Harold Bush points out that American religious culture was far from uniform. He writes: “A common mistake made by many historians of American Christianity is to posit that it ever was a singular hegemonic system of belief” (36). A close examination of realist fiction reveals how misleading this label can be when applied to American church culture; these writers clearly struggled in order to ascertain what one denomination might offer relative to another. It can be difficult to discern the underlying signifiers beneath vague religious and spiritual references simply because the cultural associations have changed since the inception of American realist literature and were frequently changing even during its heyday and certainly during its decline. For instance, when Edith Wharton depicts Lily Bart languidly eyeing a borrowed prayer book in her 1905 *The House of Mirth* (54), the unnamed church in question must surely be an Anglican (Episcopal) denomination, but Wharton does not name the sect because she apparently assumes it will be understood due to both the prayer book reference and the wealthy New York social class that is the subject of her work. Again and again in late nineteenth-century literature, we can identify unnamed churches, creeds, and denominations even in works that seem to be aiming their critiques at the institutional church, such as Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron-Mills” and Howells’s *A Modern Instance*. For the most part, critics seem to ignore the vagueness and ambiguity of the religious subject, or else they conclude that such imprecision is evidence that

these are secular texts, but the nineteenth-century was very far from being a secular culture, and such vagueness underscores that the religious subject was a problematic one for realist writers.

An important approach to the study of religion and realism is to review the history of scholarship on realism and to place contemporary criticism into a cohesive context. There is no overall consensus on what exactly realism is or how it should be studied, but recent scholarship emphasizes that there are many ways to read realism, and that all of these approaches bring new understanding to the idea of a realist sensibility. Edwin Cady was perhaps the first to suggest that any workable definition of realism is going to have to be open-ended and author-focused: “At the game of cultural definitions, the pluralist almost always wins. . . . Romancer, realist, and naturalist are easier to understand as persons, experiencing and expressing different sensibilities, than as lay figures standing for ‘isms’” (*The Light of Common Day* 23). A change of classification may, in fact, be exactly what scholars are seeking because realism as a literary paradigm has proved to be elusive and therefore problematic because it resists consistent stylistic classification.

Added to the problem of being unable to place realist texts into neat categories or to derive trademark conventions that mark realist texts, is the fact that writers themselves hardly ever adhere to a single literary approach. Scholars who label Mark Twain as realist, for example, may easily offer *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as a trademark realist text because of Twain’s selection of an “ordinary” hero protagonist, his critique of social values regarding racism and slavery, and his inclusion of regional dialogue cued to help the reader imagine the local dialect of Huck’s language. Even though these same attributes can be located in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, published just four years later in 1889, scholars have a harder time arguing that *Connecticut Yankee* is a hallmark realist text because of Hank Morgan’s time travel back to the sixth century. The conversation then turns to examining this fantasy text for realist techniques, shifting the discussion of realism away from the text itself and

back into the realm of searching for sometimes thematic, sometimes paradigmatic, and sometimes stylistic readerly cues that signify an author's engagement with materialism on a broader and more philosophical level. In this vein, scholars will examine texts for specific values that are correlated with realism, such as social critiques and specific themes that are related to the Industrial Age. One might argue that *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is *like* a realist text because Twain critiques industrialism by satirizing it via a clashing of medieval and modern social and ethical values. Struggling to place Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* into the context of realism, Gregg Camfield applies the blended label "sentimental realism" to Twain's writing (59) while Robert Paul Lamb discusses the confounding complexity of Twain's realism, but ultimately labels *Connecticut Yankee* as "a celebration and critique of the nineteenth century's cherished notion of moral and technological progress" (485). Twain's writing is perhaps particularly problematic for scholars of realism who seek neat categorizations, but the man who, along with Charles Dudley Warner, coined the phrase "The Gilded Age" can certainly not be shunted aside in any serious analysis of realist writing, nor have scholars ever suggested that he should even as they struggle to classify his literary contributions.⁴ Further, while Twain is only one of several authors who challenge the taxonomy of realism, Twain's body of work helps us to view the importance of religion to realism, both in realism's inception and, ultimately, in its demise.

To this end, many scholars now embrace the idea of examining realism as a cultural phenomenon rather than a strictly literary one or, to be more specific, rather than as strictly a narrative mode, although the approaches vary widely with some looking at realism as a response to industrial capitalism while others believe realism was a mode of critical thinking that was produced in order to promote class hierarchies and boundaries. This distinction poses a cause-versus-effect argument in the development of literary realism, with some critics such as David Shi believing that the ideology of realism resulted in the end product of realist fiction while other

historicist scholars such as Michael Davitt Bell, Amy Kaplan, and Nancy Glazener believe that realism itself was “produced” in order to maintain class stratifications and to create a sense of high and low culture in American literature.

In all cases, the emphasis on the concept of production shows the impact of industrialism on the study of realism, which ironically assumes that ideas themselves are material products of the imagination and of culture. Nancy Glazener, for example, focuses on the process of reading these various texts that she asserts were published under the umbrella of realism at the instigation of an elite group of magazine publishers working at what she calls the *Atlantic*-group magazines.⁵ Glazener defines realism as “an ‘establishment’ form due to its promotion by *Atlantic*-group magazines” (*Reading for Realism* 11), and she specifically selects the *Atlantic*-group magazines as her criteria because she believes “critics who address realism as an entity need to provide some account of its locations, variations, and modes of circulation rather than assuming that it has or had a stable, portable, trans-historical identity and function” (12). Glazener argues that these periodicals worked reciprocally to validate each other’s cultural authority, with editors and columnists often changing jobs from one magazine to another within this small circle of publications, resulting in all of these magazines featuring the work of an overlapping circle of writers (257-58). She adds: “Since U. S. literature was not widely taught in the academy until well into the twentieth century, in the late nineteenth century the *Atlantic*-group magazines had greater authority over American literature than any other institution did” (5). The crux of Glazener’s argument is her identification of the shared ideology of the *Atlantic*-group magazines and her assertion that, in order to get their work published, short-story writers and novelists had to adopt an understanding of realism and to style their works accordingly in order to adhere to the publication styles of these magazines.

Glazener focuses particularly on the influence the *Atlantic*-group publishers had on constructing cultural reading habits. Again we see the language of industrialism at work: ideas

are produced and reading habits are manufactured. She writes: “It may come as a surprise that the magazines were explicitly interested in formulating different kinds of reading, not just different kinds of texts” (6). Glazener suggests that realism must be addressed as a reading practice that was imposed on American culture by an elite group of editors with a common goal of promoting professional authorship and reinforcing class distinctions:

At its best, this appropriation of realism framed the sincere efforts of a population to understand the conditions of its own privilege and its relation to other social groups; at its worst, it fraudulently legitimated that population’s control of culture and the “monopoly of humanity” entailed in installing one’s own forms of pleasures as worthy ones. (13)

In her argument, Glazener historicizes literary realism by examining a specific timeframe and a specific type of publication vehicle, and she suggests that authors tailored their realist techniques to suit the patronage of these magazines, all of whom shared a common social and literary philosophy.

Glazener’s argument is a difficult one to dispute for many reasons, but there are some logical inconsistencies that bear consideration. Although magazine publishing was a dominant mode of access to publication, it was not the only alternative, and in fact, magazine publishing reached far smaller audiences than did other publication vehicles. As Charles Johanningsmeier has pointed out, late nineteenth-century authors utilized a variety of vehicles such as newspaper syndicates in order to reach audiences of thousands: “syndicated works . . . made it into the hands of a nationwide, heterogeneous readership often exceeding one million” (63). Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman, both categorized as regionalists but also arguably realists, used newspaper syndication publication, and Mark Twain preferred subscription publication over the *Atlantic*-group magazines.⁶ When these writers selected alternative modes of access to publishing their work, they did not simply stop writing works of realism, and, in the case of Twain, even when he did choose to publish in a more traditional manner, he varied his style to include fantasy, satire, and humor, as did William Dean Howells who wrote historical fiction, utopian fiction, and dramatic works. Johanningsmeier makes a strong argument for a

reconsideration of the audiences of regional fiction, and his argument has implications for reading realism as well since many of the writers once labeled “regionalist” are also assigned the label of “realist,” such as Sarah Orne Jewett and Kate Chopin.⁷ It is always worth considering that, in spite of their prestige, the *Atlantic*-group magazines may appeal to contemporary anthologists due to their ongoing accessibility, but that these magazines had a limited reach in terms of popular culture compared to newspaper syndications. It is difficult to separate the notion of prestige from the idea of audience size and to gauge the relative importance of each in literary history, but certainly it is important to remember that these authors themselves were marketing experts who were making professional decisions about where and how best to place their work. Sometimes such decisions were motivated by economic need, sometimes by fame, and sometimes by intangible artistic idiosyncrasies having to do with reaching specific readerships.

Even if we can get past the implication that one is not a “legitimate” successful professional writer unless his or her work appeared in one of the *Atlantic*-group magazines, there is the additional problem in Glazener’s assumption that the act of becoming a professional writer or, for that matter, an editor, relies on a shared sense of class identity.⁸ Such a claim assumes that this new collectivity necessarily subverts all other aspects of identity affiliation, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, geography, etc. and that identity is then subsumed into a class-based affiliation with mutual collective interests. Glazener bases her argument on an assumption of economic class identification that may not work as neatly for American culture as Marxist scholars would like to assume because such distinctions are not fixed, and they are not based on finite factors. What Glazener’s text leaves us with is an acknowledgment that publication practices certainly influenced writerly choices in regard to fiction, and therefore, they necessarily influenced readerly responses although, of course, the *Atlantic*-group editors were not the sole cultivators of readerly responses. Writers of the late nineteenth century had to decide what,

exactly, realism embodied, and they had to admit on some level to infusing into their fiction a certain amount of what they perceived to be a realist approach. At the very least, we must assume that writers had to enter into a discourse with realism even if writing in opposition to it.

The salient issue is each writer's stake in a realist approach; this is really the crux of the problem. In spite of the fact that we can identify a handful of realist writers and label them as such, regardless of whether we use Glazener's magazine criterion or another critical litmus test, such labeling does not assume that each writer approached realism in the same manner. Occasionally, some scholars, such as George Becker, Harry Levin, and René Wallek, have challenged the idea that realism even exists or "succeeds" as a literary mode because this term resists easy classification and because literary realism has larger cultural implications outside of stylistic criteria (Pizer 5). For various reasons, writers are cast and recast alternately under various umbrella terms such as regionalism, realism, and naturalism with sometimes problematic overlapping with sentimentalism and even romanticism. Donald Pizer addresses the inherent problem with some of these labels, particularly with the terms realism and naturalism:

[B]oth words also have distinctive meanings in philosophical discourse that can spill over into literary analysis, with awkward consequences. For example, metaphysical and epistemological inquiries into what is real, or the ethical implications of what is natural, can be used to undermine almost any act of historiography or criticism. (3)

Pizer points out that such efforts to destabilize the idea of literary realism are generally aimed at ridiculing the pretensions of writers who aim to offer literary representations of "the real." He labels this type critical stance as hostile (3) because of its misguided aim of attacking the philosophical impossibility of a constructed representation of the real rather than focusing on the texts themselves and what they reveal. Pizer concludes that in spite of efforts of scholars to discredit realism and naturalism as discreet literary styles, these labels have continued to attain a rough acceptance by critics, and he asserts that both realism and naturalism are associated with specific historical periods in American literary history, which is generally the 1870s and 1880s for realism and the turn of the century for naturalism (5). Pizer does add a caveat that the texts

given each label share a specific set of stylistic conditions, such as “new, interesting, and roughly similar” for realism (5) and yet he applies the same general label to works of naturalism.

It is not completely clear where Pizer’s historical labeling gets us in terms of defining realism and naturalism because, as always, exceptions spring to mind. Rebecca Harding Davis’s “Life in the Iron-Mills,” published in 1861, falls outside of Pizer’s timeframe for realism, yet this work is arguably one of the first examples of realist writing for thematic reasons alone; Davis tackles the subject of the Wheeling, Virginia iron works and the oppression of the Welsh working class. She uses specific language aimed at discrediting romantic notions of the sufferings of the poor, and she is absorbed with the question of the role money plays in creating or solving social problems. Similarly, Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* appeared in print in 1893, offering gritty and graphic descriptions of a girl’s very short descent from factory worker into prostitution, and scholars continue to argue whether this is a work of realism or a seminal work of naturalism. For that matter, even Davis’s work contains vestiges of the animalistic imagery used to depict human behavior that will later come to be associated with naturalism. Perhaps the real difficulty categorizing such works is the very fact that each lies on the periphery of Pizer’s timeline, and perhaps such historicist dating is meant to encompass only the majority of such prototypical writing. In any event, Pizer, like Glazener, aims to limit his focus by offering a set of criteria, with a beginning and ending point, not to undermine other efforts to examine works of realism and naturalism that lie outside these bounds but rather to define the works he examines by offering his own boundaries for inclusion. In other words, he narrows his conditions to a specific set of material circumstances, the evidence of the texts, in a manner strikingly similar to how realist writers narrowed the conditions for certainty in their attempts to capture specific aspects of social interest in their own contemporary culture.

Pizer adds another very important attribute to our understanding of the aesthetics of literary realism; he points out that realist writers tended to view civilization as a progression, and

consequently, they asserted that literature had an ethical and transformative role in the formation of social ethics in the modern age that was more advanced than the literature of earlier societies. What began to occur was an alignment between the Darwinian idea of evolution and the Hegelian idea of advancement, and many social philosophers appropriated the evolutionary model in order to suggest that their own field was superior to all that came before it because it had advanced as opposed to adapted. The advancement pose lends instant prestige to any idea or philosophy because it is so conveniently dismissive of whatever preceded it. Pizer makes a valid distinction between realism and naturalism relative to Social Darwinism, particularly as naturalist writers frequently incorporated into their texts the possibilities of devolution and atavism as explanations for unsocial behavior. Such a distinction, however, focuses on only a single aspect of this literature's sociological concern, and there are others that warrant attention, such as the conflict between material and metaphysical concerns of human intellect. This conflict is as much a concern for naturalism as it is for realism, and thus it serves to link the two literary styles, and it also provides a pathway to modernism, which focuses on the subjectivity, identity, and the psychological reality that the mind perceives.

One of the postmodernist contributions to critical theory discourse is its attempt to be all-encompassing and all-embracing in regard to the identity paradigms that are so closely aligned with various schools of critical theory. It is these identity paradigms that allow each school of theory to promote what Barrish calls its "realer than thou" position (*ALR* 129). Marxist Theory, à la Lukács and Jameson, for example, has been accused of privileging class identity over other categories, such as race and gender.⁹ Feminist theorists, such as Josephine Donovan and Marjorie Pryse, have been accused of privileging gender by artificially elevating the role of women in regard to certain types of writing.¹⁰ Historicist criticism, such as that of Brodhead and Kaplan, has been accused of validating class and gender hegemony by accepting the view that "writers classify themselves through the modes of representation they select" (Brodhead 116).

Barrish points out that each approach sets itself apart and claims intellectual authority by denigrating whatever critical approach preceded it, much as realist writers such as William Dean Howells and Henry James claimed their writing was more real than the “idealistic” work that preceded it because of its focus on the everyday life of the common man (Howells *Criticism* 11) or its access to some previously unacknowledged social truism. Postmodernist criticism attempts to soothe over all these more narrow focuses that align textual authority with a single cultural identity, instead asserting that “All is True” (Furst 12). In fact, critics like Lilian Furst and Nancy Glazener are far less interested in the critical position writers occupy than they are interested in the readerly constructions of these texts; however, the reader-focused approach brings with it a new set of problems because it requires a determination of who, exactly, the reader is.¹¹ Charles Johanningsmeier’s investigations have shown us that nineteenth-century print culture and readerships are not as easily reconstructed as once was believed. Postmodernist scholarship focuses primarily on authors and the surrounding culture in which they constructed their texts. Specifically, postmodernism acknowledges that one *can* occupy multiple positions within culture by being both privileged and marginalized at the same time. Because identity is fragmented and shifting, the possibility for realist writers to stake an authoritative claim across groups bears reconsideration.

The contemporary postmodernist compromise re-labels realism as *realisms*, and the critical consensus deems that the term must be viewed subjectively by trying to discern a realist intention or expression rather than by locating realist conventions. Such a compromise is well-suited to realist scholarship because realism as a literary aesthetic is “anti-conventional” insofar as it compares to the romantic and sentimental modes that preceded it. This kind of pluralistic rhetoric is finding favor with recent critics who frequently assert that no single definition of the term realism can possibly elicit a consensus. Peter Brooks writes: “we discover that any label such as ‘realism’ is inadequate and that great literature is precisely that which understands this

inadequacy” (20). In discussing his author-focused approach, Michael Davitt Bell writes: “The terms ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’ matter to me, first of all, then, for the simple but important reason that they have been used by generations of American fiction writers, from the 1880s to the present, to describe what they thought they were doing” (*The Problem of American Realism* 4).¹² The real benefit of this postmodernist approach to multiple realisms is, as Pizer points out, that critics have stopped evaluating specific texts in terms of gauging them as stylistic successes or failures. Pizer writes: “No longer is it possible, in short, to use a modal definition to demonstrate the inferiority of a specific work, or to use the characteristics of a specific work to demonstrate the inadequacy of the definition” (15). Again, the problem challenging scholars of realism today is the very issue that these writers themselves had to deal with: how does one reify an abstraction and render it into a material form that consistently signifies the abstraction while it simultaneously adheres to the empirical conditions required for certainty and inclusion? It is fairly easy to locate discrepancies in the rules of realism by focusing on differences. A more useful approach is to focus on shared challenges to a realist approach and then to scrutinize how different writers deal with similar sets of such underlying cultural and literary conditions, particularly those that the religious subject imposes. By doing so, we can compare realist “responses” or, in other words, the resultant textual constructions, and we can try to determine how different writers grappled with the ideology of realism while facing metaphysical challenges that seem at odds with the very concept of materialism. In other words, as these writers pondered and refined the conditions for certainty, how did these so-called realist writers deal with subjects that seemed to lie just outside the boundaries realism demands? Here we have not only the problem of stylistic textual construction but a problem with the construction of the subject itself.

Critics like Michael Anesko also make the argument that realism resists definition because it was more of a philosophical approach than a set of conventional techniques. Anesko

believes realism can best be examined on a case by case basis in order to understand each author's vision of how realism is used to assert authority in American culture. He writes: "[T]he place to begin is with our writers themselves" (Anesko 91), and he further suggests that locating "slippages" (81) between what each writer set out to accomplish and what they may have unintentionally constructed is the best approach to reading realist fiction. In fact, this seems to be the current theoretical compromise which, at its heart, reinstates the notion of assessing a writer's intention in relation to the writer's culture, a combination of a postmodernist and a historicist approach, as the "realest real" way to read realism.¹³

The religious subject allows us to examine realism in a new and distinct way by aligning fiction with shifting sensibilities in American religious thought and by examining realism as competing against other discourses of authority. As religious practices became more intertwined with their secular effects and responsibilities, fiction became a site within which to formulate various theories about the role of religion in cultural ethics. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of realism begins to parallel the rhetoric of a changing religious culture, particularly the decline of Calvinism and the rise of an ideology of religious primitivism, with both calling for a "creedless" anti-conventionalism.¹⁴ Primitivism expands on Puritan themes of embracing a vernacular hermeneutic tradition and placing its faith in the common person without the need of an intervening authority, creed, dogma, or theology in order to understand the Bible. Further, primitivism suggests a belief that the Bible contains immutable truth that is not subject to historical or cultural influence. Historian George Marsden writes: "This doctrine of the immutability of truth went hand in hand with truth's perspicuity" (80). Yet Calvinism, as it was practiced in New England culture, had become overly rigid and theocratic in order to prevent the kind of splintering that had given rise to Puritanism initially and strict sanctions were imposed on dissonant voices. Marsden, in essence, argues that in its rejection of Calvinism, nineteenth-century American culture reiterated the conditions giving rise to Puritanism in its own incipient

stages. Instead of producing a vernacular Bible, readily available to all households, such as the 1560 Geneva Bible or the 1611 King James version, the nineteenth century began to produce a plethora of its own Bible versions and editions, including the Book of Mormon and, as I have argued elsewhere, a vast array of biographies of the life of Jesus. Realism, similarly, seeks to shed earlier discourses of authority or aesthetic conventions and seeks to locate perspicuous truth while staking its authority on the condition of the common man, reflecting religion's faith in a populist hermeneutic.

Whether or not we can categorize realism as an ideology or a form of literary criticism, it is important to identify first how realism emerged in the field of fiction and how it operated, and then this literary idea must be examined in tandem with other important cultural changes. Indeed, there are many avenues to pursue in evaluating realist writing in relation to other forms of cultural expression dealing specifically with the subject of ethics. The area of utmost interest to this study is the examination of religious authority as it was exercised in nineteenth-century American culture. In two important social histories, *Faith in Fiction* and *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David Reynolds examines the interplay between various types of social reform rhetoric and popular literature, such as anecdotal sermonic discourse, "tracts," poetry, and the Oriental and visionary fiction that is associated with specific religious sects like Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, and Catholicism. Reynolds suggests that nineteenth-century social reform rhetoric emerging in the form of fiction—an umbrella term that eventually encompasses realism—was purposefully understated so that these authors could distance themselves from negative associations that accompanied competing styles of reform rhetoric, particularly what he terms reform literature that "engaged in exploring dark forces of the human psyche" (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 55). The purpose for such distancing in the newer rhetoric was, in part, to avoid the accusation of being labeled as titillating (Reynolds 64). Describing the effect of dark reform literature on subsequent nineteenth-century writers who

were trying to avoid accusations of having a fascination with vice, Reynolds writes: “The dark reformers are largely responsible for transforming a culture of morality into a culture of ambiguity” (59). Reynolds’s comparison of reform fiction to other types of rhetoric is an important one because he asserts that the new types of ambiguous social criticism embodied in fiction in turn gave rise to subsequent literary forms such as realism, in which the density of the text was a characteristic of a new socioethical literary style.

Reynolds’s social histories, and *Faith in Fiction* in particular, have important implications for examining the relationship between religion and realism because these two subjects share a mutual concern with ethical practices; therefore, they are necessarily in dialogue with each other.¹⁵ Reynolds examines the work of many writers such as William Dean Howells, Harold Frederic and Mark Twain, and he suggests that certain texts offer a “trenchant appraisal of mainstream religion” (*Faith in Fiction* 207). He further suggests that this ongoing appraisal played a key part in the emergent Social Gospel Reform movement of the 1880s and 1890s, which he explains as endorsing “brotherhood and universal progress under the direction of a fatherly God to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth” (204). While a thorough evaluation of the Social Gospel movement would take this project in an entirely different direction, it is important to note this movement’s ongoing emphasis on materiality, suggesting that the cultural desire for realism is far from over even as realism declined as a literary style and naturalism began to emerge. What this suggests is that even as realism began to lose popularity as an artistic form, writers developed new styles, such as naturalism and modernism, through which to enact realist principles. The underlying aesthetic, to return to a phrase coined by Phillip Barrish, is a concern with presenting a “realer than thou” position (*American Literary Realism* 129) in order to ascertain universal truths about cultural and ethical practices. Barrish argues that this attempt to assert a realer-than-thou claim to authority continues in literary scholarship today.¹⁶

The pairing of religion and realism allows for a new consideration of the practice of literary realism in the Gilded Age, particularly in competition with the popular newspaper press and the religious press that had already captured a large segment of the literary market. At the same time that realist fiction emerged, religious fiction already held a prominent position in American print culture. Its impact was so great that, as scholar David Reynolds writes, “Popular religious writing . . . had more than entered the religious mainstream. It had virtually become the mainstream” (*Faith in Fiction* 211). Twain and Warner comment on the popularity of religious writing in *The Gilded Age* (1873) when some lobbyists discuss the advantage of marketing bonds “handsomely among the pious poor” (256) by capitalizing on high circulation rates of religious periodicals. He writes:

Your religious paper is by far the best vehicle for a thing of this kind, because they’ll ‘lead’ your article and put it right in the midst of the reading matter; and if it’s got a few Scripture quotations in it, and some temperance platitudes and a bit of gush here and there about Sunday Schools, and a sentimental snuffle now and then about ‘God’s precious ones, the honest hard-handed poor,’ it works the nation like a charm, my dear sir, and never a man suspects that it is an advertisement; but your secular paper sticks you right into the advertising columns and of course you don’t take a trick. (256-57)

Realist writers of the late nineteenth century inherited this literary tradition and the implicit social values enmeshed in religious literature and, in many ways, they had to place their own writing in a position relative to pious or sentimental religious fiction. Whereas writers of religious fiction had relied on a certain amount of cultural stereotyping, such stereotypes began to be more and more incomprehensible by the late nineteenth century, in part because of increasingly blurred lines within religious culture, and this begins to present a real problem for realism.

At the same time, within popular fiction, religious practices must be given a material form, one provided by literary realists rather than by theologians. In a far larger sense, the appropriation of the religious subject by novelists has fiction writers becoming the theologians of the nineteenth century by usurping reform discourse in the newly flourishing print culture of

newspapers and magazines as well as book publishing. Not surprisingly, ministers and theologians begin to appropriate popular forms of discourse in response, as is evident in Beecher's *Norwood* and Sheldon's *In His Steps*. The very act of writing realism is an attempt to position one's work within culture because it is a claim to authority that acts in relation to competing discourses. Specifically, realist writers must position their texts within larger print culture and, to do so, they must position the religious subject within context of cultural frameworks particularly in relation to discussions about ethics and social justice.

The four writers whose work I've chosen to include in this study are those whose engagement with the religious subject offers something unique to an in-depth study of the practice of realism in the nineteenth century. These are Rebecca Harding Davis, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Harold Frederic. All of these writers belie any attempt to label realism as a secular practice because of their extensive engagement with religion. The focus and methodology of this project will be to examine the body of fiction of these four major writers, supplemented by their autobiographical and philosophical writings, in order to view the way each grappled with social ethics in the practice of literary realism. Davis, for example, examines the role that institutional religion might play in regulating anti-social behavior in an increasingly industrialized society in her seminal realist work, "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861). On the other hand, in *A Modern Instance* (1882), William Dean Howells, an advocate of a doctrine of individual moral authority, attempts to negotiate a compromise between intuitive conscience and the inherited ethical doctrine of Judaic law. In his later critical work, Howells remains ambivalent as he measures the "use-value" of inherited religion against a Scottish Common Sense approach to conscience and moral ethics when he writes about "those who are accustomed to accept God from authority, and who have always believed what they were bid (which is no bad thing, perhaps, and seems to save time)" (*Editor's Study* 16). Mark Twain hones in on the hypocrisy of American religious culture by showing how theology and ethics have become

disjointed. Particularly, he focuses on the Bible as an empty signifier that occupies a physical space but seems to have lost its underlying authority in relation to abstract spirituality and modern morality in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). He challenges even realist assumptions about truth and materiality. Distorting all previous conceptions about the role of the church, the self, or even science as a source of authority for regulating ethical actions, Twain extends his skepticism beyond the limits of religion and casts doubt upon the possibility of words and language providing access to the real. Late in the century, Harold Frederic displays a similar cynicism when he satirizes an increasingly skeptical religious culture in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896). In this novel, he employs economic language and financial dealings to describe the American religious landscape, revealing the cynicism with which religious values have come to be viewed. Frederic simultaneously reveals an increasingly disillusioned faith in the individual's ability to uphold moral and ethical beliefs in a changing "urbanized" culture. Other writers, such as Edith Wharton and Henry James also allude to a changing religious vista in their writing although in a more incidental manner. Their work no doubt merits consideration as well, especially when viewed in tandem with the four writers who are the focus of this dissertation. While there are many writers who could be placed in this study in relation to shifting claims of ethical authority by race or region, the focus must be on the writings of those who are not only prominent in the study of realism but who are also preoccupied with the challenge of constructing the religious subject textually throughout a large portion of their fiction. The religious subject preoccupies all of these realist writers, and the connection between religion, ethics, and the surrounding social world is one that seems unavoidable and will yield important results to the study of realism.

These four writers, Rebecca Harding Davis, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Harold Frederic, utilized very different strategies when dealing with the complicated relationship between religion, culture, and ethics, but each exhibits a clear intention of moving away from

Calvinism and its associated literature. This literature includes, for example, sermonic discourse such as Henry Beecher's 1843 *Lectures to Young Men* (Jackson 39) or the sentimental conversion novel such as Susan Warner's 1851 *The Wide, Wide World*. The Calvinist literary aesthetic relies on what Gregory Jackson describes as "the hermeneutic of fear" (*The Word* 37). Jackson argues that "Calvinism historically used fear as a vital tool for moral armament against the perceived powers of evil" (39). Calvinism, he suggests, is the impetus for more than one literary offshoot in the late nineteenth century. He defines the homiletic novel, which emerges out of this Calvinist tradition, as a "fictional narrative [used] to motivate real conversions" (30). Jackson asserts an important argument that the homiletic novel informs realist literature, and that it offers a parallel narrative of American religious experience that shares some similar traits with the realist novel. He cites Charles Sheldon's 1896 *In His Steps* as a prime example of this genre (158). Although religious conversion is the basis of the homiletic novel and social reform is the purported basis of the realist novel, Jackson argues that homiletic and realist texts both demand that readers "apply discursive enactments to their own lives through imaginative exercises for structuring everyday reality" (163). Both genres serve as a "call to arms" for social interventions.

Because of a clear movement away from the Calvinist aesthetic, it is tempting to apply the convenient label of Liberal Protestant to the writers included in this study; many scholars have embraced this umbrella term for discussing late nineteenth-century American religious culture. The inadequacy of this term becomes clear when we compare the sociological realism of Davis and Howells to the far more cynical realism of Twain and Frederic in relation to the religious subject. The former writers scrutinize religious culture and rewrite theology, seeking a model for the modern age while the latter two question the social and ethical value of religious culture, and each eventually casts doubt upon the possibility for material representations of immutable truths because of the subjectivity of human understanding. Although all four of these

writers might exhibit characteristics of Liberal Protestant rhetoric, it would be misleading to assume that they adopt similar views toward American religious culture. Just as each offers a unique portrait of the realist paradigm, each also presents distinctly different constructions of the religious subject in relation to this style of writing.

No one can ascertain exactly when realism began and ended, but one of the earliest works that blends a changing view of realism with a focus on materiality is Rebecca Harding Davis's 1861 "Life in the Iron-Mills." Determined to affix a later historical date on the onset of American realist writing, scholars often overlook Davis's fiction in relation to these other writers. The other writers included in this study, however, were very familiar with her work, and she certainly had a profound influence on the idea that marginalized social, economic, and immigrant groups were worthy material for literary constructions. Chapter Two will examine the writing of Rebecca Harding Davis, who is arguably the first realist writer in American literary history (Glazener, "The Practice and Promotion" 30). Davis strives to find a cultural stereotype against which to set her work. She wants to debunk romantic notions about self-sacrifice and martyrdom, and to do so, she focuses her gaze on harsh economic realities that she believes are glossed over in literary depictions of women and African Americans. In her essay, "The Middle-Aged Woman," she writes of her preoccupation with locating "the genius of the commonplace" (374). She speculates that the subject of the middle-aged woman allows an artist to "gain a clear idea of the condition of American society" (375), and she frequently makes such women the subjects of her fiction. In Davis's use of the typical lingo of the realist writer, that is, her focus on the commonplace and the realist's struggle to typify material representation, and in her concern for locating truth in culture and in print, Davis demonstrates the kind of self-conscious writing that necessarily places her aim into the context of realism although she readily admits that "reality oppresses us sometimes" ("Men's Rights" 343). Such an admission underscores Davis's intention to direct the reader's gaze toward unpleasant and otherwise overlooked truths.

Davis's most famous work, "Life in the Iron-Mills," initiated the American reading public into her vision of social reform that aligns religion with realism. Throughout this story, she examines the role that religion might play in an increasingly industrialized society. Davis considers these concerns under the confines of an emerging capitalist system, and she criticizes the exclusivity of the established church. Her story is set in a particularly brutal work environment, the Wheeling, Virginia iron works. She depicts many of the injustices of capitalism that preoccupied Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Similarly, her work demonstrates a concern with individual identity and a preoccupation with the concept of selfhood in society.¹⁷ Davis, in particular, examines the function of institutional religion in regard to regulating antisocial behavior and thus shaping social identity. She seeks a form of social Christianity that will minister to all members of an urban community.

The subject of the Quakers will prove to be a particularly interesting one in an examination of Davis's work, and it provides a link between sentimentalism and her emerging realism. The social benevolence practices of the Quakers serve as the basis for Davis's aim in shifting spiritual concerns from an eschatological focus to a sociological one. Because of her 1863 marriage to Lemuel Clarke Davis and her subsequent relation to Philadelphia, she spent many years among the Quakers and she became intrigued with their history and religious practices. She frequently creates Quaker figures in her stories and novels that function in a variety of different ways, but most notably to introduce ethical crises between social law and conscience. Davis, in fact, writes a new theology for her age, drawing on the practices of the Quakers in order to offer a model of how Christianity and social reform might be combined to meet the needs of the oppressed classes. This is a model that will eventually come to be practiced in American culture as the Social Gospel Movement.

While "Life in the Iron-Mills" offers an early example of literary realism and Davis's view of how religious reform might work in a changing culture, it is important to examine other

early Davis works, such as “John Lamar” (1862), “David Gaunt” (1862), *Margret Howth* (1862), and “The Wife’s Story” (1864) as well as her later writing, including *Waiting for the Verdict* (1867) *Dallas Galbraith* (1868), and *A Law Unto Herself* (1877). By examining the scope of her fiction, both her short stories and her novels, her comprehensive scrutiny of American religious culture becomes evident. Davis’s critique of current reform ideologies, which she writes into her fiction, requires the supplement of her life-writing in order to complete the satirical tableau of her own emerging theology. Again, the question about the limits of realist writing must be posed; to what extent does Davis’s realism allow her to portray the “truth” of what she sees when it emerges as incomplete without the background material that allows the reader to interpret her text? Her simultaneous embracing of religion, or at least of scripture, and her concern with verisimilitude as a theme suggests that, for Davis, religion and realism go hand-in-hand. She cannot envision social reform happening without realist writing, yet she cannot write her vision of social reform without including religious reform. For Davis, these were systems in which the reforms she imagines should work reciprocally, but she spins a web in which neither concept can be clearly extricated nor clearly understood. Davis’s ambiguity and blending of sentimentalism with realism allows us to identify in her work the inchoate leaning toward anti-conventionalism that will come to be associated with the writing and realist aesthetics of William Dean Howells.

In realism, at various points in time, we see a deliberate engagement with the religious subject on the part of several authors. At the same time, in a mode of writing that depends on specificity and detail, the subject of religion itself resists easy categorization because of its numinous nature. The resultant ambiguity corresponds to an emerging type of sociological rhetoric that sets itself against earlier forms of dark reform rhetoric, as David Reynolds points out. This juxtaposition immediately places all religious references within realism into a dialogue with other types of social reform literature and the administration of social ethics. Such

reciprocity between religion and social behavior is not a difficult relationship to accept because the alternative would be to examine religion in relation to spiritual notions about sin and salvation, which would place the subject of religion even further from the material realm. Writers such as Howells even begin to question if religion might not be replaced by literature although this suggestion once again posits the question of what exactly he means by religion. Although Howells exhibited several viewpoints during his long and prodigious career, he nevertheless provides an interesting view of the relationship between literature and religion in 1885 at a time when he was fully committed to trying to develop a realist paradigm. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Boston Brahmin Bromfield Corey states this view of literature: ““All civilisation [sic] comes through literature now, especially in our country. . . . once we were softened, if not polished, by religion, but I suspect that the pulpit counts for much less now in civilising [sic]”” (Howells 126). Corey’s words reflect a belief that religion wields a civilizing influence, and this belief lends itself naturally to Howells’s wish for an ethical literature. It is not clear whether Howells suggests through his fictional character that literature does influence social behavior in the way the institutional church used to or merely that it should take over this function. For that matter, with Howells, it is possible that he is simply satirizing a popular viewpoint in the civilizing capacity of literature and not necessarily his own belief. Later in his career, he would reiterate that the authoritative role of literature in the administration of social ethics was, he believed, literature’s primary purpose.

Following Davis’s early realist writing begins a period we might define as the heyday of realism from the 1870s to the 1880s. During this period, as Glazener points out, the *Atlantic-*group magazines actively promoted this new mode of writing, promising a literature that mirrored real life. Chapter Three will examine William Dean Howells as the major proponent of American realism. Howells was on the forefront in his efforts to establish a paradigm for realist writing by drawing on the language of natural science in order to distance himself from

romanticism. In this way, his realist ideology is akin to George Eliot's literary realism when Eliot writes: "How little the real characteristics of the working-class are known to those who are outside them, how little their natural history has been studied, is sufficiently disclosed by our art as well as by our political and social theories" (183). More importantly, in his work as an editor and critic, Howells was arguably the most significant arbiter of realist works published in America. Howells's biography is also critical to any discussion of his religious views as he, himself, represents an amalgamation of several prominent religious influences in the nineteenth century, including Methodism, Swedenborgianism, Calvinism, and Episcopalianism. These influences can be located in his writing, and it becomes clear that Howells is absorbed and intrigued by church history and the ongoing relevance of the institutional church.

In spite of the social value he places on literature, Howells never fully adheres to a belief that religion is obsolete in modern society; he continues to exhibit some degree of doubt. Many of his works reveal his perplexity over how exactly religion operates in culture and specifically how religion operates in the development of individual conscience and self regulation. Howells's belief in a culpable collectivity is perpetually undermined by his equal emphasis on self-determination and an individualized moral code, that is, conscience. He begins his novelistic career by satirizing the emptiness of what he terms inherited orthodoxy, by which he means Calvinist practices, and he later goes on to examine various religious movements from Shakerism to Methodism. Later, he also toys with a form of primitive Christianity in his utopian fiction, and by the time he writes *The Leatherwood God* in 1916, he even begins to theorize about the process by which society creates new prophets and creeds. Throughout his entire career, Howells never exhausts the religious subject, and he examines it in new ways and from various points of view until he finally begins to incorporate aspects of the supernatural into some of his short-story writing, particularly after he is influenced by William James and the rise of

psychology, at which time he begins to contemplate the mysteries of the impenetrable mind (Cady 147).

In his realist writing, Howells might best be classified as a critic and author who is afraid of what he sees when he examines the decline of traditional Calvinism even though he himself did not give serious thought to Calvinist orthodoxy until he left Ohio. Edwin Cady writes: “Howells’s religious heritage was compounded of a strange set of radical views almost all largely heretical from the viewpoint of Christian orthodoxy. It was Quaker, Methodist, Millerite, Deistic, Swedenborgian, and Utopian” (156). An advocate of a doctrine of individual moral authority, emphasizing conscience over church doctrine, or Common Sense ethics over theology (Suderman *Religion* 288), Howells nevertheless attempts to negotiate a compromise between individual moral ethics and the inherited ethical doctrine of Judaic law expressed in American religious culture via Puritan-derived Calvinist creeds. At the end of *A Modern Instance*, Ben Halleck, “a man who had once thrown off all allegiance to creeds” (Howells 450), becomes a minister, but one who is stymied by indecision in trying to discern the difference between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law in his own interpretation of scriptural ethics and their application to modern culture.

Howells dedicates much of his fiction to examining the influences of various religious movements in both American frontier and urban industrial culture. Works such as *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Minister’s Charge* (1887), *Annie Kilburn* (1889), the Altrurian Romances [which include *A Traveler from Altruria*, *Letters of an Altrurian Traveller*, and *Through the Eye of the Needle* (1894-1908)], and *The Leatherwood God* (1916) reveal Howells’s fascination with the role that various religious movements, from Presbyterianism and Unitarianism to Shakerism and Evangelical Methodism, played in transforming social ethics in a rapidly-expanding and developing population. In his exploration of American religious culture, Howells offers up an explanation for the persistence of traditional Calvinist orthodoxy by revealing that the rise of

skepticism at the end of the nineteenth century brought with it a fear of social instability.

Orthodoxy, he suggests, appears to ease guilt by its very inflexibility; it does not change or adapt in response to modern social dilemmas like divorce. What was once a criticism of Calvinism becomes its saving grace.

A return to Calvinist orthodoxy was apparently a prevalent move in late nineteenth-century culture. In one of his famous sermons, the popular Presbyterian clergyman, Reverend Thomas De Witt Talmage, provides a justification for accepting the Bible as an unquestionable authority by simply dismissing all inconsistencies as part of the great unknown mystery of the universe. Talmage, in fact, embraces the ambiguity of the Bible in his sermon “The Reckless Penknife,” in which he states: “I would not give a farthing for the Bible if I could understand everything in it. I would know that the heights and depths of God’s truth were not very great if, with my poor finite mind, I could reach everything” (49).¹⁸ Talmage’s words offer solace to tortured souls like that of the fictional Ben Halleck for whom the weight of doubt has become an unbearable burden. In spite of Howells’s belief that natural science and the study of man offered a method for penetrating and representing “truth” about mankind, Howells employs his realism as a mode of negotiating a reconsideration of what he terms “inherited” values, which can arguably be read as Calvinism. Ultimately, Howells is unable to view man as an individual capable of living in society without the safety net of some sort of institution for regulating moral behavior. His observational technique becomes a reform paradigm when he fashions his realism not according to his principles of reporting what he sees but rather of shaping what he would like to see, and thus, Howells’s scientific grasshopper becomes an idealistic grasshopper in the final production of his realist text.¹⁹ Howells’s unresolved depictions of the American religious landscape ultimately are reflected in some unresolved sentiments about literary realism. In his later autobiographical renderings, he makes it clear that he has come to reconsider the ethical

role of fiction, and he has trouble resolving the conflict between the authority of the text and the autonomy of the self.

Howells's close friend, Mark Twain, had a similarly long and prolific career although he deliberately avoided magazine publication and chose to publish primarily by subscription sales instead. Along with these other writers, Twain aimed to capture a key moment of cultural transition when American agrarian culture rapidly modernized with the fast-paced growth of American cities. Like Davis and Howells, Twain draws on his own experiences with institutional religion as he examines a changing culture. Chapter Four assesses Twain's contribution to the ongoing discourse between religion and realism in the late nineteenth century. Distorting all previous conceptions about the role of the church, the self, or even science as a source of authority for regulating ethical actions, Twain extends his skepticism beyond the limits of religion and casts doubt upon the possibility of words and language providing access to the real. In late nineteenth century America, the former confidence placed in tangible evidence of religious authority began to be undermined. Realist writers had to grapple with the fact that inherited symbols and institutions of authority no longer seemed relevant to a rapidly-changing industrial culture. Twain particularly hones in on Bible culture and various encounters with The Word, especially in his own Presbyterian upbringing and the rote memorization of Bible verses from his Sunday School days. In the process of poking fun at the ways in which Americans read and interpreted Scripture, Twain reveals his extensive knowledge of the print history of the Bible.

In an analysis of Twain, it is important to look at the larger body of his work, beginning with his travel writing account, *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress* (1869), in which he establishes the framework and rhetoric for his satirical examination of American religious habits that he will continue in his subsequent fiction. Twain's fascination with the religious subject emerges in his autobiography and his essays as well, many of which are now

available in the collections *Mark Twain and the Three R's* and *The Bible According to Mark Twain*. In addition to exploring Calvinistic culture in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Twain toys with both realist techniques and the topic of religion in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). By having his protagonist, Hank Morgan, travel back in time, Twain is allowed to consider briefly a revisionist history of the role the Catholic Church played in moral ethics by having Morgan contemplate the efficacy of introducing modern religious theology into a predominantly Catholic culture. Other important Twain works include "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1907-08), Twain's self-described satire of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's 1868 *The Gates Ajar*²⁰ (Ramussen 61), and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (1969, but written 1896-1910), in which Twain suggests "that the belief in the traditional God of the Bible and of American Protestantism may be a terrifying and terrible belief without which man would be infinitely better" (Suderman *Religion* 23). Another text that bears examining in the context of Twain's realism and the concept of individual ethics is "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1900), a tale in which Twain satirizes the struggle between community ethics and individual greed when a stranger places a monetary temptation in the hands of a local newspaperman.

Additionally, many works have been written about Twain's religious views, such as Allison Ensor's *Mark Twain and the Bible* and William Phipps's *Mark Twain's Religion*, and these analyses will highlight the complexities of Twain's individualist theology at the height of nineteenth-century skepticism. The ways in which he infuses his realist writing with a sharp underlying satire casts new doubt on the very nature of realism as a materialist mode and suggests that realism as a cognitive mode merits further consideration. As a materialist mode, realism offers to reproduce empirical reality through the use of language and symbols, which implies that truth already exists but that the writer's task is to record or magnify certain situations in order to draw attention to and demand social reform. As a cognitive mode, realism becomes

more about social values and shifting awareness of a changing world, and it insists that “truth” can be found in its subject but it also insists that the manner of locating that subject is equally important; it might be described less as a way of writing and more as a way of seeing. What we can locate in all of these works is an exploration about not only how truth can be constructed but how any social idea is formulated and this brings with it a consideration about the very nature of the construction itself as Twain’s work shows.

By the turn of the century, American literary realism began to decline, but once again, sharp delineations do not distinguish between genres. Just as Rebecca Harding Davis offers a blend of sentimentalism and early realist verisimilitude—even arguably naturalistic themes—Harold Frederic experiments widely with subject and style. Chapter Five will examine Frederic’s groundbreaking work; he is one of the few realist writers to make religion the central subject of his text. In his satirical novel, *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896), Frederic undercuts the conventional conversion narrative and modernizes the religious vista by finding that the only consistent American religious value is hypocrisy. In addition to satirizing the skeptical culture of the late nineteenth century, Frederic also displays an increasingly materialist language in his descriptions of the American religious landscape. As Eric Sundquist remarks, “The age of realism in America is the age of the *romance of money*—money not in any simple sense but in the complex alterations of human value that it brings into being by its own capacities for reproduction” (19). The use of financial language in religious description becomes increasingly prevalent by the time *Theron Ware* is published. It emerges again in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* whose heroine Lily Bart envisions a dreadful future having to attend an “expensive church” every Sunday (54). Frederic offers a dense text in which he places Methodism, Catholicism, and Darwinism side by side with nuances exploring dichotomies within each of these movements.

By the time we get to Harold Frederic, we begin to see the extent to which doubts about the “realness” of the religious subject have begun to influence writerly considerations about materiality and larger culture and the possibilities for realistic representation in any field or subject. As with all of the writers included in this study, Frederic’s major realist novel, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, offers an evaluation of modern culture and the role of religion in the formation of ethics. This close scrutiny emerges more clearly when we examine this novel as a development of important themes he first introduces in his early career. In *Seth’s Brothers’ Wife* (1887) and *The Lawton Girl* (1890), set in the Mohawk Valley region of upstate New York, Frederic explores the social mores comprising regional identity, not the least of which is institutional religion and its associated habits. When he focuses on Methodism and Catholicism in *The Damnation*, his critique is more easily understood in the context of his ironic constructions of the Baptist and Episcopal churches in these earlier works.

Finally, in his later fiction, Frederic explores other forces of social determinism, as he broadens his cultural considerations by examining a declining agrarian-based European aristocracy and a budding urban capitalist economy in modern London. In *Gloria Mundi* (1898) and *The Market-Place* (1898), both published posthumously, Frederic explores other forces of social determinism, such as inheritance, both financial and genetic, and humankind’s indomitable pursuit of social power. He considers specific aspects of a Spencerian model of Social Darwinism, offering a cynical view of human nature in relation to the development of ethics and conscience. These two economic novels, initially intended to be published as one text, place Frederic’s social ideology far out of the range of the Social Gospel model Davis had offered nearly a half a century earlier. Frederic provides not only an early glimpse of the atavism and devolution that will serve as the themes as naturalism, but he also lays out the socioeconomic conditions that might allow us to view how twentieth-century fascism and socialism might

emerge in this urban tableau. For Frederic, by the end of his career, religion is yet another form of social determinism that encourages hegemony by those wishing to maintain class hierarchies.

Realist writers themselves begin to question the strength of religious affiliations relative to other important aspects of social identity. Edith Wharton allows just a glimpse of religious identity in comparison to economic identity in *The House of Mirth* and Harold Frederic satirizes religious affiliations in a similar manner in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. Frederic also provides a satirical view of how easily some affiliations are assumed and shed in a world of seduction and greed. When critics relegate realism to a literary style of middle class sensibilities, other important distinctions are all too easily overlooked. Regional identity was undoubtedly a complicating factor in trying to ascertain the importance of religious influence; in places where only a single church institution was available, isolated pioneers probably cared little about specifics of creed even if that creed could be adequately explicated and understood, but this assumption has rarely been challenged or examined in relation to realism. Correspondingly, Christianity as a blanket term is still frequently recognized in realist literature as the basis for American cultural ethics, and in the case of William Dean Howells, he sometimes uses this term synonymously with the term democracy, even as it becomes less and less clear what exactly is meant by Christianity and how it is practiced in the late nineteenth century. Realism offers the same problem of overgeneralization, and any analysis of it requires a case by case evaluation in order to discern what each writer offers in the creation of this paradigm. In his review of Barrish's *American Literary Realism*, Tom Quirk writes: "The relation of realism to 'the real' remains a vexed question. . . . Whether reality is sub-atomic or sub-conscious, metaphysical or metonymic, hardly matters for the practicing realist" (88-89). If realism fails to deliver the "realest real thing" (Barrish 130) in regard to religious discourse, it must be considered that the failure may be implicit in the intangible perception of authority itself, as this notion can be

located, beginning in late nineteenth-century culture and continuing into twenty-first century culture.

The question of realism's failure or success is not the focus of this project, but rather it is my aim to examine the so-called paradigm of realism and to assess the role that the topic of religion plays in bringing important social and ethical problems to the forefront of a larger discussion of realism as both a cognitive and a critical mode. The purported aim of realism to offer up a social critique is an important aspect of this consideration: Amy Kaplan, author of *The Social Construction of American Realism*, elaborates: "To call oneself a realist means to make a claim not only for the cognitive value of fiction but for one's own cultural authority both to possess and dispense access to the real" (13). Keeping in mind the function of realism and its mission both to critique and construct institutions of culture is important to the study of how religion operates in these works, whether to provide social critique or parody, to support efforts of social reform, to examine its effect on culture, or to write a new theology, one more suitable for the Gilded Age. The topic of religion, because of its numinous nature, provides a unique challenge to realist writers as they attempt to reconcile the metaphysical aspects of spirituality, idealism, and the supernatural with realist materialism and its privileging of that which can be observed and named in the existential world. Peter Brooks writes: "Reading these novelists we are ever discovering what it is like to try to come to terms with the real within the constraints of language, and how one encounters in the process the limits of realism, and the limits to representation itself" (20). The relationship between the metaphysical and the material world is one that is fraught with contradiction, and the aim of this project is to try and determine how realist writers have made tangible the immateriality of religious philosophy.

The ways in which the pervasive nature of religion crosses various social disciplines and movements, from sociology to science and from philanthropy to economics, suggests that religious expression, whether architectural, institutional, or doctrinal, might be viewed as a link

or thread throughout nineteenth-century culture that impacted questions of authority across many fields of study. Realist writers took up the question of the authority of the text and the embodiment of social ethics; in order to do so, they had to construct religion as a cultural entity, and this in turn became a source of religious authority itself. In many ways, it became a frightening examination of a culture that does not fully comprehend the role religion has or should play in the administration of cultural ethics. When William Dean Howells offered up Ben Halleck's hasty return to the unimpeachable orthodoxy of Halleck's youth, he may have inadvertently foreshadowed a massive religious movement in twentieth-century American culture.

Notes

¹ Shi, in fact, believes that realism was an inevitable result of early nineteenth-century idealism. He believes that a philosophical debate started in literary journals between "idealists" and "realists" during the 1850s (10). In Part I, "Setting the Stage," he describes four types of idealism: "genteel, domestic, transcendental, and brooding" (13), which all shared "a basic conviction that fundamental truth rested in the unseen realm of ideas and spirit or in the distant past rather than in the accessible world of tangible facts and contemporary experiences" (13). According to Shi's argument, we can infer that idealism and realism shared a similar aim of revealing absolute truths, but the criteria of certainty shifted from an unseen metaphysical realm to a materialist basis of human experience.

² See also Lisa Moody, "The American 'Lives' of Jesus: The Malleable Figure of Christ as a Man of the People," *Christianity and Literature* 58.2 (2009): 157-84.

³ David Reynolds asserts that such a movement to reify spiritual experience predates realism: "The adaptation of religion to human experience was impelled first by the Scottish Common Sense philosophic movement and later by English and Continental romanticism. The former encouraged earthly observation over abstract logic, ethical behavior over expectancy of grace; the latter emphasized imaginative intuition of God in nature and the worth of the common man" (*Faith in Fiction* 4). The salient point here is that realism's emphasis on materiality derives in large part from fiction's engagement with the religious subject, and in fact, such an engagement might be viewed as an important impetus for realist writing.

⁴ Twain co-authored his 1873 *The Gilded Age* with Charles Dudley Warner.

⁵ The *Atlantic*-group includes: *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Critic*, *The Forum*, *The Galaxy*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Lippincott's*, *The Nation*, *The North American Review*, *Putnam's Monthly*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly/The Century* (Glazener, *Reading for Realism* 257-66).

⁶ There are, no doubt, important reasons why we might classify a writer as a regionalist or a realist or a naturalist, but often such distinctions seem to promote the idea of a literary hierarchy, as in this case. For example, Fetterley and Pryse criticize Eric Sundquist for what they call "miniaturizing" certain texts because he "upgrades" writers like Rebecca Harding Davis or Sarah Orne Jewett from regionalist to realist if a specific text passes muster (*Writing Out of Place* 53). One of the fundamental problems with assigning a hierarchical value to any form of literary

expression is that it requires a fixed value to support such a distinction. In literature, it is difficult to assign a value to the idea of influence, prestige, and circulation, so it must be assumed that such classifications are ascribed after the fact and have meaning primarily to help us classify sets of texts that can be read together in order to understand some greater point of cultural or historical interest, as I hope to do with my project. To this end, regardless of whether we classify some of these writers as regionalist or realist, the point is that those who published via newspaper syndicates reached huge readerships, and this publication vehicle was available to writers who also published in *The Atlantic*-group magazines.

⁷ Johanningsmeier writes: “The limitations of the print distribution system, it has been argued, created strong class and cultural boundaries separating rural, mostly female, regionalist authors and the chiefly poor, rural dwellers who provided their subject matter, on the one hand, from the urban, chiefly male, magazine editors who procured the fiction, and the middle- and upper-class urban readers who consumer it, on the other. . . .

“This configuration of how authors, subjects, and audiences interacted, however, is based on a somewhat erroneous representation of where regional authors . . . published their works” (60-61).

⁸ As far as Glazener’s assertion that the claim to professional authorship was based on the desire to stratify class distinctions, there are scholars who see such a claim to professional authorship as an attempt to unify social identity. Claudia Stokes, for example writes: “Local and national periodicals of the 1880s are replete with attempts of American writers to raise public awareness and transform themselves in the public imagination from aristocrats to literary laborers on par with other manual workers” (80). Stokes asserts that such an attempt to assume a place in the laboring class by promoting the idea of intellectual property was aimed at increasing public support for international copyright legislation between 1868 and 1891 (79).

⁹ Linda Hutcheon offers an example of this type of postmodernist critique of Marxist theory in Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, eds., *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

¹⁰ Stephanie Foote offers a glimpse of this kind of critique when she asserts: “[T]he pioneering work of feminist critics also tended to establish women as the most important regional writers because, in reclaiming the implicit derogation of previous definitions of the ‘domestic,’ or ‘feminine’ content of regional writing, they usually ignored the work of middle-class male writers of regionalism” (13). Foote is addressing regionalism, of course, and not specifically realism, but the critique of the feminist approach underscores Barrish’s observation that each new approach asserts authority by staking its claim to be more authoritative than what came before.

¹¹ Furst writes: “My method is reader-oriented. I distinguish this approach from a reader-response one, which is subjective, while the reader-oriented method is concerned with the cognitive process whereby readers construct the text” (x).

¹² See also Elizabeth Ammons, “Expanding the Canon of American Realism,” *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, ed. Donald Pizer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 95-114.

¹³ See also Glazener, “The Practice and Promotion of Literary Realism” 31-32 and Furst 97.

¹⁴ Michael Davitt Bell writes: “What is Howellsian realism, after all, but a lie that claims to be truthful, a form of literature that claims *not* to be ‘literary,’ a deployment of style that claims to *avoid* ‘style’” (*The Problem of American Realism* 66).

¹⁵ In discussing Melville, for example, Reynolds writes: “Like Emerson and Whitman, [he] was liberated by popular embellishments of religion to find a kind of redemption in the very *process* of truth seeking through creative stylization and inventive reallocation of religious symbols” (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 30). Reynolds’s assertion about the redemptive process of truth seeking suggests that such a mission might have attracted realist writers as well.

¹⁶ Barrish writes: “Guided by diverse, often conflicting critical and political agendas, recent approaches to literature nonetheless assert their own intellectual distinction and authority through claims to have an intimate, even a defining, relation to some bottomline material reality” (*American Literary Realism* 130).

¹⁷ Theories of selfhood and individual ethical authority in an increasingly secular world also inspired the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud. Like Davis, both Marx and Engels and Freud speculated on the existence of certain deviant behaviors within a social system, behaviors of alienation and criminal activity, around which

Davis's plot centers. See Friedrich Engels, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, Trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner, New York: MacMillan, 1958. See also Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.

¹⁸ Talmage's logic here is a faint echo of the doctrine of predestination, which emphasizes the notion that man can never fully comprehend God's plan for salvation (Wentz 37). Talmage is applying the same logic to his encounter with scriptural text, which he reads as being handed down directly from God via the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, "Talmage wholeheartedly denounced the [1881] new version [of the Bible] and urged his congregation to keep their old Bibles" (Szasz 20).

¹⁹ Admittedly, I am paraphrasing: In *Criticism and Fiction*, Howells compares the mission of the realist to the mission of the scientist in a pseudo-Socratic dialogue between the writer of yore and the scientist, showing where these fields diverge, and he now calls for a new aim on the writer's part. The writer should stop writing the ideal grasshopper, popular though it may have been, and begin trying to capture the "real" grasshopper, the one the scientist would recognize. He writes: "You may say that it's artificial. Well, it is artificial; but then it's ideal too; and what you want to do is cultivate the ideal. You'll find the books full of my kind of grasshopper, and scarcely a trace of yours in any of them" (11).

²⁰ *The Gates Ajar* offered a reformist alternative to Calvinist theology by locating a form of spiritual materialism in death, based on the Creed of the reincarnationalist (O'Connor 156).

CHAPTER 2: REBECCA HARDING DAVIS AND SENTIMENTAL REALISM

In the previous chapter I suggested that in order to develop a broader understanding of how realism operated in nineteenth-century culture, we must examine how various writers fashioned their realist works in relation to the subject of religion. Arguably one of the first writers of American realism, Davis's work is a pivotal introduction to my larger thesis that the religious subject is a catalyst in both the formation *and* the decline of American literary realism. For the sake of a definition or set of criteria, we can align these works by adopting a realist's rhetoric of searching for truth by focusing on the commonplace. Davis, in fact, helps to construct the rhetoric of realism, one that promises to disclose hidden truths in the real lives of "every day people." This is the language Rebecca Harding Davis offers in her early fiction, and she continues to employ this rhetoric throughout her long career, writing against expected conventions of sentimentalism and romanticism. For this reason, her work offers a look at realism in its incipient stage, and allows us to examine changes in Davis's model throughout her long career. She styled herself as a realist in a period beginning somewhat earlier than the post-Civil War date most scholars generally designate as the beginning of American literary realism. In her texts, Davis links religion and realism in ways that shape our understanding of how closely their associated discourses share the common aim of trying to materialize abstract concepts in order to deal with the changing social conditions of late nineteenth-century American culture. Davis's work also offers a look at the important relationship between religion and realism by focusing on the shared rhetoric of truth, unconventional aesthetics, and a belief in a populist hermeneutic.

Jean Pfaelzer suggests that American realism is "an indigenous political narrative" (li). Whether or not we agree with this claim, it provides one of the many benchmarks for examining realism by honing in on a specific subject and seeing if such a claim holds true. For Davis, I argue that this claim, in fact, works well for the religious subject. She writes about religion in

many of her essays, stories and novels, and specifically, she presents religious identity as a key component of regional identity in a way that is uniquely American as well. For example, she writes about Quakers and urban industrialism in “Life in the Iron-Mills” (1861), Methodists during secession in “John Lamar” (1862) and “David Gaunt” (1862), German Pietists and utopia in “The Harmonists” (1866), Dutch Reformists and indentured servitude in “The Story of Christine,” (1866), Moravians and Westward expansion in “Dolly” (1874),²¹ and Presbyterians and Episcopalians in relation to spousal abuse, swindling, imprisonment and social redemption in *Dallas Galbraith* (1868), just to name a few of her “indigenous” American scenes. Davis appeared to be fascinated with the diversity of religious identity in America, and the larger body of her work illustrates her attempt to evaluate American religious culture both historically and in relation to contemporary life.

My research into the representational claims of realism and the question of what the subject of religion offers in testing those limits in late nineteenth-century America begins with Davis because she captures a key historical moment in an ideological split that happens along religious lines. She begins publishing on the cusp of the Civil War, which is, of course, an important cultural moment for many reasons, including the fact that it marks a decisive move away from Calvinism and toward Liberal Protestantism.²² This shifting religious aesthetic underwrites much of the socio-ethical critique embedded in Davis’s fiction. Davis side-steps the conventions of the sentimental novel with its laborious insistence on self-sacrifice and renewal of an established faith.²³ Instead, she perpetuates an alternate model of spirituality that subjugates the role of the Bible, moving away from the Calvinist notion of *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone), and she asserts the role of the individual, specifically the domestic female, as the agent of ethical and spiritual enlightenment.

During this period Davis offers us a strange look in a kind of distorted mirror at how the same source of religious authority, the Bible, seems to serve two opposing ideologies. By doing

so, she immediately undercuts Biblical authority as a source of immutable truth, and she offers instead a reiteration of Quaker theology that favors visionary intuition for deriving divine knowledge. We can see this clearly in “John Lamar” (1862) when a Methodist boatman is shocked to hear the dying Confederate soldier Lamar recite the twenty-third psalm.²⁴ Convinced that his own mission is to accomplish the vengeance of the Lord for the evils of slavery, the Methodist boatman cannot reconcile Lamar’s words and final prayer with his own beliefs, and he simply dismisses Lamar’s appropriation of scripture as misguided: “With the dead face before him, he bent his eyes to the ground, humble, uncertain,—speaking out of the ignorance of his own weak, human soul. ‘The day of the Lord is nigh,’ he said; ‘it is at hand; and who can abide it?’” (53). Unable to resolve Lamar’s application of scripture with his own interpretation, the boatman simply reverts to his own theology, dismissing the moment of contradiction. Davis, of course, is not dismissing the ironic moment of disconnected belief. She shows how the Bible’s words can be appropriated to justify the sentiments of both sides of the war, and she challenges her readers to consider the lack of authority the words themselves offer relative to the ensuing action, with both sides claiming the sanction of Providence. She also shows her characters being unable to puzzle their way through such ideological problems. She presents this conundrum as a problem of theology rather than scriptural inconsistency or misinterpretation, but her subsequent work reveals her ongoing concern with the limits of divine certainty. Her text here offers a critique of the surrounding religious culture for which she offers no clear solution until later in her career. She continues to examine the relationship between religion and culture throughout Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction, and she begins to derive her own implicit theology in the late war and post-war years.

In Davis’s stories, she tests religious inheritance and moral codes in light of the contemporaneous conditions she observes. Just as she shows how existing religious institutions no longer seem to suit the moral challenges of the modern age, she similarly rejects popular

literary conventions in her experiments with subject, form, and style. Her essays offer additional commentary on the extent to which she conceives of religious practice as a key component of regional and national identity. It is fascinating to read her sometimes ambivalent accounts over the fifty-year span of her writing career as she navigated her way through changing attitudes toward a variety of social problems. For this reason, it is helpful to examine Davis's writing during specific periods in which certain religious interests seem to work in arcs that include similar groupings by theme. I will divide Davis's texts into two broad groups comprising first texts about Quakerism, and second, those dealing with sectarianism, which include her eventual turn to the figure of Christ as an example of moral idealism, a hallmark Liberal Protestant move. Davis's work does not always divide neatly or chronologically into these categories—for example, she was writing about Quakers at the same time that she was critiquing Protestant sectarianism—but these groupings allow us to see the development of major themes that shaped her own emerging personal theology. Her theology can best be described as a form of primitive Christianity that draws on ideas and beliefs of various Protestant denominations. The most influential group in her own burgeoning liberal Protestantism are the Quakers, but she draws only selectively on ideas from the Society of Friends. In the end, Davis devises her own belief system, but she leaves her personal creed problematically vague and more abstract than pragmatic, hinting at the types of representational problems later realists will face. What is clear is the extent to which Davis's changing beliefs shaped her literary style, and we can easily see how realism allowed her to examine human nature in all its complexities.

After her marriage in 1863, Davis relocated to Philadelphia, a move that would have a strong impact on her writing, particularly in relation to the subject of religion. At this time, she encountered a new religious culture that she would frequently incorporate into her fiction and her essays: the Quakers. Although Davis had written a Quaker figure into her earlier story, "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861), her experience living in Pennsylvania and her acquaintance with Quaker

abolitionist and feminist Lucretia Mott brought her into the social circle of the Philadelphia Quakers, a far more prestigious and influential group than the much maligned and heavily persecuted English and New England Quakers of colonial America.²⁵ Davis became intrigued by the Philadelphia Quakers' history of religious tolerance and diversity, and she particularly admired their own model for blending abstract spiritual beliefs and material social reform practices. Later, she would research the colonial history of the City of Brotherly Love examining the diversity of religious practices coexisting there, and she even wrote a series of three essays about colonial Philadelphia that she published in 1876: "Old Philadelphia," "Old Landmarks in Philadelphia," and "A Glimpse of Philadelphia." Her stories and essays from 1863 to 1876 reflect the Quaker influence on her writing and social reform views. Understanding her admiration for the Quakers helps us to discern her critique of some of the other Protestant churches that appear in her fiction.

For Davis, the Quakers offered an interesting subject for several reasons that became closely aligned with her realist aesthetic and her vision for social reform. She examines their practices in relation to abolition, women's rights, domestic power, and benevolence. In works such as "The Wife's Story" (1864), "Out of the Sea" (1865), and *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868), she challenges what she sees as a declining influence of the institutional church, and she begins a long evaluation of various religious influences. She begins to create her own socio-religious manifesto that borrows heavily from the social justice principles of the Quakers. In order to draw on their model of practical Christianity, Davis must first reconcile their spiritual beliefs with competing popular beliefs in her own social world. She establishes fairly clear boundaries separating those aspects of Quakerism she thinks are useful in contemporary culture from those that she thinks are antiquated. A brief overview of the Quaker religion will show the complexities of Davis's task.

The Quaker subject presents a challenge that displays a natural tension with Davis's realist aims: the Quaker, or Society of Friends, creed relies on a numinous belief in an intuitive inner light that reveals religious truth, while realism values the materialist basis of empirical experience as a condition for certainty.²⁶ The Quakers exhibit a far different emphasis on subjectivity than other Protestant denominations embrace, particularly in an era where a new "Bible alone" approach began to dominate conservative offshoots of American Calvinism. There are complicated theological and hermeneutical issues at stake that require a brief explanation. Two basic concepts are critical here: the relative importance of the Bible as a source of divine knowledge and the scriptural hermeneutics dictating how the Bible should be read. In the former case, some Protestants believed the Bible was *the* only authority revealing religious truth (*sola scriptura*) while others believed the Bible was *a* source of religious knowledge but they believed that divine revelation could be located elsewhere as well. In regard to hermeneutics, some Protestant sects believed the Bible was transhistorical and contained literal truths while other Protestant sects believed the Bible needed to be interpreted for each new age of civilization because civilization was progressive and so the lessons of the Bible needed to be applied in a new way for each given age. Within each concept, there are varying degrees of importance placed on how each functions in relation to the other. For example, Mark Noll believes there was a major shift in American Christianity in 1861, a date he identifies through his reading of the many religious tracts that demonstrate the new "Bible alone" approach to certain sects of Protestant theology (*America's God* 370-71). Coincidentally, Davis began publishing her work in this year as well.

Because of their different emphases, abstract intuition versus empirical evidence, the two ideologies, Quakerism and realism, would seem to be at odds. Nevertheless, the subject of the Quakers proved to be a good fit with Davis's inchoate realism; although it *is* foundationally mystical, Quakerism as a religious practice anticipates the realist writer's privileging of

materiality because the Quakers believed that the inner light could be used as an “instrument for the perfection of human society” (Wentz 80). In fact, in Davis’s discussions of Quakers, she is careful to focus on the secular force of Quaker social practices, signaling her reform interest, and thus we can begin to see how her religious and realist interests begin to inform each other.²⁷

During Davis’s “Philadelphia years,” from 1863-1876, her geographical surroundings feature prominently in her religious evaluation. She draws on the physical aspects of this city to illustrate how materiality can capture the metaphysical nature of specific spiritual beliefs, and thus she begins to align the concrete with the abstract. For Davis, the social value of Quaker beliefs displays itself in even the physical dimensions of Philadelphia architecture. Discussing Philadelphia’s Quaker roots in “Old Landmarks,” she writes, “Her religion has not uttered itself in massive piles of carved stone and stained glass, but in unpretentious, though vast and well-managed charities—asylums, hospitals and training schools” (145). Davis embraces this physical evidence as a sign of a benevolent religious institution even as she disparages specific Quaker practices, which she attributes to the ignorance of an earlier age, such as excessive dedication to the habit of plain dress, described by Davis as “sad drab paduasoy gowns” (“Old Philadelphia” 875)²⁸ and actual “quaking” as an expression of religious fervor. She writes: “The most ignorant of Penn’s followers were daily seized by the spirit and their bodies shaken (whence their name of Quakers)” (712). By distancing herself from what we might call physical manifestations of spiritual sensibilities, Davis signals a shift to her own interest in secular materialism.

The Quaker emphasis on perfection implies a theory of social advancement as well, a belief that society can improve through religious practices. Jean Pfaelzer points out the perfection paradox is linked to an underlying model of utopia and a *resistance* to social forces. She writes: “Utopia is generally presumed to be teleological; history is a predetermined passage toward a finite state which marks the end of change, regardless of human will or activity”

(*Utopian Novel* 24). We will see how this idea of perfectionism is somewhat at odds with Davis's call for a primitive model of Christianity, which seems to be necessarily regressive. Davis reconfigures Quaker theology, allowing her to resolve this dilemma by "adapting" these practices to suit the modern age. I have suggested that realist rhetoric works in a similar manner; it is a style of writing that attempts to be both primitive in the sense of being anti-aesthetic and anti-conventional in its search for universal truth and yet progressive in being suited for the current condition of civilization. The perfection paradox emerges again as a conflict in the writing of Howells, Twain, and Frederic, particularly in relation to religious allegory.

Another important term to understand is "Primitive Christianity" because Quakerism itself, arising in the mid-seventeenth century out of the Puritan Revolution, is a form of anti-doctrinal Christianity, and that is part of its appeal to Davis; she specifically refers to Quakers as "primitive Christians" ("Old Landmarks" 146). This claim offers a decisive departure from the history of the established church. Most models of primitivism aim to form a purportedly "creedless" Christianity. Primitivism attempts to recapture a pre-modern Gospel-based idea of spirituality by focusing on a relationship between man and God by discarding nearly 2000 years of intervening Church history, creeds, and doctrine. The Quaker's primitivism is distinctive in that the external authority of the scriptures is subjugated to a position below an intuitive perception of The Master. Another aspect of the Quaker's primitivism is the absence of clerical agency since God was believed to approach every individual directly.²⁹ This is a very convenient notion for an emerging writer who wishes to influence social reform practices. In many ways, this opportunity to address cultural ethics allowed many writers of fiction to usurp the authority once delegated primarily to the clergy by seizing the implicit authority that the visionary mode allows. As Wentz points out: "The Quaker emphasis on equality and the assumption that God approaches each of us directly through the inner light that is the Christ within are shared by other Puritans. It was the Quakers, however, who drew heavily on these

convictions and made them the essence of their tradition” (79-80). What this allows for is a theory of advancement such that even the Bible can be subject to interpretation and adaptation to assist in understanding its application to the given age. We see this idea expressed rhetorically in the phrase “the living God,” a precept Davis frequently invokes³⁰ and in today’s culture in the “What would Jesus do?” rhetoric.³¹ By this same token, new scripture can be written in any given age that can presumably carry an authority equal to or even surpassing the Bible.³² Scripture might appear in any form, even in a work of fiction.

In order to gauge the literary impact of Davis’s relocation to Philadelphia in relation to the Quakers, we need to examine briefly her depiction of the Quaker figure in her earlier fiction, most notably in “Life in the Iron-Mills,” published in 1861. Davis’s story offers a look at how sentimentalism and realism can coexist within a text, a pairing that is particularly interesting against the backdrop of how Davis herself represents “reality” in this work, offering a view the narrator describes as “horrible to angels perhaps, but to [these men] commonplace enough” (“Iron-Mills” 4). The deliberate juxtaposition of angels and the commonplace signals Davis’s aim of shifting the gaze from eschatological concerns to something within culture that she wants to address, and it soon becomes clear that her text strives to deal with this commonplace subject in a different manner than previous styles of writing such as visionary fiction have allowed. David Reynolds writes: “The subversion of intellectual doctrine through fictional techniques was accompanied by a turning away from tangled metaphysical questions and an embrace of such real aspects of experience as nature, human feeling, and vernacular perspective” (*Faith in Fiction* 197). Davis cues the reader that she is indeed asking for a voyeuristic view into the “dull lives” of this commonplace. She writes: “This is what I want you to do. I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me. . . . I want you to hear this story” (Davis 4). Davis projects a sense that she is pulling her reader away from the abstract and right down into an earthly, sensual raunchiness, and yet she asks for this shift in the name of

“Christ’s charity” (5). By doing so, she positions her request as one of spiritual benevolence.

At the same time, the problematic vagueness with which Davis represents religion seems at odds with the emerging realist genre, which finds its authenticity through the particularization of the specific. She draws on what appears to be a familiar rhetoric of Christian activism but she subverts it at the same time by showing institutional Christianity to be inadequate for dealing with the mill workers.

At first glance, Davis seems almost to gloss over the religious critique implied in this story by over-generalizing the role of the institutional church in industrial culture. As the story unfolds, there are several mentions of a church although none are specific until Davis introduces an unnamed Quaker figure at the end. The protagonist, Hugh Wolfe, has become an accessory to the crime of theft, and he is seeking a solution; if he speaks the truth and names the culprit, he will sacrifice his friend Deborah, a martyr who has tried to help Hugh escape his abysmal life. In a moment of crisis, when “the church-bells’ tolling passed before him like a panorama” (25), Hugh Wolfe contemplates whether to return the stolen money or keep it and become a criminal himself. The narrator reveals that “people going by to church saw only a sickly mill-boy watching them quietly at the alley’s mouth” (25). Davis mentions the church twice at this point, and yet the specific denomination is unnamed, leaving her social criticism frustratingly vague. A closer look at this troublesome passage reveals that Davis’s critique is in fact, very pointed and specific; we must examine her accusation here in order to understand better what the Quaker solution at the end offers.

Davis, an early proponent of what will later be termed “social gospel,” apparently wishes to critique modern religion for failing to provide moral guidance and practical assistance to those who need it most. She attempts to direct the reader to the soul of a man in turmoil, a result of the industrial atrocities of the mechanical age, by asking the reader to assume a certain amount of collective responsibility for other such lost souls. She writes: “I only want to show you the mote

in my brother's eye: then you can see clearly to take it out" (23).³³ The narrator's reference to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke couches an accusation of hypocrisy toward her readership as the passage in question suggests that one must first examine one's own life for sin before reproving others for their flaws. Davis challenges her reader to examine the relationship between scripture and the elitism of modern religious practices; she charges both the minister and the congregants with the responsibility of attending to Hugh's suffering. Davis is non-specific about the church she describes and yet her intentions are clearly accusatory. The reader knows only that Hugh follows the crowd into the church, "a sombre Gothic pile" (27), and that the "speaker" is described as "a Christian reformer [who] had studied the age thoroughly; his outlook at man had been free, world-wide, all over time" (27). Davis's narrator condemns the preacher's inability to penetrate Hugh Wolfe's consciousness: "His words passed far over the furnace-tender's grasp, toned to suit another class of culture; they sounded in his ears a very pleasant song in an unknown tongue" (27-28).³⁴ The narrator faults the speaker for the failure to save a soul rather than the protagonist for failing to find salvation, and the entire congregation is implicated for its participation in this moral crisis.

As Hugh Wolfe leaves the church unassisted and aimless, there is a tension among culture, class, and this "boy," this unshaped soul. Here, Davis's rhetoric suggests that salvation itself is becoming a collective concern rather than an individual one. At the same time, the reader surely struggles to comprehend the ambiguous accusation; is all Christianity failing as a source of moral authority or is this crisis sparked by a capital industrialist culture? In either case, why does Davis introduce redemption through the figure of the Quaker woman at the end? Davis implicates the church in question for the manner in which it panders to the wealthy classes and the economic system as a whole.

There is another piece of this puzzle that has only recently come to light; Davis scholars such as Janice Milner Lasseter have been combing the archives of her manuscripts, and such

research has yielded important results for Davis scholarship and, more importantly, for Davis's views on religion. For years it seems that readers have simply accepted that in this passage of "Iron-Mills," Davis criticizes institutional Christianity, perhaps assuming that the specific denomination she scrutinizes does not matter since her underlying goal is reform-oriented anyway. Any assumption of a broad critique, however, is a mistaken one as Lasseter's archival research shows. She argues that in this story Davis is criticizing the Evangelical Protestant denomination, and Lasseter suggests that she may have modeled the story's minister on Alexander Campbell, a former Presbyterian minister who founded the "Disciples of Christ" sect of Evangelical Protestantism ("The Censored" 181).³⁵ The "Disciples of Christ" adherents tried to establish an ecumenical form of primitive Christianity based on an assumption that the "individual has only to examine the evidence of Scripture and his or her own existence to arrive at the point where a reasonable commitment to the truth can be made" (Wentz 213). Like many Calvinist-derived creeds, Evangelical Protestantism "viewed materialism and wealth as a logical outcome of a steady faith" (Lasseter, "The Censored" 177), and it is clear that this is one more belief at which Davis levels her criticism. The Disciples of Christ attempted to combine rationalism with a literal reading of the New Testament that left many social questions unanswered. For example, although the church was theoretically evangelical, any form of *institutional* evangelicalism was found to be problematic: "The work of evangelization and mission had to be done without societies. The New Testament proposed no such institutions" (Wentz 217). Alexander Campbell's 1835 *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians, and the Restoration of Primitive Christianity* was the influential doctrine of this "creedless" sect, and he also taught Davis's mother and lived in close proximity to Rebecca Harding Davis for most of her formative years.³⁶

Lasseter points out that in the story's first publication in 1861, *Atlantic Monthly* editor James Fields excised two important paragraphs from the passage of text in which Hugh Wolfe

wanders into a church at a crisis point in his life. Lasseter identifies the specific text and its proper placement in the story in her archival essay (“The Censored” 176), and she also reveals that the missing text explicitly presents Hugh Wolfe as a brother of Christ: “If He had stood in the church that night, would not the wretch in the torn shirt there in the pew have ‘known the man’? His brother first. And then, unveiled his God” (176). The implication is that Wolfe would have recognized Christ if Jesus had stood before him in the church as a fellow sufferer but that the church-goers cannot recognize the similarity to Jesus in Wolfe even as he stands before them because they are too removed from the condition of human suffering. Davis does not go so far as to say Wolfe is a stand-in for Christ, but she substitutes his situation for the similar situation that the historical Jesus found himself in shortly before his crucifixion. Wolfe resembles not the Divine Christ but the human Jesus, son of Joseph: “A social Pariah, a man of the lowest caste, thrown up from among them, dying with their pain” (176). Lasseter examines both the missing portions of Davis’s holograph and the church sermon in the story, and she identifies specific elements that lead her to conclude that Davis was writing about Campbell’s Disciples of Christ sect, such as its intellectual elitism and the reputation as “a church where capitalist materialism, prosperity, and complacency seem to be Christian virtues” (182). The identification of the Protestant sect within the story allows for two important comparisons to emerge, one in relation to popular philosophical culture and one in relation to the Quakers specifically.

Davis, clearly knowledgeable about the popular philosophical and social rhetoric of her day, questions the role of the institutional religion in relation to various sociological reform initiatives. Lasseter argues that Wolfe presumably turns to God after recently having heard the factory visitors, May, Mitchell, and Kirby, debating important nineteenth-century social, economic, and religious philosophies, such as socialism, capitalism, Deism, Calvinism, and Transcendentalism (“The Censored” 181). Lasseter suggests that none of these approaches

offers any practical solution to Wolfe in his desire to change his position, and that his next move toward the church illustrates Davis's intention of examining yet another disappointing vehicle in the administration of social justice. Lasseter writes:

The holograph version and, less effectively, the 1865 text [with the missing section partially restored] target the Evangelical Protestant church as the primary social institution which had failed at what she believed was its most elemental task—to allow 'brotherly love' to inhere in the church and then to suffuse American culture, thereby eliminating poverty." (175)

Lasseter's discovery has important implications for Davis's developing critique, her theology, and for realism itself as an emerging form of rhetoric because it is in this story that she first actively aligns realism with religious critique.

"Life in the Iron-Mills" begins a discourse in which Davis examines numerous trends of cultural thought by honing in on what, specifically, various philosophical and religious approaches have to offer someone like Wolfe, a potential artist who "chanced" to be born into the poverty-stricken life of a Welsh immigrant working class family. Once Davis rejects the popular sociological reform movements, she turns her attention to Protestantism and socialized Christianity. If we can accept that the unnamed church in the story is a Disciples of Christ Evangelical Church, then what emerges is a comparison of two forms of primitive Christianity that present polar models for dealing with social reform: one posits that it is "unchristian" to interfere with material culture while the other, the Quakers, posits that Christianity mandates ministering to the social needs of the underprivileged. Lasseter concludes that "all three versions [the 1861, the 1865, and the holograph] are consistent with a hermeneutic examination of a host of creeds offered as possible solutions to the social problems presented in all versions of the story" (182). We can see more clearly that Davis was not so much suggesting a turn to Quakerism as a national religion, but rather she was suggesting that primitive Christianity is not creedless in its practices, and she was offering the Quaker's example as a superior model in the administration of social justice. Her views toward the Quakers took many turns and twists in her

subsequent writing, but “Life in the Iron-Mills” offers an important foundation for Davis’s ensuing religious critique in which she systematically examines several Protestant sects in her fiction but always in relation to this initial comparison of Quaker primitivism.

I have suggested that Fields’s editing has larger implications for realism as well. It should be clear that, even in its incipient stages, realism engages with the subject of religion but Fields and others practiced a certain amount of censorship. Realist writers offer critiques of contemporary religious practices and sometimes of notable church leaders in their examinations of modern culture. Lasseter reminds us that there were financial interests at stake driving some of the editing of religious rhetoric. In any event, it is evident that in order for realists to stage a religious critique, they had to position themselves and their views somewhat neutrally and even obscurely in their narratives. Other factors may have been at work as well in anticipating public reaction to this sensitive subject. For example, David Reynolds suggests this move toward obliqueness is an important strategy realist writers employed to distance themselves from earlier titillating discourses of dark reform rhetoric (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 64). The ensuing obscurity of religious rhetoric certainly reveals a complicated dynamic, but the relationship between religion and realism is a strong one and, I will argue, a reciprocal one. Davis’s work offers a timely glimpse into the kinds of critiques that served as catalysts for the exploration into a new type of fiction that values the same preference for materiality that Protestant reform was demonstrating in its own re-examination of practical Christianity.

If we examine Hugh Wolfe’s moral crisis in “Iron-Mills” as a comparison of two models of primitive Christianity, one very modern and one fading into antiquity, it is easy to interpret the story’s ending as Davis’s desire to preserve some of the aesthetics of the rapidly diminishing Quaker society. Jean Pfaelzer points out that Quakerism in this story is still associated with the romantic trope of sentimental fiction.³⁷ She writes:

Two endings mark the romantic choice between solipsism and commitment—one promises social rebirth through Quakerism, a community identified with Abolition and

reform, the second offers the persistent image of the unsatisfied statue which refuses to remain hidden, parodying the sentimental figure of the repressed narrator and decrying the frustrations of Davis's own life. (*A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader* xx)

When the physically deformed, socially-oppressed Deborah lands in jail for theft, a reform-minded Quaker visits her and promises assistance in burying Deborah's suicidal friend Hugh Wolfe. The story ends with Deborah's return with the Quaker woman to a rural, pre-modern landscape that vaguely blends into an image of eternity: "Waiting: with her eyes turned to hills higher and purer than those on which she lives,—dim and far off now, but to be reached some day" (Davis, "Iron-Mills" 33). What the Quaker ending offers us at this point is a problematic turn-back-the-clock notion of reform through religious salvation, an eschatological focus that is not as apparent in Davis's subsequent work. Through the Quaker theology, which she will modify, she shifts her focus eventually from the eschatological to the secular, paving the way for progressive liberal social reform.

There is only a brief mention of Quakers in a well-known work of Davis's short fiction, "The Wife's Story," written in 1864 soon after her marriage and relocation. Because of the chronological relationship of this work relative to the Philadelphia years, it is worth examining here as a transitional piece in Davis's religious discourse. This story involves a clash of many religious and cultural beliefs, from Hester Manning's Concord Transcendentalism to the unnamed Western theology of Daniel Manning, and the subsequent Newport influence of both the Quakers and Dr. Manning's preacher son, Robert. As the Mannings contemplate their forced relocation due to a financial crisis, Manning's ward, Jacky Monchard suggests, "'Friends ready waiting. And different sort of friends from any we have here, eh?'" ("The Wife's Story" 113). Jacky is clearly making a reference to the likelihood of encountering Quaker Friends in Newport, but it seems unlikely that the Mannings are Quakers themselves, especially given Robert's occupation; Quakers do not have ordained ministers but rely instead on the "inner light" to move various members to speak during weekly meetings. The struggle to figure out the role of

God is a significant part of this story's unfolding. In the beginning, Manning essentializes the role of God in Western thought and his own exceptionalist beliefs when he explains, "we Western people have the mass of this country's appointed work to do, so we are content that God should underlie the hypotheses. We waste no strength in guesses at the reason why" (120). Manning speaks of himself as "the" West and suggests that all "Westerners" share the same set of cultural and religious values. Davis appears to attach a certain amount of nostalgia to the region by connecting the geography of untamed nature with a creedless vision of how Christianity should operate. Once the Mannings are removed from the West, it seems inevitable that some type of cultural and spiritual crisis is imminent.

This story offers a two-fold conflict as first East meets West and then later when West meets East. The first crisis follows the union of Hetty and Daniel Manning, and this perpetuates a larger conflict as the narrative shifts back to the East. Just as Manning begins to realize the clash of religious cultures within his marriage, Hetty faces her own crisis of conscience that Davis depicts by elevating the mental and intellectual anguish Hetty experiences to a larger theological and spiritual crisis by having her invoke the idea of a God-given talent. Hetty comes to see musical ability and aesthetic appreciation as a gift from God, and she agonizes over the question of rejecting such a gift when she asks, "Was I to give it unused back to God" (121). In Calvinism, the idea of ignoring a gift or talent has religious roots; not to fulfill one's potential is to ignore or reject God's grace, which relates back to the belief that Jesus was given as a gift to wash away sin, but the gift must be "received." To spurn a gift from God is similar to spurning Jesus as a savior. Davis uses religious rhetoric to challenge her readers regarding the role of women in culture; she struggles to work out a solution in this tale by specifically invoking a traditional Calvinist belief in relation to contemporary woman's suffrage issues.

The final religious resolution in the story is enacted through an elaborate dream sequence, a trick Davis plays on the reader, but one which links back presumably to what Reynolds calls

Orientalist visionary and allegorical fiction.³⁸ In these types of tales, displacement or allegory is used to illustrate moral imperatives. Reynolds writes: “The reader and the protagonist are . . . distanced from peril by the use of a panoramic landscape contained in an Oriental dream vision. . . . In the American allegories, sin is usually converted into objects—rocks, caves, cliffs, gardens—which can be sidestepped by proper moral choice” (*Faith in Fiction* 28). This dangerous precipice that Reynolds describes is, in fact, the exact setting of Hester Manning’s crisis. She describes her “fall”: “I turned and crept slowly along the road to where the grassy street opened on the cliffs, and sat down on the broad rocks. I could see my husband on the sands with Robert” (Davis, “The Wife’s Story” 130). What Hetty then describes as her choice to board the steamer headed for New York is later revealed to be “brain-fever and what not” (135) and she is saved: “it comes to me yet as a great truth—that God had let me be born again” (136).³⁹ Davis does not offer a discernable religious codification in this work as she will in her other stories, probably because Davis is still trying to reconcile sentimentalism with her emerging realist aesthetic and changing cultural values about domestic female power. She closes the story with a very ambivalent, conventional solution that focuses on the eschatological implications rather than the secular impact of Hetty’s sin, but this may be one of the last instances of Davis leaving us with such an evasive ending. We can see here that a rejection of sentimentalism is necessary in order for Davis to explore new endings and social reform. Religion and realism begin to operate in tandem as a response to modern problems. This story allows us to see how that transformation develops.

The next significant reading of Quakers that Davis offers is in “Out of the Sea” (1865), This story portrays the reform Quakerism that is associated with the Philadelphia Quakers, and it features two significant Quakers, one from Pennsylvania, one from New Jersey. The New Jersey Quaker will be ultimately killed off, but not before imparting her wisdom and values to her modern replacement. Old Mother Phebe is an impoverished fish-wife, a social outcast,

reminiscent of the old school New England Quakers, who has given up her association with her illegitimate son in the hope that he can attain a new identity and a better life while Mary Defourchet is a modern and affluent bride-to-be who represents the diverse and tolerant history of the City of Brotherly Love. As with many of Davis's stories, the question of social identity and revelation of life history is a key plot component that propels the action forward. We learn almost immediately that Mary is "over thirty, an eager humanitarian, [who] had taught the freedmen at Port Royal, [and] gone to Gettysburg and Antietam with sanitary stores" (Davis, "Out of the Sea" 142). Mary exudes confidence, wisdom, social justice, and a blend of private and public domesticity; nevertheless, her guardian, Dr. Bowlder, believes she is overly polished and is in need of a practical education. He writes, "Before she begins her life in earnest, it would do her good to face something real. Nothing like living by the sea, and with those homely thorough-blood Quakers, for bringing people to their simple natural selves" (141). There is so much implication in this statement that it is difficult to deconstruct it; Davis represents the New Jersey Quakers as simple, primitive, pure-blooded, and most importantly, *real*. They offer the potential for more "real" experience, in fact, than Mary's Civil War service. There is a value Davis wants to capture from Old Phebe's Quakerism, but she wants to preserve it even while she rewrites the Quaker story, blending old with new in a clearly American narrative, which is signaled by the references to the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction.

The reconciliation of old and new takes place through the agency of Old Phebe's son, Derrick Trull, now a successful surgeon known as Dirk Birkenhead. Birkenhead is Mary's fiancé, and his formal acknowledgement of his mother after she saves his life increases Mary's love and devotion to him. Like Mary, Birkenhead must find a way to reconcile old with new, implying a Hegelian dialectic to Davis's model of social advancement. As Birkenhead contemplates his mother's face, he too, uses the rhetoric of "the real," which helps to connect Davis's literary realism to her theological primitivism: "Something homely and warm and true

was waking in him to-night that had been dead for years and years; this was no matter of aesthetics or taste, it was real, *real*. He wondered if people felt in this way who had homes, or those simple folk who loved the Lord” (160). Birkenhead’s relationship with Old Phebe is alluded to in religious terms as an enactment of “the Ideal Mother and her Son” (158), and she is described as “a holy woman-type which for ages supplied to the world that tenderness and pity which the church had stripped from God” (158). Davis asserts the idea that human beings are the essential agents of Christian sympathy, and she wants to make the idea of home and hearth a key component of her new theology.

Clearly, Davis is promoting an idea of primitive Christianity, merging Catholic and Protestant strains of Christian faith into “the church.” In this section, she privileges a maternal model of Christianity, which can easily be read as an assertion of domestic female power. We see similar strains of such domestic feminism in the writing of Harriet Beecher Stowe, but it is not as easily aligned with the realist aesthetic.⁴⁰ For Davis, we might infer that she promotes religious primitivism in an attempt to reduce Christianity to an unencumbered pursuit of divine truth, her literary realism tries to operate in a similarly reductive manner by shedding cultural aesthetics and literary conventions associated with the social themes she wishes to address. Quakerism helps her negotiate this transition because it serves as a model that successfully blends the numinous and the material by configuring the social world as an allegorical rendering of divine order. This kind of allegory occurs frequently in realism; Davis offers reductive model in which the material is a rudimentary figuration of the divine. Howells, Twain, and Frederic will also make use of this reverse imagery.

The most significant of Davis’s fiction addressing Quakerism and social reform is *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868), a novel that deals primarily with abolition and Reconstruction and which is, perhaps, Davis’s sequel to Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In this work we see problems specifically related to contemporary American culture for which religious solutions

cannot be found, even within Quakerism. In fact, the Quaker women in this story serve merely as shadowy mentors to some of the protagonists in this convoluted plot. Ann Yates adopts and reforms the Mulatto slave Sap, later known as John Broderip, while Abigail Blanchard helps educate and socialize Rosslyn Burley, a former peddler from the wrong side of the tracks. This work, more than any, seems to address the Quaker question for Davis, and it also reflects the Philadelphia influence, making this a key text for Davis's pairing of Quakers and realism.

As far as providing a religious framework, Quakerism works well for Davis with her interest in human rights because its social practice already embodied the anti-racist model that Davis wanted to see expanded to larger society. What is interesting here is that while there are two prominent Quaker "Friends" instigating social change, both are peripheral, exhibiting a diminishing agency as the story progresses. Once Sap grows up, Friend Yates literally inhabits an upstairs room, advising him but remaining, for the most part, out of sight, only half alive. She functions as Broderick's conscience in many ways. Friend Blanchard takes a more active role in Rosslyn's affairs, even to the point of trying to interfere between Ross and her grandfather in order to help Rosslyn make a beneficial marriage; nonetheless, she is described as "the sole relic left us of the old *régime*" (*Waiting for the Verdict* 132). These Quaker figures embody beliefs that have lost their usefulness in resolving moral dilemmas. Up until this point, Quakerism was an integral part of Davis's ideal of primitive Christianity, but here we see her beginning to move away from it. Both Broderip and Rosslyn must move forward and confront their own crises of conscience without the aid of their Quaker mentors. These Quaker women attempt to practice religion with a socially-conscious altruism, but each is stymied by ethical problems for which neither their beliefs nor their consciences offer easy solutions. Yates and Blanchard both attempt to "hide" secrets which, if revealed, work to the detriment of their wards. There is a resultant ambivalence in their actions because while each believes there is a higher law than the nation's law, each nevertheless has trouble adhering to the Quaker value of truthfulness without

subverting it. The new social order requires a different system for dealing with moral conditions brought about by a changing culture. The failure of Quakerism in this story implies that the new system must encompass both spiritual and cultural change.

In this novel, religious values are challenged due to moral failings such as prejudice, dishonesty, and even excessive love, which leads Ann Yates to lie to John Broderip (Sap) by telling him what she believes he wants to hear rather than what she believes to be true about his ability to marry. Broderip is an undiscovered Mulatto representing his identity as a European Caucasian. She is deeply troubled after he departs:

How could she tell him tonight that he was never to have a man's portion, as he never had had a child's? "But he never will. Love and marriage are not for him. He should submit to God's will." She covered her face with the newspaper and lay quite still for a long time; and the servants, thinking she was asleep, gently lowered the gas, and left her. But she was only thinking over her last words, "Was it God's will? Was it?" (153)

Here, again, is a failure of institutional religion when confronted with very modern problems that the newspaper signifies—problems that are based in prejudice and habit rather than justice or law. Ann Yates is unable to retain her steadfast trust in God's will because she begins to doubt the possibility of ascertaining that will. By the story's end, Davis exchanges the idea of trying to attain divine perfection with a more secular model of social justice. Broderip suggests, "How to be a man—that's what we want to know—not how to be a God" (414). Davis, at this point, focuses on the secular aspects of Quaker practices and maintains the social justice reform values associated with Quakerism, but she relinquishes the possibility of external authority in relation to God. And, in fact, in her next novel, *Dallas Galbriath* (1868), the only Quaker figure we see turns out to be an imposter—a detective parading as a visiting Quaker in order to earn the trust of Manasquan villagers.

The Quakers are singularly significant to Davis's work with realism because she draws most heavily on this "creedless" creed in order to write her own theology, one that she believes is needed for the post-Civil War era. They are the basis for her own model of primitive

Christianity, but she changes and updates the model in order to adhere to the emerging culture of Liberal Progressivism. We see this most clearly in her essay, “A Faded Leaf of History” (1873) when she allegorizes the Christ child in the figure of a Quaker baby who receives his nourishment from a troupe of surrogates when his parents travel from Port Royal, Jamaica to Pennsylvania in the year 1698. In her depiction of this baby, she relinquishes even the Quaker beliefs and expands her religious model to an intuitive “feeling” about God, represented as an allegorical rebirth: “But the baby, who knew nothing of the judgments or mercy of God, and who could neither pray nor sing, only had learned in these desperate straits to grow strong and happy in the touch of sun and wind, and to hold out its arms to friend or foe, slave or savage, sure of a welcome, and so came closer to God than any of them all” (373). What she does not deal with and what subsequent writers will have to confront is the lack of external authority in her allegory. By advocating a religious system and corollary literary aesthetic both derived from intuitive conscience, simply a feeling about God, the abstract notions of justice and even social activism need to be assigned some type of value and relative weight in order to be examined in relation to empirical experience.

While Davis was arriving at the conclusion that the inner light does not give any clear indication of God’s authority (i.e. that God does not necessarily approach each of us directly), she was also conducting a critical survey of several other religious movements and philosophical trends with the aim of de-bunking them. These stories comprise the second major arc of Davis’s writing when grouped by religious subject. As suggested earlier, Davis’s effort to evaluate contemporary American culture through the filter of Protestant sectarianism begins with “Iron-Mills” and her scrutiny of the Disciples of Christ Evangelical Church. Her evaluation continues throughout several stories, overlapping with her interest in Quakerism. Some of the titles that belong in this second group are “John Lamar” (1862) and “David Gaunt” (1862), *Margret Howth* (1862),⁴¹ “The Captain’s Story” (1865), “The Harmonists” (1866), “The Story of Christine”

(1866), *Dallas Galbraith* (1868), “The Doctor’s Wife” (1874), and “The Yares of Black Mountain” (1875). Each of these stories deals with institutional religion in very subtle ways that help us understand better the relationship between religion and realism in Davis’s writing.⁴² In each story, Davis tackles problems of representation and the subtleties of trying to ascertain truth in relation to materiality and external expression. She examines religious inheritance through its effect on the current practices and behaviors that emerge in contemporary culture, and she challenges her readers to question the ongoing relevance of creeds such as Puritanism, which she presents as a habit rather than a belief. Along the way, Davis reveals her extensive knowledge of the religious forces that have shaped several regional, ethnic, and racial identities in American society.

Rebecca Harding Davis was consumed with the idea of socially-constructed models of identity not only by race but by gender and class as well, and she frequently examines identity conflicts through a religious lens. Her writing offers several instances of what W. E. B. Du Bois would later term “double-consciousness.” Du Bois’s term refers to an individual who might have a distinctive self-perception but who is simultaneously aware of how others see him or her and so he or she inevitably performs identity in a certain expected way due to factors such as race.⁴³ Davis creates innumerable characters who are not what they seem to be but who manage to pass social scrutiny by conforming to social expectations. In general, her characters are able to disguise themselves successfully until their consciences get the better of them and each is forced into identifying with a race, class, or group that works to his or her detriment. This model is, of course, slightly different than Du Bois’s model of double consciousness since, in Davis’s stories, these “dual” characters do not display any visible physical characteristics that would mark them as outsiders. In “Out of the Sea” (1865), Derrick Trull/Dirk Birkenhead is forced to reconcile his illegitimacy and poverty with his newly assumed social standing as a prominent Philadelphia physician. In *Waiting for the Verdict* (1868), Rosslyn Burley must confront not

only her illegitimacy, but also her hybrid Southern plantation roots and her Northern market huckster allegiance while Sap/John Broderip attempts to cover up his mulatto blood and slave identity as he achieves success as a surgeon of renown and falls in love with Margaret Conrad, a white woman. Later, Dallas Galbraith similarly attempts to reinvent himself by covering up his criminal past and reconciling with his wealthy Episcopal and Presbyterian grandparents who appear to have irrefragable notions about what constitutes an honorable citizen. In each of these cases, Davis's protagonists find themselves in DuBois's position of seeing themselves in a different light than they are seen by others while simultaneously perceiving how others would classify them in both their assumed identities and in their hidden ones.

For Davis, in an era of rapid social change, heightened by changing social justice laws and rapid shifting of wealth from the 1860s onward, the question of social collectivity needs to be re-examined. Davis's interest in such change impacted her literary efforts. David Shi suggests that the emergence of literary realism corresponded with a desire to find modes of artistic expression that would best capture the spirit of the age. He writes: "An unprecedented new society demanded new aesthetic forms" (98). For Davis, a re-examination required new literary forms because existing conventions of romanticism and sentimentalism did not allow her to explore the issues of social identity that she wanted to see questioned and changed.

Romanticism is too closely aligned with solipsism and sentimentalism is too closely aligned with eschatological salvation to offer Davis a style and form that reflect her reform goals. Realism with its rhetoric of truthfulness and a focus on the "common" became her experimental style although she did not make a clean break away from either romanticism or sentimentalism.

The first two stories in this period of Davis's writing work well in relation to each other. Both "John Lamar" and "David Gaunt" deal with secessionism and abolitionism, and both evaluate the Methodist movement as a social force. "John Lamar" was published just five months before "David Gaunt," and it works well as an introduction to the larger and more

elaborated story told in “David Gaunt.” For this reason, Davis’s plot parallelisms in “John Lamar” merit further review. As I discussed above, the idea of double meanings emerges in this story as the two opposing sides of the secessionist question make the same claim to religious authority to justify their actions, echoing the positions of the North and the South in the Civil War. In fact, the entire story deals with the idea of double meanings; the captured Southerner, Lamar, promises his loitering slave Ben that they soon will find freedom once Ben helps Lamar escape. In this promise, Lamar means his own freedom and fails to realize the irony that his own capture has resulted in his slave’s liberation and vice versa. It is only when Ben comprehends that Lamar’s liberation portends his own return into slavery that he determines not to help Lamar escape and kills him instead. A second but closely-related doubling involves a hymn and a psalm; while imprisoned, Lamar hears a Methodist abolitionist singing a hymn in a scene that will parallel his own later recitation of the twenty-third psalm, which the Methodist will overhear. When Lamar hears the hymn, he recognizes it as “an old-fashioned Methodist air that [his sister] Floy had caught from the negroes” (Davis 50). Lamar is surprised and even comforted to realize that “It’s the same God. . . . Floy’s and theirs” (50). He does not include himself in the group who knows this same God, but his later recitation of the psalm suggests that perhaps Lamar has joined the fold of believers by returning to the “simple faith his mother taught him” (52). Davis frames this story with a pattern of parallel circumstances: the promise of freedom, the hymn and the psalm, the role of God, Ben’s and Lamar’s eyes cast to the ground in an act of simultaneous inward and outward recognition, and the sexual fantasies Lamar and Ben each have about Floy. Davis shows how everything we experience can run in tandem to another’s experience and yet be subject to perception and interpretation, resulting in two completely polar points of view. At the same time, she doesn’t negate the value of empirical experience as necessary to the development of conscience. She portrays moral identity in a cause-and-effect relationship with cultural conditioning. The idea of the parallels undercuts the

notion of immutable difference in creed, faith, or culture; such differences are all productions of the material world. The central problem this text introduces is one of recognition, an idea that Davis features prominently in her fiction.

Davis elaborates on many of the themes of “John Lamar” in her longer work, “David Gaunt.” This story is strikingly similar to “John Lamar” and it would be easy to confuse them, but “David Gaunt” does more than examine what Davis might call the misdirections of Methodism; she begins to examine religious culture as a larger entity. She locates problems of authority in religious habits in general, and her text is carefully crafted for this purpose. This story begins with a series of religious allegories drawn from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Davis asks, “What kind of sword, do you think, was that which old Christian had in that famous fight with his Apollyon long ago?” (“David Gaunt” 54). If we remember Gregory Jackson’s point that there is a link between literary realism and homiletic narrative, Davis’s opening illustrates her intention of appealing to the reading practices of Protestant audiences (Jackson, “What Would Jesus Do” 645). Jackson himself makes his point with a similar reference to Bunyan’s allegory: “For Christian critics, such lurid catalogs [of human misery] ensnared readers in a sensual world (much as Vanity Fair traps John Bunyan’s wayfaring pilgrim), seducing them into exchanging spiritual reality for tangible materiality, the eternal verities of faith-based knowledge for the disenchanted, deceptive authority of modern secular epistemology” (645). This move from the allegorical realm of perception to a more immediate material realm is exactly the shift Davis offers. She writes: “Reading the quaint history, just now, I have a mind to tell you a modern story” (54). Davis then offers another series of allegories drawn from *Pilgrim’s Progress* suggesting this allegorical framework for reading her story about the Virginia hills. In this way, she wants to materialize the allegory, grounding it in the present rather than the past but appealing nevertheless to a belief in timeless truth. The link between religious allegory and literary realism is a fascinating move on Davis’s part because she clearly sets her

work alongside homiletic narrative even as she distances herself from it. She is offering her realism as a new aesthetic while drawing on this shared sermonic discourse that reminds her audience of how they are used to receiving moral tales. By doing so, she lays the groundwork for a new literary form that promises to deal with such subjects in a different manner.

After the opening allegory, Davis follows up with yet another rhetorical question posed to the reader aimed at challenging cultural conditioning. She asks: “How wide is your own ‘sacred soil’?—the creed, government, bit of truth, other human heart, self, perhaps, to which your soul roots itself vitally” (55-56). Davis, in fact, offers here a list of misdirections, and then she backtracks a bit in order to how the experience and prejudices of several characters led to tragic outcomes. In the end, she will resolve a crisis of faith by offering an example of religious primitivism in Dode Scofield, the story’s heroine. Dode’s primitivism is clearly a replacement for the creeds and practices that currently exist in this world. This story allows us to view the complexities of religious affiliation and political beliefs; Joe Scofield and David Gaunt are Methodists and both draw on their religion to explain their actions—Joe for supporting the Confederacy and Gaunt for joining the Union. Generally, Methodism was associated with Abolitionism, but there was a schism prior to the Civil War resulting in at least three different branches of Methodism: the North, the South, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴⁴ The action shifts between Scofield, the Confederate father, Dode/Theodora, his daughter, David Gaunt, an itinerant Methodist preacher (converted from an unnamed Calvinist denomination) who is also a would-be-suitor and eventual Unionist, and finally, Douglas Palmer, who is Dode’s true love and who was the best friend of Dode’s deceased brother, George, who died at Manassas. Palmer is a Unionist and thus an ideological and political enemy of the Scofields. Dode has rejected Palmer on the advice of Gaunt because he is an infidel: “Gaunt told her tonight that to love him was to turn her back on the cross, to be a traitor to that blood on Calvary. Was it?” (69). It is never quite clear whether the objection to Palmer is personal or political, and

the clear suggestion is that both aspects are irrevocably linked until Gaunt joins forces with Palmer, allowing for a kind of synthesis.

Davis clearly indicates that Dode's religion differs from those around her, and she offers it as a model of visionary spirituality. Dode's father cannot explain her creed to Gaunt other than to say, "She gets her religion quiet" (58). She exhibits "passion-fits" of religious fervor (57) that can be visibly observed by those around her, but these are internal, uplifting moments of transcendent reflection. Dode's actions exemplify how spirituality is meant to propel us forward. The detailed descriptions of the beliefs and practices of all the other characters are meant to show a sense of misdirection, but Dode's "quiet" religion, highly subjective, allows her to fathom moral action as if by instinct. Like the baby from "A Faded Leaf of History," Dode possesses a simple, unaltered faith: "Her religion was not ours. People build their faith on Christ, as a rock,—a factitious aid. She found Him in her life, long ago, when she was a child, and her soul grew out of him. He was a living Jesus to her, not a dead one. That was why she had a healthy soul" (68-69). When Davis talks about the "living Jesus," it is not yet clear exactly what she means. This is a mystical, intuitive connection to the Divine, and it carries with it the Quaker belief in the inner light, a similar idea to the Holy Ghost with a transhistorical agency to direct the actions of a person. The person then serves as a living embodiment of their faith. Dode's religion only steers her wrong when she suppresses her own desires and takes direction from Gaunt, himself a converted Calvinist misled by "Creed" (62).

Ironically, it is Palmer, the infidel, who sets Dode back on the path of her primitivism by suggesting that salvation is collective and that Dode needs to emulate Jesus rather than isolate herself from sin. He says: "The selfish care of your own soul that Gaunt taught you is a lie: his narrow heaven is a lie: my God inspires love, other aims. What is the old tale of Jesus?—that He put his hands on the vilest before He blest them? So let Him come to me,—through loving hands" (75). Dode struggles between her intuitive belief and her religious education, but she has

to work out her difficulties in her own mind and conscience. This is a religious model in only the vaguest of senses; Davis does not specify how it can be duplicated by others, but there is a clear sense that domestic felicity is at stake. Dode, in fact, cannot fully realize her spirituality until she begins to view it as an expression of her love for Palmer. Her journey searching for his wounded body becomes an allegory for her spiritual journey and her own role as a savior of collective souls. The narrator writes: "I told you the girl thought her Helper was alive, and very near. She did to-night. She thought He was beside her on this lonesome road, and knew she would be safe. She felt as if she could take hold of His very hand" (94).⁴⁵ The story ends with her reunion and marriage to Palmer, performed by David Gaunt, who heads out West as an itinerant preacher, finally finding redemption through the realization of his own sinfulness. Palmer himself never has the requisite conversion experience typical in sentimentalism, but Dode perceives he is coming closer to it through her own agency: "He has come now; stops to look in his wife's face. . . . There is no new look in her eyes he loves so well to see as that which tells her Master is near her. Sometimes she thinks he too—But she knows that 'according to her faith it shall be unto her'" (102-103). This passage's shifting pronouns creates a sense that Dode and Palmer are becoming spiritually unified in their beliefs. Dode's visionary performance provides spectral evidence that allows Palmer to strengthen his own belief.

If Palmer's possible conversion was the main focus of the story, it would be fairly easy to pass it off as a traditional example of sentimental fiction. The story, in fact, readily seems to follow this established framework, but, as Davis herself suggested, this is a modern story, and so we are cued to look for exceptions to the sentimental conventions. We see this happen when Dode realizes her power through her insistence on her unique spirituality, and she asserts her subjectivity through this claim to righteousness. She refuses to subjugate her sense of self-identity to greater salvation, and she does not privilege Palmer's salvation over her own. Instead, Dode uses her belief in salvation to assert her domestic identity as a powerful cultural force. It is

through specific departures from the sentimental tradition that we can examine the parallel between Davis's Christian primitivism model and her emerging realism.

We also begin to see Davis's socioeconomic concerns engaging with pragmatic materialism, but it would be problematic to apply the term secular to her work because the subject of religion is central to her larger interest in collective cultural norms. She deals very purposely with the religious subject, and she offers a seminal example of a changing liberal Protestant ideology that begins to marry Christian ethics with social reform specifically through fiction. The underlying problem becomes yet another one of definition: trying to define the meaning of Christianity in late nineteenth-century America is challenging in part because writers such as Davis are in the process of renegotiating theology and Biblical hermeneutics, undercutting any easy understanding of what they mean by this term. Just as postmodern scholars allow that there are multiple "realisms,"⁴⁶ we must similarly acknowledge that there are multiple "Christianities."

Contemporary readers may have trouble trying to understand and define nineteenth-century religious culture because it *was* in a state of flux, and facile labels such as Christian, Protestant, or even liberal Protestant are often easily applied with little acknowledgement of the inadequacies of such conflated labels. While it is true that nineteenth-century America was predominantly Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other, the term Protestant implies an encompassing allegiance only in relation *to* those other religions. It also presents a deceptive unity because significant differences exist within Protestantism, many of which will emerge clearly in an examination of Davis's fiction. Nineteenth-century realists were apparently well aware of these differences. Davis, in particular, dedicates much of her fiction to depicting various types of religious figures who embody the beliefs and practices of specific Protestant denominations that she wishes to critique, such as Evangelical Protestantism, Presbyterianism, or Methodism. In an analysis of nineteenth-century religious culture, George

Thomas comments on the rise of revivalism and Protestant sectarianism: “I offer the interpretation that religious movements articulate a new moral order and that each attempts to have its version of that order dominate the moral-political universe” (2). Davis apparently agreed that sectarianism played a prominent role in the negotiation of social ethics, and she evaluated several religious organizations in relation to the problems of her age. She reveals her familiarity with the hermeneutics, theology, and social practices that are associated with a number of Protestant sects, and she is interested in unraveling how social action results from religious identity, beginning, of course, with the Civil War. Scholars who apply the label “Christian ethics” to Davis’s social views are not examining the specificity of her prose carefully enough; she is not looking to Christianity as a solution but rather within it to critique its practices.

Davis also offers a complex look at how religious identity is a central component of regional identity. She challenges her readers to imagine the kinds of conflicts that result when characters with differing interpretations of theology and scripture encounter each other and try to make ethical decisions based on their inherited creeds. She offers a view of ethical and philosophical problems that are specifically relevant to modern culture such as post-Civil War social identity for liberated African Americans and the role of women as breadwinners of the family. Most readers today who are familiar with Davis’s work tend to read “Life in the Iron-Mills” (1861) solely because of Davis’s revolutionary look at the economic deprivation caused by the horrors of industrialism, but all of Davis’s stories examine equally relevant “modern” problems, and the larger body of her work reflects her intense scrutiny of institutional religion in relation to those problems.

Once Davis departs from expected sentimental conventions such as self-sacrifice and the renewal of an established faith, she takes one other very bold step that shows how very far she has departed from sentimental fiction. With her highly intuitive model of mystical spiritualism,

Davis also undercuts the authority of scripture, once the incontrovertible source of religious authority. In “David Gaunt,” the Bible emerges not as a sacred icon but a superfluous one following the First Battle of Bull Run. Davis subtly suggests that the Bible has lost its authority as an ethical guide once the United States begins to divide against itself in a “moral divorce” (56). When the Unionist Palmer and a New York reporter named Nabbes meet *in a church* to discuss army recruitment, Nabbes searches for a scrap of paper on which to write his story: “He tore out a fly-leaf from the big Bible, and jotted down notes of the meeting” (78). The Bible here functions as a scratch pad, and Davis deliberately aligns it with the popular newspaper press. In this scene, this somewhat shocking scene where the reporter cavalierly pulls pages from the Bible, the Scripture has no larger authority other than its convenience at a time when it is needed and not for the sacred power that was once invested in it but for the popular dissemination of information instead. Inside the church, the American flag now hanging over the pulpit illustrates the attempt to sanction divinely the nation’s political future.

This turn to the popular press is not surprising given the rise of journalistic print culture at this time. This rise is connected to both political and religious subjects. In fact, it was through such journals that sermonic discourse was disseminated to large audiences, creating a culture of celebrity preachers. David Reynolds writes that popular preachers such as Henry Ward Beecher, Thomas DeWitt Talmage, and Dwight L. Moody, all skilled orators, had all “accelerated the press-over-pulpit movement” (*Faith in Fiction* 210). Davis provides her readers with a sharp foreshadowing of the effect the Civil War will have on a public who would increasingly rely on newspaper journals for realistic depictions of everyday events just as these events become a lot more gruesome. In this brief vignette, the Bible is transformed into the popular press, and we see three competing discourses: Scripture, newspaper, and Davis’s own template for realist fiction.

The Bible scene between Palmer and Nabbes repeats in the text when Gaunt parallels this same action by going into the pulpit of a sect he had fallen into “by mistake” (82), and he, too,

opens up the fly-leaf of a Bible. We see, once again, that the Bible figures as a material artifact rather than a source of spiritual truth. In fact, the Bible invokes a sense of dis-ease because Gaunt does not quite know what to do with it. He reads a message written earlier by the marginally literate Scofield: “To my Dear friend, David Gaunt. May, 1860. the Lord be Between mee And thee. J. Scofield.”⁴⁷ A short time later, Gaunt, the Methodist minister, who has now enlisted in the Abolitionist cause, receives his first task: he is to kill Scofield. The Bible inscription, additive scripture in this sense, does not prevent him from breaking one of the Ten Commandments because he believes he is called to act on divine authority. Gaunt tries to puzzle his way through his determination to act in the interests of freedom, but he cannot reconcile the Bible, neither the printed scripture nor the handwritten message, with his current beliefs. Davis writes: “But a Face was before him, white, thorn-crowned, bent watchful over the world. He was sent of Jesus. To do what? Preach peace by murder? What said his Master?” (86). Gaunt seeks to discover the ethics of Jesus, but he cannot solve his modern dilemma with a direct interpretation of the Scripture he holds in his hands. Baffled, Gaunt carries out his assigned task with the Bible buttoned inside his coat. The Bible is with him, but its utility is in doubt.

As the story ends, he rededicates himself to God by serving in a Western hospital; it is a chance to rewrite the nation’s history, leaving the problems of North and South behind. He once again turns to the Bible for comfort, and it is not the traditional scripture he reads, but Scofield’s inscription. These are the words that help Gaunt make sense of his own actions. He responds to the words, saying: “Let it be true what you have writ,—‘The *Lord* be between me and thee,’ forever” (103). Gaunt’s final reflection parallels the harmony between Dode and Palmer, who were once separated by their doctrinal differences; it is not the creed or the scripture that has made God “real” but instead it is the people who have acted as agents of divine authority, serving as conduits between the natural and the supernatural. When Davis earlier used the expression “living God,” she was locating God not in the Bible or the church but within other people and

their ability to recognize human suffering. The intuitive search for knowledge appears antithetical to the tenets of realism, which emphasizes experience and observation, but Liberal Protestantism and realism share the shift to human agency in matters of conscience.

The importance of the Bible as a source of knowledge about God leads very naturally to the foundation of realism. With a philosophical presupposition that fundamental reality exists and awaits detection, the Bible must be evaluated as a source of material evidence that relates to some larger notion of eternal Truth. Surely realism attempts to operate in a similar manner by manifesting a notion of a larger truth within the confines of the material text. The words and phrases of the Bible work their way into realist texts repeatedly, implicitly acknowledging the importance of the Bible in American culture. How various realists position the Bible within their texts differs widely, of course, but the scriptures exist in the material world and they exist in the textual reflections of the material world, either as material objects or referentially through allusion. By examining how the Bible functions or is perceived, we can deduce some of these theological and hermeneutical implications that allow us to identify how religion operates as a cultural force. Davis does not fully dismiss the Bible's authority; it exists within the text as an important symbol, but she views it in an ironic light and subjugates it to a position below intuitive morality, a move that continues to reflect the Quaker influence on Davis's primitivism.

In Davis's next major story, *Margret Howth*, she continues to examine social problems in light of religious and philosophical solutions. Ironically, the title character is probably the least interesting in this portrait of a factory town in Indiana, and she does not even feature prominently in Davis's opening lines. Once again, Davis begins her text with rhetoric expressing her desire to link social change to literary form by offering something new and different to her readership. In opening lines that resemble those of "Life in the Iron-Mills," she invites the reader to become a spectator to the squalor of everyday life. She writes:

My story is very crude and homely . . . —only a rough sketch of one or two of those people whom you see every day, and call 'dregs' sometimes,—a dull, plain bit of prose. .

. . . I expect you to call it stale and plebian, for I know the glimpses of life it pleases you best to find; idyls [sic] delicately tinted; passion-veined hearts, cut bare for curious eyes; prophetic utterances, concrete and clear. . . . You want something, in fact, to lift you out of this tobacco-stained commonplace. . . . I want you to dig into this commonplace, this vulgar American life, and see what is in it. Sometimes I think it has a new and awful significance that we do not see. (6)

The novelty of this story, Davis makes clear, is the subject itself because she will focus on the dregs of the commonplace in a new and unexpected way. She enters the narrative with the promise to reveal new truths about an existing materiality, and this we will recognize is the pose of the literary realist from Davis through to Howells at least. This story also seems to exist on a boundary between sentimentalism and realism, as Jean Pfaelzer observes: “The tension between realism and sentiment in the novel marks Davis’s definition of social responsibility as active participation in a sympathetic community” (*Parlor Radical* 58). Davis toys with sentimentalism, in fact, by having Dr. Knowles try to appeal to Margret’s sentimental side in order to enlist her help in developing a utopian community. Margret resists his sentimental appeal, and she refuses to let Knowles be an intervening voice of God’s authority. This is a scene that will bear examining after a brief look at some of Davis’s descriptions of the religious influences at work in this factory town.

Davis faces the problem every realist must face in trying to present something new as something that is “more real” than that which precedes it. The new entity must be presented in contrast to what the reader expects to find in the surrounding visual order. Much as Davis attempts to jolt her reader by preparing him or her for the unexpected commonplace subject of *Margret Howth*, she also presents her religious model in contrast to the available options in existing culture. In a discussion about the legacy of British realism, Nancy Armstrong makes an interesting assertion about the representation of cultural stereotypes, which she claims are an important part of the visual order of both photography and realist writing: “Cultural stereotypes are real, not because they refer to real bodies, but because they allow us to identify and classify bodies, including our own, as image-objects with a place and name within a still-expanding

visual order” (31). Davis, in fact, offers a comprehensive depiction of religious and philosophical culture, showing points of intersection that shape the social consciousness of four distinctive male characters: Margret’s blind father, Mr. Howth, her rejected suitor, Stephen Holmes, the factory owner/social reformer, Knowles, and the family slave/servant, Joel. Each of these men—cultural stereotypes all—might be termed a representative man, employing Emerson’s terminology, and each reveals some aspect of an existing social reform alternative that Davis believes falls short. In the end, it will be the Mulatto huckster Lois who offers an example of religious primitivism that all of these figures must adopt in order to find a progressive solution to the personal and political problems of the town.

The first of typical figures, old Mr. Howth, offers a fairly simplistic echo of an antiquated theological or philosophical order. Howth is a Quixotic-type who “was touched by the picture of the far old chivalry, dead long ago” (Davis, *Margret Howth* 32). He represents a fading medievalism: “Honour! I think, Calvinist though he was, that word was his religion. Men have had worse” (34). Calvinism and medieval valor seem an odd pairing, almost as though Davis were trying to kill two birds with one stone; in any event, we are to accept that Howth is a good man in spite of his Calvinism. The failing Howth is kept alive by his wife and daughter as they secretly sell off the possessions he can no longer see. This is an ironic statement on materiality as well since Howth believes his beloved objects to be still present in the room simply because he has no reason not to believe in their continued existence. This is surely a tongue-in-cheek commentary on his belief system as a whole. With little to occupy his daytime hours, Howth rejuvenates every evening when Knowles arrives to challenge him into defending his antiquated views. Knowles’s visits keep him “in a state of boyish excitement during the long idle days, looking forward to this nightly battle” (36). Howth does not occupy a role directly driving the story’s plot, but rather he exists peripherally as a symbol of the surrounding sociopolitical world. That is, he is a cultural stereotype.

In contrast to Howth, Stephen Holmes represents a more recent trend of American self-reliance, but he offers another example of a fading order that Davis's wishes to see replaced with a form of social Christianity that should derive from domestic harmony. Throughout the story, different characters describe Holmes's views, but he himself speaks little until he arrives on Margret's doorstep at the end. Initially, Pike, the plant manager describes Holmes as a sort of Everyman, suggesting his potential to master the natural world: "Adam must have been some such man as he, when the Lord gave him 'dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air'" (80). In Pike's description, Holmes has a primal role as the father of all humans, exemplifying a unique connection to the natural world. The Adam-figure stands in contrast to the Jesus-figure in late nineteenth-century realism, and we will see Davis present this ideal of primitive man later in *Dallas Galbraith*. In *Margret Howth*, Holmes might begin as an Adam figure, but he is not so easily understood as the novel progresses. For example, later in the story, this Old Testament image of Holmes is replaced by the German romanticism associated with Emersonian Transcendentalism. Knowles accuses Holmes of following Novalis⁴⁸ in the belief that "the true Shechinah is man" (112).⁴⁹ The Hebrew term "Shechinah" loosely translates to where God dwells. Holmes's role in the story seems to be to save Margret from the clutches of Knowles, and to drive the plot toward a spiritual synthesis in which love can be cited as the perfect expression of Christian belief. When Holmes and Margret eventually reconcile, the narrator describes this event in religious terms: "Down there in the farm-window two human hearts had given the joy a name; the hope throbbed into being; the hearts touching each other beat in a slow, full chord of love as pure in God's eyes as the song the angels sang, and as sure a promise of the Christ that is to come. Forever and ever,—not even death would part them" (240). Once again as with "David Gaunt," Davis locates her model of Christian idealism in the actions and example of domestic bliss and conjugal love. It is never clear how this model works to solve social problems, but she nevertheless identifies a correspondence between the private

and the public apparently believing that felicity cannot exist outside of the home unless it is first achieved inside the home.

Much has been written about the character of Dr. Knowles, by far the most complex and interesting figure in the story. His benevolence emerges in his daily visits to Mr. Howth and in his securing a job for the nearly destitute Margret, as well as in his own ambition of forming a communal living experiment for the poverty-stricken outcasts in town. In spite of his altruistic machinations, Knowles operates as misguided and even downright ominous from the start. In an early scene, a farmer offers an example of common sense analysis when he derides Knowles's plan for "a new Arcadia" (84). Quoting Francis Bacon, the farmer launches off into a diatribe against Knowles's self-delusion:

There's two ways for 'em to end. If they're made out of the top of society, they get so refined, so idealized, that every particle flies off on its own special path to the sun, and the Community's broke; and if they're made of the lower mud, they keep going down, down together,—they live to eat and drink, and make themselves as near the brutes as they can. . . . I've seen it. . . . It's *facts*, Sir; and facts, as Lord Bacon says, 'are the basis of every sound speculation.' (84)

A doctor chimes in that no such experiment can be found in the Bible, and the parson dryly corrects him: "'One, I believe'" (84), meaning the work of Jesus. Once again, Davis exhibits her cogency in presenting the kind of rhetoric that a Baconian philosopher would utter. George Marsden explains the relationship between this approach and Protestant evangelical practices. He writes:

While it is of course true that many other intellectual and religious traditions also affected the outlook of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism, Common Sense Baconianism conditioned these traditions in the sense of giving them their exact shape. The inductive scientific bent of this outlook gave many American evangelicals a strong intellectual disposition to look for hard facts that could readily be classified. Viewing theology as an exact science, they tended to assume that God would reveal himself in terms that could be given very definite and precise meanings. (90)

In other words, the evangelicals could satisfy themselves with a circular argument, believing that God helps those who help themselves because the evidence of Divine providence would eventually emerge if that was what God intended to happen. Marsden clarifies this belief:

“Specifically the Common Sense approach said that all normal people were endowed by their Creator with various faculties that produced beliefs on which they must rely” (83). If Holmes offers an example of Emersonian self-reliance, the farmer offers here a Common Sense model of self-reliance. At the same time, although he relies on deductive reasoning to support his argument, the farmer seizes the authority that religious justification allows to express his suspicion about interfering on the natural order.

There are many other complexities to Knowles’s character. He is Hawthornesque, as Jean Pfaelzer has noted (*Parlor Radical* 63), closely resembling the equally ambitious Hollingsworth of *The Blithedale Romance*. Knowles is determined to enlist Margret’s aid in forming his community. He views religion as a positivist, believing that Christian sympathy will be a useful tool in reforming the stricken. He tells Holmes: “I have destined [Margret] for this work always: she has latent power of sympathy and endurance, such as can bring the Christian teaching home to these wretches” (Davis, *Margret Howth* 188). The ambivalent narrator does not seem to know whether to condemn Knowles, described as “an intolerant fanatic, of course” (179), or to defend him. The narrator admits: “But the truth he did know was so terribly real to him, there was such sick, throbbing pity in his heart for men who suffered” (179). Knowles, in fact, is so ambitious that even though he himself is a non-believer, he believes in the humanity of Jesus and feels it is a worthy model to emulate (188). More importantly, he sees the utility of this model as a means to an end. He employs Margret’s Christianity against her in an attempt to persuade her to join his crusade. Using scriptural rhetoric, he says: “God calls you. He waits for you answer. Swear to me that you will help His people. Give up father and mother and love, and go down as Christ did. Help me to give liberty and truth and Jesus’s love to these wretches on the brink of hell. Live with them, raise them with you” (155).⁵⁰ Margret resists Knowles’s manipulations, refusing to let him serve as an agency of Christian authority. She insists on defining her own faith, and she believes her own subjective desire for love will be realized: “I

think He heard my prayer. I think He will answer it. He was a man, and loved as we do” (157). Ironically, both Knowles and Margret base their beliefs on the humanity of Jesus in the way they would like to see religion enacted in the world. Davis specifically rejects the Calvinist God of Providence for an ever-present, intervening Jesus who will always advance the power of domestic feminism as a benevolent social force.

There is one last significant social influence at work in the story and that is the religion the slave Joel practices. In Davis’s writing, which contains an abundance of subtle commentary, it is often easy to overlook the degree to which she offers significant vignettes of the many cultural forces shaping the action of the story. In an almost unnoticed scene, the narrator describes the slave Joel residing in the barn while thinking over a sermon about wishing to sweep slaveholders from the land. Davis reveals her astute observations of contemporary slaves’ religious preferences when she discusses the spiritual leanings of Joel and his church. Referring to the wish to eradicate slaveholders, Davis writes:

[That] rendering of Christian doctrine was so relished by Joel, and the other leading members of Mr. Clinche’s church, that they hinted to him it might be as well to continue choosing his texts from Moses and the Prophets until the excitement of the day was over. The New Testament was,—well,—hardly suited for the emergency; did not, somehow, chime in with the lesson of the hour. (86)⁵¹

This section illustrates perfectly Mark Noll’s assertion that the unique hermeneutics of slaves in America tended toward an Old Testament notion of justice. Noll claims: “Only recently have historians, searching for the ante-bellum black religious consciousness in general, cast light on the slaves’ use of Scripture in particular. They found that the slaves discriminated between the Bible which their masters presented and the Bible they found for themselves” (“The Image” 48). He adds: “The narratives of the Old Testament in particular lent slave use of the Bible its special social dimension. . . . For slaves, the figure of Moses assumed a special importance as the one whom God raised up to free his people” (49-50). Davis purposefully includes Joel’s religious preferences in her critique of American religious and philosophical culture for several reasons

that support her own emerging preference for a primitive Christianity. For one thing, she once again undercuts the sacredness of scripture as a source of transcendent order by showing how subjectively the Bible was read within the various sects. For Davis, the Bible is too easily appropriated as a means to an end when read to support the larger political position of the institutional church. Secondly, Davis allows her readers to understand better what is at stake if the social problems of the day are ignored; there is always the looming threat of social unrest and a chance that another representative group might take up the mighty sword.

In this story, synthesis happens through the agency of the crippled Lois who is neither black nor white, but mulatto. A simple market huckster who has suffered at the injustices of industrialism, the rickety-riden Lois happily drives her cart from house to house spreading Christian charity wherever she goes. Lois may be an intended representation of a dying sentimental tradition—she is, in fact, dying. Lois has inhaled dangerous factory fumes during her daring rescue of Stephen Holmes following her own father's act of arson. Lois has a simple, child-like faith that is not dependent on the Bible or a church, but is realized simply through her belief and ability to allegorize the figure of Jesus: "So she knew, too, the Master in whom she believed, saw Him in everything that lived, more real than all beside. . . . So it was that He took part in her humble daily life, and became more real to her day by day" (Davis, *Margret Howth* 94-95). In one sense, Lois as the quintessential sentimentalist must die; this is the tradition that Davis wishes to replace with a more relevant and realistic literature that engages with the problems of the modern age. At the same time, Lois acts as a unifying force because of her accessibility to all levels of this diverse social group. In this way, her actions are socially progressive because she breaks through barriers of economic class, gender, and social status. Lois's simple "universal sympathy" (266) is adopted by all, Holmes and Margret reconcile, Knowles is financially broken and therefore unable to found his misguided socialist community, and the slave Joel discovers oil right in the Howths' own backyard, assuring wealth and

prosperity for all. Critics have a difficult time accepting the all-too-convenient prosperity at the close of the story because James Fields asked Davis to alter the story. The manuscript no longer exists, so readers cannot know with certainty how differently the original tale had been written. Scholars can only speculate on the extent to which Davis was satisfied with the rewritten ending, and so the story survives for posterity as a blend of the sentimental and realist genres with the requisite happy ending of sentimentalism.⁵²

In the next three stories of religious scrutiny, Davis examines some of the more marginal undercurrents in American religious culture: utopianism, Dutch reformism, and even spiritualism. Her story about a utopian society, “The Harmonists” (1866) is a work of historical fiction, and it features the same Dr. Knowles (we presume) who appeared earlier in *Margret Howth*.⁵³ Following this, she published “The Story of Christine” (1866), another semi-historical work detailing the existence of indentured servitude after slavery was outlawed in Pennsylvania. Finally, in the “The Captain Story” (1866), she offers up a theory about spiritualism, a practice in which mediums claim to be able to contact the dead. She will return to this subject briefly in *A Law Unto Herself* (1877), but her cynical views on the subject are very explicit in this earlier short story. It is worth noting, once again, that Davis tackles the religious subject in a uniquely American way by showing an aggregate cultural consciousness resulting from the movement and travel of individuals in and out of these smaller ideological communities. The intersecting histories of seemingly isolated geographic communities affect an emerging sense of national identity that absorbs elements of these sometimes competing ideologies. She deals with occurrences that are part of the development of America, such as utopianism, slavery, and the spiritual movement, and she illustrates the abundance of religious idealism that played so crucial a role in the nation’s history.

The first of these three stories, “The Harmonists,” allows us to explore an interesting perspective on Davis’s “realism” in relation to the historical novel, but first we must examine

how it functions as a cultural critique. “The Harmonists” is a story within a story, told by a fictional narrator, Zack Humphreys, who recounts a visit to the Rappite community known as “Economy” in Pennsylvania. Humphreys is accompanied by his socialist friend Dr. Knowles and Anthony, Knowles’s four-year-old son. It is Knowles who talks Humphreys into visiting to the nearby commune so that they may devote themselves “with these lofty enthusiasts to a life of purity, celibacy [sic], meditation,—[and become] helpful and loving to the great Humanity” (Davis, “The Harmonists” 169). Initially, the men form a favorable impression of a fairytale existence as they approach Economy, a millennial commune, which appears as: “some quaint German village brought hither in an enchanted sleep, and dropped down in the New World” (171). Once the men actually enter the community, they are quickly disillusioned, and, as the story unfolds, one disappointment is heaped on top of another. Although they’ve maintained their celibacy, the Rappites have lost their purity. The inhabitants seem to arrange their days around multiple mealtimes, signaling an overzealous attention to the flesh. They have become disillusioned that the promised second coming of Christ did not happen, and they are left in a permanent state of suspension waiting for an apocalypse that will not arrive. Old Christina explains this to the visitors: “Father Rapp say the world shall end in five years when we come in der society, den I shall see mein shields again. But I wait, and it haf not yet end” (175).⁵⁴ Historically, the Rappite was one of several failed communal societies that never realized the millennial promise of its founders’ prophecies. Allegorically, the village represents the unfulfilled promise of a society that outlives its rigid creed.

Even as Economy exists in a seemingly timeless pastoralism, the village has, in fact, entered the Industrial Age. The visitors discover that the community has prospered and industrialized to an even greater extent than the outside world: “We have steam-mills, distilleries, carry on manufactures of wool, silk, and cotton. Exclusive of our stocks, our annual profit, clear of expense, is over two hundred thousand dollars” (177). The visitors are shocked to

find that rather than being greeted as welcome ideologues, each would first have to prove his financial merit before being admitted into Economy. Knowles sums up the situation: “Why, these Arcadians, sir, have made a god of their stomachs, and such of them as have escaped that spend their lives in amassing dollar after dollar to hoard in their common chest” (178). The men decide to depart, and we learn later from Zack Humphreys that eventually the Harmonists would abandon industry altogether upon the discovery of oil on their land. In this story, Davis depicts a sense of the inevitability of industrialization among the Harmonists, who cannot seem to stop accruing wealth; the village exists in a strange time warp that shows market capitalism permeating a pre-modern agrarian culture, which suggests a parallel with Davis’s view of larger American society.

In writing “The Harmonists,” Davis displays her willingness to experiment with genre in order to publish her work. She first conceived of this story as a “sketch” and submitted it to James Fields, editor of *The Atlantic*. Fields was interested in the subject of the German Pietists, but he wanted a fictionalized account rather than a sketch, and thus she rewrote her account into a narrative (Harris 128-29). This story’s development of this story reminds us of the important role of the editor in relation to literary aesthetics as Nancy Glazener has pointed out in *Reading for Realism*. Critics often blame Fields for the revised sentimentalism of *Margret Howth*, but he exercised an comparable influence on many of Davis’s submissions to *The Atlantic*, and he did not consistently steer her writing in a sentimental direction as this example demonstrates (nor did he consistently steer it in a realist direction as Glazener has asserted).⁵⁵

Davis’s ability to fictionalize historical events provides us with yet another insight into how her realism operates. More than once—both in “The Harmonists” and in “A Faded Leaf of History”—Davis takes an essay version of a historical event and fictionalizes it in order to make known some larger truth about the condition of humankind. An important aspect of realism is the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, and her imposition of narrative in the case

of “The Harmonists” illustrates realism’s performative aesthetic. By creating characters who draw on the reader’s empathy, the realist writer adopts a theory of history in which fiction plays a key role in making that event “real.” Richard Walsh elaborates on how readerly perception relies on this act of vicarious appropriation: “What we understand, feel, and value may be ultimately grounded in the abstract and the general, but it is not in general terms that we experience understanding, feeling, or valuing it. Fiction enables us to go through that process for the sake of experience” (120). Davis’s historical and cultural subjects allow us to view religious culture shaping specific historical events and communities, and we can generalize her assessment of the past in order to apply the same lesson to the present. This assumption allows for two important observations about Davis’s realism; clearly, it operates on the allegorical level as we saw in “David Gaunt,” and here we see a performative aspect in relation to fictionalizing history. In this way, the reader can imaginatively experience the unfolding of history much like the viewing of a film allows.

Other scholars have noted Davis’s important contribution to cultural discourse by making the connection between the historical and philosophical trends and the specifically “modern” subjects Davis depicts in her stories. Nan Albinski notes that utopian fiction, in particular, attracted several female writers, and she suggests this subject allowed writers such as Davis the opportunity to ground their social views in an ideological realm in order to shape future discourses on “topics such as marriage, motherhood, sexual autonomy, the sexual division of labor, political participation of women, and religious doctrine as it influences women’s lives” (341). Albinski writes: “Such fictional portrayals of utopian visions for new social arrangements suggests a process by which feminist authors appropriated and adapted the ideological debates of their day to feminist purpose” (340). Davis’s interest in German Pietism and her inclusion of Christina, “an old-dried-up woman [who clasps the four-year-old Tony to her] shriveled breast” (Davis, “The Harmonists” 174) illustrates Davis’s ability to link religious ideology with gender

identity in nineteenth-century culture. With Davis's belief that the domestic married female was the perfect expression of a Christ-centered primitivism, the celibate communal practices of the Rappites offered an exemplary subject for introducing her larger ideology of conservative domestic feminism.

This story, which began as a sketch, shows Davis's ability to embrace realism as a socio-historical aesthetic, fluidly shifting her writing style from reporting and describing to fictionalizing in order to repackage her ideology. Glazener has suggested that literary realism was produced to promote middle-class hegemony, and Fields's influence in this case seems to support that suggestion, but it is also clear that writers of the late nineteenth-century conceived of realism as possessing a historical aesthetic that privileged narrative form working in tandem with this sociological agenda. Davis's easy rendering of her subjects from one literary mode to another reveals her clear aim to give voice to her own personal sociological views. In Davis's case, her religious critiques allow her to shift fluidly between subjects in order to justify these views. It is difficult to make any easy claims about the production of realism, however, when Davis so frequently alternates between narrative and exposition throughout her career with no clear preference for one form over the other. An interesting relationship does seem to exist between genre and sociology in relation to the domestic feminist model that lends credence to Glazener's claim.

Shortly following "The Harmonists," Davis published "The Story of Christine" in *Peterson's Magazine*. Like the earlier story, this one also deals with the subject of woman's sexuality, and like Christina of the Rappite society, this Christine's story deals with the powerless position of a female in regard to her own sexuality. The narrator reveals: "It is nearly a century ago, this time of which we write; deeds were done habitually then, and made legal in this good city of Brotherly Love, which the just and merciful grandchildren of good old Quakers would hardly credit their ancestors" (Davis, "The Story of Christine" 19). Davis is referring to

indentured servitude.⁵⁶ Christine's story is told first by a child narrator, a twelve-year-old girl, who spends time with Christine and whose family is indirectly responsible for Christine's subjugation and ongoing position as a social pariah. Christine had been kidnapped by a spurned lover, presumably raped,⁵⁷ and later sold into indentured servitude, and she was ultimately purchased by the late grandfather of the little girl narrator. We find out later that to escape her bondage, Christine had run off with a surgeon named Petrelli who cared for her on the ship and lived with him out of wedlock until he abandoned her in New Orleans, after which she slowly found her way back to the Hubbard family in Scottsville. The second part of the story is told by the same narrator, but now the little girl has grown up and understands the events in a more mature manner. She refuses to participate in Christine's ongoing ostracism, and she once again spends her days as a companion to the pariah.

It does not seem to be a coincidence that Davis offers two such female characters in this story and in "The Harmonists" with not only a similar name, but a name that contains a feminized version of "Christ." This is a strong cue to examine these stories for Davis's emerging model of primitive Christianity, in which the domestic female features prominently. The social isolation and oppression of these two female characters make a strong parallel with the suffering of Christ, and Davis draws attention to this kind of parallel repeatedly in her realist texts beginning with Hugh Wolfe's suffering in "Iron-Mills."

A quick overview of Christine's background helps complete this allegory linking human suffering to the figure of Jesus. In the little village of Scottsville, Pennsylvania, the title character is referred to as "Dutch Christine" and the little girl first observes her as an "old Hollander, stiff, lean, and angular, [sitting] in a certain corner of a back pew in the old Baptist church at home" (Davis, "Old Christine" 181). The little girl narrator mentions Christine's "Dutchness" repeatedly in the tale; nearly every time she references Christine, her nationality is mentioned. For the little girl, Christine's Dutchness is irrevocably linked with her spiritual

beliefs. Of course, Christine's religious inheritance is a mixed one, and we can only make assumptions about her array of convictions and practices based on the circuitous route of her from Holland to Pennsylvania, to New Orleans, and finally back to Pennsylvania again. The little girl reveals: "her simple stories of Holland, and of the saints and their dealings with the low Dutch—for she had been a Roman Catholic long ago; and good Baptist as she was now, she had come out of that dark wood with some glittering cobwebs of superstition hanging about her, very beautiful, and surely not harmful" (183). Her naming of the Baptist church once again reveals Davis's disdain for the evangelical Christian sects who abandon doctrine to establish a more primitive relationship to Christ but then follow elite practices that fail to recognize fellow sufferers as modern-day examples of the human figure of Jesus. She critiqued this model in "Iron-Mills," and she seems to be critiquing the evangelical Baptists in Scottsdale for following the same restrictive tenets even when they themselves are culpable for the suffering of the scapegoat Christine. This Jesus allegory becomes increasingly evident when the little girl narrator returns after a long absence to find Christine completely ostracized by the town because she has been diagnosed with Asiatic leprosy (195) and is now considered to be both physically as well as morally unclean. Like the Christina of the Harmonist commune, this Christine is in a constant state of waiting, the former for the apocalypse, and the latter for her own death. Both are forced to live out a kind of living death isolated from a thriving, changing culture and contacts with the outside world.

In her final story in this set, "The Captain's Story," Davis gives us a tale of ratiocination, in which three psychics are called in to help explain the mysterious disappearance of Joseph C. Wylie, a river hand. In this story, Davis investigates the spiritualist movement. Wentz describes this belief: "Spiritualism is a term often used to refer to those beliefs and practices associated with the purpose of establishing communication with the spirits of the dead" (39). In one way, spiritualism is the opposite of realism; whereas realism engages with the material in order to

make abstract ideas understood in a concrete manner, spiritualism “tends to deny significant value to outward or formal expressions” (Wentz 39). It is an extremely internalized form of religious practice in which materiality is transcended. Oddly enough, although Davis embraces a kind of Quaker mysticism or intuitive knowledge of God, she is entirely cynical about the possibility for spiritual contact with the metaphysical world.

In this story, the Captain narrates the strange events, and he leads the reader through visits to three mediums and puzzles over the differing explanations of Wylie’s disappearance. He explains: “The matter puzzled me. I did *not* believe the spirits of the dead had anything to do with it. . . . [At the same time] I did not believe [medium] Lusk was an imposter. I thought, as every impartial, cool, observer must, that there was something—not charlatanism—in this matter, and I think, in the end, I got the key to it” (199). The captain concludes that the spiritualists, even when sincere, simply “read” the room and voice the hopes and thoughts of their clients. He states: “In this case, as in every other of which I have become cognizant, the mediums have only put into shape the thoughts of those who question them” (207). In this view, spiritualists can not transcend the physical world but rather, like the realist, they provide language to give shape to abstract thoughts. In many ways, Davis’s criticism of spiritualism is the same as her criticism of scriptural interpretation; she believes that the agent, that is, the interpreter, simply reiterates something that is already believed. Just as the Bible was quoted as justification by both the abolitionists as well as the secessionists, so, too, do the spiritualists reiterate the beliefs of their audiences.

The last few works in which Davis skewers existing Protestant sectarianism and dismisses Calvinism altogether are *Dallas Galbraith* (1868), “The Doctor’s Wife” (1874), and “The Yares of Black Mountain” (1875). In these writings, Davis deals with westward expansion and East Coast regionalism, discarding various forms of Protestantism and exploring a more ecumenical model. The first work is a revisionist story, with Dallas Galbraith returning to the

small coastal town of Manasquan and reforming the mistaken villagers who misjudged him. Religious hypocrisy prevails in *Dallas Galbraith*. In this story about movement and identity, Davis examines subjectivity through the lens of religious affiliation. Davis frames this story within the context of her critique of Protestantism. The story opens in the almost utopian setting of the coastal Manasquan, “a curiously old-time, forgotten village” (Davis, *Dallas Galbraith* 6) that seems to have existed in a time warp until Dallas arrives, bringing with him the outside problems of the modern world. His past catches up with him, and now facing forgery charges in Manasquan, Dallas turns to the obscure “Father” Kimball, whose religious affiliation Davis does not name. His title sounds Anglican, but most likely he is a Baptist, given the religious leanings of the village.⁵⁸ Father Kimball’s advice to Galbraith reveals strong Calvinist undertones. He advises Galbraith to be patient and “trust in the Lord. He will deliver you if you are one of his children” (34). He later warns: “The Lord has it in his care. That is, if you are one of his children. Every hair of your head is numbered. But if you’ve never been converted, your good intentions and works are but as filthy rags, in His sight” (35). With this shaky promise of limited grace, Galbraith knows he is sunk, and eventually he lands in jail for the crime he did not commit. Manasquan’s religious practices offer little solace to the problems of the urban inner-city that accompany Dallas when he arrives in this village.

Davis’s religious scrutiny continues in the next major section of the novel when Dallas later journeys west to seek out his estranged Galbraith relatives who live in “a rigid Presbyterian community” in the Ohio Valley (Davis, *Dallas Galbraith* 40). Dallas arrives to find a household of mixed economic status and religious affiliation. His grandfather has little wealth and follows the practices of the Anglican Church, along with his adopted ward Honora (Nora) Dundas, who argues strongly in favor of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith (Davis 141).⁵⁹ His wealthy grandmother is a Presbyterian who practices social benevolence mainly as a means of exercising power over the community but has little use for the religious beliefs that inform the town. The

story is shaped by a series of encounters that highlight a clashing of faiths and the impact of such beliefs on the characters. Of the Galbraith household, we find out that Honora and her uncle (Mr. Galbraith) are:

Bigoted Episcopalians; [who] fasted rigorously, went to church through rain or snow, to the great spiritual satisfaction of Madam Galbraith, who, poor old heathen! Had not been there but once in two years, and then had scandalized the congregation by lecturing the rector, on the porch, about his drowsy sermon, until both she and he were in a passion. (89)

The major conflict between characters (and faiths) occurs, as in Manasquan, when Dallas arrives with his own particular burdens that challenge the beliefs of the isolated community. A disguised Dallas's arrival tests the Christian charity of his undisclosed relatives. Although his Galbraith identity is not known, he reveals his criminal past as he attempts to sell the artwork he painted while in jail. Viewing him as unclean, his family spurns him. They send him away with only a hesitant handshake by Honora and a delicate grasp of the hand of his grandfather, who perhaps has recognized him.

Dallas's arrival provides fodder for a discussion of theology between his Manasquan friend, Lizzy, now a housekeeper for the Galbraith family, and Honora, the young ward. Honora reveals the hypocrisy behind her seemingly generous act in shaking the hand of the criminal. She explains: "It is our duty as Christians to hold out a helping hand and speak encouraging words to that class of people, but to consort with them and make them companions!—It is to touch pitch and to be defiled" (106). Lizzy, the Baptist, argues back: "You forget your Master's work,' rising, 'He made friends of publicans and sinners'" (106). Honora disagrees with her believing her feminine purity itself is at risk: "That is a different matter. . . . He could not be tainted by contact, but a woman like me or you, Elizabeth, should keep herself pure and apart. The Church's ministers were left to preach His gospel" (106). The conflict between these two women is not one of belief so much as how those beliefs are practiced in culture. Both seem to recognize in the other a shared Christian sensibility, but Lizzy embodies the kind of

Christian socialism Davis would like to see practiced; however, much as she does with Quakerism, she represents Lizzy as belonging to an antiquated system. She selectively preserves Lizzy's sentimental beliefs by synthesizing them with modern culture and the empowered domestic female, Honora, who is not the New Woman but the True Woman of late nineteenth-century culture.

The other significant encounter where two faith systems collide occurs when Dallas becomes a geologist and he explains to Honora his system for deriving knowledge of the natural world. Dallas's association with the natural world positions him as an Adamic figure, which his encounter with Honora illustrates. She asks if he can read the history of the Creation written on the rocks as she would [read] in the Bible. He answers that he can read it "more plainly here than elsewhere" (86). It is not quite clear that he means "elsewhere" to be the Bible; he might perhaps mean compared to other geological formations, but the passage's obscurity undercuts Biblical authority in relation to the natural world, and it positions Dallas as a primitive romantic figure who is more comfortable out of doors than in. He distances himself from education and creed, feeling most at home among the elements. Dallas and Honora part ways although he will later strike it rich and take on the care of several orphan boys. In his fostering of these boys, he exhibits a highly personal theology. He practices a limited form of social benevolence, quickly deciding to provide for the material needs of the boys but entrusts their souls to the care of Mr. Rattlin, the self-described "Protestant" preacher. Planning to depart for the (further) West, Dallas says, "There are some children—three or four: I took them a year ago to try to make decent men and women of them. Baptist, Methodist or Catholic—they can settle that matter for themselves when they're older, but my plan was to give them a home: to let them see a mother in her home and hear of Christ" (169). Here, again we see a call for an ecumenical Christianity, but Dallas asks that it be administered on a farm, by the hands of this itinerant preacher who has reared several children of his own and whose education of the boys will be balanced with the

same model of domestic feminism Davis exhibits in her other fiction. Ironically, Dallas is willing to share his salary for the upkeep and education of the children but he himself is unwilling to administer hands-on service, in an odd echo of Honora's hands-off Christian benevolence. Now he may claim that his own hands are already tainted due to his past, but the point of the novel is that such social stigmas should be shed, so his failure to follow through on his personal commitment to these orphans is somewhat contradictory to the emerging Christology of Davis.

In fact, Davis presents Dallas as a kind of seeker who tries to locate a creed that exemplifies his own beliefs. Again and again, he decides that institutional religion imposes too much dogma that he cannot align with the Christ figure that exists in his own imagination. Later, Dallas tries to puzzle through his religious confusion with his grandfather. He says: "But here in Society, as you call it—Christian Society—a man is weighed and measured and marked, and, it seems to me, by narrow scales, sir, narrow scales. . . . And if he has made a slip in his youth . . . there is no hope for him. . . . There is no Christ among us now-a-days to look below the hard luck or below the guilt" (190-91). Dallas reasons his way through system after system, even one of pure social benevolence, a forerunner of the Social Gospel movement, but it is not until he finds a way to reconcile the natural world with his social one that he finds resolution that provides access to the supernatural. Not surprisingly, this cannot happen until he first finds domestic bliss with Honora. Dallas eventually has his epiphany as he walks through the woods at sunset:

For the first time, Dallas saw the order beneath the life of the larvae, of the snow that killed it, of the summer that called it into being. The old Jewish account of the creation had always been to him a child's fable beside the story written on the rocks. But to-day he seemed to catch a glimpse of an infinite truth that underlaid these gropings after God of the world's earlier days, as well as the clearer insight of later time—an eternal Right, of which the order and disorder of the world were but chance glimpses that came to us. (211)

Dallas's idea of theology is very similar to the Quaker creed and it is all about intuitive perception and direct communication with God, to a far greater extent than through the Bible as a source of Divine authority. Somewhat surprisingly, it is irrevocably linked to chance, allowing for a connection to Darwinism as well. Dallas's model is not a new theology; in fact, it is a reiteration of the Quaker "creed" adjusted to fit the modern notion of the self except that, unlike Dallas, the Quakers emphasized communal worship and coming together in a shared physical space. This revised model is not the solipsism of the transcendentalists either, although it does come close to that. Rather, this is a kind of union between inner and outer space, combining the scientific authority of geological observation, rural space, and interior contemplation. Unlike transcendentalism, which did not really require leaving the armchair, Dallas's theology requires a physical exterior space in which to "find" God.

Davis's religious solution in this story is not without its problems. He symbolizes an Adam-like innocence but he seeks a Christ-like humanism, and it is not clear how Davis intends to reconcile these two disparate representations. Although the young orphans, we are told, "learn, day by day, . . . an awful reverence for God, outside of all the creeds of the churches" (240), the reader is left without a working model explaining how, exactly, to achieve such a non-sectarian ideology. We identify the call for abstract empathy that is derived from material experience, but this remains undefined and hugely problematic as a working model because it is dependent on chance, as Davis herself points out.

So how does the realist reconcile the need for an abstract idealism that is dependent on the material circumstances surrounding one's fortunes? Davis presents realism itself as a kind of solution. She offers up the text as a conduit between the material and the abstract; nevertheless, one has to question the authority of the realist writer to serve as the navigator. Davis and Howells take great pains to defend their ability to go back and forth between North and South for the former and the West and the East for the latter. As each evaluates the institutional church,

each tries to promote a literary authority to shape cultural ethics. But we can also discern a foreshadowing of the problems each is going to encounter because divinity, religion, spirituality, and God cannot be appropriated in measurable ways if all social authority surrounding such concepts is removed; they become increasingly intangible. The argument simply relies on the reader's ability to intuit true spirituality infallibly as if such abstractions will become self-evident truths.

The complexity of Davis's intuitive model emerges in the next two stories in this set. In these texts, we see Davis anchor her emerging model of primitivism in two specific areas: the figure of Christ and the purity of unfettered belief. In the very brief account of Mrs. Dode in "The Doctor's Wife" (1874), Davis presents the perfect example of domestic felicity. Dr. Noyes's wife continues the pretext of her daily life even after she secretly finds out her illness is terminal. We are told:

Mrs. Dode did not change her habits in the least. She had never been a constant church-goer, nor a member of any charitable society, and she did not become one now. It was remembered afterwards that she remained out longer in the mornings on her rounds among the poor, and that she had a print which was in her chamber, re-hung, so that she could see it when she first woke in the morning. (It was the Head crowned with thorns)." (72)

Mrs. Dode's spirituality is so internal that it requires only one material reminder, and that is just a small print with the image of Jesus. Davis suggests that practical benevolence mimetically representing accounts of Jesus offers a relevant model for the age. She may imply that such knowledge of Jesus comes from the Gospels, but she does not state so directly. She substitutes a simple image for Biblical text.

In fact, Davis becomes increasingly obscure in her treatment of Biblical authority compared to her more distinct allusions of her earlier writing. In "The Yares of Black Mountain" (1875), Davis takes her reader on a journey deeper and deeper into Appalachia where the "strange tribe" of the Yare family lives deep in North Carolina. Their location is so remote that "civilization stops here" (Davis, "The Yares" 292). The Yares are so primitive, in fact, that

the mother has read “little beyond her cookery-book and her Bible” (Davis 301). The humorous juxtaposition of the Bible along a cookbook positions the scriptures strangely in the text. On the one hand, the Bible can be viewed as a symbol of faith so elemental that it accompanies the basic impulse for nutrition. On the other hand, she dismisses the Bible as having little more importance than a recipe book, again reminding us of Davis’s view that the Bible itself carries little inherent authority.

Once again in “The Yares of Black Mountain,” the reconciliation between the natural and the supernatural requires the open space to convene with God as suggested in *Dallas Galbraith*. The Yares’s only visitor, Mrs. Derby, our guide, finds her faith on Black Mountain. She reflects, “It was as if God had taken her into one of the secret places where He dwelt apart” (Davis 302). This seems like a small statement, but it is quite revelatory; the idea of God dwelling apart instead of among is more of a Calvinist perspective and Mrs. Derby is, in fact, a Northerner. In other stories, Davis has characters who believe the Son or the Savior lives beside them. She captures these small details that reflect varying religious beliefs. In this story, she once again unites disconnected experiences with spirituality and attempts a kind of synthesis. She certainly does not suggest that civilization can return to the primordial state of the isolated Yares; in fact, she shows that even the Yares could not escape the inevitability of the Civil War (304), but she tries to preserve the purity of a faith that has been allowed to exist without the institutional church to taint it.

Davis’s problems with specific sources of objective authority have obvious implications for the realist writer as well; if there is no certainty in traditional authority such as scripture and human beings are not reliable conduits between the natural and the spiritual world, she needs some type of reliable vehicle for illustrating her ideology. She begins to examine truth as an internal process, but she continues to justify this process using a religious rhetoric. She continues to employ her realism as a means of exposing the truth, as she sees it, but she will

make one more classic liberal Protestant turn; she turns to the figure of Jesus, both Divine and human, as a bridge between the human condition and the supernatural world. Richard Fox writes: “The malleable figure of Jesus helped American Protestants of all stripes move into the modern era together” (*Jesus in America* 156). Davis’s critique of existing Protestant practices allows her to employ the Jesus figure as part of her primitivism. We can see that first she rejects existing creeds and dogma, but she still needs a way to reconcile conscience with action and this problem emerges again and again in her writing. She never offers a model that successfully resolves this problem.

It is in her later fiction that Davis begins to strengthen the domestic female figure as a benevolent social force by showing how such women can achieve a purity of divine discernment. Davis herself never seems quite clear on what she believes about salvation: is it individual or is it collective? What is the model that allows us to know? Early in her social reform works she seemed to be moving in one direction but here we see her pulling back from collective social consciousness as well by suggesting that none of us can really know with certainty what is best for others. The key phrase here is knowledge with certainty; realism tries to operate as practice that allows certainty even in small doses, but by the end of the nineteenth century the notion of certainty itself comes into question again.

As religious thinkers were seeking to balance democratic principles of subjectivity and collectivity while still adhering to a “united we stand, divided we fall” principle, popular literature responded with a similar aesthetic of trying to negotiate the privileging of individual development with a sense of collective strength and unity. Within fiction, different scenarios are elaborated, challenging readers to think about the idea of social responsibility, initially in relation to the idea of salvation but later in regard to material culture and secular life. Realism, particularly, is concerned with this idea of how collective identity works, and in this way, its anti-conventional pose signals a shift away from romantic and sentimental tropes found in earlier

fiction. These latter two styles tend to focus on subjectivity, imagined alternately as either an expression or suppression of individual egoism. Broadly speaking, while romantic literature examines the role of the individual in relation to nature and sentimental literature suppresses the self in the greater interest of the salvation of the soul, realist literature focuses on how society constructs the individual. It begins to ask its readers to make sociological changes in order to remove obstacles from an increasingly valued conception of selfhood, but this is a new notion of self-awareness that exists in relation to a larger collectivity comprising other “selves.” Therein lies the inherent paradox of realism, which asks for both subjective and collective identity to be given equal weight: the self cannot find fulfillment unless society enables it to do so. Even more specifically, realist writers such as Davis begin to challenge modes of collective identity by asking for an acknowledgement that collectivity often subsumes subjectivity and forces people into static positions; African Americans are subjugated to a position below Caucasians to the extent that even the elimination of the institution of slavery cannot remove that barrier. Realist writers begin to reflect on the idea that these larger categorizations are bound by artificial social constructs, and thus, within realism, we see a challenge to cultural stereotypes, testing their truthfulness to allow civilization to make progress.

Ultimately, with the backlash of fundamentalism and the rise of psychology by the end of the century, materialist realism begins to lose its claim to authority. Naturalism, a literary form that pairs romanticism with atavism and devolution, emerges more strongly along with the onset of modernism, with its emphasis on subjective realities that are dependent on individual perception rather than observable phenomena. But I am getting ahead of myself by focusing on endings rather than beginnings, and Davis’s work is seminal in the pairing of religion and realism. What we must take away from this example is the idea that the Quakers offer a compromise for Davis that allows her to combine an abstract notion of intuitive Christian spirituality with a strong cultural reform vision that can be observed and explicated and rewritten

into a new theology. In her writing, we see similarities to Marxism and Social Darwinism and an emerging Social Gospel ideology through a close examination of the Quaker subject. Understanding where Davis stands in the development of realism as a literary aesthetic will undoubtedly change the way we think of realist writing. She was clearly writing in response to her religious environment, and she was seeking a mode of writing that would address the problems and concerns of the modern world in a way that existing tropes did not allow. Davis's work was tremendously influential, particularly with her groundbreaking 1861 *Atlantic* story "Life in the Iron-Mills" which introduced not only a new kind of subject to the literary world but a new style of writing about that subject. Once we identify the underlying religious rhetoric and philosophical ideologies prompting Davis to respond by developing her own realist aesthetic, we can then begin to contemplate subsequent realist writers within this same type of discourse. My focus has been mainly on Protestantism because that was Davis's focus, but this kind of engagement with the religious subject presumably pervades realism in a much more encompassing manner. This is an area of influence that has been very much overlooked, particularly in regard to realism. Davis was far from alone in her concern about the relationship of religion and culture in regard to ethics; we will see how William Dean Howells was tremendously absorbed in a similar examination. Both Davis and Howells were ambivalent about which aspects of religion they wished to honor and acknowledge and which they wished to criticize. Literary realism allowed them to examine these dynamics in a way that each deemed very modern.

Notes

²¹ For a socio-economic history of the Moravians, see Katherine Carté Engel, *Religion and Profit: Moravians in Early America* (Philadelphia, U of Penn P, 2009).

²² It is difficult to offer an all-encompassing definition of Liberal Protestantism, since this is an aesthetic that can occur within any denomination of Protestantism, but it is a general trend away from doctrine and toward a socially-conscious organized faith. In general, the rhetoric includes a progressive historical model, suggesting that each new age requires a new faith or at least a new set of parameters for practicing that faith. The figure of Jesus may be viewed as divine, human, or both, but the spiritual foundation of Liberal Protestantism turns to the ethical example

of Jesus and attempts to translate those ethics for the current age. The common catchphrase signaling Liberal Protestantism is WWJD? (What Would Jesus Do?).

²³ For example Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822), Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862), a contemporary and competing discourse.

²⁴ "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou are with me" (Davis, "John Lamar" 52).

²⁵ Not insignificantly, Mott is a Philadelphia Quaker of New England birth, representing a blended identity that would have appealed to Davis. Davis calls her, "one of the most remarkable woman that this country has ever produced. . . . [M]uch of her power came from the fact that she was one of the most womanly of women. She had pity and tenderness enough in her heart for the mother of mankind" ("A Peculiar People" 111-112).

²⁶ "The most impressive development of the doctrine of the inner light was provided by a Scottish Quaker theologian named Robert Barclay. His *Apology*, published in English in 1678, makes the case for the inner light against any external authority, including the Bible" (Wentz 80).

²⁷ It is important to interject here a reminder that Davis's preference for Quaker theology carries with it a hermeneutical approach that she will have to work out in her realist text. The Bible alone approach is one model of primitivism that stands in opposition to Davis's model of Quaker primitivism, which is explained below, but this notion by itself does not restrict whether the Bible must be read literally or interpreted anew by each generation of a changing culture. Davis's preference for the Quaker's intuitive model suggests not only that she was interested in *interpretive* hermeneutics of scripture, as opposed to the literal hermeneutics posited by most Calvinist creeds at this time, but also that her intuitive model is specifically a rejection of *sola scriptura* although it should not be taken necessarily as a rejection of the Bible itself.

²⁸ In *Waiting for the Verdict*, Friend Blanchard vicariously enjoys Rosslyn Burley's vanity: "The Old Quaker's carnal nature had rebelled against her own brown and gray clothes all her life, and it took a vicious delight, now, in Ross's fresh, high-tinted beauty and dress" (Davis 162). The nineteenth-century derision for Quaker garb, which Davis elsewhere labels as "drab-hued [and] phlegmatic" ("A Glimpse of Philadelphia" 30) and equated with leading a "drab-colored life" ("A Glimpse" 33), can also be found in Hallowell's history of New England Quakers. He writes: "The Quaker garb and directness of speech, once grand protests against extravagance in dress and the flattery bestowed upon wealth and rank, lost their original significance; and the broad-brimmed hat, the peculiar bonnet, the thou and thee, became the sectarian badge, and too often indicated the bigotry of the children in their worship of the fathers" (22).

²⁹ Richard Hallowell explains: "This doctrine of Inward Light was the corner-stone of Quakerism. It inflicted a mortal wound on priestcraft. If God dwells in the soul of man, he is a usurper who dares to assume to be man's spiritual guide. A mere scholastic education cannot qualify man for the true ministry. As religion is from God, only such as are inspired by him can teach religion. Church tithes, an ordained and paid ministry, were abominations in the sight of Fox. He found the kingdom of heaven within him" (19).

³⁰ See, for example, Davis's description of Dode Scofield's Christology: "He was a living Jesus to her, not a dead one. That was why she had a healthy soul" ("David Gaunt" 68-69).

³¹ Richard Fox traces the history of the WWJD movement back to Charles Sheldon's 1896 *In His Steps (Jesus in America* 279), and he cites several instances illustrating the pervasiveness of this rhetoric today.

³² Paul Gutjahr points out that the nineteenth century embraced an increasingly blurred boundary between sacred and secular texts. He offers the plethora of religious biographies written during this period as evidence of such blurred boundaries, and he adds: "Joseph Smith Jr.'s *The Book of Mormon* was perhaps the most audacious rendering of Christ's life to appear in the nineteenth century. It followed the tradition of [Paul] Wright's [*The New and Complete Life of Our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*]—blurring the sacred and common through rhetorical, binding, and illustrative practices" (151). Wright's book was first published in 1785 and first available in America in 1803 (Gutjahr 150).

³³ See Matthew 7:5 and Luke 6:42. Both Gospels offer nearly identical verbiage for this passage.

³⁴ Davis is non-specific and yet almost accusatory in her subtle allusion to the New Testament passages 1 Cor. 13:1 and 1 Cor. 14:2; her words imply the complicity of religion in capitalistic oppression of the poor laboring class.

³⁵ According to Wentz, the “Disciples of Christ” was formed by both Alexander Campbell and his father Thomas Campbell (215), but Wentz does say that it was Alexander “who became the more articulate architect of the movement” (215).

³⁶ Lasseter writes: “Davis’s mother had lived, as a child, in Campbell’s home as a paying pupil in the school he taught there. Campbell lived in northern Virginia (not yet West Virginia) as [Rebecca Harding] Davis did; he also lived in Washington, Pennsylvania, where she attended female Seminary” (“The Censored” 181).

³⁷ See, for example, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *A New England Tale, or, Sketches of New England Character and Manners* (1822; New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

³⁸ This episode can arguably even be read as Quaker mysticism.

³⁹ Harris reads the dream sequence as “Davis’s recurrent symbol for transcendentalism” (111), and Hetty’s Concord upbringing certainly lends credence to that interpretation. The dream-like mysticism of transcendentalism shares common ground with the mysticism of oriental fiction, so these readings are not mutually exclusive. Additionally, Swedenborgian mysticism is another cultural force at work within transcendentalism. The main point to understand in this passage is the privileging of intuition over objective experience.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Stowe’s feminist hermeneutics in both *Women in Sacred History*(1873) and *Footsteps of the Master*, see Eileen Razzari Elrod, “‘Exactly like My Father’: Feminist Hermeneutics in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Non-Fiction,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63.4 (1995): 695-719.

⁴¹ *Margret Howth* was first published as “A Story of Today” in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Oct.-Dec. 1861), but the edition I am citing is based on the 1862 Ticknor and Fields publication.

⁴² This list is not comprehensive relative to the general subject of religion. For example, in *A Law Unto Herself* (1877), Davis includes a critique of various forms of institutional Christian charity. The list of works I have included in this project are limited to those that reveal something about religion in relation to Davis’s realist aesthetic.

⁴³ Du Bois defines this term in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (quoted in Vincent Leitch, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001) 298.

⁴⁴ See Bucke 39 and also Russell Richey and Kenneth Rowe, eds., *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1985). (Note: a conference publication.)

⁴⁵ Davis seems to be alluding to Psalm 23:4 in Dode’s walk down the dark, deserted road.

⁴⁶ See Bowron 269.

⁴⁷ Scofield’s poor grammar and spelling is indicative of a typical Methodist on American soil, both the congregants and the preachers (Bucke 305). Methodism was spread by itinerant preachers like Gaunt, of whom little education and no formal training was required. All that was required was the willingness to share the Good News of the Gospels. In fact, this was one of Palmer’s criticisms of Gaunt: “Douglas Palmer used to say that all Gaunt needed to make him a sound Christian was education and fresh meat” (Davis 62). Scofield’s inscription represents his marginal literacy presumably developed solely for the purpose of being able to read the Bible.

⁴⁸ Novalis is the pseudonym for Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Harenbery (1772-1801), a German Romantic philosopher who studied the writings of Johann Fichte (1762-1814), another German Romantic philosopher.

⁴⁹ There is some scholarly disagreement as to the philosophical foundations of both Stephen Holmes and Dr. Knowles. Jean Fagan Yellin writes: “In Stephen Holmes, Harding dramatizes the debasement of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance. Holmes attempts to practice the ideas about self-development voiced by the German

philosopher Fichte. But Holmes lacks not abstract liberty, but concrete cash” (281). Elsewhere, Jean Pfaelzer attributes the same philosophical underpinnings to Knowles: “Knowles is a follower of the French utopian socialists Fourier (1772-1827) and Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and of the German romantic and founder of ‘absolute idealism,’ Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), whose works Davis probably read with her brother, Wilson, a student of European romanticism” (*Parlor Radical* 67). Sharon Harris cites a direct quotation from Davis in which she refers to Holmes’s character as “the development in common vulgar life of the Fichtian philosophy and its effects on the self-made man, as I view it” (Harris 62, quoted from James T. Fields, *Yesterdays with Authors*, New York AMS, 1970).

⁵⁰ In *The Blithedale Romance*, Hollingsworth makes a nearly identical appeal to Coverdale: “It offers you (what you have told me, over and over again, that you most need) a purpose in life, worthy of the extremist self-devotion,—worthy of martyrdom, should God so order it! In this view, I present it to you. You can greatly benefit mankind. Your peculiar faculties, as I shall direct them, are capable of being so wrought in this enterprise that not one of them need lie idle” (Hawthorne 84).

⁵¹ Not only was slavery a divisive issue in the history of the Methodist church, but Abolition and Reconstruction affected church splintering as well. Their history includes the formation of Methodist congregations aimed at black membership, with black leadership. Bucke writes: “The cultural and social importance of the independent Negro churches is not always understood. The creation of these churches was one of the most important consequences of emancipation and Reconstruction. A contemporary historian writes: ‘It meant religious freedom for the blacks for the first time in their history and opened up to Negro leadership at least one field of social endeavor. To this day not even the most reactionary Southern white challenges the right of the Negro to determine his own religious concepts’” (Bucke 287). (The historian quoted is Francis Butler Simkins, *A History of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959) 307.)

⁵² There are several sources available discussing the editorial and print history of this story. See, for example, Paelzer, *Parlor Radical* 54-75 and Yellin 286-94 and Harris 61-71.

⁵³ There is nothing in the text itself directly stating that this is the same character in both stories. Once again, scholars offer differing interpretations; Sharon Harris identifies “The Harmonists” character as “Dr. Knowles, who first appeared in *Margret Howth* [and who] reappears in “The Harmonists;” it is the communist ideology of Knowles with which Davis is now concerned” (129). Pfaelzer identifies Knowles as merely “the namesake of the utopian socialist in *Margret Howth*” (*Parlor Radical* 128). The geographical setting of the two stories suggests that this is the same character because, like Knowles, the Rappites moved from Indiana to Pennsylvania. The Rappites first settled in Pennsylvania from 1804-1814, and then profited by selling their land to Mennonites. They next re-settled in Indiana from 1814-1824, naming both of these communities “Harmony.” Finally, the Rappites returned to Pennsylvania from 1824, remaining there until they formally dissolved in 1906, naming this last settlement “Economy,” the name of the town depicted in “The Harmonists.” *Margret Howth* is set in Indiana which strongly suggests Davis was purposefully establishing continuity between the two texts by drawing on the geographic history of the Rappites.

⁵⁴ Christina might be referring to either 2 Samuel 22:3 or Ephesians 6:16. Both passages refer to faith as a shield to overcome evil and achieve salvation.

⁵⁵ “I argue that American realism was an ‘establishment’ form due to its promotion by *Atlantic-group* magazines” (Glazener 11).

⁵⁶ Pfaelzer explains: “Always a precise historian, Davis places the story in a time ‘nearly a century ago’ when the system of indentured servitude enjoyed a brief rebirth in Pennsylvania. Large landholders who owned slaves become [sic] desperate for cheap labor when they were forced to comply with Pennsylvania’s Gradual Abolition Act of 1780, the first antislavery statute in the United States” (*Parlor Radical* 136).

⁵⁷ The rape incident is implied rather than stated. When Hubbard and Petrelli visit Christine, she is in a “half-idiotic” state, showing fear of her kidnapper Jan Velt, and she casts her eyes downward on her soiled and foul linen, expressing her shame (Davis, “The Story of Christine” 192).

⁵⁸ The only real clue to Father Kimball’s affiliation is that Lizzy, Dallas’s only friend in Manasquan, is later revealed to be a Baptist, but this is not revealed until Chapter VII. Given the care Davis has taken to depict Manasquan as exhibiting a closed system of religious practice, it seems likely that father Kimball must be a Baptist as well.

⁵⁹ Established in 1563, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith contain the creed of the Church of England.

CHAPTER 3: WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AS WRITER AND CRITIC OF AMERICAN LITERARY REALISM

William Dean Howells is arguably the most significant arbiter of American literary realism. For Howells, realism was something more than an artistic form; it was a cross between social science and literary endeavor. Howells believed that to be of value, literature had to be useful and to be of use, literature had to be real. By real, Howells meant that the representational world of the text had to mirror the anterior world outside of the text, and that the representation of characters, landscapes, ethics, and moral dilemmas had to appear observable to the reader. Howells believed mimetic representation offered the reader a model for examining a text in relation to practical experience or existential value, and, in particular, he relied on the religious subject in order to allegorize and demonstrate matters of social justice. Howells uses this use-value of the text to make a hierarchical distinction between mere entertaining fiction and lofty illuminating literature (*Editor's Study* 74). He frequently contrasted his realist ideology with early nineteenth-century sentimental literature or what he termed romanticist literature, and it was against that earlier form of writing that he was reacting as he struggled to construct new literary forms that were meaningful and significant in his contemporary world. Literature itself becomes a component of a formula for the development of a system of cultural ethics and, in his early career, he even suggests that literature might replace sermonic discourse in the formation of such ethics. Additionally, for Howells, literature is necessarily political because he himself frequently makes symbiotic connections between ethics, religion, and democracy in his fiction.

Howells approaches the religious subject in a variety of ways. He depicts several symbolic figures of ministers such as Reverend Sewell in *The Minister's Charge; or, the Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker* or the unnamed minister in *A Traveler from Altruria*, who seem to reflect his own disillusionment with how institutional religion had come to be practiced

after the Civil War. He implicates these figures for being out of touch with the changing moral and ethical dilemmas that the modern age imposes, such as a bifurcated class system and the creation of a wealthy, urban elite who lack the education and moral foundation to maintain the independence and equality that the postbellum years promised. He also includes characters that are associated with particular denominations and sects as he scrutinizes what various creeds have to offer in a rapidly changing capitalist economy. In particular, Howells begins to question the role of the self and the role of society in identity-formation and in the development of a social conscience, and he examines the role of the institutional church in relation to moral behavior. He offers a key word, “complicity,” as a synthesis of internal and external identity in which the needs of the individual and the needs of society as a whole can begin to merge. Howells suggests that different degrees of self-awareness affect our understanding of a text, and his aim seems to be to allegorize collective society in the figure of the self such that duty is understood in terms of desire.

The complicity theme pervades his writing, and it is a key component to understanding Howells’s incorporation of different philosophies into his social model. In his approach to literature Howells offers examples of Swedenborgian views of the use-value of the text, and he later begins to examine utopian scenarios of how different solutions, including socialism, might be practiced. Whether we view Howells’s writing in terms of reflection or projection of the anterior world, his reliance on allegory remains a link for him to render abstract notions of social justice into an empirical model for his reader. Through his use of religious allegory in particular, we can identify important literary influences such as Matthew Arnold and Heinrich Heine. In his later fiction, he even begins to examine how society itself constructs cultural institutions as his texts begin to explore the psychological workings of the human mind. In order to understand Howells as an advocate of realism, it is useful to examine how the religious subject informs his model for the synthesis of self, culture, and society.

It should be clear that Howells was by no means single-minded in his approach to fiction despite his widely acknowledged advocacy of realism. In fact, over his long and prodigious career, Howells experimented often with form, scope, and topic. Although some scholars try to designate Howells as emblematic of a nineteenth-century middle-class hegemony that has come to be associated with realism, he is, in fact, quite difficult to categorize due to his propensity to embrace literary and social change throughout his long career.⁶⁰ Howells began his career as a poet, became a biographer and playwright, worked as an editor, publisher, and critic, and emerged finally as a fiction writer, experimenting with both the novel and the short story form. From his Midwest upbringing to his Boston relocation, Howells himself represented the land-to-big-city movement that he portrayed in *The Minister's Charge; or, The Apprenticeship of Lemuel Barker* (1887). Lemuel Barker, like the Dryfoos sisters in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), is a rural transplant who resists being essentialized by the urban elite into a socially-inferior rural joke. These characters, Lemuel Barker and Christine Dryfoos, perplex their more polished benefactors, the minister Sewell and the artist Beaton, because they do not act in the manner they are expected to, and they refuse to see themselves the way others wish to see them.⁶¹

Howells includes some key scenes in these texts that point to disparities between how various social classes categorize each other by misleading signifiers of social and economic standing. For example, in contemplating Christine's debut at a New York society event in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Beaton marvels at her aplomb and her complacency about her relative social position. Howells writes: "[T]he girl's attitude under the social honor done her interested him. He was sure she had never been in such good company before, but he could see that she was not the least affected by the experience [S]he seemed to feel her equality with them all" (*A Hazard of New Fortunes* 235). Beaton is struck by the realization that it is not solely Christine's wealth but rather her view of herself allows her to overcome what, to him, should be a social disadvantage, and he begins to see the flimsiness of social stasis when subjectivity is

brought into play. Howells dwells repeatedly on the act of outward seeing juxtaposed against ironic self-knowledge, satirizing the tendency of individuals to fictionalize and romanticize the surrounding anterior world. By doing so, Howells emphasizes that the realist approach is itself an act of seeing and fictionalizing an elusive subject, and thus he establishes early on his awareness of the tension between materialist symbolism and an intangible subjectivity that resists neat categorization. Howells develops this tension even more pronouncedly in his presentation of religion, adding a key paradox to the limits of realist materialism that many critics ignore: an abstract concept lurks beneath the allegorical textual representation. This abstraction seems to demand some type of social value be assigned to it along with its mimetic representation in the same way that, for Howells, one type of fiction has a higher “value” than another such that the genre of the text corresponds to that notion of its worth. In the case of religion, Howells tries to ascertain the underlying question of value by looking at the role institutional religion plays in the formation of social ethics. He tries to locate the use-value of religious habits just as he evaluates the use-value of fiction.

Howells is a complicated figure to dissect in relation to his own religious background. He represents an amalgamation of both conservative and liberal Protestant ideologies. Scholars persist in assigning Howells a fairly static middle-class social identity perhaps because of his influential power as an editor and critic, but such an assignation overlooks the many fluctuations in Howells’s life and career that make him difficult to categorize. Born in Ohio, he was largely self-educated, he lived in Europe during the Civil War, and he taught himself several languages, including Spanish, Italian, German, Russian, and French. Between 1865 and 1881, Howells moved at least four times to different locations in New York and Cambridge, MA. By the time Howells turned from editing to fiction-writing as his primary career in 1881, he was almost perpetually on the move, a “traveler,” to borrow a Howellsian term. In spite of a narrow tendency on the part of critics to label Howells as a middle-class writer and critic with limited

access to the world beyond New England limits, Howells was somewhat amorphous in his social and economic standing throughout his life, and he maintained long-term relationships and correspondences with not only his family but with generations of writers whose careers he helped to establish. He was a complex character living in a complex age where social boundaries were ever-changing, particularly as vast fortunes were made and lost. He often examines the fluidity of modern society as a thematic concern in his fiction, and this same fluidity emerges in his inclusion of religion in his fiction.

Although most widely identified as a realist, in his later career Howells also wrote utopian fiction in his three *Altrurian Romances* (1894-1908) and even a work of historical fiction, *The Leatherwood God* (1916). He was eager to tackle contemporary social and ethical dilemmas, which he believed to be unique to the industrial age, writing about issues ranging from divorce in *A Modern Instance* (1882) to labor union disputes in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), and he considered the direction of social change and social values in relation to those dilemmas. He wrote about religious movements as varied as Shakerism in *The Undiscovered Country* (1880), *A Parting and a Meeting* (1896), *The Day of Their Wedding* (1896) and *The Vacation of the Kelwyns* (1920) and Methodism in *The Leatherwood God*, and even a fictional religious sect, the Rixonites, in “A Difficult Case” (1900). Howells’s topics include social concerns such as marriage, inner-city living conditions, economically-declining rural landscapes, poverty, and even paranormal experiences in his *Turkish Room Tales* (1901-16). Realism as a literary form is closely aligned with empiricism and the social and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century. Howells’s preoccupation with religion and spirituality indicates that for him, realist writing was not bound to the terrestrial world, but rather it involved a symbiotic relationship between things that can be experienced and knowledge that can only be intuited.

As a representative of the social and geographic mobility that marked the American cultural movements during the nineteenth century, William Dean Howells also stands at a unique

cross-section of changing religious experiences and beliefs. In his literature, he frequently contemplates specific aspects of the American religious landscape, allowing his readers to examine the interplay between religion and realism in regard to social ethics in the realist text. Most particularly, Howells appears to advance a doctrine of ethical determinism that relies on an ideology of individual conscience and self-knowledge for a sense of moral rightness and wrongness. At the same time, he frequently addresses the risk implicit in elevating the importance of the individual above the needs of social collectivity. Even while he tries to advance an argument for common sense reasoning combined with intuitive conscience, he simultaneously offers a view that social duty requires a form of altruism that necessarily requires self-sacrifice. He expects his readers to deduce that individual happiness can never be obtained if society is harmed by selfish action. To comprehend fully the tension that marks Howells's ambivalence about the role religion plays in this dualistic model of ethics, we must examine a few of his trademark philosophical notions.

Specifically, Howells elaborates on philosophy of a collective social ethics that can be best summed up with one word: complicity. Complicity to Howells meant that all classes of society are inextricably connected, and that the fate that affects any class befalls them all. This is a progressive model of civilization in which humankind can self-consciously determine its own advancement. In the *Editor's Study* (February, 1886), he writes: "no class of Americans is to be polished alone, but that we are all bound together, high and low, for barbarism or civilization" (7). Howells scholar Paul Petrie elaborates on the idea of Howellsian complicity as being a largely unconscious state. Petrie writes: "Howells developed the idea of 'complicity' to express the inescapable idea of ethical interdependence, which in [Howells's] view binds all people to each other through webs of influence of which they remain largely ignorant" (xvii). Petrie's distinction about the general obliviousness of social bonds suggests that Howells's realist aim is to draw attention to the interconnectedness of all social beings, why is why, for Howells,

literature itself has what Petrie terms a “social-ethical duty” (2). The ethical responsibility of literature (as opposed to the entertainment value of fiction) is a concept that Howells discusses at length in *The Editor’s Study*. For example, in April, 1887, he writes: “[W]e cannot conceive of a literary self-respect in these days compatible with the old trade of make-believe, with the production of the kind of fiction which is too much honored by classification with card-playing and horse-racing” (75). The social responsibility of the writer is an important concept that I will return to again in a discussion of Howells’s Swedenborgian upbringing. The idea of the use-value of artistic creation is one that can be directly traced to Swedenborg’s philosophical writings, revealing yet another point of intersection between religion and realism for Howells.

Howells returns to the notion of complicity repeatedly in his fiction, and he speculates on the effect that a failure to acknowledge mutual dependence might portend. For example, the nearly identical speeches of the Reverend Sewell in *The Minister’s Charge* and the attorney Eustace Atherton in *A Modern Instance* expand on the subject of complicity, particularly in relation to a democratic society. Sewell states the basic premise of complicity: “No man . . . sinned or suffered to himself alone; his error and his pain darkened and afflicted men who had never heard of his name” (*The Minister’s Charge* 309). Sewell’s speech is a repetition of Howells’s earlier 1886 *Editor’s Study* claim, but in his fiction, Howells moves from discussing class or social effects of interconnectedness to an explicitly religious language involving sin and, implicitly, salvation drawing on sermonic discourse. Like Sewell, Atherton states the view that complicity is connected not only to democratic values but in fact to Christian values: “‘We’re all bound together. No one sins or suffers to himself in a civilized state, or religious state—it’s the same thing. Every link in the chain feels the effects of the violence more or less intimately. We rise and fall together in Christian society’” (Howells, *A Modern Instance* 418). In his use of the web or chain metaphor, Howells appears to be using the terms democratic and Christian interchangeably, revealing an undercurrent of exceptionalism in American culture in which the

American political ideology is divinely sanctioned. For Howells then, a successful democracy equals an application of what he terms “Christian values,” and he appears to be seeking a synthesis of these ideologies so that moral laws can be abstracted from Judeo-Christian principles in a manner that is fluid rather than fixed in American culture although he never states specifically how this might occur. Ultimately, Howells begins to question if the problems within democracy that he observes can be attributed to failings in Christian values as they are practiced in late nineteenth-century America. In this way, Howells constructs a positivist examination of the religious subject in order to evaluate the utility of modern religious practices.

Many scholars have noticed the close connection between Howells’s social model, his religious rhetoric, and the way in which he relies on Christianity to exemplify a system of “civilized” behavior. For example, Michael Anesko notes the presence of the term complicity in what he calls Howells’s novelistic vocabulary, and he correlates the importance of this term with Howells’s presentation of a system of social ethics in which the act of writing serves to elevate the altruistic values that Howells associates with civilization. Complicity, Anesko notes, is “not merely sociological but theological in its overtones” (*Letters, Fictions, Lives* 196). Anesko dedicates an entire chapter to documenting the thematic prominence of the term “complicity” in Howells’s fiction, citing works such as *The Minister’s Charge* (1887), *April Hopes* (1888), *Annie Kilburn* (1889), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Unfortunately, Anesko does not elaborate on Howells’s use of complicity as a theological concept—he merely acknowledges it—and this is an association that bears further consideration. Howells’s connection between sociology and theology is truly at the center of any discussion of religion and realism in his writing because this intersection challenges his materialist mission as a realist writer. It would be an oversimplification to accept the idea of complicity as standing in for the term religion in Howells’s texts, but it certainly bears further scrutiny in light of the way Howells represents the metaphysical value of spirituality in relation to his collective ideal of identity. He promotes

complicity in terms of sin and salvation suggesting that society equals an enactment of the “kingdom of heaven on earth.” For Howells, then, a progressive society must work toward mimetically modeling itself on the concept of an afterlife. For the agnostic Howells, this notion is somewhat paradoxical, but he clearly is willing to draw on scriptural rhetoric in order to “convert” his readers to the importance of his socio-ethical model.

Howellsian complicity reveals a key paradox in his realist philosophy because his insistent insertion of this concept points to the discrepancy between the act of seeing and the act of imagining the anterior world. In fact, Howells repeats his the mantra of complicity so often that it begins to present an interesting dilemma for Howells’s realist aim, which he claims is to reflect society, or specifically, “to portray men and women as they actually are, actuated by the motives and the passions in the measure we all know” (*Editor’s Study* 81). As Howells continues to represent not what he observes but what he would like his reader to believe, he faces the inherent challenge of any realist writer; is the goal to mirror the anterior world and stimulate social change or is the mission to construct the social world that one would like to see? And is the latter utopian construction truly distinct from the “make-believe” that Howells criticizes in romanticism (75)? The dilemma between reflective and utopian representation emerges continually in Howells’s literature to such an extent that it is not easy to discern whether his aim is critical scrutiny or a prescriptive remodeling of American democracy. Even more interestingly, Howells frequently locates this realist conundrum in tandem with the religious subject, suggesting that religious values exist at the very least in an important peripheral role even as society changes. In other words, for Howells, the religious subject allows for some type of resolution between the act of seeing and the act of imagining because the manner in which religion operates relies on the same type of allegorical representation that realism requires of its reader. For this reason, the religious figures in Howells’s texts reflect American cultural ethics

even as he indicts them for not advancing social change in a manner beneficial to all classes of society.

Howells seeks a kind of sociological conversion similar to the spiritual conversion that religious allegory commands. Clearly, he believes that the realist text can succeed where modern religious culture falls short. In order to establish how he attributes a limited social value to figures of religious authority, one only has to recall the Greek chorus of side-lined religious figures that are ever-present in Howellsian fiction. These include characters such as David Sewell in both *The Minister's Charge* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), who lectures on complicity and needless romantic self-sacrifice yet frustratingly finds himself unable to effect the kind of social change he would like to see because he is frustrated at every turn by his lack of understanding of his rural acquaintances. He cannot overcome his own subjectivity. Sewell's position as a minister allows him to move among the lower classes, yet he is unable to shed his preconceived notions of how these individuals think and act because he views them as static fixtures. Lemuel Barker, for example, is described as a "granite boulder [sic]" from Willoughby Pastures (*The Minister's Charge* 98). Another such stymied minister is Julius W. Peck in *Annie Kilburn* (1889), a flawed example of new light "Orthodoxy," which is Howells's term for either Congregationalism or Presbyterianism.⁶² In offering advice to the Unitarian Annie Kilburn, Peck criticizes the town's benevolent Social Union project for its socially-exclusive premise that assumes the town's upper class citizens know what is best for the town's economically deprived (683). Peck finds himself at an ideological crossroads, unable to act as he identifies class struggles because he remains unable to imagine an effective way to cross social barriers. Peck's flaw is his inability to forge a relationship between the political and the personal. Every solution he practices seems to do more harm than good, alienating him from his congregation. Howells satirizes Peck's political concerns by emphasizing his private neglect of the well-being of his own daughter, Idella, showing him to be ideologically out of sync with the enactment of his

beliefs. Given Howells's own struggles with his anorectic daughter Winny, one cannot help but wonder if such a criticism isn't self-reproachful.

Howells's critique of religious leaders is not limited to those belonging solely to the so-called Orthodox sect. Other figures include purposefully vague individuals who are harder to classify, such as Clarence Ewert, the "Rixonite" minister in "A Difficult Case" (1900) who struggles to explain immortality to atheist Ransom Hilbrook and exhausts his own spirit in the process, and the even vaguer unnamed minister in *A Traveller from Altruria*, who reclines on the front porch of the New Hampshire resort along with the equally vague and unnamed banker, lawyer, professor, doctor, and manufacturer. When challenged by the Altrurian traveler about the exclusivity of his church, the minister uneasily admits that although he wishes there were more brotherliness between the rich and poor, there are no working class people in his congregation (*A Traveller from Altruria* 126). His is a congregation that depends on the financial support of its members. It is clear that Howells links social ethics to religious values in his construction of the anterior world and to economics as well, and he returns to this pairing of religion and realism again and again in his writing. While eager to engage religious figures in his sociological considerations, Howells presents these figures as stymied by differences between ideology and action, unable to serve as conduits between differing social classes when they are financially dependent on the benevolence of the wealthier classes, and thus the religious world takes on the values of late-nineteenth-century capitalism while the church itself perpetuates class division. Howells's view of complicity, always so closely aligned with these religious leaders, is his term for a metaphysical concept of divine justice that he never fully reconciles with materiality in regard to religious belief or practice. For Howells, complicity exists yet it is largely unseen. To address complicity in his fiction means that Howells tries both to mirror and to construct this concept textually by directing his reader's gaze at a value he believes is already present but simply unacknowledged.

In an analysis of American realism, Phillip Barrish suggests that realist writing had the aim of directing attention at marginalized groups in particular although he contends that Howells proffered “realist taste as a way for *some* middle- and upper-class readers to claim cultural superiority over *other* middle- and upper-class readers” (17). Barrish makes a complicated claim; on the one hand, regardless of whether or not we can truly accept Howells as emblematic of an arguably amorphous “middle class,” Barrish views Howells and other realist writers as reinforcing hegemony by using their realist claims as a means to establish cultural authority for their social views. At the same time, the premise of this claim to cultural authority rests specifically on directing attention to the shared fate of lower social classes such as the rural and working classes. In fact, Barrish specifically employs the realist lingo of directing the gaze when he writes: “As a genre, realist writing strove to move the overlooked into mainstream view” (10). If one accepts Phillip Barrish’s assertion that realism is a claim to intellectual or cultural prestige (10), Howells’s satire of religious leaders might be argued as a glimpse of a critic who captures himself looking at his surrounding social world and sees the irony of his own claim to prestige. He is as stymied as his fictional ministers. Howells addresses the complicated relationship between observation and memory construction in *Years of My Youth* when he writes, “[A man’s] environment has become his life, and his hope of a recognizable self-portrait must lie in his frank acceptance of the condition that he can make himself truly seen chiefly in what he remembers to have seen of his environment” (57). For Howells, whether writing biographically, historically, or fictionally, he frequently acknowledges that in the act of seeing, a disparity exists between what one wishes to see and what can be seen by others. Barrish’s assertion that realism’s aim strives to bring the overlooked into view might be adjusted slightly for Howells whose focus is on the act of looking itself. Howellsian realism challenges the very process of fictionalization and the way in which the realist strives to reconcile disparities between ideology, observation,

memory, and construction. Howells forces his reader to examine his or her own subjectivity; this challenge emerges in the way he satirizes his own self-conscious gaze.

Howells was aware of the irony of the limited ability of so-called reformers to see themselves and those around them with any objective detachment. In his texts, Howells toys with the prospect of gazing, particularly in relation to critical objectivity, not only with his religious figures but also with reform figures in general. In his short story, “The Critical Bookstore” (1913), Howells articulates the impossibility of any critic to determine public taste, emphasizing a gap between the personal and the political. He writes about competing claims of the market, reader expectations, author self-criticism, and publishing world logistics. What he acknowledges is that the largest appeal of any book is the public’s willingness to recognize itself caught in the act of gazing at society or caught in the act of reading which, to Howells, should ideologically be one and the same. When bookstore owner and self-appointed critic Frederick Erlcort designs his ideal bookstore in which he will preview the stock for a guaranteed quality, he toys with Margaret Green’s suggestion to hang several mirrors of any shape. Margaret explains the benefit: “‘People like to see themselves in a glass of any shape. And when,’ Margaret added, in a burst of candor, ‘a woman looks up and sees herself with a book in her hand, she will feel so intellectual she will never put it down. She will buy it,’” (*Selected Short Stories* 206). Margaret’s suggestion recognizes that it is the act of self-conscious gazing and the resultant recognition that markets a book’s appeal, far more than the critic’s inclusion of a text on a pre-selected list of Great Books.

Howells does not level the accusation of hegemony toward modern reform movements that Harold Frederic later will in his fiction, but he does satirize the public’s vanity. He understands that a market exists if a writer can capitalize on the image that a public wishes to see of itself, and this association perhaps helps to explain his alignment of complicity with sermonic discourse of sin and salvation. The underlying irony of “The Critical Bookstore” plot aims at

gauging what the public demands versus what serves its greater interests. Erlcort the critic ultimately becomes overburdened with trying to decide if the relative good qualities of a book outweigh its bad aspects. He desires an absolute model, and he is unable to derive a formula for a cost-benefit analysis that is not entirely negated by subjectivity. He questions, "Who am I that I should set up for a critical bookstore-keeper? What is the Republic of Letters, anyway? A vast, benevolent, generous democracy, where one may have what one likes, or a cold oligarchy where one is compelled to take what is good for him? Is it a restricted citizenship, with a minority representation, or is it universal suffrage?" (217). Erlcort's comparison of the literary market to American democracy expands into an allegory of the entire Spencerian model of natural selection within Social Darwinism when he finally concludes: "Let there be no artificial selection, no survival of the fittest by main force" (218). For a critic whose entire authority purportedly derives from his so-called imposition of middle-class values on the reading public, Howells reveals his deep discomfort with the role of any critic to impose artificial standards on the tastes and choices of others. He does, however, wish the public to acknowledge the cultural impact of literature and to accept the interplay between the way readers see themselves seeing the text and the way they see themselves seeing the world outside of the text. Howellsian realism specifically targets subjectivity and hypocrisy and the fine line that separates the two.

It is in his dialectical comparisons that Howells examines disparities between group identity and social benevolence, suggesting without showing various possibilities for synthesis, particularly when dealing with the subject of religion. Howells strives for a narrative presence that is neither in one camp nor the other but seeks to occupy a textual and cultural position of in-betweenness across class. It is an impossible claim, of course, because as Barrish argues, each critical or theoretical school operates with the same claim to prestige that is based on insider access to a marginalized group, so that Marxist theorists might claim that Howells could not occupy one class while identifying with the interests of another, in spite of the fact that Howells

changed his class from that of a blue-collar compositor who works with his hands to a white-collar journalist who might move among the social elite in a community (*Years of My Youth* 149). Simultaneously, feminist theory could argue that Howells, a successful white male author, could not make a cultural claim to the shared experience of a nineteenth-century uneducated dependent female writer, even though his own sister occupied that very position. The conflict that exists between subjectivity and collectivity in regard to class identity remain at odds in any school of theory. As a scholar, one can only conclude with historicists such as Michael Davitt Bell that it is less important to examine what realists like Howells could not do than it is to examine what they thought they were doing (*American Realism* 4), and perhaps the best evidence Howells offers are the episodes of disparity where one view cannot quite match up with another. What is at stake in relation to realism is the larger question of identity, and the problem with how the realist writer conceives of it and represents it allegorically or mimetically. The conflict, at least for Howells, is in his vacillation between the value he places on subjectivity and the value he places on collectivity, once again setting up a dialectic that requires some sort of synthesis.

When Howells writes about religious systems in his culture, he sets up pairings that allow him to present points of resistance between old and new values as he perceives them during the Gilded Age. He tries to capture moments of transition between Calvinist notions of Hebraic Law and Liberal Protestant preferences for an intuitive model of morality. These issues of resistance emerge when individual conscience opposes the demands of the collective religious whole. The work that best highlights the religious subject in all its creedinal confusion is *A Modern Instance* (1882), Howells's novel about divorce and its moral ramifications. In this work, Howells sets up the plot by showing the social inheritance and slow decline of Calvinist values in a small rural American town. This work begins in the fictional town of Equity, Maine, which is modeled after Fryeburg, Maine (Goodman 138), a small inland village about fifty miles northwest of Portland.

Equity is in a state of flux, with several competing churches vying for membership, particularly among the younger townspeople. The contrast is realized through old Squire Gaylord, an atheist, and the young newcomer, Bartley Hubbard. Gaylord, a lawyer, serves as a symbol of law and vengeance with values left over from Puritan days. He oversees an empty ritual of justice with no underlying religious foundation for his system of ethics other than that which has been handed down through town tradition of Judaic Law. The distinction here is that he exemplifies a practice rather than a belief. We are told that “For liberal Christianity he had nothing but contempt . . . and he maintained the superiority of the old Puritanic discipline against [church sociables] with a fervor which nothing but its re-establishment could have abated” (*A Modern Instance* 32-3). Gaylord’s religious beliefs have lost their underlying authority although he is well-versed in scripture, frequently quoting it to expose what he considers to be the hypocrisy of “latitudinarian interpretations” of religious beliefs (32). Gaylord’s ambivalence toward the institutions of religion positions him as an atheistic figure with a strong sense of absolute right and wrong, someone who enacts his principles with unrelenting decisiveness. He is caught in a state of in-betweenness, belonging neither to the past nor to the present religious order in Equity, but he carries with him a puritanical inheritance of the social values that are slowly ceasing to operate in the town. Howells’s double-sided criticism shows his own ambivalence toward this fading order. While Howells exposes the lack of substance underlying inherited Puritan-derived beliefs and practices, he nevertheless is equally critical of the values and practices he observes replacing such antiquated beliefs.

In contrast to Gaylord’s Hebraism is a more contemporary Liberal Protestant ethic that arises in the multitude of churches that attempt to appeal to the new generation in Equity. The narrator cynically opines that “Religion there had largely ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience and the visible church had flourished on condition of providing for the social needs of the community. It was practically held that the salvation of one’s soul must not be made too

depressing, or the young people would have nothing to do with it” (24). Bartley Hubbard flits in and out of this array of New Light alternatives. In contrast to Gaylord who visits no church, Bartley Hubbard visits them all on a rotating schedule but belongs to none. For him, religion is a matter of social advantage, and Bartley enjoys fiscal freedom by distributing his visits liberally between the various congregations for the sole purpose of being seen in all without offering financial support to any. This strategy ultimately backfires when he decides to leave town; whereas Bartley feels comfortably removed from religious obligation or commitment, each sect believes itself entitled to a piece of Bartley Hubbard’s rapidly diminishing purse, and each presents him with a fee upon his impending departure. It is clear, however, that Bartley views the potential suffering for his failure to join any one specific church to be material rather than spiritual: “each of the churches had sent in a little account for pew rent for the past eighteen months: he had always believed himself dead headed at church” (122). The financial accounting of the church shows that modern religion in Equity is both a social ritual and a simultaneous “measure” of one’s financial and moral worth. Administering to the financial interests of the church becomes a symbol of participation, and so the dollar becomes a symbol of faith. Bartley Hubbard flees town without paying any restitution whatsoever, and the lack of financial commitment allows him to continue along his way without any further sense of obligation to his spiritual practices. Once he reaches Boston, the question of institutional religion becomes moot for Bartley Hubbard. He has learned the cost of religion.

Howells criticizes Equity’s system of religion for its overly-materialistic administration. In examining both the past and the present, Howells, in fact, identifies that the key problem in Equity is its lack of spirituality; religion exists but is not metaphysical enough. Equity has reduced its religious habits to vengeance, social gatherings, and pew fees, alternatively, mere vestiges of a once substantial faith. This seems an odd problem for a materialist writer as Howells styled himself. The key question is how he represents here not only a concept of

metaphysical belief but also a declining metaphysicality, an oxymoron requiring textual representation. He tries to examine the after-effects of the absence of a non-material presence, which surely must be a conundrum for a realist writer. Howells can only construct a textual representation by showing the effect that such an insubstantial practice renders on social ethics and moral behavior. He examines the vengeance of Gaylord and the lack of a sufficiently developed conscience in Hubbard, and he represents the effect allegorically in the downfall of Marcia Gaylord, who hastily abandons her moral code by eloping to Boston with Bartley Hubbard. She is at once a product of both her hollow heritage and her cultural surroundings as she interacts with these vacuous figures and is left to face the consequences when Hubbard ultimately deserts her, and her father urges her to avenge the desertion.

These two men, Gaylord and Hubbard, exemplify the social and religious problems in *A Modern Instance*, but the tension between them is by no means the sole focus of Howells's religious consideration in the novel. When the narrative shifts to Boston, institutional religion again intervenes in the story even though Bartley has completed his spiritual contemplation once he leaves town both in debt and debt-free depending upon one's perspective. In Boston, Howells again sets up a contrast between "inherited" religious values, the presumably Puritan-derived religion of the older Hallecks, possibly Congregationalist, and a more contemporary alternative being practiced by young people, in this case, the "outspoken Unitarianism" of Olive and Ben Halleck (218). Howells frequently sets up his comparisons across two generations, typically linking the older generation to Puritan values and the younger one to significant but equally problematic alternatives to "orthodoxy." Other examples of older generation "inherited Orthodox" practitioners include Persis Lapham in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and Isabel March in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890).

Like Rebecca Harding Davis, Howells locates cultural stereotypes within the religious landscape in order to examine attitudes toward shifting cultural concerns as the world

modernizes. He can then depict his characters acting either in accordance with or against these denominational biases. His purpose in depicting such stereotypes is easily understood in the context of his cross-generational antagonism and synthesis. He juxtaposes two generations in order to illustrate the tensions between the two value systems; presumably the ensuing generation will offer a resolution, preserving what works well in the antiquated system and merging it with some new insight the newer system might offer in dealing with contemporary challenges. Typically, there are two points of resistance in his model; first, the individual must challenge his creed in the tradition of sentimental fiction, as Ben Halleck does, and second, all opposing creeds must enter into a dialogue with each other, colliding and ultimately reconciling in relation to the modern ethical dilemma. In other words, like many late nineteenth-century writers, Howells writes a new theology by drawing on or rejecting various aspects of the institutional church that surrounds him. As is often the case with other realist writers, his critiques rarely point toward specific solutions. This is, perhaps, one of the most confusing aspects of reading realism; the writer seldom offers a revolutionary credo but instead merely seeks a cause-and-effect argument for examining social change. We might try to distinguish between a descriptive critique and a prescriptive one and Howells demonstrates how both aspects are at work within realism. He examines the past for its impact on the present, and we can read his cross-generational model as an allegory for a Hegelian model of synthesis.

Howells typically shifts his textual attention to the subsequent generation prodding the reader toward some type of ideological resolution. This is a positivist move in which the effect of the religious action is far more important than the ideology of the creed. In *A Modern Instance*, he directs the reader's attention to the youngest generation when he highlights Flavia's baptism as emblematic of her inheritance of Marcia and Bartley Hubbard's confused religio-ethical values. In this scene, he contrasts Marcia Gaylord's superficiality with old Mrs. Halleck's traditionalism; the baptism of Flavia represents a synthesis of values or at least the

suggestion for the need of such a resolution. He merely asks his reader to contemplate how the next move might best be made and to consider the consequences of what might happen if change does not occur: marriages and resulting children are the textual equivalent of long-term social consequences.

Clearly, in *A Modern Instance*, Howells considers the church's role as a voice of moral authority, yet his specific shaping of the role of church and religion remains unclear due to the incomplete contrast he offers. In a scene where Marcia Gaylord considers baptizing Flavia, the reader might be able to read the intended satire; Marcia's inability to differentiate among churches and church creeds, yet to rely on these institutions for moral guidance, demonstrates a larger confusion about what constitutes moral behavior in general. The alienation between individual and religious moral authority is realized through Marcia's emphasis on baptism—here a ritual without substance—but the final resolution of this vignette is never fully realized. She attends “church” and observes, “I think it's best to belong to some church,” (*Modern Instance* 247). When Ben Halleck suggests, “I suppose you would want to believe in the creed of the church,” she replies, “I don't know that I should be particular” (248). Marcia believes that any church will serve the same purpose, and perhaps Howells does as well. He seems to endorse this position even as he satirizes it, in my view. Marcia's assumption emphasizes her belief that it is the act of practicing religion that develops conscience and ethics. This consideration is a reversal of Squire Gaylord's act of practicing law without religion; Marcia wants to practice religion without law. Harold Frederic will later establish this same conflict between Hebraism and Hellenism in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896), and Howells will return to it as well in *A Traveller From Altruria* (1894), as we will see below.

Marcia's vague spiritual intention resolves itself in her subsequent decision to join the Calvinist church in which Ben Halleck was raised. Unlike the Gaylords, the Hallecks practiced their religion with belief and sincerity: “They were of faithful stock, and they had been true to

their traditions in every way. One of these was constancy to the orthodox religious belief in which their young hearts had united” (*Modern Instance* 204). In this passage, Howells suggests that even the Hallecks have outgrown their faith or at least that the modern world has, but their faithful adherence to its practice has rewarded them with a peace of mind directly linked to their beliefs. What Howells presents as the Hallecks’ habitual religious practice results in their rearing offspring who exemplify a high degree of individual conscience, and Marcia believes she can mimic them and achieve the same effect with her daughter. Mrs. Halleck, Ben’s mother, instructs Marcia that in order to join her church, Marcia must first believe in the Bible and further, she must have a Savior (251). Marcia decides to join this vaguely Christian church, presumably Congregationalist, to which she attributes Ben Halleck’s fine sense of values. She decides to christen Flavia because ““One musn’t be left too free”” (253). Marcia’s decision to choose a specific church selected simply because of its moral influence rather than its creed is problematic for the reader because, apart from the vague Christian reference, Howells does not provide the specifics of denomination. He leaves the reader with an ambiguous critique of the established church and its relevance in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, he is clearly ambivalent about abandoning this fading institution.

Howells displays a similarly satirical view of church spectatorship in his other works as well. Such examples reveal his cynicism with how church buildings can occupy a physical space yet simultaneously serve as symbols of a kind of empty space much as museum artifacts serve as symbols that point to ancient civilizations. He depicts churches that draw people in voyeuristically without drawing them in spiritually. For example, when Basil and Isabel March wander into the Gothic “Grace Church” while house-hunting in New York City, they find themselves “Rapt far from New York, if not from earth, in the rich dimness of the painted light” (*A Hazard of New Fortunes* 47). Howells’s oxymoronic pairing of rich dimness and painted light in this church with its unnamed creed undercuts the “solemn ecstasy” of the Marches’

sojourn. Basil brings them down to earth by comparing their church tourism to a visit to the Vienna Café for breakfast as both “gratify only an aesthetic sense” (47). Such diminished religious experiences replace the notion of spiritual ecstasy with aesthetics, suggesting that the former has a higher cultural value than the latter, much in the same way Howells suggests that morally uplifting ethical literature is superior to mere entertaining fiction. The vague satire of religious experience is a problem one finds in American realist writing; writers like Rebecca Harding Davis and William Dean Howells clearly aim to critique the present order of religious institutions, and both suggest that the “church” could be doing more to ease human suffering, but neither will explicate how such authority might function or who should mediate it or even how to draw the suffering lower classes into church, whether or not they should want to go.

The passage depicting Marcia’s church selection highlights Howells’s ambivalence about the role of the institutional church. He both embraces and denies the importance of doctrinal distinctions in his refusal to specify the relationship between creed and practice in the development of social ethics. What is the church that “succeeds” in Howells’s opinion? Is it, in fact, Congregationalist? Could it be Presbyterian? Is it Baptist? Might it even be Episcopal? What is the church that Ben Halleck returns to in the end, seeking refuge in his “inherited belief?” (*Modern Instance* 450), when he exemplifies the same blind acceptance that Howells suggests “seems to save time” (*Editor’s Study* 16). Howells appears at first to be critiquing Unitarianism, the adopted religion of Olive and Ben Halleck, which Halleck later rejects in favor of the ambiguous Christian option. This critique is confusing in part because Unitarianism is not necessarily non-Christian, particularly in the nineteenth century; some critics equate Unitarianism with Deism, but Unitarianism encompasses Christianity as well as other monotheistic religions. Further, some would argue that liberal Unitarianism is a creedless sect, which would presumably have appealed to Howells if he intends to downplay the importance of doctrine. Is Howells promoting a particular Christian church as a necessary component of moral

authority, or is he critiquing nineteenth-century America's reliance on what he views as an increasingly vague and largely symbolic institution? In the end, he seems to return to the role of individual belief; it is not creed or doctrine that Howells emphasizes but the way in which the individual interacts with the institutions of religious practice that allow one to develop a conscience. Simply put, he suggests that ethics derive from habit, and habit derives from Judeo-Christian law. Howells makes it clear, however, that he equates a so-called Christian conscience with ethical behavior when he claims a Christian society and a democracy are one and the same. He does not seem to look beyond the practice of Christianity even though he will not look within it either. Howells never fully explains his understanding of the reciprocal relationship between institutional religion and its effect on conscience and morals; nevertheless, he constructs this conflict in several of his texts, leaving it always unresolved.

Howell's *A Modern Instance* begins to hone in on the individual as the rightful legislator of moral authority, a concept better known as individual determinism. Howells does not clearly advocate for one doctrine over another, but rather his writing reflects the preoccupation with authority prevalent at this time. Most particularly, as T. J. Jackson Lears remarks, "The center of morality was the autonomous individual, whose only moral master was himself" (12). The idea of exercising authority solely through conscience and rational thought is articulated in *A Modern Instance* as Ben Halleck struggles to resolve his amorous feelings for Marcia Hubbard: "He had mistaken peace for that exhaustion of spirit which comes to a man in battling his own conscience; he had fancied his struggle over, and he was to learn now that its anguish had just begun" (Howells 399). Ben Halleck is never able to resolve his conscience, even after Marcia's divorced husband Bartley is found dead, because Ben's attraction to Marcia is tainted with a sense of shame because his feelings originated when Marcia was happily married. Ben's lawyer friend Atherton sums up the dilemma: "[I]t isn't a question of mere right and wrong, of gross black and white—there are degrees, there are shades; there might be redemption for another sort

of man in such a marriage; but for Halleck there could only be loss—deterioration” (453).

Atherton’s observation highlights the fact that it is Halleck’s individual conscience that stymies him rather than an independent or church-based doctrine of moral authority. Halleck is unable to separate his private actions from their social ramifications; he is the embodiment of complicity. Howells’s use of the term “deterioration” signals his concern that society itself will decay or devolve without a collective notion of morality. At the same time, no absolute value exists nor does a set of criteria help determine rightness or wrongness; Halleck vacillates irresolutely between desire and duty and even his ethical perception of justice cannot resolve this tension.

Halleck’s self-struggle illustrates the shifting concept of selfhood and identity so dominant in realism and in nineteenth-century culture at large. Eric Sundquist makes the observation that: “The self becomes an *image* of the real, and the real becomes an advertisement of and for the self” (11). Knowledge and truth become inexorably linked to an individual’s perception of the world. The rising sense of intellectual contemplation began to replace an externally-focused sense of moral authority handed down through Puritanism. Lears attributes this shift to the religious splintering evident during this period: “Protestant and liberal ideology corroded habits of deference to external authority, replaced them with an internalized morality of self-control, and enshrined the autonomous individual whose only master was himself” (220). While Lears attributes the rising conception of self-autonomy to religious splintering, he may in fact be confusing causation with correlation. It is clear that the traditional role of moral authority associated with religion and community is changing into a model of individual determinism, but the one-to-one association of cause and effect cannot be comfortably assumed. There were other cultural influences still in play, such as the remnants of Swedenborgianism, which emphasized that salvation is a choice and every individual controls his own destiny, the exact opposite of the Puritan doctrine of predestination. In *Years of My Youth* (1916), Howells writes: “[I]n the philosophy of Swedenborg . . . even those who ended in hell chose it their portion because they

were happiest in it” (19). A similar focus on individual authority can be seen in the beginnings of Social Darwinism, which adopts the Spencerian notion of survival of the fittest and applies it to society, suggesting that self-interest rather than altruism equals social advance because society will cleanse itself of the unfit. Howells’s difficulty with social ethics is that he must reconcile the importance he allocates to individual conscience with the collective identity suggested in his notion of complicity. Ideally, for Howells, the self metonymically represents society at large.

There are some key concepts in the teachings of the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (born in Stockholm in 1688) that bear examining in relation to William Dean Howells’s upbringing. While Lears makes a convincing argument that important social and ethical trends emerged from Protestant reform movements, similar and influential philosophical teachings arise also in the Church of the New Jerusalem, which was founded upon the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Although, as an adult, Howells moved away from his father’s Swedenborgian practices, he does recall his early commitment to this sect and its influence on his religious views. He writes: “I had been received with three or four brothers and sisters into the Swedenborgian communion by a passing New Church minister” (*Years of My Youth* 22). Ralph Waldo Emerson discusses these principles in his 1855 writing, “Swedenborg; or, The Mystic” (*Representative Men* 89-141). As indicated above, Swedenborg’s Christian teachings emphasized the role of individual autonomy in choosing the path to salvation. In response to Lears, one could argue that Swedenborg’s emphasis on individual determinism and social duty was later generalized to a model for social ethics and altruism, both in Emerson’s writing and arguably in the writing of Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Sarah Orne Jewett; all three were realists influenced by the teachings of Swedenborg.

Several scholars, beginning with Edwin Cady, have examined Howells’s writing for evidence of Swedenborg’s teachings, believing that Howells’s renunciation of his religious upbringing was far from decisive. Howells biographer Rodney Olsen explains the impact of this

theology on Howells's ethical views: "With its antisacramental and ethical emphasis, Swedenborgianism mirrored the secular tendency to substitute self-control for religious authority and to understand the moral purpose as social utility. The central Swedenborgian term, *usefulness*, increasingly replaced *righteousness* in the vocabulary of the aspiring middle class" (*Dancing in Chains* 19). In Howells's concept of complicity, one can easily identify a similar philosophy that Swedenborg advocates in his doctrine of uses, in which he emphasizes the obligation of the individual to exercise beneficial influence on larger culture.⁶³ In fact, in an essay on Swedenborg written by Howells's father, W. C. Howells writes: "Our inevitable duties in some way relate to others; and even what we do for ourselves, if rightly done[,] is for others" (Olsen 18). The teachings of Swedenborg, particularly the emphasis Howells's own father places on individual benevolence, are frequently reflected in Howells's fiction when he emphasizes his model of social interconnectedness, which he renames as complicity. Early in his writing, he casts certain figures into his fiction to lecture on the idea of complicity, such as Eustace Atherton in *A Modern Instance* and Reverend Sewell in *The Minister's Charge*, but he eventually formulates a grander model for social ethics in which he marries the idea of complicity and Christianity, and he presents this model of altruism in his Christ-like Altrurian traveler, Aristides Homos.

Olsen is not the only Howells scholar who finds a credible link between Howells's Swedenborgian background and his fiction. Paul Petrie, in evaluating Olsen's work, argues that there is a link between Swedenborgianism and Howells's entire realist philosophy. Petrie's focus is on trying to understand Howells's social views as the impetus for his literary philosophy. Petrie selects *The Editor's Study* as his source text because he finds it to be a far more comprehensive guide to Howells's critical views than the more frequently-cited *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), which Howells compiled by excerpting passages from his *Editor's Study* columns. To this end, Petrie examines *The Editor's Study* with its encompassing literary

contexts as the primary manifesto of Howells's literary theory. For Petrie, the role of religion and specifically Swedenborgian teachings are pivotal influences in the development of Howells's larger social evaluation. Petrie writes: "Howells was driven to conceptualize the literary vocation, and hence literature itself, not only as a respectable and potentially lucrative choice of profession but also as a publicly useful communal enterprise" (17). While many Howells scholars focus on Howells's purported mission to influence the public taste (Crowley 26), scholars like Olsen and Petrie are beginning to study the underlying moral and ethical philosophy of Howells's literary approach. He was not, for example, trying to instill better taste to correct American crassness, but rather he was trying to advance a literary philosophy that emphasized the importance of the writer's responsibility toward advancing social consciousness, and clearly he believed in the transformative capacity of the text. When Howells writes: "We are saying what our experience of literature and of life has persuaded us is the truth" (*Editor's Study* 34), he is criticizing what he felt to be irresponsible writing that represented American culture as being ideal. He relegates such writing to the realm of romanticism. He was fearful of the possibility that such literature would remain as a legacy of American culture, a culture that he believed it falsely depicted because writers glossed over some of the harsher aspects of national history. He writes: "It is only now and then, when some dark shadow of our shameful past appears, that we can believe there was ever a tragic element in our prosperity" (41). What Howells wanted was a literature that showed the effect of the flawed ideology of democracy as it came to be practiced in the nineteenth-century Industrial Age and a reconsideration of the ideals of democracy. In his utopian fiction, Howells fluctuates between attacking current democratic practice with its class disparity and advocating the alternative of socialism, which he ultimately depicts as an erasure of individual identity, as an examination of *A Traveller from Altruria* will demonstrate.

In the use-value of the text, we might compare Howells's socially-conscious realism, a term he found to be "never satisfactory in regard to any school of writers" (*Editor's Study* 39),

and literary Marxism. While Marxist critics examine literature for its capacity to influence social revolution by stimulating change in the lower classes, Olsen and Petrie advance a similar argument that Howells valued social purpose in literature as well, but he envisioned change trickling down from the middle and upper classes to raise the level of collective social consciousness. This is not quite Barrish's model of synthesizing only the middle and upper classes into a larger collectivity while essentially keeping the lower classes marginalized, but rather it is a model for a larger synthesis, seeking to unify lower and upper classes into a classless collectivity. Both schools of theory, realism—what Barrish labels materiality—and Marxism, assume that literature can produce some sort of advance or what Hegel might call a “higher perfection” (644), and thus both are essentially Hegelian in nature. By Hegelian, I mean that there is an inherent synthesis between an old and new order, resulting in the production of a new social stage that represents an improvement. In “Lectures on Fine Art” (1835-1838), Hegel writes: “For it is only among civilized people that alteration of figure, behaviour, and every sort and mode of external expression proceeds from spiritual development” (640). Howells worried that both readers and writers who failed to credit the effect that literature produced on social values would themselves be complicit in perpetuating the myth that democracy in American was a successful ideology. When Howells appears to be inviting American authors to “concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life,” (*Editor's Study* 41) he is, in fact, criticizing both the American public and American writers for extending and accepting this optimistic pretense and, by doing so, neglecting the “sin and suffering and shame [that] there must always be in the world” (41). Howells offers the example of Dostoyevsky's fiction with its sympathy and power as exemplifying what ethical writers might produce (40). He elevates the status of three Russian writers, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Turgenev, and Leo Tolstoi, because he locates in their similar styles a capacity to influence social reform. Howells suggests that the best possible description for their literary office is humanism (39) because of the way these writers

examined social conditions and offered credible motivations for human behavior in their texts. He believes literary humanism outranks even realism in its usefulness to the development of social ethics.

In Howells's praise of these writers, he offers a clear dialectic; although the genre of realism relies on writer's ability to represent cultural stereotypes in order to reflect something recognizable in the anterior world, Howellsian realism aims to show how individuals act against cultural norms. The ensuing social tension creates the central conflicts in his texts. The realist's underlying premise is that resistance forces new humanistic considerations, and that such knowledge drives change, or what I have termed as synthesis. Howells constructs the religious subject as a cornerstone of his sociological model by allotting prominent positions to religious figures and institutions. He ties religion to specific segments of class and culture. His subsequent focus on humanism among the Russian writers allows for a new consideration of how he envisions his readership internalizing the realm of religious concerns in relation to the actions and motivations of individuals as subjects of resistance. In his later fiction, Howells moves away from simply placing religious figures into his social constructions to considering how society itself constructs figures of religious authority. He examines this question in modes of writing that seem atypical to his earlier realist milieu and begin to reflect his interest in humanism, which he defines as the study of how man behaves in relation to society. He begins to focus less on what established religion offers to a society and more on how people construct religion and for what purpose. In other words, his rhetoric reflects a move away from an eschatological relationship between religion and culture to a more utilitarian examination of religion as an institution itself.

Howells's early and late writing are distinctly different; in his later years he begins to experiment more freely with form, including historical, utopian, and psychological fiction that even includes paranormal experience. It is not clear that Howells viewed such writing as a

departure from his realist principles; indeed, there are many links and threads which suggest that these literary experiments were merely extensions of him practicing his realist philosophy across a variety of subjects. For one thing, he continues to emphasize the idea of complicity which, for Howells, was a seminal aspect of his social philosophy. He revisits “complicity” in his utopian fiction. In *The Altrurian Romances* (1894-1908), for example, Howells constructs allegorical scenarios in which the reader can imagine different social solutions being carried out. These allegories center on a Christ-like traveler, Aristides Homos, who visits upstate New York in order to view the great American democracy in practice. Reynolds writes: “William Dean Howells’s *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894) and Milford W. Howards’s *If Christ Came to Congress* (1894) used the device of Jesus’s reappearance to expose political corruption and commercial exploitation of American cities” (*Faith in Fiction* 203). Howells, in fact, is examining American democracy as a whole, in both rural and urban settings.⁶⁴ On the surface, it is difficult to reconcile an allegorical work of utopian fiction with the concept of realist writing, but in fact, it is the realist’s insistence on the need for corporeality that allows for this link. The material subject is merely an allegory for a more abstract concern. By constructing a modern-day figure of Christ, Howells tries to reconcile a spiritual concept of conscience and authority with the textual practice of mirroring the anterior world of the reader. Howells places the Christ figure into a real-world rendering of late nineteenth-century culture in order to allow his readership to contemplate how a historical model of Christianity might be enacted in the modern world. Several writers popularized this trend in the literature of this period; examples include not only the aforementioned work of Milford W. Howard, but also Charles Sheldon’s *In His Steps* (1896) and William Stead’s sociological treatise *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1895).⁶⁵ The figure of Jesus became emblematic for the voice of individual conscience in a mystical model of intuitive justice. This is not the Puritan God waiting to judge but rather an internalized presence trying to guide one’s actions.

In order to fictionalize the way in which conscience works on social action, in *A Traveller from Altruria*, Howells creates a physical embodiment of Christ, Aristides Homos, a being who can interact within Howells's contemporary social world. Homos is a figure who represents both conscience and a model of Christian ethics in practice. Howells is not necessarily advocating a system of Christian ethics derived from orthodox Protestantism; in fact, it should be fairly clear by now how problematic Howells found "Orthodoxy." Rather, he seems to be challenging his readers to consider whether or not the system of ethics at work in America could validly be considered Christian. In other words, he is re-writing theology at least in a very rudimentary way by invoking a primitivist creed.⁶⁶ One might question, is this realism? For Howells, the act of materializing abstract principles, ethics, and conscience via the character of Homos relies on the realist privileging of corporeality because to intuit Jesus otherwise relies on a type of mysticism that falls into the sphere of metaphysics. To deal with the concept of Jesus as a numinous presence as Rebecca Harding Davis does would place Howells's writing in the realm of sentimentalism or romanticism. On the other hand, the construction of a romantic figure, one with human traits and characteristics, relies on the realist act of emblemizing, which in turn, allows Howells to construct a religious allegory without violating his own realist principles. He thus constructs Homos as a material allegory of Jesus just as Darwin uses a telescope as a material allegory to demonstrate the complexity of the eye.⁶⁷ This kind of textual representation might be read as a blending of sentimental fiction's reliance on allegory to demonstrate religious "truths" with a scientific approach to demonstration modeled in Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859).

Howells's Altrurian version of Jesus is a bizarre mixture of several ideologies, once again exhibiting the ambivalence Howells felt about the reciprocity between identity, sociology, and the institutional church. Aristides Homos⁶⁸ is obviously a Christ-like traveler, but he also seems to represent a figure of Greek perfection, placing him in the realm of Neoclassicism. Homos is

an inhabitant of a far-off island called Altruria, and he inhabits a self-described “Hellenic” communal society (*A Traveller from Altruria* 32), which is “strictly Christian, and dates back to no earlier period than that of the first Christian commune after Christ” (32). Homos never states exactly how Altruria’s utopian principles are derived or authorized, but the implication is that they are scripture-based, derived through a literal but timeless interpretation of New Testament teachings. The figure of Homos requires a bit of deconstruction in order to reconcile the classical association with the Greeks with the New Testament figure of the Messiah. The contrast set up between Hellenic and Hebraic values is implied, but to understand the distinction, one must unravel a literary trail beginning with Matthew Arnold, and leading back to the work of philosopher and poet Heinrich Heine.

Howells was certainly familiar with the writing of Matthew Arnold, and, with Mark Twain, he attended Arnold’s lecture in Hartford in 1883 (*Literary Friends and Acquaintance* 272-73).⁶⁹ Arnold, a well-known Victorian social critic and reformer, wrote several essays on the subject of religion, on the contribution of Heine, and on Hellenic and Hebraic values, tracing these ideas back to the Enlightenment. Expressing a positivist view that embraces religion as a social system that can be examined for its effect on society, in the “Sweetness and Light” chapter of his 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold expresses an evolutionary view of religion as “the greatest and most important of the efforts by which the human race has manifested its impulse to perfect itself” (47). Religion for Arnold is a mechanism of social advance. Further, Arnold sees human perfection as an internal condition, not an external one (47). Like the realists, however, Arnold believes that “Perfection, as culture perceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated” (48). Arnold believes that culture is, in fact, dependent on the same shared collectivity that Howells likes to call complicity.

Arnold’s positivist approach to religious experience serves as a foundation for understanding his essay on the German romantic poet and philosopher, Heinrich Heine, a poet

Howells read and researched throughout his entire life.⁷⁰ Jeffrey Sammons writes: “[Heine’s] champion [American] admirer was William Dean Howells, who learned German to read Heine and felt liberated by him” (211). In a later chapter of *Culture and Anarchy*, entitled “Hebraism and Hellenism,” Arnold expounds of the views of Heinrich Heine, a pivotal influence in Howells’s philosophical and literary views.⁷¹ Referencing Heine, Arnold discusses two major distinctions in contemporary religious thought, one derived from Hellenism and one from Hebraism. The key distinction, he writes, is between clarity of material perception, or, in other words, the truthful vision of the realist’s mantra and external religious practice, or what might be termed inherited belief. Arnold writes: “The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience” (“Hebraism and Hellenism” 131). The term Hellenism loosely corresponds to Christianity and New Testament teachings via Enlightenment Neoclassicism whereas the term Hebraism corresponds to Judaism and Old Testament teachings of law and obedience. Heine, himself a German Jew, represents a hybrid of Hellenism and Hebraism.

It is, in fact, Homos’s association with “Hellenism” that allows him to be read as a Christ-like figure. Further, the association with Hellenism also allows Homos to be read as anti-Puritan and primitivistic in relation to Christian theology. Echoing Marcia Gaylord’s desire to baptize Flavia without particularity to creed (*A Modern Instance*), Homos states, “We have several forms of ritual, but no form of creed” (*A Traveller from Altruria* 169). In other words, Homos is trying to have it both ways; he wants to demonstrate that Altruria practices social religion, but he wants to remove his religion from a narrow definition of how that religion should be practiced. This is where his self-identification as Hellenic becomes important in interpreting what Howells is trying to establish. According to Arnold, Puritanism was a reaction against the “great re-awakening” of Hellenic principles of the Renaissance (“Hebraism and Hellenism” 141), and he calls for a rejection of Puritanism and a renewal of “that irresistible return of humanity to

nature and to seeing things as they are” (141).⁷² In fact, Arnold prescribes the very formula that Howells enacts in *A Traveller from Altruria* by suggesting a return to a form of primitive Christianity that emphasizes deductive reasoning over church-based creed, but one that ironically insists on the material evidence of the rituals as a measure of religious expression. Homos states: “[W]e want a clue to some sound order and authority. This we can only get by going back upon the actual instincts and forces which rule our life, seeing them as they really are, connecting them with other instincts and forces, and enlarging our whole view and rule of life” (*A Traveller from Altruria* 144). Arnold writes the formula for examining Christianity as a primitive system; that is, Arnold suggests it is possible to formulate a creedless Christianity through the words and principles directly interpreted by the individual from scripture without the intervening authority of a church institution, and then one may apply those derived primitivist principles to current society to measure the shortcomings of the status quo. This is, in fact, the very model Howells posits in his Altrurian romances, yet he shows it to be impossible because he represents ideal identity as collective rather than individual so that conflicts between what the self desires and what society requires are erased. Howells can address these two opposing models of identity in a philosophical manner by invoking primitive Christianity, but he never presents a formula for merging self-centered subjectivity with the demands of an altruistic collectivity. This problem will be better understood after a closer examination of Homos’s ideology.

Homos’s philosophical and religious views are really quite complicated, in part because they are ideologically antagonistic. He represents himself as a Hellenic figure à la Heine and Arnold in his insistence on material criteria for accessing the real even while he simultaneously offers an Enlightenment focus on deductive reasoning, which favors intuitive knowledge over observational practices. Nevertheless, he remains a symbol of Howells’s ambivalence about the danger of abandoning the Hebraic values of conduct and obedience, the so-called puritan “inherited orthodoxy” so closely aligned with Judeo-Christian law. For example, Homos states:

“We look at the life of man rather than the profession for proof that he is a religious man” (*A Traveller from Altruria* 169). And by “religious man,” Homos offers up the phrase, “a true follower of Christ, whose doctrine we seek to make our life” (169). The dual desire both to seek and to reject doctrine is inherent in all primitive models of Christianity, and it is probably the single most important cause of late nineteenth-century religious ambiguity. What Homos suggests is that it is the very evidence of a man’s expression of conduct and obedience—that is, Hebraism—that proves his adherence to these so-called Christian principles—that is, Hellenism—that cannot be laid down in a particular creed.

Howells’s *Altruria* represents the conundrum of the realist writer who tries to mirror reality but is limited by the task of assigning not only an emblematic representation to the metaphysical but who must also contextualize a sociological demand to assign that emblem a value and to show a relationship between concept and value. There is no tangible expression for examining Altrurian perfection because it cannot be determined by facts or objects but rather it is formed by a unity between behavior and creed. Going back to Heine’s terms, it is the unity of Hebraism and Hellenism that marks the successful utopia of *Altruria*. All potential obstacles have been removed in the creation of this “kingdom of heaven on earth” (*A Traveller from Altruria* 170-71): there is no economic need, no distinction between class or material affluence or outward appearance, no disease, no war, no ability to be different than one’s neighbor and apparently not even a desire to be different than one’s neighbor. This is, in fact, a complete denial of selfhood. And the evidence of success is not based on the material world at all but in one’s strict adherence to the “creedless” creed. Homos states: “Our ideal is not rights, but duties” (175). Such an admission is the very basis of Hebraism, in Arnold’s interpretation of it as conduct and obedience. Howells’s utopian model of heaven on earth is inherently paradoxical because the removal of the material differences between men is a necessary pre-condition for materializing such a kingdom, and this idea requires a kind of equality that even a socialist

model cannot provide because it requires an eternal guarantee of an absence of a desire to be different. This is not merely a model for regulating behavior, but rather it is a model for regulating desire, a metaphysical concept that cannot be measured or gauged in realist terms.

To some extent, Howells anticipates the problems of the kingdom of heaven on earth by addressing the same danger that every enactment of such a kingdom must face. The kingdom must exist in isolation in order to avoid the conflicts attributed to the Industrial Age, such as the desire to accumulate wealth by embracing mechanical progress. O'Connor explains this conflict in his discussion of comparative sects that tried to establish similar kingdoms. He writes: "When, as in the cases of the Mennonites, Amish, and Shakers, sectarian doctrines inhibit the processes of accommodation [sic] or assimilation, the sect must either isolate itself or face extinction" (231).⁷³ In fact, O'Connor stipulates the same condition Darwin offers in *The Origin of Species* as a necessary condition for evolution, which is isolation. Darwin writes: "Isolation, by checking immigration and consequently competition, will give time for any new variety to be slowly improved" (121). Homos's land of Altruria is a successful utopia because of its isolation; there is no fear of invasion or concern over a forcible conquest, and thus there is no threat to the island's ideological socialism ever since the "Evolution" (Howells 169). It is a land that has evolved, and it now exists at its pinnacle without any threat of devolution. As Pfaelzer points out, utopianism carries with it the suggestion that there is a social-Darwinistic progression resulting in an end of time, or a period of perfection that might be realized on earth. She writes: "Lacking change, utopias seem to mark the end of history" (*Utopian Novel* 17). This notion is strikingly similar to the religious rhetoric of the nineteenth century emphasizing "God's Kingdom here on Earth."⁷⁴ Howells capitalizes on such religious rhetoric to present a sociological model of a perfect community, and he employs evolutionary concepts to do so. Howells's combination of religious, social, and scientific rhetoric demonstrates his literary consideration of contemporaneous notions of human perfection. A fourth and important

consideration in his model is his political concern; by having the Altrurian traveler visit America, Howells once again insists on the political ramifications of his socio-ethical model.

The notion of utopianism and utopian societies in the nineteenth century marks a significant religious movement called millennialism that assumes mankind is in a kind of waiting period between the second coming of Christ and Judgment Day, and that society must try to attain a model that comes as close to perfection as can be achieved on earth in order to prepare for Heaven. In this sense, it is apocalyptic. Conversely, utopianism can also be marked as a secular movement that disregards biblical revelation altogether and posits that society can regulate its own evolution into a higher state of perfection. Several utopian models emerged in the nineteenth-century attempting such a paradoxical existence that sought to enact and exemplify a model of perfection while simultaneously attempting to isolate themselves from negative social influences.⁷⁵ This notion is paradoxical because it tries to be both evangelical and isolationist as Howells's Altrurian island suggests. The Altrurian traveler evangelizes even as he prevents the outside world from incorporating itself into the social world of Altruria. In Spencerian terms, Altruria tries to evolve without the ability to adapt because it has reached the end of evolution. Altrurian perfection equals the end of the individual, and it represents a crossroads of both the religious and the sociological models of utopianism.

From a religious standpoint, Social Darwinism presents a problem for spiritualists as well as for materialists. The argument is simply that if Jesus is divine, then his spirituality supersedes the process of evolution. In other words, if perfection exists outside of the terrestrial realm, then realism cannot capture the essence of spiritual perfection; thus, perfection can be attained only in the afterlife if at all. On the other hand, if Jesus is human but not divine, then it is impossible to see him as emblematic of human perfection because he existed two thousand years ago, and thus mankind must have evolved toward a higher state since then. Christian theology often settles the question by conceding that Jesus is both human and divine, and he is therefore necessarily

separate from all laws governing human progress. Problematically, to deny the importance of Jesus altogether, either the divine incarnation or the historical one, would require an acknowledgment that the Bible, the primary source of social and religious authority in the Western world is not, in fact, the material evidence of the superiority of a Christian society. Of course, it is important to remember that this is Spencerian evolution, which assumes a model of progression, as opposed to Darwinian evolution, which assumes a model of adaptation without assigning a hierarchical value to evolved species.

For Howells, the evolutionary model is further complicated by his insistence on speaking of orthodox religion as an inherited value, using a term that will later come to be associated with genetics as opposed to social conditioning, the way he seems to intend. In *The Minister's Charge*, in the Reverend Sewell's complicity speech, Howells does present spiritual belief as a function of men's imaginations, imposing a progressive model on the development of religious thought that is directly related to the development of mankind. Viewing the figure of Jesus allegorically, Sewell states: "The gospel—Christ—God, so far as men had imagined him—was but a lesson, a type, a witness from everlasting to everlasting of the spiritual unity of man. As we grew in grace, in humanity, in civilization, our recognition of this truth would be transfigured from a duty to a privilege, a joy, a heavenly rapture" (*The Minister's Charge* 309). In this speech, Howells marries several concepts of spirituality; he allows for the perception of God to be an evolving mystical presence that reflects mankind's progress, and he merges that idea with the Swedenborgian emphasis on substituting duty for sacrifice. He still must reconcile this notion of God with what he locates as the failings of the Industrial Age, and he does so by a return to Christian primitivism, using this criterion in order to locate shortcomings in the practice of American democracy. Howells poses the question of what would Jesus be like if he could be intuited simultaneously in the past and the present; nevertheless, Howells's Jesus can exist as a function of the modern imagination. In short, Aristides Homos is an evolved figure of Jesus,

adapted and returned to address the challenges of the Industrial Age. This is the figure of Jesus Howells offers in the guise of the Altrurian traveler with the play on “traveler” again representing the metaphysical as a material allegory.

The emblematic figure of Christ as conscience marks an important shift in realism that insists on the humanity of Jesus rather than the divinity of Christ, and thus it is a move that gives shape to the spiritual rendering of a social God that is highly individualized. Nineteenth-century American culture began to take new liberties in imagining Jesus as a reflection of the self. It helps to recall the mother of the fallen soldier in the unnamed war in Howells’s subsequent story, “Editha” (1905). Mrs. Gearson is grateful her son died in battle with a clean conscience before committing the act of killing any opposing soldiers in the unnamed war of the story’s plot. She sees the all of the fighting men as equal victims, in harm’s way simply ““because they had to be there, poor wretches”” (*Selected Short Stories* 167). In accusing Editha of forcing her son George into an impossible ethical dilemma, kill or be killed, Mrs. Gearson cries out, ““I thank my God he didn’t live to do it. I thank my God they killed him first, and that he ain’t livin’ with their blood on his hands”” (167). She does not share her religious beliefs or even her God with Editha, but rather she perceives God in an internalized and very personal way, and she reiterates her claim with the repetition of the possessive pronoun, “my God.” The battle between Editha and Mrs. Gearson is not a battle over creed or scriptural interpretation, but rather it is a battle over the concept of God itself. Editha’s God of providence battles Mrs. Gearson’s God of conscience. George Gearson sums up the difference when he references the contrast between Editha’s “pocket Providence” and his own concept of a more distant deity (159). Howells’ gives form to the disparity by showing the enactment of the two beliefs facing off in a cultural crisis that presumably reflects the 1898 Spanish-American War as a marker separating two distinct spiritual constructions.⁷⁶ Howells’s story suggests that that the devastation of war on American culture forced a questioning of the role of God and providence that severed religious beliefs

about the nature of God, leading to a highly individualized perception of a higher being. The ethics of soldiering are interpreted in vastly different ways depending on how the individual reconciles divine sanction with acts of war. Howells presents an ironic reversal of generations in this story, atypical for his fiction, in which the younger generation is here aligned with the puritan God and the older generation is aligned with the God-as-conscience construction. It is an interesting reversal and one that is not seen otherwise in Howells's fictional religious vista.

The imagining of Jesus into late nineteenth-century culture is an attempt at a resolution of multiple conceptions of perfection. Writers re-imagine Jesus as he might appear in modern culture. They intuit and reconstitute his social model and essence of perfection to suit the modern age but often simply ignore the troublesome implications related to religion and evolution. Richard Lewis explains the paradox within the perfection model that writers allegorize variously through the figures of both Jesus and Adam. He writes: "Here, and occasionally later, I must distinguish between the notion of progress toward perfection and the notion of primitive Adamic perfection. Both ideas were current, and they overlapped and intertwined. On the whole, however, we may settle for the paradox that the more intense the belief in progress toward perfection, the more it stimulated a belief in a present primal perfection" (Lewis 5). This evasive incarnationalism appeared in both religious rhetoric as well as fiction during the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition to the aforementioned works of fiction and sociological treatises, several biographies of Jesus appeared, many with an emphasis on how Jesus would address the social and ethical problems of the Industrial Age with problematic supernatural aspects of the gospels simply ignored. Until Mark Twain, no one attempted any type of biography of Adam,⁷⁷ but the tension between progressive perfection and primal perfection is clearly evident.

The relationship between these various discourses on the life of Jesus seems indisputable. Whether a writer took a historical, mythical, allegorical, or theological approach, some

application of deductive reasoning occurs in order for a writer to discuss Jesus ideologically.

Historian Patrick Allitt credits the modern Jesus rhetoric to Henry Ward Beecher, who wrote the 1871 *The Life of Jesus, the Christ*. Allitt writes:

Beecher established one of the techniques that have persisted in the Jesus literature ever since. If Jesus did something of which the author approves, he is cited as an authority for doing likewise. But if Jesus did the opposite of what the author requires, an argument about changed social context can always explain away the difficulty: Jesus *would* have acted this way had he been alive now. (134)

Howells offers an emblematic Jesus figure in *A Traveller from Altruria* that embraces the protean nature of the modern-day-Jesus rhetoric. By doing so, Howells can present his own unique construction of a modern day Jesus, and he can unite his creation with his own individual view of how modern theology should work. He settles the literary demands of realism by bringing Homos, now a corporeal figure, into the present age from an isolated island, making a credible pseudo-scientific claim of the discovery of a lost civilization allowing him to shed the problematic history of Puritanism that he does not wish to address in his new theology.

Howells's departure from reporting what he sees (*Editor's Study* 81) to what he imagines as the ideal seems to embrace an apocalyptic philosophy. In his presentation of the visiting idealist Homos, Howells suggests that the second coming of Christ is at hand, and that it is time to evaluate the present state of social readiness for Judgment Day. Howells's model of salvation is collective rather than individual, and therefore his model requires that society must function as a unified whole. Homos's visit is clearly an evaluation of America's fulfillment of its democratic ideology. Is Howells offering a vision of religious reform or presenting a material model that he would like to see enacted? Perhaps he envisions a bit of both of these possibilities. A third consideration is that he is writing neither; he is implementing a kind of theological allegory, one that might be found in religious fiction, but he is replacing the spiritual model with a sociological one that is intended to challenge or provoke his reader rather than one that offers any tangible solution whatsoever.

It is consistent with Howells's literary philosophy to believe that he might simply be challenging his reader to examine social dilemmas without offering a clear cut vision of reform. In fact, the Altrurian traveler has been criticized for his evasions or refusals to offer alternatives to the problems he encounters in upstate New York. Pfaelzer points out that Howells deals with socialism somewhat ambivalently, casting doubt upon the possibility that he truly expected to see an enactment of socialism as a viable social solution. Pfaelzer writes: "Throughout the story, Homos hints at Altrurian solutions to the problems of caste and class, but he withholds details of the political, social, and economic institutions of his utopian island—perhaps appropriately for Howells, who was ambivalent about socialism and unclear about how social change might safely occur" (*Utopian Novel* 60). The Altrurian traveler offers a general but dim view of a socialist revolution, suggesting that change happens from the bottom up, but Howells's view of complicity suggests that the author is trying to do something other than spark a grass-roots rebellion of social reform. He is perhaps trying to force the reader into imagining the conditions under which such a change might occur, another positivist move and one that taps into the hegemonic desire to avoid radical social change. He tries to show his reader how the conditions that might spark social revolution already exist. By doing so, he forces his reader to contemplate the idea of complicity not from an empathetic standpoint, a method he tries in his earlier fiction, but from a standpoint of the threat of social unrest. He offers two alternatives, the first being that change can trickle down from the upper and middle classes out of a shared sense of humanity, and the second being that change can happen from the bottom up, via revolution or social anarchy. Howells's utopian fiction allows him to explore the complicity problem from yet another angle.

After Howells finished with utopian fiction, he changed his literary direction yet again to focus on a historical event he had first read about in 1871 in *The Ohio Valley Historical Series*, which he reviewed for the *Atlantic* (Goodman 418). *The Leatherwood God* (1916), Howells's

work of historical fiction, focuses on another Jesus-like figure, one with a charismatic ability and romantic charm who is lauded as a prophet as young girls swoon over him. In this new construction, Howells makes a significant move in his consideration of spirituality. Whereas Aristides Homos might be read as a modern day Jesus as Howells interprets him, the Leatherwood God is a Jesus-like figure in the regard of the pioneers in the early nineteenth-century Ohio Territory settlement of Leatherwood Creek. The story is based in the 1820s, and it captures a key moment of religious transition when the itinerant Methodist preachers engaged in a rigorous campaign in conjunction with America's westward expansion, competing and winning popularity over Calvinist sects brought out west from New England.

Like Ernest Renan's 1863 construction of Jesus as a man who was elevated to a godly status by his converts (*La Vie de Jésus*),⁷⁸ Howells presents the similar situation of Joseph C. Dylks, the Methodist camp meeting revivalist, as one whose popularity increases to the point where miracles are demanded of him. The story climaxes when Dylks is expected to turn a homespun cloth into a seamless raiment, and instead he incites a riot.⁷⁹ The crowd turns on him, forcing him to flee into the woods and wander in the wilderness until he dares to emerge for help. Howells implicitly compares the biblical figure of Jesus to the camp meeting revivalists in order to show that the attribution of godliness is a function of people's need to believe and of the participation of a charismatic prophet who comes to believe his own publicity. When Dylks approaches the ironic but wise Squire Braille for help, Dylks explains how the converts' beliefs have validated his own acceptance of himself as a prophet. Dylks explains:

Their faith puts faith in you. If they believe what you say, you say to yourself that there must be some truth in it. If you keep telling them you're Jesus Christ, there's nothing to prove you ain't, and if you tell them you're God, who ever saw God, and who can deny it? You can't deny it yourself—. (*The Leatherwood God* 173)

The squire accepts Dylks's logic, and he compares him to all the prophets of the Old Testament and to "Mahomet" himself (173-74). In the end, Braille comes to believe that Dylks is at least in part a victim of his own pride rather than a confidence man, and he helps him make his way out

of town safely with his some of his loyal followers, and they leave to inhabit the New Jerusalem, which is certainly an ironic reference to the Swedenborgian Church of Howells's youth.

In one fell swoop, Howells discredits the entire history of the prophets of the world, even though he also suggests that the idea of truth itself is a mere construct of the human intellect, meaning that truthful knowledge of any claim to divinity can never be fully credited or discredited by either historical or supernatural proofs. Instead of trying to prove or disprove perceptions of the supernatural, Howells once again implements his deterministic model for examining the way society assigns divine status to charismatic leaders. The historical novel gives Howells an opportunity to examine an actual event to which he assigns a rational explanation. Once again borrowing the allegory of religious fiction, Howells suggests an explanation about social spirituality that can be generalized to Christianity and, in fact, to all world religions. Ironically, the implicit questioning about knowledge and truth in the material world seems to slide by almost unnoticed by Howells, but what does emerge is an increasingly cynical view about the role of religion in society, particularly the outlying rural areas that he had previously represented in his fiction as being puritan. The shift of location from New England to the West allows Howells to examine the role Methodism, with its campfire revivals, played in a developing nation. The positivist model focusing on systems of religion and their cultural effects allows for the ongoing link to Howells's concern with social ethics, so prevalent in his realist writings. What emerges in *The Leatherwood God* is the assumption that using materiality to get at universal truths is far less important to Howells than is examining behavior to learn something about how society constructs and accepts evidence of supernatural concepts and how it materializes those suppositions. Throughout the body of Howells's fiction, he creates a discourse on comparative religion, and he ultimately derives a model for the social construction of religious beliefs and practices that can be applied to any age. His references to Old Testament prophets, New Testament teachings, Mohammed, and Methodist revivalists suggest that Howells

is dealing with more than four thousand years of religious history, not just Christianity anymore, and he seeks to unify religious behavior by offering a framework for examining the advent of prophets.

In spite of Howells's cynicism about revivalism and by extension, all religion, he does not seem to view organized religion as being harmful or without purpose. Not only does he recognize that people find belief because they want to, he apparently concludes that religion plays a role in social ethics that cannot be replaced by literature. Such an admission undercuts the authority of his realist philosophy, which in many ways had suggested that fiction rather than religion had come to serve in the administration of social ethics. At least, that was his belief in the earlier part of his career. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Boston Brahmin Bromfield Corey states this view of literature: ““All civilisation [sic] comes through literature now, especially in our country. . . . once we were softened, if not polished, by religion, but I suspect that the pulpits counts for much less now in civilising [sic]”” (126). Evidence for a significant reversal of this earlier position appears in Howells's later biographical writing, *Years of My Youth*, published in the same year as *The Leatherstocking*. He recalls a criticism of *A Modern Instance*, by a friend who suggested ethical questions should best be left to the church rather than taken up by writers of fiction. He writes:

I thought he was wrong, but I am not sure that I so strenuously think so now; fiction has to tell a tale as well as to evolve a moral, and either the character or the principle must suffer in that adjustment which life alone can effectively manage. I do not say ideally manage, for many of the adjustments of life seem to me cruel and mistaken. If it is in these cases that religion can best intervene, I suppose my old friend was right. (*Years of My Youth* 160)

In this reflection, Howells implies that religion provides a type of balance or administration of divine justice that cannot be adequately understood in life experience. Returning to Howells's notion of complicity, what might be inferred is that he continues to believe that religion plays a peripheral social role in bringing to light a sense of interconnectedness and purpose that might be

otherwise unseen. And, once again, he does not state exactly how religion might administer or aid this understanding, but he continues to insist on its retention as a source of ethical authority.

The question of religion and realism becomes increasingly difficult to examine in Howells's later works because he seems to have become somewhat disenchanted with the realist mode itself and how it should operate in relation to ethics. He was trying to maintain a marketplace presence, and he had a harder time getting his works published, but even when embracing new literary forms such as the utopian works and the historical fiction, Howells continues to examine the same themes that repeatedly emerge in his works of realism. What looms most largely is his continued ambivalence about the role of institutionalized religion and his own cynicism about the potential for religious truth to be merely a misguided notion of a dissatisfied population desperate for some new belief. At the same time, Howells continues to place religion in his fictional world, and he continues to carve out a place for religion in the administration of social ethics and the development of conscience. Like many nineteenth-century writers, Howells's texts incorporate scripture and scriptural allusions illustrating how entrenched he is in Bible culture and rhetoric, but he never reconciles or even clarifies his hermeneutics with a theological model, unlike Davis.

In many ways, Howells prepares us for Twain's cynicism by questioning the religious institutions of his age. Twain picks up this thread in his own scrutiny of American religious culture, but Twain begins to examine the Bible itself as a skeptical guide to modern civilization, and he frequently situates the Bible as a peripheral accoutrement of modern religious practices. If Howells begins by attacking the institutions of culture, Twain continues by examining the ways in which cultural signifiers inadequately represent ideological beliefs. Howells focuses on collective society, with the Jesus figure as the exemplar of a progressive civilization. Twain, on the other hand, shifts his focus back to humankind itself by examining the primitive ideal of the Adam figure, moving away from Christianity altogether. A significant change occurs during this

process; whereas Davis and Howells use the subject of religion, and specifically Christianity, to construct a sociological realism, Twain employs the subject of religion in order to cast doubt on the very idea that words and symbols can ever provide access to an absolute notion of what is real. Twain's fiction takes a turn toward modernism and the idea of multiple subjectivities of the mind, while Howells was preoccupied with bringing subjectivity and collectivity into unity. Much later, Harold Frederic, an admirer of Howellsian realism, takes a naturalistic turn when he begins to examine forces of scientific and cultural determinism other than religion. Davis and Howells offer a very optimistic kind of realism that exemplifies a notion that civilization is progressing and that self-understanding can aid that progression, while Twain and Frederic return to a more romantic emphasis on man's primitive nature as a major sociological determinant. All four of these writers examine religion in terms of allegory and, by doing so all make critical connections to the similarity between how religion operates and how realism operates in the act of reducing metaphysical abstractions into material representations. Twain goes even further than Howells; he does not merely construct new allegories, but rather he examines religious symbols that already exist in the world and shows how impossible it is to project the allegory backwards towards some larger notion of universal knowledge. For Twain, the failure of the allegory becomes a failure of certainty, and his doubt turns to disbelief. Howells reveals a similar struggle with doubt and disbelief, but his ambivalence about abandoning belief emerges repeatedly in his refusal to abandon religious orthodoxy. He retains some degree of faith in the institutions of religion to impact on the development of individual conscience and, by extension, collective ethics.

Notes

⁶⁰ See, for example, Phillip Barrish, who writes: "Understanding Howells's proffer of realist taste as a way for *some* middle- and upper-class readers to claim cultural superiority over *other* middle- and upper-class readers may help, first, to mediate between two seemingly incompatible critical accounts of Howells's cultural and political significance" (*American Literary Realism* 17). See also Amy Kaplan 8-9 and 21-23.

⁶¹ See also Howells (*The Minister's Charge* 25-28).

⁶² In *Literary Friends and Acquaintances*, Howells admits that he had not heard of the term "Orthodoxy" before meeting with Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1860. It is clear only from this one passage that Orthodoxy most likely refers to New England Congregationalists and not Presbyterians: "He had to explain Orthodoxy to me, and then I could confess to one Congregational Church in Columbus" (43). Howells recalls discussing several other religious sects with Holmes, including Unitarianism, Universalism, Swedenborgianism, and Episcopalianism.

⁶³ Josephine Donovan provides excerpts from Swedenborgian teachings on the doctrine of uses in her article "Jewett and Swedenborg" (733-34). Donovan cites two main sources, which are Sig Synnestvedt, *The Essential Swedenborg: Basic Religious Teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg* (1970; rpt. New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984), 49-50 and Theophilus Parsons, *The Infinite and the Finite* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1872), 155.

⁶⁴ The *Altrurian Romances* have a confusing publication history since some of the "letters" of the Altrurian traveler were published in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* only, but not in the book form of the 1894 *A Traveller from Altruria*. Apparently, the last six of the magazine letters became the Part I (twenty-seven chapters) of the 1907 *Through the Eye of the Needle* (Kirk xi). When Reynolds refers to Howells's attack on the city in *A Traveller from Altruria*, he is presumably referring to the content of these last six letters, which describe Aristides Homos's departure from rural New Hampshire to visit his new acquaintances in New York City. Originally, this portion of *Through the Eye of the Needle* was part of the *A Traveller from Altruria* during the November 1893 through September 1894 serialized publication in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.

⁶⁵ The construction of such modern-day-Jesus rhetoric continues today as Richard Wightman Fox's *Jesus in America* illustrates. He includes a photograph of an advertisement for the Evangelical Environmental Network employing the anachronistic heading, "What Would Jesus Drive? (Fig. 34)." This advertisement ran in 2002.

⁶⁶ The term primitivist here refers to the idea of early Christianity rather than a pre-Christian primitivism. As Rebecca Harding Davis did in her construction of the religious subject, Howells is attempting to isolate a notion of Christianity from the historical development of the institutional church. John May makes a distinction between "primitive religion" and "Judeo-Christian hope" that ties these two models to an understanding of history. In light of May's distinction, Davis's and Howells's models of primitive Christianity would be better labeled Judeo-Christian hope. He writes: "The Judaeo-Christian [sic] norm is eschatological expectation, the projected vision of faith. Primitive religion therefore renews the present on the basis of the past, whereas Judaeo-Christian hope is based on the expectation of future fulfillment. The former conception of time is clearly cyclic and closed, the latter linear and open" (24). Clearly, in the case of Aristides Homos, time is linear and open as civilization works towards its own evolution.

⁶⁷ Darwin writes: "May we not believe that a living optical instrument [that is, the eye] might thus be formed as superior to one of glass, as the works of the Creator are to those of man?" (145). Darwin turns the logic of his antagonists to his advantage through a combination of allegory and materialism. Howells appears to be using a similar rhetorical strategy in his presentation of Homos.

⁶⁸ Aristides is presumably an allusion to Aristides the Athenian, a second-century Greek Christian who authored the *Apology of Aristides*. His manuscript was published in the late nineteenth-century. (There was also a fifth century B. C. Athenian military and political leader called Aristides the Just.) Homos, meaning "man," is a subtle way of emphasizing the humanity of Howells's Christ figure as opposed to his divinity.

⁶⁹ Ironically, because of his visit to Twain, Howells reports he was not at home to receive Arnold's letter of introduction when Arnold first arrived in Boston (*Literary Friends and Acquaintance* 272).

⁷⁰ Howells writes about his admiration for Heine several times in his autobiographical accounts. For examples, see *My Literary Passions* (189) and *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (8).

⁷¹ Jeffrey Grossman calls Matthew Arnold "one of Heine's most important promoters in English" (197).

⁷² In the 1957, Reinhold Niebuhr reworked several of Arnold's ideas into an essay entitled "Two Sources of Western Culture." In this essay he elaborates on his own views of the Hellenic and the Hebraic, which he believes represent order and freedom, respectively (18). Niebuhr believes that Western Culture requires a balance of Hellenism and

Hebraism: "In short, the realm of meaning has dimensions of both order and freedom, and every culture seeks to do justice to these two dimensions" (18-19).

⁷³ See also Mandelker: "Utopian sects hold a dual, contradictory commitment to both evangelism and utopia. The world is a proper sphere of utopian activity and must be made consistent with an ideal image, yet it must also be held at a distance safe enough to prevent contamination. The utopian response to the world is this fraught with ambivalence" (135).

⁷⁴ See Charles Howard Hopkins, "God's Kingdom and 'Our Country,'" *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1940) 98-117.

⁷⁵ These utopian communities include, for example, the Shakers, the Oneida movement, the Mormons, the Seventh Day Adventists, and even so-called secular communal living experiments such as the 1841 transcendental Brook Farm experiment, made famous by Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1852 *The Blithedale Romance*, and the 1843-44 transcendental Fruitlands communal living arrangement of the famous Alcotts, the subject of L. M. Alcott's *Transcendental Wild Oats* (1874). Howells has a connection to the Oneida Movement through his wife, Elinor Mead Howells, whose maternal uncle was John Noyes. In 1848, John Noyes founded this religious commune most famous for its doctrine of perfection and its complex open marriage policy (Goodman 62-3).

⁷⁶ It should be pointed out that scholars disagree about the unnamed war in this story. Ruth Bardon cites readings by Everett Carter in 1954 and William Free in 1966 who argue that Howells is writing about the Spanish-American War, but she also cites the work of John Crowley in 1975 and 1989, who suggests that Howells "symbolically recalls the Civil War" (Bardon 151-52). He bases his argument on Howells's autobiography *Years of My Youth*, and he further argues that "Howells's guilt about sitting out the Civil War motivated considerable parts of his fiction (Bardon 152). There is no urgent need to determine the specific war that is the subject of this story, but in the story, George Gearson clearly recalls to Editha that his father had served and lost an arm in the Civil War (Bardon 163), indicating that the story is dealing with the more recent war. At the same time, my reading of the religious conflict in many ways supports Crowley's suggestion of a "symbolic" Civil War reading. It seems clear that Howells wanted to make a connection between the two wars and to the political and religious rhetoric related to the pro-war and anti-war positions. In this subtle way, he reminds his readers that "the current phrases of the newspapers" (Howells, *Selected Short Stories* 157) contain rhetoric that has been circulated before in American history.

⁷⁷ In *The Bible According to Mark Twain: Writings on Heaven, Eden, and the Flood*, the editors include "Extracts from Adam's Diary."

⁷⁸ Renan presents a Jesus who became increasingly fanatic as he "yielded to the ideas that were current in his own time" (161).

⁷⁹ There are two Biblical passages to which Howells could be alluding: in the Old Testament, the passage is in Psalm 22: 18-19, and the related New Testament passage is in John 19:23-24. The New Testament passage details the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus and a contest by soldiers for his seamless robe (*chiton*), and it is frequently cited as evidence that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 4: MARK TWAIN AND THE BIBLE:
“I SEE IT WARN’T NOTHING BUT A DICTIONARY”

For more than fifty years, Twain conducted a discourse about the religious subject in an era when the American religious landscape was changing dramatically. In many ways, religion is more than a pervasive subject for him; it is the very the foundation of his writing. He writes about it in a variety of genres, such as travelogues, satire, realism, fantasy, and autobiography. The only thing that can be concluded with any certainty is that Twain was ambivalent about religion and that, in his critique of American religious culture, he projected his ambivalence particularly onto an engagement with scripture from a realist’s perspective. Historically, there are at least three distinct “stages” of Twain’s work that relate to larger culture: his early rejection of Presbyterianism, his subsequent cynicism regarding Bible culture in America, and finally, a resolution in his later years in which he begins to reconcile his Calvinist upbringing with his personal and highly subjective hermeneutics. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that Twain invokes realist writing as a way of conducting a religious discourse and that, through a close examination of this subject, realism itself can be better understood in the context of nineteenth-century literary culture. During the nineteenth century, with the religious vista continually shifting, the attempt to locate something that might be known with certainty, that is, something *real*, can be seen as both a rhetorical strategy and a philosophical one in the manner in which realist writers examine ethics via this mode of writing.

In any discussion of Twain and the Bible, there are two key terms that require some definition and a set of parameters: religion and realism. By religion, I reiterate a critical view of Harold Bush who, in turn, invokes William James, by offering a broad definition that this term means simply the representation of beliefs that originate “in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual” (Bush 15). Specifically, in the context of Twain’s writing, this term includes Bible reading habits, the development of ethics and morals, the application of what he

terms “the moral sense” when dealing with contemporary social problems,⁸⁰ and finally, the idea of an afterlife. Twain also discusses institutional religion, primarily Presbyterianism, but his theology moves in a distinct direction that some have termed Liberal Protestant because of Twain’s rejection of an orthodox Calvinist doctrine. It is true that Twain’s system of beliefs comprises a complicated theological amalgamation that includes some elements of Liberal Protestantism, such as a primitivist yearning for a pre-doctrinal state of spirituality, but that term alone does not suffice, as his texts reveal. Instead, Twain seems to waver between the hermeneutics of Liberal Protestantism, the Hebraism embedded in Calvinism, and even a scientific secularism. These various components are not easily separated in his writing, but his fascination with religion clearly emerges as a central concern in his realist writing. I have argued earlier that religion served as a catalyst in the formation of realism, and I believe what we can conclude from Twain’s writing is that religion also serves as a catalyst in the decline of realist writing. Twain’s attempt to capture the religious subject underscores the impossibility of concrete representations of abstract subjects, which signals the limits of realism.

When possible, I aim to avoid all-encompassing terms such as Christian and even Protestant because these terms gloss over important denominational and sectarian differences that realist texts depict. In fact, it is only by focusing on some of these important differences that the relationship between religion and realism can be understood. The latter term, realism, also requires a set of parameters, but these are, admittedly, loose parameters because, like religion, it has both an abstract and a concrete dimension. Simply put, realism has both a philosophical ideology, which is empiricism, and a material expression, which is the realist text. By realist texts, I refer to the dominant mode of American literary works historicized to the period between 1861 and the turn of the century. For a working definition, this includes texts in which the writers offer particularization of naming and detailing, homogenous time,⁸¹ and a focus on ordinary protagonists as a critique of contemporary culture in order to examine social ethics. I

readily acknowledge that the term realism generally encompasses a wide variety of definitions, so I accept the postmodern term “realisms” offered by contemporary scholars such as Richard Lehan, Peter Brooks, Michael Davitt Bell, and Elizabeth Ammons that were discussed in the introductory chapter of this work.⁸² The value of the term “realisms” is that we can examine the different ways in which late nineteenth-century American writers conceived of realism, and we can discover new ways of viewing their texts as a discourse. In fact, we may identify at least three different levels of discourse: author to culture, author to author, and author to self, meaning that each author might be responding to his or her own literary canon or personal religious intuitions and uncertainties.

My larger aim is to examine the fluid relationship between religion and realism, i.e. author to culture, in order to acknowledge the reciprocity through which each informed the other during the late nineteenth century. Implicit in this claim is the need to examine the different styles in which various writers themselves conceived of realism as a literary aesthetic in an ongoing effort to establish a satisfactory set of parameters for the many realisms. Even more important than understanding what realist writers believed they were doing with this genre is the need to clarify *how* they were conducting this discourse. Lilian Furst points out that one common characteristic of realism is an implicit agreement between author and reader that the text can be imagined as a mimetic representation of the exterior world. She writes: “The real and the fictive are reciprocally permeable. . . . Only through a willing and conscious participation in realism’s performative pretense can readers begin to understand its games” (Furst 115). The materialist basis of realism requires the writer to employ a type of symbolism that creates verisimilitude for the reader. That is, the writer must locate cultural signifiers that link the exterior world outside of the text, meaning the social world it claims to represent, to the imaginary world that the text evokes, meaning the reader’s perception. The reader must identify the symbol and know how to apply it in deconstructing the text. The religious subject works

well as a signifier within the realist text because it offers a dual level of representation, both abstract ideology and concrete cultural practices, that allows both writers and readers make the leap from the external reality of lived experience to the vicarious reality of the text. The subject itself is mimetic and operates in a similar manner to realism.

A discussion of Twain's fiction must begin with the work that shaped his literary aesthetic around the religious subject. In his travelogue, *Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress* (1869), Twain begins an early discourse on Presbyterianism that he will take up again in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). By invoking the John Bunyan's popular allegory, he signals his intention of placing this text into a discourse with Calvinism. For this reason, *Innocents Abroad* is a seminal work for examining Twain's approach to religion, and it also marks an important popular rhetorical shift for Twain from dealing with this topic in a broad, worldly manner to focusing specifically on religion in American culture as an important facet in shaping national identity. Beginning in this text, and later throughout the wide scope of his writing career, he discusses Catholicism, Islam, Presbyterianism, and even the broad sectarianism of late nineteenth-century American culture. A harsh critic of Catholicism, he returns again and again to examine his Calvinist roots, critiquing institutional religion even while grudgingly concluding that it is almost a cultural imperative. By the end of this travelogue, Twain has constructed a view of religion that seems uniquely American. He works his way through Europe and Asia, comparing religious identity and religious practices to modern day American Protestantism. He uses the broad term "Christian" in the early part of his text, but by the time he reaches the Holy Land, he becomes more and more specific about denominationalism and American culture. We begin to see the inadequacies of the all-encompassing "Christian" label; it does not sufficiently describe the complex subjectivity of American religious culture.

There are three main religions that contrast each other in *The Innocents Abroad*: Catholicism, Islam, which Twain refers to as “Mohammedism” (51) or “Islamism” (446), and Christianity, a problematic moniker that both includes and excludes Catholicism depending on its context. Christian is sometimes a synonym for Protestantism, and for this reason, it requires a bit of deconstruction in realist literature. Twain’s narrator, a pilgrim voyeur, occupies a unique position in this text as being “a Christian” and yet not identifying himself with any particular Christian denomination. He tries to establish a neutral objectivity in order to report on the world around him. To do so, he uses many labels for Jesus: Blessed Saviour while in Italy (202), and later Master (348), Saviour (357), the Young Child (364), Christ (436), and Jesus (379). He chooses each moniker carefully, and he contextualizes each usage; Blessed Saviour is reserved for Italy and the Inquisition while Jesus is the young man of Nazareth who has long since forgotten siblings: “Who gives a thought to the sisters of Jesus at all?” (379). The narrator’s use of the multiple synonyms for Jesus, each uniquely assigned to emphasize either his divinity or the humanity within specific contexts, positions him as an expert while he simultaneously refrains from revealing an affiliation with a specific Protestant denomination. He maintains this neutral stance throughout most of the narrative until his arrival at the Holy Land forces an admission that the historic reality of the Holy Land is at odds with his abstract deism, and he cannot easily reconcile the geographic and numinous dimensions of his religious experiences.

In a moment of epiphany in the Holy Land, the narrator admits that his own faith is challenged by the repetitive reminders all throughout his journey that tangible evidences of religious history do not logically correlate to his notion of spirituality. In Palestine—contemporary Israel—he contrasts the subjective empiricism of denominationalism in the “search for evidences” (388) with the abstract notion of spirituality when he writes:

It seems curious enough to us to be standing on ground that was once actually pressed by the feet of the Saviour. The situation is suggestive of a reality and a tangibility that seems at variance with the vagueness and mystery and ghostliness that one naturally

attaches to the character of a god. . . . I cannot comprehend this; the gods of my understanding have always been hidden in clouds and very far away. (357)

With this admission about the slippage between experience and imagination, he implicitly acknowledges that there exist manifold notions of the Christian deity, complicating the attempt to reconcile the real with the abstract.

In fact, by the end of the text, Twain begins to speak very specifically about Presbyterianism, noting the subjectivity that religious identity imposes on the traveler. He concludes that travelers visit the Middle East “seeking evidences in support of their particular creed” (388). He suggests that Presbyterians find a Presbyterian Palestine because “they had made up their minds to find no other” (388). He mentions Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, and Episcopalians. Here, the narrator suggests that the only way the concrete and the abstract can be reconciled without diminishing one’s faith is through subjectivity. Subjectivity mediates the discrepancy that exists between an interior and an exterior reality.⁸³ One must view the Holy Land through the lens of denominationalism in order to reconcile the disparity; reality is formed when imagination shapes the search for evidence and reconciles what one finds with what one expects. By doing so, Twain reveals the extreme importance he places on subjectivity and perception, two issues that will prove to be crucial to his realist aesthetic and the ways in which he will later play with material emblems of religious culture. When Twain later writes about such objects of faith, namely, the Bible, in American religious culture, it is this disparity between signifier and signified that he highlights.

Twain also mentions Judaism in *Innocents Abroad*, but this religion occupies little of the text’s discourse; mainly, the narrator makes offhand comparisons of the treatment of Jewish people in various countries and parts of the world.⁸⁴ He offers an imaginary description of America’s treatment of its Jewish inhabitants as if viewed by a Roman tourist:

Jews, there, are treated just like human beings, instead of dogs. They can work at any business they please; they can sell brand-new goods if they want to; they can keep drug stores; they can practice medicine among Christians;⁸⁵ they can even shake hands with

Christians if they choose; they can associate with them, just the same as one human being does with another human being. . . . [A]t this very day, in this curious country, a Jew is allowed to vote, hold office, yea, get up on a rostrum in the public street to speak about the government if the government don't suit him!" (197)

Ultimately, he holds America up as the only place he has visited where Jewish people enjoy true equality. He uses the broad term "Christians" but he means "Americans" and it is not clear exactly which Americans he includes in this generalization other than non-Jewish ones. Such comparisons illustrate Twain's belief that religious tolerance is a mark of an enlightened civilization although he himself is somewhat critical of institutional religion as a cultural force. This narrator, in fact, has little or no tolerance for either Catholics or Muslims.

In his dismissal of Catholicism and Islam, Twain presents a complicated portrait of religious identity that is part political, part economic, and part sociological. He frequently hones in on manifest symbols of faith as a means of criticizing and dismissing the cultural value of specific religious denominations. For example, although he praises Catholics for their preservation of the Holy Land, he simultaneously criticizes Catholicism for its ostentatious displays of religious grandeur throughout Europe—its "profusion of costly and elaborate sepulcher ornamentation" (171)—and the religion's fetishizing of relics: "We find a piece of the true cross in every old church we go into" (116). Of Catholics in Israel, he writes: "Whenever they ferret out a lost locality made holy by some Scriptural event, they straightway build a massive—almost imperishable—church there" (401). Clearly, the Catholic Church has played a fundamental role in the preservation of Christian beliefs, both spiritually and physically by literally building the architecture of these shared physical spaces. At the same time, Twain has a dim view of the history of the Catholic Church. Specifically, he derides the Inquisition: "They did all they could to persuade [the barbarians] to love and honor [the Blessed Redeemer]—first by twisting their thumbs out of joint with a screw; then by nipping their flesh with pincers—red-hot ones, because they are the most comfortable in cold weather; then by skinning them alive a little, and finally by roasting them in public" (202). Looking around Italy, he concludes that "the

vast array of wonderful church edifices” was accomplished by starving “half her citizens” for fifteen hundred years (188). Twain takes a positivist approach when evaluating religion, and he seems to suggest that the age of Catholicism has reached its utilitarian end, suggesting that a new institution will accompany a new age.

Twain did not deride only Catholicism following his visit to the Holy Land; later, the *Innocents Abroad* narrator offers a similar dismissal of Islam. Once again, associating religious identity with its architectural symbols, he describes “Moslem houses” as “dark as heavy, and as comfortless as so many tombs” (305) and by doing so, he substitutes religious identity for national, cultural, or even geographic identity. This kind of substitution is somewhat jarring; one would not, for example, expect to hear a New England colonial-style home described as a “Calvinist house” although it was likely to have been built and inhabited by Puritans, but for Twain, cultural artifacts and architecture are invested with the ideology of those who preserve and inhabit them. Here, the association of the “Moslem” religion with the house as a tomb foreshadows the narrator’s conviction that this religion is declining. He comments later that he will not be unhappy to see it vanish. Of Jerusalem, he writes: “The Moslems watch the Golden Gate with a jealous eye, and an anxious one, for they have an honored tradition that when it falls, Islamism will fall, and with it the Ottoman Empire. It did not grieve me any to notice that the old gate was getting a little shaky” (446). Twain’s metonymy emerges as a literary experiment when he toys with different forms of figurative representation. Here, he examines religious identity in relation to architectural objects. Later, when he writes about American culture, he will offer a different set of symbols, and he will locate a textual object that serves him exceedingly well: the Bible. However, he will not light upon this symbol until he finishes his scrutiny of Old World religion.

Twain’s position on Catholicism is unequivocal; he despises it as both a social institution and a moral force. Of Catholicism he asserts: “She is to-day one vast museum of magnificence

and misery” (188). He compares Catholicism to American Protestant religious practices and in the process introduces a new rhetoric: “All the churches in an ordinary American city put together could hardly buy the jeweled frippery in one of her [Italy’s] hundred Cathedrals” (188). Twain’s comparison of Old World religion to American Protestantism allows him to transition from nonfiction to fiction and, in particular, realism. Broadly speaking, his views on Catholicism remain fairly static while his views on American religion shift continually throughout his lifetime, and it is the latter subject that will occupy a prominent position in his subsequent work.

The two works that, as a set, bookend Twain’s early views on Catholicism in *Innocents Abroad* also resemble each other in style and ideology; these works offer the context for viewing Twain’s realism as a departure from the European romanticism embedded in Catholicism although he does return to a visionary mode in both. These are *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, published in 1889 and *No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger*, which was published posthumously in 1969, but written between 1896-1910.⁸⁶ He structures both texts as historical flashbacks to earlier periods when society was under the domination of the Catholic Church: *Connecticut Yankee* is set in sixth-century England when the Knights of the Round Table mythically crusaded on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church while *No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger* is set in Eseldorf, meaning Assville or Donkeytown, in the late sixteenth-century Austria. Both works illustrate the influence of Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), or the Tailor Retailored, as Twain’s language reflects. While *Sartor Resartus* examines a fictional text by the German Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, whose name translates to Devil’s Shit, Eseldorf is visited by a mysterious stranger who identifies himself as number forty-four, New Series 864,962 (Twain, *No. 44* 33) and who appears to be Satan himself. When Teufelsdröckh advises the reader to “Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*” (Carlyle 146), Carlyle signals the end of Romanticism and the beginning of a Victorian sensibility by suggesting that it is time for society to move beyond the “Satanic Poetry” (115) of the Romantics.⁸⁷ In doing so, he links

literary genre to ideology in a Hegelian model of progressive history, an idea in which art is an expression of its age.⁸⁸ In a similar manner, Twain signals an aesthetic shift by debunking the romantic myth of what he terms the “Age of Faith” (*No. 44 3*) and constructing his own realist style for the “Gilded Age.”

Twain offers a positivist position of history near the end of his career when he writes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* in 1889. In this novel, the protagonist Hank Morgan suggests that the real danger of the Catholic Church is the amount of power it has amassed. He imagines the possibility of usurping the history of the Catholic Church by introducing Protestantism about ten centuries early. He believes he can advance the course of civilization by altering religious practices. He says, “I was afraid of a united Church; it takes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty, and paralysis to human thought” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 50). Once again, Twain’s writing reflects the Carlylian influence when Hank states his own view of institutional religion by invoking the clothing analogy. He says: “A man is only at his best morally, when he is equipped with the religious garment whose color and shape and size nicely accommodate themselves to the spiritual complexion, angularities, and stature of the individual who wears it” (50). There are many similar passages in *Sartor Resartus* discussing the manner in which people “cloak” themselves in religious ideology: “Church clothes are first spun and woven by Society; outward religion originates by Society, Society becomes possible by Religion” (Carlyle 163). Carlyle suggests that society creates institutional religion and subsequently creates material symbols of that system while Twain suggests that moral development is dependent on an individual equipping himself with the metaphorical garments of his own subjective beliefs and the religion of his choice. While Carlyle focuses on collective identity, Twain adapts the analogy to serve as an expression of subjectivity.

A Connecticut Yankee's Hank believes that religion serves as a benevolent force as long as it can be contained, but he still believes that man chooses his religious garment and therefore operates as an autonomous force. By the time Twain writes *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in 1894, he will begin to see identity itself as an artificial social construct, and he will attempt to debunk the myth of racial identity. In *Connecticut Yankee*, Hank's ideology reflects his Common Sense views by evaluating religion in pragmatic terms:

We *must* have a religion—it goes without saying—but my idea is, to have it cut up into forty free sects, so that they will police each other, as had been the case in the United States in my time. Concentration of power in a political machine is bad; and an Established Church is only a political machine; it was invented for that; it was nursed, cradled, preserved for that; it is an enemy to human liberty, and does no good which it could not better do in a split-up and scattered condition. (89-90)

What we have here is not only a bit of a spoof of the democratic religious culture of America, but also, in fact, a celebration of it. It is the very diversity of the American religious vista that maintains the system of checks and balances that is the foundation of American government.

Twain does not object to the regulation of moral behavior by a church; in fact, he seems to view it as necessary. What he objects to is concentrating that power too heavily in a national church.

Hank Morgan must ultimately accept the fact that the Catholic Church will never relinquish its political and social power, at least not in the century Hank wishes to reform. When the church puts the entire country under an Interdict, Hank's "beautiful civilization" is "snuffed out" (235).

Religious ideology and social history are irrevocably linked.

The real similarity of Twain's two Catholic fantasy tales is the view he offers of the absolute control the church exercises over the minds of the people. This sociological domination hinders intellectual development but reinforces the social hierarchy. August Feldner, *No. 44*, *The Mysterious Stranger* apprentice, describes his idyllic childhood in Eseldorf just before Satan arrives:

Eseldorf was a paradise for us boys. We were not overmuch pestered with schooling. Mainly we were trained to be good Christians; to revere the Virgin, the Church, and the saints above everything. . . . Beyond these matters we were not required to know much;

and, in fact, not allowed to. Knowledge was not good for the common people, and could make them discontented with the lot which God had appointed for them, and God would not endure discontentment with His plans. (4)

In *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* Twain levels his criticism at the culture of ignorance he believes the Catholic Church perpetuates as a means of social control. He cynically labels the setting of this story as the “Age of Faith” (3), but it is clear that the simple faith of the townspeople cannot withstand the danger of independent contemplation. Faith and peace can abide only as long as Eseldorf can maintain the status quo. Twain’s point is that even in a simple system of adhering to a single established church, there is no long-lasting potential for faith to be sustained; religious practice is necessarily reduced to a power play for social control.

Both texts, *Connecticut Yankee* and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, end similarly in a dreamlike state in which characters lose the ability to distinguish between sleep and wakefulness or distortion and reality. Twain has a great deal of difficulty dispensing with the Catholic Church in his European-based writing. At the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, all he can do is validate the power of the Catholic Church with its Interdict and the electrocution of the twenty-five thousand knights. The apocalyptic ending replaces Hank’s dream of a social evolution. The narration reverts to Clarence, Hank’s helper, and this story, like *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, ends in an incoherent dream in which Hank can no longer distinguish between imagination and reality. He describes “dreams that were as real as reality” (Twain, *Connecticut Yankee* 257). The supernatural 44 tells August Feldner that “*Nothing* exists; all is a dream” (Twain, *No. 44* 186), and August’s Catholic faith is replaced with nihilism. Twain’s own literary experiment illustrates that the Established Church remains a problem for him as well. He is able to criticize the excessive power of the Catholic Church dialectically by comparing the centralization of power and the grandeur of its physical presence to the far more democratic and unassuming style of religious practices in American culture in the early nineteenth century. The rhetorical shift helps reveal that Twain is far less interested in Presbyterianism than he is in

Protestant sectarianism as a whole in American society, but he will use Presbyterianism as a basis for critiquing nineteenth-century religious practices, presumably in order to reshape them.

Stanley Brodwin describes the dream scene as “epistemological confusion” (61), and he suggests that this scene impacts the style of Twain’s realism. He writes: “The structure and language of the novel confirm the truth that contradiction lies at the heart of the ontologically ‘real,’ and that apprehending this . . . leads to a dialectical vision of God and history, tragic and comic by turns. It is a novel of *theological realism*” (61). Brodwin points out that Hank not only wanders between historical periods, but he wanders “between two theological forces” (63). The term theological realism is an interesting one because it illustrates the importance of religion as a cultural force, and it allows us to understand how these realist writers entered into a discourse of the real simply by engaging with the religious subject. For example, in *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain seems to suggest that the superstitious mysticism of the Roman Catholic Church in the medieval world has a certain inevitability. By doing so, he seems to have concluded that democratic Protestantism is just as inevitably linked to the Industrial Age of late nineteenth-century American culture. A close examination of the Twain’s literary aesthetic in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* and *Connecticut Yankee* similarly reveals that while Twain relies on the visionary tale to discuss Catholicism, he experiments with the conventions of realism in order to discuss American Protestantism. Specifically, he begins to focus on what Lilian Furst calls the “close and credible present” (77), meaning a generation or so before the present, and he identifies important cultural symbols that allow the reader to view the text mimetically.

As Twain begins to focus on fiction, one particular aspect emerges relative to the subject of religion, and that is his engagement with scripture as a means of undercutting realism’s privileging of material emblems. Just as he honed in on the elaborate cathedrals and ubiquitous remnants of the true cross as material symbols of European Catholicism in *The Innocents Abroad*, in his subsequent fiction, Twain presents the Bible as a signifier of American Calvinism.

In fact, Twain takes a very playful approach to examining the Bible in a wide variety of uses and, in each instance, a connection can be made to the surrounding religious culture that is contemporaneous to the text. Gregg Camfield writes: “Whether by secretly denouncing it or publicly teasing its devotees, Mark Twain was, like his contemporaries, steeped in the stories and language of the Bible, and his continuous reference, while usually couched in irony, shows how thoroughly the Bible shaped his consciousness whenever he confronted the spiritual, ethical, or scientific questions of his day” (*Oxford Companion* 53). Twain begins to examine the Bible as an object in culture that emerges in surprising ways but rarely as a sacred artifact invested with numinous revelations.

Twain’s interest in the Bible is well-documented, and it is not surprising that this tome makes such a prominent appearance in so many of his works because it clearly occupied an important role in his own religious experiences. He had extensive expertise in scripture and hermeneutics, approached first through the lens of his family’s Presbyterianism and revisited later through his own personal study of competing world religious movements. Although he frequently pokes fun at America’s dependence on the Bible as an emblem of absolute truth, Twain himself was drawn to the Bible and was quite knowledgeable about the translation history and print culture of the Good Book. He had a large collection of Bibles: “Eventually [Twain’s] library contained thirty-two different copies of the Bible or of the New Testament, some of which contained his marginalia” (Phipps 221). He also collected supplementary interpretive texts, including T. W. Doane’s 1882 *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions* and Rufus Noyes’s *Views on Religion* (Phipps 247). The Bible also held a sentimental place in Twain’s life. William Phipps writes: “Significantly, when he was dealing with family inheritance matters in 1904, the only thing that had belonged to his mother that he wanted to keep was her illustrated family Bible” (221). Though touted by many as a cynical agnostic, Twain was ambivalent about and endlessly fascinated by American religious culture. Bible

reading habits emerge as a discursive site for him to examine American religious practices in relation to late nineteenth-century socio-ethical problems.

In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Twain provides a glimpse into the Sunday school monotony of his own childhood in Hannibal, Missouri in the 1840s. Tom's world is bound by religious habits, from Sunday to Sunday as Tom sits contemplating life in relation to the stiff confines of the Presbyterian Church. Twain invokes the image of the physical church structure itself to emphasize how strictly the ritual takes hold of family life: "Breakfast over, Aunt Polly had family worship; it began with a prayer built from the ground up of solid courses of scriptural quotations, welded together with a thick mortar of originality; and from the summit of this she delivered a grim chapter of the Mosaic Law, as from Sinai" (*Tom Sawyer* 24). Beginning with this early morning repast and Tom's best church attire, Sundays are turned over completely to religious observation, and through Tom, Twain depicts the painstaking boredom of a highly ritualized Calvinist culture: "Sabbath school hours were from nine to half-past ten; and then church service" (27). Tom drags himself unwillingly out the door to Sunday school, "a place that Tom hated with his whole heart" (27). For Tom, Sunday school soon becomes a site where he can practice the wheeling and dealing with which he negotiates his life. For Twain, the religious subject becomes a site where he can debunk the homiletic novel's theme of romantic conversion by reversing the focus from eschatological concerns to more immediate ones.

As he will do throughout his career, in *Tom Sawyer* Twain discusses the Bible in a highly-materialized manner, translating Bible reading habits into various scenarios of "value" as the Industrial Age in America takes hold. We are told of Tom's economy as he deals with the necessity of learning the requisite scripture for Sunday school recitations: "Tom bent all his energies to the memorizing of five verses; and he chose part of the Sermon on the Mount, because he could find no verses that were shorter" (24). This passage shows the materiality of the Bible first coming into play—the shorter, the better. There is a frugal approach to the Bible

in relation to its inconvenient intrusion on the school boy's limited free time. Beginning with his short verses, Tom soon "trades up" once a system of exchange is enacted at Sunday school. Here, Tom negotiates for a "yaller tickets" (27) awarded for the memorization of Bible verses. Tom trades a "piece of lickrish and a fish-hook" (27) for one of the coveted tickets. He negotiates for tickets of all color, increasing his net worth before entering the church:

Ten blue tickets equalled [sic] a red one, and could be exchanged for it; ten red tickets equalled a yellow one; for ten yellow tickets the superintendent gave a very plain bound Bible (worth forty cents in those easy times) to the pupil. How many of my readers would have the industry and application to memorize two thousand verses, even for a Doré Bible?⁸⁹ And yet Mary had acquired two Bibles in this way; it was the patient work of two years: and a boy of German parentage had won four or five. He once recited three thousand verses without stopping, but the strain upon his mental faculties was too great, and he was little better than an idiot from that day forth. (28)

Twain here launches a critique of American religious behavior by "over-materializing" the Bible. We see the capitalist influence on religious behavior, where Bible ownership is the reward of assembly-line memorization by rote learning. The Bible's "worth," apart from forty cents, is equal to two thousand verses, but the system itself is undermined by Tom's Wall-Street like wheeling and dealing for the yellow, red, and blue tickets. And the Doré Bible is presumably worth more than 2,000 verses because its market cost surpasses the plainly bound bible. In Twain's system, it should require more "work" to earn the more ornate volume. At the same time, the vacuous memorization numbs the mind and renders even the most industrious mute and stultified. In Twain's words, two thousand sheaves of scripture must be "warehoused" (33). If the Sunday school drudgery reflects the current state of Calvinism, Twain's example of the production of idiots reveals his denouncement of religious practices in Hannibal during his childhood.

Twain's depiction of the Sunday school scriptural relay offers more than a critique of Calvinism; in fact, he offers a commentary on specific Bible reading habits that shifted significantly just as Calvinism was rapidly losing its foothold as the dominant American religious ideology. The changes in Bible reading habits were directly related to the

modernization of print culture in America. The Bible became much more easily available and, as Twain points out, easily affordable. Colleen McDannell asserts that the print process of stereotyping made Bible production easier and more accurate beginning in the early nineteenth century (69). Shortly thereafter, newly-formed Bible societies effected a widespread distribution of these new, cheaper editions: “It was not enough for each home or church to have a copy of the scriptures. The goal of Bible societies was for each individual to own his or her own Bible” (71). In Tom’s Sunday school, clearly the aim is to ensure that each child obtains an individual copy of scripture, reflecting this larger movement. Although the Bible was always accessible, it becomes more plentiful as a cultural artifact during this period. Meanwhile, the very effort that made the Bible more accessible diminished its rarity and value while simultaneously changing Bible reading habits from communal and family events to far more private encounters with scripture. In short, the social control over scriptural exegesis began to diminish during this period. Guided readings became individual interpolations.

Another important result of the plethora of new Bible editions that saturated the market was the resultant need for “marketing” the Bible. McDannell argues that the sentimentalization of the Family Bible was replaced by the commodification of this artifact as publishers competed for sales. Rather than uphold a traditional stance stressing the importance of sacred scriptures, such efforts undercut authority of the Good Book. She writes: “Bible publishers realized that if they were to sell Bibles, they would need to counter the notion that Bibles only contained eternal truths of the Old and New Testaments. An unchanging Bible never became obsolete and therefore never needed to be replaced” (87). In other words, a market had to be created for these new editions, and publishers needed to capitalize on doubts over the authenticity of the text in order to sell more copies.

In American Bible culture, the idea of an authoritative, unchanging text is undermined by such marketing efforts. Instead, it is the very “differentness” of the Bible that allows various

publishers to distinguish their products. Some Bibles editions were designed to include supplementary material, such as maps, commentary, and illustrations, while other editions appealed to lavish Victorian aesthetics with expensive covers, bindings, and artwork. As I will discuss below, the difference between editions was not merely cosmetic; later, there will be controversy over translations as well, but the multiplicity of available editions emerged first in relation to supplementary or extra-scriptural enhancement, and later, the text itself began to change.

Paul Gutjahr discusses the collecting impulse that came to be associated with Bible ownership in a consumer-driven culture. Acquisition of religious artifacts, he argues, propagates the market for Scripture. He writes: “The bindings and illustrations helped create Bibles that were purchased for reasons aside from the words they contained. Bindings increasingly became tools to mark levels of gentility and social status” (177). What McDannell and Gutjahr emphasize is that several changes in market culture resulted in the more than 2,000 Bible editions that were available to consumers by 1880 (Gutjahr 3). Nearly every American who attended a religious institution received an individual copy of the Bible, reading habits changed from a collective to a private encounter with Scripture, publishers had to differentiate editions by undermining the idea of a single sacred text, and the text itself became recognizable by its physical appearance and value-added inserts, resulting in a brand-name Bible mentality.

When Twain anachronistically asks his readers in 1876 what they would be willing to do even for a Doré Bible (*Tom Sawyer* 28), he is indeed toying with the associated value of the brand-name Bible in relation to manifest religious practices in the late nineteenth century. He tunes into the very idea that certain editions will be more sought after than others, and he makes a crucial link between Calvinism, consumerism, and the technological revolution that has modernized the printing press. Himself a collector of Bibles, he is teasing Americans about the aesthetics of Bible acquisition and what it implies. The Bible becomes increasingly accessible

even as it is ironically losing its authenticity as a source of divine revelation because it is so frequently subject to change. As the Bible seemingly becomes less real, or less verifiably real at any rate, realist writers take up their pens trying to ascertain exactly what in culture can be understood with certainty and how abstract concepts might best be conveyed via the written word.⁹⁰ When Howells famously argues that literature was the new religion (*Silas Lapham* 126), he indirectly implies that realist literature is competing with the Bible in trying to bridge the relationship between spiritual beliefs and a system of ethics. What realist writers have inherited, however, is an increasingly skeptical public that has learned that all texts are now subject to doubt. In *Tom Sawyer*, Twain suggests that bible verses are known but not well understood; they are read and reiterated, but he calls into question what the text has to offer in relation to how it is both taught and read. What begins perhaps as a critique of Calvinism precipitates a broad inquiry into all literary practices that emerges directly from Bible hermeneutics and reading habits associated with it.

There is one other scene in *Tom Sawyer* that bears examining in relation to Twain's rejection of the Calvinist ethos. This scene allows readers to glimpse beyond the Bible itself as an expression of a changing religious culture; here, Twain expands his focus to materiality itself as a literary trope. Following Tom's Sunday school lesson is the additional tedium of sitting through the church sermon. Once again, Twain describes the scene with an analogy of value; the abstract value of the preacher's words are, like the Bible, given a concrete measurement in a system of exchange: "Tom counted the number of pages of the sermon; after church he always knew had many pages there had been, but he seldom knew anything else about the discourse" (*Tom Sawyer* 38). Tom observes the sermon, but he does not listen to it. The sermon itself becomes a tangible object in the room in a kind of play on materiality that Twain will often employ in his subsequent writing. We clearly gain the understanding that the Bible comprises merely "verses" while the sermon comprises merely pages, and abstract possibilities are now

repeatedly bound by their material forms and the interactions with those forms in American religious culture.

It soon becomes evident why the sermon fails to hold Tom's attention. In a description reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, another departure from Calvinism discussed below, Tom's attention is drawn to a competing discourse, which is the buzzing of a fly. As he "counts" the sermon and waits impatiently for an opportune time, he longs to capture the errant fly: "But with the closing sentence his hand began to curve and steal forward; and the instant the 'Amen' was out, the fly was a prisoner of war. His aunt detected the act, and made him let it go" (38). Minutes later, Tom remembers a pinch-bug he has brought with him. Soon, not only Tom but several of his fellow congregants allow their attention to wander from the minister's exposition to the competing entomological spectacle. After a quick and painful pinching, Tom watches in chagrin as the beetle escapes and is carried out on the back of a dog. "Tom Sawyer went home quite cheerful, thinking to himself that there was some satisfaction about divine service when there was a bit of variety in it. He had but one marring thought; he was willing that the dog should play with his pinch-bug, but he did not think it was upright in him to carry it off" (40). The moral lesson is dubious, but Tom at least finds relief from the monotony of the Sunday service, and Twain aptly forecasts the "variety" that the concurrent evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening offer to a public that has become bored with its Puritan inheritance.

If we contextualize the two instances of the insects to two memorable examples from Thoreau's 1854 *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, Twain's satire becomes easier to spot. Recalling Thoreau's assertion that "Be it life or death, we crave only reality" (71), Thoreau provides a strikingly similar account of a mosquito "making its invisible and unimaginable tour" (64). Unlike Tom, Thoreau does not view the insect as a diversion from sacred abstractions, but instead he likens the mosquito's journey to Homer's account of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (64) and still later he describes an epic battle between a red ant "Achilles" and a black ant (155). For

Thoreau, even an insect is transcendental, and the great ideas of the Universe recur again and again; they are preserved in words, but they are also able to be derived through close observation of the natural world.⁹¹ Thoreau's materialism is a conduit to the metaphysical realm as he locates a new trope for making his inherited Calvinism tangible and relevant. Tom finds only stark relief and a bit of variety that distracts from the grueling requirements of his Sunday-to-Sunday regimen. Tom is far less interested in eschatological salvation and meaning than he is grounded in the here and now. In both of these writings, a shift occurs that represents a departure from the hold Calvinist practices have had on the seminal imagination of developing minds, but Thoreau projects our imaginations outward to the notion of universal truths while Twain grounds our attention in the physical reminders of more earthly concerns. He offers a different kind of redirection than Thoreau does, and Twain will repeat this play with materiality in his subsequent realist works in various ways. For Twain, materiality itself functions as a literary trope.

Throughout his fiction, Twain not only alludes to bible verses, but he toys with the materiality of the Bible itself, examining how this tome signifies American reading habits in relation to a changing print culture and a market economy. Stories such as "The Stolen White Elephant" (1882) reveal Twain's familiarity with the print history of the Bible. In describing the missing elephant's propensity to consume scripture, Twain's characters discuss physical differences between the "ordinary octavo" edition and the family illustrated Doré Bible ("Stolen" 31). The detective asks his hapless victim question after question trying to ascertain exactly how much scripture the elephant was able to swallow. He tries to derive a formula first based on weight: "No, you do not get my idea. I refer to bulk. The ordinary Octavo Bible weighs about two pounds and a half, while the great quarto with the illustrations weighs ten or twelve. How many Doré Bibles would he eat at a meal?" (30). After a discussion of the different sizes and weights of Bible editions, the difference between editions is settled in financial terms as Twain

satirizes competing arguments about higher criticism by offering a new method for settling such theological disputes in a capitalist culture: “Well, put it in dollars and cents, then. We must get at it somehow. The Doré costs a hundred dollars a copy, Russian leather, beveled” (31). Twain “over-materializes” the nature of lofty scripture by focusing on its physical weight rather than its philosophical weightiness. Bible reading is implicitly compared to the elephant’s act of digesting Bibles, and the value of the Bible becomes intimately connected to its marketable cost, substituting a metaphysical concept with its capitalist equivalent.

Throughout his literary career, Twain alludes to scripture as well as hermeneutics in both subtle and overt ways. The importance of scripture to Twain’s fiction is indisputable, and his inclusion of it has captured scholars’ attention for decades, as scholar after scholar has attempted to quantify such references. Phipps summarizes: “Alan Gribben found allusions in MT’s writings to more than four hundred biblical passages, 139 to the Gospels and almost as many to the Pentateuch. They are drawn from more than half the books of both Testaments. Philip Williams guesses that there are more than a thousand allusions to the Bible altogether, having found 108 in *The Gilded Age* alone” (248-49).⁹² What is clear is that Twain becomes increasingly direct in his appropriation of scripture, not only by rewriting it but also by examining the Bible itself as a misleading symbol of divine knowledge or as a source of ethical authority.

Twain toys with many abstract notions of authority and conscience, and he intersperses this kind of play throughout his critique of religion. In his humorous depictions of both conscience and “the Moral sense,” he attempts to locate the nexus of morality in a culture with very little success. This kind of contemplation of socio-ethical behavior is common concern of realist writers, and it often emerges at a critical juncture when institutional religion engages with individual conscience, resulting with a feeling of dissatisfaction arising from the conflict between what one has been taught and what one desires to do. In “The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut” (1876), Twain depicts a protagonist who is able to

confront his very own conscience, which he is surprised to see is but “a shriveled, shabby dwarf” (9). In fact, the protagonist wants to confront his conscience not to resolve a moral question but instead to badger him for suppressing his deviant desires and causing him to be dissatisfied with himself because of the moral codes imposed by his Presbyterian upbringing. His crisis is instigated by the imminent arrival of his Aunt Mary, the executor of his moral inheritance. Confronting his conscience, he says, ““Curse you, I have wished a hundred times that you were tangible, and that I could get my hands on your throat once!”” (13-14). What ensues is a battle of the wills between narrator and conscience with a victory when the narrator finally kills his conscience by tossing it into the fire. Just as he drives away his conscience, the narrator similarly drives off Aunt Mary with his taunts: ““You behold before you a man whose life-conflict is done, whose soul is at peace, a man whose heart is dead to sorrow. . . ; a man *without a conscience!*” (24). The congruent imagery of the heart’s death and the soul’s peace is somewhat startling in a man who, according to his religious foundation, will now be damned for all of eternity. Reporting that he is now able to commit arson, swindling, and the murder of tramps, this man believes himself to be at peace because of the release from his moral restraint; it is not God who damns him but rather society. Although Freud would not publish “The Ego and the Id” until 1923, Twain clearly depicts the obstacle that a well-honed conscience provides to the latent desires of the unfettered psyche. Religion does not provide solace to the narrator; it ruins his life. In his counter-conversion, he is released and thus saved. Twain’s play on the manifestation of morals and custom presents conscience itself as a burden in the form of the taunting, hindering dwarf. He reverses the conversion experience by saving his subject in the immediate moment rather than promising the reward of eternal grace. The real question the text raises is about the trade-off; without metaphysical certainty, is the terrestrial shift worth the risk?

If *Tom Sawyer* and “Carnival of Crime” offer examples of Twain’s movement away from Presbyterianism, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) might be viewed as a larger

examination of different enactments of American religious practices. Once again, Twain concentrates his attention on different methods of observation and experience in relation to the symbolic representations that make religion *real*. This tale reveals Twain's fascination with objects, clues, observations, and revelations. As Tom Quirk points out, this novel is about misdirection: "The two principal plot devices, it turns out, are false leads" ("The Realism" 149). Huck never had any need to run away from his Pap because Pap, it turns out, was already dead, and Jim is running away long after he has been set free. In a scene at the end of *Huck Finn*, Huck observes how misleading material clues can be in deriving information about the unseen world, in this case, the world where Jim is hiding: "It shows how a body can see and don't see at the same time" (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 234). Huck's world is full of material clues, such as the Good Book, that do not provide clear guidance for the intangible realm of ethics, conscience, or salvation because, like all symbols, the Bible exists as an artifact that can be both seen and unseen at the same time because of the many ways in which the it has come to be understood.⁹³

As we have seen with "The Stolen White Elephant," often the Bible as a material artifact rather than specific verses therein captures Twain's interest. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain takes every opportunity to mock the symbols associated with moral and ethical behavior and to show how a symbol of authority can easily be undermined as soon as it assumes a new function in culture. Like *Tom Sawyer*, this story is set in the 1840s, but Twain's cynicism regarding biblical authority is much more indicative of late 19th-century culture. Twain aptly demonstrates the German "higher-criticism" historical view of the Bible's diminishing role as a literal source of authority in the many ways he plays with the appearance of the Bible in this novel. The many substitutions of biblical authority that occur within the text point to a shifting cultural emphasis in the way knowledge is inscribed and preserved.

In Huck's first impression of the Grangerford home, he notices right away a makeshift library that represents fairly accurately the moral and religious texts likely to be found in a

typical American home. Huck observes several items on display: “There was some books too, piled up perfectly exact, on each corner of the table. One was a big family Bible, full of pictures. One was ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ about a man that left his family it didn’t say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough” (103).⁹⁴ Such paragraphs register the Bible’s diminished role as merely an important source of truth but no longer a sacred religious and moral text; Huckleberry Finn places the Bible beside these various enactments of the Bible that illustrate applications of the sacred text, each perfectly balanced and “piled up perfectly exact.”⁹⁵ The careful sense of proportion assigned to the books emphasizes the downward course of the Bible’s ethical authority. Clearly, this is not a home that practices *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone), nor does the Bible elicit a sense of reverence relative to these other texts.

Following Huck’s introduction to the Grangerford home, we see Twain toying with the physical presence of the Bible, much as he had done in “The Stolen White Elephant.” In one scene, the Bible serves merely as a means of transporting secret love notes between warring families, the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons. When Huck is sent to locate Sophia Grangerford’s forgotten Bible, he becomes suspicious: “Says I to myself something’s up—it ain’t natural for a girl to be in such a sweat about a Testament; so I give it a shake, and out drops a little piece of paper with ‘*Half-past two*’ wrote on it with a pencil” (113). Here’s a good example of the narrator locating realism within the text and revealing a critical flaw with realism’s assumptions of the act of mirroring the social world; the act of observation emphasizes the role of subjectivity. It is an emotional discrepancy that reveals the misplaced authority of Sophia’s Bible, and it requires a specific ability to read the signs surrounding the object. Huck believes it “ain’t natural” that Miss Sophia would be so frantic about a lost book of scripture. His experience tells him the anxiety she reveals is disproportionate. Sensing her reaction is “not real,” he views the Bible only as a symbol of subterfuge. Just like the pilgrims in *The Innocents*

Abroad, Huck begins his search for evidence by employing the subjectivity of his own religious experience as a lens for viewing the world, or, in this case, examining the Bible.

Here we see the Bible causing a kind of anxiety because the hidden message in the Bible is not what it is supposed to be. Huck suspiciously searches the Bible in a new manner, and, sure enough, he finds “added” scripture, which is the secret rendezvous note. Responding sentimentally and remaining silent about the secret Bible note, Huck’s action leads to an ethical crisis when a feud is reignited between the warring families, and his friend Buck Grangerford is killed. Huck begins to contemplate his actions, and he feels uneasy about his own role in the apocalyptic outcome at the Grangerford home. This drama sets the stage for what Norris Yates labels the “counter-conversion” of Huckleberry Finn, a later scene in which Huck once again chooses to remain silent and tears up his own note betraying Jim’s location to Miss Watson. This counter-conversion occurs later in the novel at a point at which Huck rejects eschatological concerns about salvation and decides instead to follow his conscience as he helps Jim remain free. In Huck’s own words: ““All right, then I’ll *go* to hell”” (217). The subtle implications of this first passage relate very well to larger culture’s examination of the authority of the Bible and the inclusion or exclusion of specific gospels. Higher criticism and new translations undercut the Bible at every turn, causing an anxiety about the nature of Truth itself that realist writing begins to reflect.⁹⁶ The later passage, the counter-conversion, reveals the emphasis on conscience and self-knowledge over law and/or scripture as an ethical guide. The individual becomes an autonomous moral agent.

A later scene, without directly impugning the Bible, replaces it with other symbols of knowledge. When Huck is caught in a lie about his religious experience as a “valley” to the duke, the book Huck lays his hand on to swear to his honesty is a dictionary: “I see it warn’t nothing but a dictionary, so I laid my hand on it and said it” (177). Twain is probably making a covert reference to an 1880 Bible edition issued by Gately & Company that included “Dr.

William Smith's Standard Bible Dictionary," which was also called the "Household Dictionary of the Bible" (Gutjahr 80-83).⁹⁷ A direct reference would be anachronistic to the setting of the novel, but the substitution seems indicative of Twain's play on modern Bible editions in other writings such as *Tom Sawyer* and "Stolen White Elephant." The dictionary stands in for the Bible and offers instead a book that has another type of cultural authority; it is the ultimate books of "facts" but every word in it offers only a socially-constructed meaning making it as mutable as the Bible has become. The dictionary Bible seems to underscore Huck's inaccurate information while getting tripped up in his extensive web of lies about his social status and his church-going behaviors while sitting as required "by law" in the "family pew" of one of the seventeen sometimes preachers of an Anglican Church in "sea-bath haven" of land-locked Sheffield, England (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* 174-77). The multiplicity of Huck's collection of stories and yarns parallels the dictionary's collection of words and definitions; both collections are shifting and fallible. Ironically, Huck can recognize the substitute scripture while those who surround him cannot even as they claim to rely on the Bible as a touchstone to ascertain a man's integrity. The Bible is present and tangible, but it exists as an icon that is both seen and unseen because of the substitution of the dictionary edition and because of the multiple ways in which it is viewed in this exchange.

Twain's realism toys with the very construction of words, meaning, and authority within culture and with the way in which those words are retold with varying degrees of accuracy. In fact, the Bible begins to have two functions in this scene. On the one hand, the sacredness of the Bible is somewhat preserved as Huck feels comfortable with the dictionary simply because it is not an actual Bible. At the same time, the easy substitution underscores the dwindling authority of the Bible as one text is carelessly exchanged for another, much as the books on the Grangerford table are piled up perfectly exact. For Huck, the Bible itself is invested with truthfulness, but for his witnesses, it is Huck's *word* that should be sacred. There is an

underlying conflict between *The Word* and Huck's word that cannot be reconciled in this scene, reiterating the complicated subject-object relationship between knowledge and truth that Twain first suggested in *Innocents Abroad*.

Twain's portrait of the diminishing authority of biblical text finds its parallel in late nineteenth-century religious culture when most Protestant denominations replaced the King James Bible with an 1881 revision, causing a huge uproar (Szasz 19-21). In fact, this revision caused yet another round of splintering within Protestantism because some sects refused to acknowledge the authority of the new Bible translation claiming that the King James translation was divinely sanctioned via the inspiration of the Holy Ghost (20). Updated translations between 1881 and 1905, which changed the language of certain New Testament passages, caused further dissension among evangelical Protestant sects as to the legitimacy of both the new translations and the formerly accepted ones. Harold Bush writes: "Thus the new version of the Bible that emerged in 1881 was symbolic of an entirely new way of reading and thinking about the Bible that was emerging at just about the same time" (119). Twain's cutting satire of the Bible aptly engages with and presumably influences the controversy over scriptural authority in relation to the amorphous nature of language study in the Gilded Age.

In his later works, Twain begins to work toward a resolution of his hermeneutics and personal theology. In stories such as "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899), Twain himself actually rewrites New Testament scripture by changing the Lord's Prayer given in Matthew 6:13 from "Lead us not into temptation" to "Lead us into temptation." In his alteration of The Lord's Prayer, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Twain comfortably meddles with what was once held to be a sacred text. He reinstates a more Hebraic version of a God who tests humankind rather than a God who models perfection by removing all temptation that could lead to sin. In fact, during this era, Biblical text becomes increasingly subject to alteration, as we have seen, but Twain's adaptation here is more a reflection of his disillusionment with how

Christianity has come to be practiced through both Calvinist principles and subsequent liberal Protestantism rather than a commentary on translation accuracy. In Hadleyburg, the townspeople at first pride themselves on their reputation of living in an “incorruptible town” (Twain 75). The characters must acknowledge that the town’s motto reflects “an *artificial honesty*” because their integrity is untested (86). What they learn is that the citizens are as “weak as water when temptation comes” (86), and they begin to welcome the challenge to their moral fiber that resisting outside forces represents. This small change to The Lord’s Prayer represents a larger view into Twain’s emerging hermeneutics. Letting go of his Presbyterianism, he also discards the Puritan social conventions that stringently regulate social control to such an extent that all temptation is removed from the human condition. Nevertheless, he begins to reinstate the Calvinist preference for the Old Testament God of Law and other Old Testament figures even while he moves away from inherited Calvinist principles and practices.

Twain somewhat inadvertently seems to offer a compromise to late nineteenth-century religious culture. Liberal Protestantism revealed a strong bent toward New Testament teachings with the figure of Jesus held up as the epitome of human perfection, presumably in a deliberate move away from the Calvinist obsession with Hebraic God of Law. Twain, on the other hand, locates an emphasis on humanity *in* the Old Testament—and later through the figure of Adam—that offers a new way of embracing these ancient scriptures for their archetypal relevance to humankind and the condition of nineteenth-century American culture. It is in the Old Testament that Twain locates a universal notion about the human condition that seems applicable to the modern age.

Mark Twain’s fascination with the figure of Adam is well-documented. Alison Ensor describes Adam as “the Biblical character he was to use more than any other in his future works” (5). Harold Bush discusses “Mark Twain’s American Adam” in his book *Mark Twain: The Spiritual Crisis of His Age*, and he recounts Twain’s “preposterous scheme to erect a memorial to

Adam” in Elmira, New York (205). The purported goal of this well-organized effort was so that Adam would not be forgotten on earth, and the possibility of dozens of Elmiran tourists flocking to Upstate New York to “Kodak” Adam was irresistible to Twain. Bush concludes that Adam is simultaneously the metaphor for a lost faith and changing scientific culture, and he points out that this figure was invoked in different ways by Calvinists of the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ Bush writes: “Adam can often stand simultaneously for both Calvinist religion and for progressive American civil religion, for stasis and uniformity or for idealism in the face of an emerging realism” (Bush 216). For Twain, he believes Adam offers “a trope of far-reaching and multiplied levels of signification” (216) representing, ultimately, a “longing for a system of faith” (218) that is credible in late-nineteenth-century Darwinistic culture. In order to establish a connection between spirituality and humanity, an emblem must be invoked.

Twain’s focus on Adam is very logical choice relative to the more popular spiritual emblem for mankind, Jesus. By the late nineteenth century, Jesus was a popular rhetorical figure in modern religious discourse. Dozens of lives-of-Jesus biographies appeared on the market, and social scientists frequently invoked this figure as a model humanitarian when trying to figure out the relevance of the Scriptures to the problems of an industrial culture.⁹⁹ But the Jesus rhetoric is complicated and fraught with contradiction, especially in a materialist model. For example, evolutionists find the figure of Jesus to be somewhat complicated because whether understood as divine or human, Jesus represents perfection; he is the role model of a sinless life. The idea of perfection is problematic in an evolutionary schema. In a Darwinian model, evolution represents adaptation but not progress, so the idea of a perfect being does not allow for the possibility of adaptation. In a Spencerian model, evolution is progressive. If understood in a divine context, Jesus represents a spiritual connection to eternity whose meaning must be extrapolated anew for each given age. In this model, Jesus is transhistorical and cannot be understood in a materialist model and therefore must be intuited rather than experienced or understood. If understood as a

model of human perfection, then evolution—at least in a Spencerian model—makes no sense; how can mankind “progress” when perfection was achieved two thousand years ago? And if society has indeed “progressed,” what might the figure of Jesus, perfect perhaps in his own age, offer to the modern world that has advanced for centuries beyond his moral teachings? Michael Ruse and Edward Wilson discuss the impact of Herbert Spencer’s interpretation of Darwinian evolution as a model for social evolution. They write: “Attempts to link evolution and ethics first sprang up in the middle of the last century, as people turned to alternative foundations in response to what they perceived as the collapse of Christianity” (Ruse and Wilson 507). A liberal Protestant solution embraces the Spencerian model and tries to combine, somewhat illogically, the mystical conception of an ever-present Jesus with the material reality of an advancing civilization. T. J. Jackson Lears explains: “Discarding Calvinistic severity, [liberal Protestants] formulated a Christ-centered evolutionary creed which married spiritual to material progress and preached universal salvation” (23). Twain’s position on the progressive model remains unresolved, but he begins to question not only the reliability of the subject-object relation to material symbols but the idea of subjectivity in relation to how identity is produced within culture. The figure of Adam serves as a critical link between a universal condition of mankind, a pre-modern symbol, and a scientific age.¹⁰⁰ With no pretext of divinity, Twain’s Adam is both a challenge to Darwinists and a figure emblematic of humanity that overrides the divine nature of Jesus in its application to modern culture.

While Bush argues convincingly that Twain’s Adam is a complex, multifaceted metaphor for a far-reaching religious debate, the Adam character also seems to offer a final division of spirituality and secularism for Twain. It is, of course, a biblical secularism, but in *Adam’s Diary* (1892), he seems conclude decisively that the reality of lived experience is a better alternative to the infinite promise of sublime reward. In this journal, fallenness and love are linked, and thus it is Adam’s humanity that Twain associates with the modern age. In Adam’s reflection, he writes:

“After all these years, I see that I was mistaken about Eve in the beginning; it is better to live outside the garden with her than inside it without her. At first I thought she talked too much; but now I see I should be sorry to have that voice fall silent and pass out of my life” (*Twain*, “Extracts” 16). In this poignant passage, Adam concludes that even the sacrifice of an everlasting Eden is worth a finite amount of time outside of the garden. Here, the emphasis is not only on the tangible nature of lived experience, but there is also a strong foreshadowing of modernist thinking that emerges. Happiness is dependent on the subjectivity of experience as it can be comprehended. Again, there is an imposition of limits and parameters that defines the realism of that experience; it is finite and not infinite, and it must be realized in the here and now. This is surely the turn that modernism will offer when subjectivity is projected inward as a psychological perception of experience and potential. In other words, experience is real only as it can be perceived. Without Eve to tempt him to sin and catapult him from the garden, Adam can only exist in an endless state of uncomprehended grace. Twain seems to find little value in this condition, and in this way, he expresses little interest in eschatology.

When examined closely, realist texts actively engage with the religious subject, particularly scripture, in an effort to examine the reciprocity of the material and the spiritual in relation to ethics and social conscience in the Industrial Age. Realism itself is closely defined by the idea of parameters and limits as various writers seek to understand how to make tangible abstract notions of truth and knowledge without stretching the limits of credibility. By offering manifestations of abstract notions such as his caricature of conscience, as he does in “A Carnival of Crime,” Twain shows that certainty of knowledge is itself an unattainable condition regardless of the “object,” whether abstract like conscience or concrete like the Bible. Such doubt is a definite movement towards modernism. In *The Education of Henry Adams*, Adams, like Twain, lays the groundwork for modernism by viewing truth as a multifaceted condition that is dependent on subjectivity and circumstance. In Chapter 15, Darwinism (1867-1868), Adams

discusses the emerging field of psychology and the obsessive need for "truth." He writes: "The mania for handling all sides of every question, looking into every window, and opening every door, was, as Bluebeard judiciously pointed out to his wives, fatal to their practical usefulness in society. One could not stop to chase doubts as if they were rabbits" (Adams 181). At first, in realist literature, it appears that the very search for truth is a never-ending quest as if the only obstacle to truth is the process of discovery with its infinite possibilities, but what happens next is that the reliability of the mind, meaning perception itself, begins to be suspect. One wonders if anything can be known with certainty when the conduit to all knowledge—the mind—is unreliable.

There are two paths that emerge; one is to abandon the quest for guaranteed truth and reinstate a quest for belief, while the other is to hold all knowledge as susceptible to doubt. In short, what emerges is a battle between faith and cynicism, and both Adams and Twain show that these proclivities are not mutually exclusive. In an unusual defense of Bluebeard, Adams relates this quote about the futility of chasing down every doubt specifically to scientific development and changing social values. He also writes that he was "the first in an infinite series to discover and admit to himself that he did not really care whether truth was, or was not, true. He did not even care that it should be proved true, unless the process were new and amusing. He was a Darwinian for fun" (181). By this same token, belief can be as enjoyable as doubt. Both notions can be embraced with equal cynicism. Upon his discovery of "Adam's tomb," Twain writes: "That Adam was formed of dirt procured in this very spot is amply proven by the fact that no man has ever been able to prove that the dirt was *not* procured here whereof he was made" (Twain, *Innocents Abroad* 430).¹⁰¹ The narrator pokes fun at popular religious discourse in which something can be believed as long as it passes the test of reason and cannot be disproved. With Twain, as with Henry Adams, the pleasure of uncertainty becomes synonymous with modernism, and the literature begins to poke fun at the ways in which knowledge is inscribed

and preserved as the age of science replaces the age of faith. In fact, we later learn in “Adam’s Diary” that Twain’s literary Adam like Henry Adams is also a “Darwinian for fun.” As he observes the natural world, he soon learns that “Perplexity augments instead of diminishing” (Twain, “Extracts” 13). He conducts experiments, decries simple beliefs, and toils away on Sundays, but he ultimately concludes that lived experience is far more comprehensible than the Garden paradise. The fall from Grace was worth it, he concludes, if only to comprehend the pleasures of the moment.

Twain’s late-career writing is noted for its cynicism. He never found a way to reinstate the quest for belief although he continued to be fascinated with the idea of this earlier era. In 1896, he published *Joan of Arc*, in which he takes one final comprehensive look at European Catholicism. Reviewing this work, William Dean Howells captures the inherent concern of the text when he writes: “What can we say in this age of science, that will explain away the miracle of the age of faith?” (*My Mark Twain* 133). As Twain abandons his pursuit to explain adequately the lost “age of faith,” he turns again to a scrutiny of American religious practices. David Reynolds views Twain’s later writing as a response to Calvinist fiction, and he classifies him under the label of under the label of “debunking and extending” (*Faith in Fiction* 207-208) earlier religious fiction. Specifically, he refers to Twain’s parody of popular religious literature in such works as “Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven” and his “sour rewriting of scriptures” (207) in “Extracts of Methuselah’s Diary” (1876) and “The Diary of Adam and Eve.” He writes: “Stormfield finds the terrestrial heaven a place of monotonous routine, annoying crowds, and infrequent appearances by Biblical figures. Yet another theme of religious novelists, redemptive visitation by divine agents, was darkened in *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916), in which Mark Twain carried the demonic visionary mode to a portrayal of chaos and moral relativism” (207-208).¹⁰² These two latter literary contributions, “Stormfield” and *Mysterious Stranger* are difficult to access and one reason for that is that by the time some of his later stories were

published, Twain had been rewriting and revising some of these pieces for decades.

“Stormfield” may have been elaborated on as a parody of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s 1868 *The Gates Ajar* at one point, but Twain began “Stormfield” just before Phelps’s work was published, so the story must be considered as something other than simple parody.¹⁰³ Like *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, it has a complicated bibliographical history. As a result, the final piece is more like a patchwork quilt that was sewn together from four generations’ discarded fabric. Some of these later publications, in fact, are the best examples of how Twain incorporated a changing religious vista into his literature, and they are worthy of deconstruction for that reason. It is soon evident that the realist label becomes increasingly problematic as mimesis is subverted and the dimensions of time and space cease to exist.

Modernism hones in on even the act of comprehension and forces the subject to ask if comprehension can be trusted to be reliable. The idea of reality itself begins to fragment resulting in the dangerous implication that nothing is real. Roger Lundin writes: “In the wake of Darwin, language increasingly appeared to be not a symbol uniting self, nature, and God, but a sign of the impassable divide between consciousness and the natural world” (105). In this light, “Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven” might be read as a modernist work not only because of its digressive composition but also for its preoccupation with the uncertainty of all knowledge and experience. Once again, the problematic issue of subjectivity emerges. Here, the “search for evidences” suggested in *Innocents Abroad* does not attempt to reconcile tangible artifacts with abstract beliefs. Instead, the issue of certainty becomes increasingly problematic as the foundation of the beliefs is attacked. The premise of the story challenges the notion of realism with a multi-layered level of reportage of the story’s events. It is told as a tale within a tale: it is a fictional secondhand account of Stormfield’s dream of a visit to the “Other World,” yet the narrator reports that Stormfield “believed that the visit was an actual experience” (Twain 139). With this construction, Twain presents a two-sided interpretation about the possibility of whether

or not the story might be accepted as a dream or an actual experience. The structure of the story itself also adds to the surreal experience of the dream, posing the critical question of what makes an experience “real.” The story opens with the newly dead Stormfield journeying to Heaven, but by its third chapter, the events leap forward by about thirty years, indicating how far Heaven is from Earth. Heaven is so far away, in fact, and so immense that Stormfield has trouble finding the entrance gate and he ends up “billions of leagues from the right one (153). When he tries to explain what he’s looking for, his vocabulary is not adequate to convey his proper proximity to Heaven, and the closest he can come is to start naming the planets in his “astronomical system” (152). Twain plays with the textual dimensions of time, space, language, consciousness, and perception in this story to such an extent that every tool for gauging truth becomes suspect.

In fact, in his later years, Twain begins to experience vivid dreams of his own in which he believes his loved ones are physically present in the room. In 1905, he describes a dream in which his late wife Livy appears to reassure him that the sorrows he has experienced at the loss of his loved ones were only dreams. He writes: “The conviction flamed through me that our lamented disaster was a dream, and this a reality” (Neider 195). Twain continues on to describe his confusion over discerning between dreams and reality when he awoke. Twain biographer Fred Kaplan writes that Twain’s reading of William James’s *Principles of Psychology* along with his own dream encounters with loved ones force Twain to question the role that the subjectivity of the mind plays in relation to understanding what is real. Kaplan writes: “More than ever before, he was redefining the terms of realism for life and for fiction. Dream life lent itself to another kind of fiction. Myth and fable could convey ideas and situations before which realism faltered” (Fred Kaplan 541). Twain’s experiences with dream accounts impact his fiction in his later years as he revises his manuscripts of *Captain Stormfield* and *The Mysterious Stranger*. The visionary mode allows him to examine the function of the mind in the process of interpreting

how the physical world operates in relation to both the metaphysical world and the interiority of the mind itself. He begins to believe metaphysicality is itself a fabrication of the imagination.

The purpose of the story seems to be to take on every possible preconceived idea about Heaven and expose it as a myth, but, in fact, the story deals with a broad series of cultural stereotypes that relate to religious customs and have very little to do with the afterlife. Instead, the story challenges the foundations of knowledge relative to a world of experience. Each new encounter introduces an ethical dilemma that Stormfield must address from religion to doctrine to race. These three immediate challenges jar the reader by signaling Twain's "debunking" rhetorical pose. Unlike Phelps's vision of Heaven where Heaven is reassuringly whatever one wants it to be as long as nothing can be directly contradicted by Scripture, Stormfield's Heaven is nothing that he expected it to be because his preconceptions do not allow him to reason through the many problems he encounters. Twain begins by showing Stormfield's encounter with a Jewish man on his journey from Earth to Heaven. Stormfield reports: "It was a great improvement, having company. I was born sociable, and never could stand solitude. I was trained to a prejudice against Jews—Christians always are, you know—but such of it as I had was in my head, there wasn't any in my heart" (Twain 142). Right away here we have a notion of prejudice existing either in the head or in the heart, suggesting that there are two kinds of prejudice, one which is conditioned (believed but not felt inherently) and a more deep-seated kind that is more permanently rooted in the "heart" of man. The first kind is evidently more curable than the second. Stormfield loosely labels himself as a "Christian," a label which, as the story unfolds, proves once again to have multiple levels of signification just as the term did years earlier in *Innocents Abroad*.

The travelers Stormfield encounters on his spiritual journey challenge his Christian identity by shaking the foundation of his beliefs. Believing he is headed for Hell, Stormfield enters into an ethical debate with himself about whether or not it would be a kindness to his new

companion, Solomon, to inform him that they must both be headed for Hell. After a brief misunderstanding, Stormfield realizes he is misjudging Solomon and concludes that “To my mind there was the stuff in him for a Christian” (143). Next, Stormfield encounters two best friends who died by suicide after one tricked the other with a practical joke that had gone wrong. The scenario suggests that choice is an important factor in the concept of sin since suicide would preclude admission to heaven. George Bailey had been led to believe that his girlfriend Candace Miller was in love with Tom Wilson, but it was Wilson playing a practical joke (145). Next, Stormfield encounters “a nigger” on his journey. Stormfield begins to lose his patience with some of the “pick-ups” he meets along the way because “dead people are people, just the same, and they bring their habits with them, which is natural” (146). The men begin to debate on the nature of spirituality when they are tempted by tobacco, but, because “there is no atmosphere in space” (146), they cannot get a match to light. Each new situation highlights the potential for an earthly sin according to Stormfield’s theology and carries with it the suggestion that under these assumptions, no one would make it into Heaven, and even if they do, they are unlikely to find any real peace. Surprisingly, Stormfield realizes that he is not on a journey to Hell and that perhaps he has misunderstood the prerequisites for admission to Heaven. He finally concludes, “I begin to see that a man’s got to be in his own heaven to be happy” (155). All of these scenarios are just a warm-up act for some of the ensuing doctrinal challenges with which Twain will torment his readers. Stormfield’s Heaven begins to look more and more like Earth.

Finally, the story shifts to Stormfield’s initiation and tour of heaven with a host of parties and events celebrating famous prophets, both ancient and modern. Stormfield and his new companion, Sandy, have a long discussion about class and human potential. Unlike Earth, however, Heaven apparently favors new angels for their potential rather than their actual achievements, with a sympathy factor counting toward one’s circumstances of birth and social position as limiting disadvantages that can be discounted in Heaven. They discuss the famous

Brooklyn preacher, Talmage, who had expressed a wish to “fling his arms around Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and kiss them and weep on them” (166). Sandy reveals, “Those are kind and gentle old Jews, but they ain’t any fonder of kissing the emotional highlights of Brooklyn than you be” (166). Reinforcing Stormfield’s conclusion about the subjective “reality” of heaven, Sandy concludes, “When the Deity builds a heaven, it is built right, and on a liberal plan” (167). In the end, Heaven prepares to welcome its newest celebrity, the “tailor Billings, from Tennessee” who wrote poetry but could not get it published” (170). In Heaven, the tailor is as important as Homer and Shakespeare, and he will receive a grand welcoming in spite of his low rank on Earth. The tailor’s heavenly entitlement is really a Calvinist concept suggesting predestination or foreordination. If one is saved based on potential rather than earthly endeavor, then life itself is immaterial as long as one can maintain a pure *intention*. The poet’s unpublished words do not differentiate his chances for a successful entrance into Heaven. Here, one can be a writer, a poet, even a celebrity, with neither language nor text. There is an inherent and intangible purity that somehow paves the way, but, as in Calvinism, no material evidence exists that can prove irrevocably what Divine intention may be. Although Twain was no doubt satirizing the difficulties of publishing, he is distinguishing between the private and the public life of a writer. The underlying question he poses is at what level do words and language begin to serve as material evidence of the intention of the soul? At the same time, the suggestion of a collective social culpability for limiting a man’s potential is antithetical to the American Calvinist ideal of a self-made man. His vindication of the tailor poet is really quite problematic for someone who is trying to locate any notion of truth through the use of language. This model makes it impossible to access the *real* via the text because there is something even more real just beyond the limits of the text.

Sandy presents a Heaven that offers a revisionist history that corrects not only theological prejudices but imperialist assumptions as well. In fact, Stormfield’s vision of Heaven cannot be

sustained as Sandy's mathematical proof illustrates. The discussion turns to the number of dark-skinned people in heaven whose presence is a surprise to Stormfield. "Sandy, I notice that I hardly ever see a white angel; where I run across one white angel, I strike as many as a hundred million copper colored ones—people that can't speak English. How is that?" (174). Sandy replies, "You see, America was occupied a billion years and more, by Injuns and Aztecs, and that sort of folks, before white man ever set his foot in it" (174). Sandy proceeds to give a complicated mathematical explanation of the mathematical probability of finding a "white" man in the American corner of heaven in order to show the unlikelihood of this expectation. The tale just begins to unravel as all subjects are used up and simply set aside with no remaining conjecture left to satirize. There are actually several endings to this tale and several other "visits" to Heaven—those of Simon Wheeler and Sam Jones—but there is, of course, no resolution; every scenario fails to hold up to intellectual scrutiny, but no other access to a system of knowledge can be substituted. With his highly offensive preaching and exhorting, the Texan Sam Jones ends up causing a mass exodus from Heaven and finds himself with "the place all to himself" (Twain, "A Singular Episode" 202). He finds himself in a Heaven where no one else would possibly desire to be. Twain's final attempt at Heaven depicts only a very solitary state of tremendous uncertainty.

Scholars have spent decades trying to understand Twain's complicated theology. As a corrective to earlier scholarship that tended to view Twain as an embittered cynic, more recent scholars, beginning first with William Pellowe and continuing with John Hays and William Phipps, have come to view Twain in a more multifaceted light. These scholars view Twain's ambivalence toward Christianity not as a rejection of mainstream American religious thought but as an emblem of the changing liberal Protestant aesthetic that displaced Calvinist dogma by the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Twain, however, stands apart from the liberal Protestant movement in many ways, particularly in his emphasis on the archetypal value of Old Testament

Scripture. In this way, he also hints at the fundamentalist aesthetic that will follow in the early twentieth century. As Hays points out, “Clemens merely followed chronologically the development of American religious thought up to and through his own time” (12).¹⁰⁴ A close examination of Twain’s fiction supports that claim, but it is in his ultimate compromise, that is, his return to the Old Testament, that Twain finds his resolution. Just as Adam and Eve occupy a state of separation from the divine, Twain begins to correlate his own alienation from the divine as being archetypal of a modern religious sensibility. He never returns to his Calvinist principles—he satirizes many of such beliefs—but he does find a way to make the Bible relevant again in the way he locates “realism” within Scripture by focusing on the figure of Adam. This is an important shift away from the liberal Protestant preference for the more mystical figure of Jesus although, like other liberal Protestants, Twain seems to be seeking a primitive faith that longs for a pre-doctrinal state.

In the end, Twain seems to prefer an immediate post-Eden state to the alternative of a literary Eden. He does not embrace the utopian literature that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century such as William Dean Howells’s *Altrurian Romances* (1894-1908) or Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888). Utopian literature drew on a transhistorical re-creation of a Christ-like figure, which Twain avoids, and it assumes that mankind is progressing toward perfection or an end of history.¹⁰⁵ Twain’s fallen Eden is clearly a pre-Christian state, which is why the liberal Protestant label is so problematic for Twain. Susan Jacoby suggests a better label for Twain is freethinker (189). She defines this term broadly encompassing both atheists and deists. She writes: “Often defined as a total absence of faith in God, freethought can be better understood as running the gamut from the truly antireligious . . . to those who adhered to a private, unconventional faith revering some form of God or Providence but at odds with orthodox religious authority” (4). In short, Twain differs from most liberal Protestants by avoiding the philosophical debate about whether to view Jesus as a figure of divine or human

perfection, but he never rejects the positivist notion that religion can play a civilizing role. Instead, he relies on the archetype of Adam to open a discourse on the problems he believes are unique to the nineteenth century, which are specifically scientific, capitalist, and industrialist concerns. In doing so, he cues his preoccupation with humanity rather than spirituality as he seeks universal knowledge about the condition of mankind.

The religious subject is not limited to the role of the Bible in relation to the realist text; however, hermeneutics calling into question the infallibility of “The Word” inevitably projects doubt onto the reliability of all texts. In this sense, religion first paves the way for literary realism as an empirical examination of truth in American culture as realist writers usurp discourses of authority that had been strongly associated with the religious subject. These discourses include not only the Bible itself but other discourses related to scriptural teachings, such as sermons, tracts, and homiletic novels. Twain’s work is pivotal to this process. These textual passages reveal his play on the material nature of the text as he subordinates the semantic content of the Bible. Ultimately, however, it is materiality that is set aside as new literary forms such as naturalism and modernism emerge by the turn of the century.

Twain is a difficult realist; there is no getting around that fact. He experiments with form and style, and he satirizes popular literary forms even as he embraces them. Like other prominent realists, he does not have a single unified vision of how the realist text should operate, but he does allow us to examine realism as an expression of culture and as a vehicle for addressing the kinds of cultural changes he would like to examine and influence. His interest in the religious subject is indisputable, but what emerges upon a review is the importance of form and style in tandem with this subject for Twain. When cynical, he resorts to fantasy frameworks, projecting both back in time and even out of time in order to ridicule the prejudices of the modern world in a vast comparison to the possibilities of universal truth. At other times, as with *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*, Twain narrows his focus and locates his fiction in the “credible and

close present” (Furst 77). He locates cultural signifiers that allow the reader to imagine the textual world as resembling either the present or the immediate past, but then he instantly undercuts those signifiers by using them in unexpected ways. He plays on his reader’s ability to recognize symbols such as the Bible, but he also challenges his reader’s expertise and experience with the Bible to force an acknowledgement that mimesis is hardly possible in American religious culture. Nothing is quite as it seems. He follows what Henry Adams terms “a mania for handling all sides of every question” (Adams 181), but by doing so, his texts begin to spin out of control because instead of the limitless possibilities of Lilian Furst’s “All is True,” Twain reveals that none of this could possibly be true. After questioning material culture, he then challenges words and language as adequate signifiers, and finally he challenges the notion that man himself is an adequate interpreter of knowledge.

At the same time, Twain never quite loses faith in mankind; he reinstates Adam as an emblematic figure for nineteenth-century man. It is the very fallenness of humankind that Twain celebrates. His texts offer a discursive cite for exploring that complete lack of certainty that Adam had to confront when expelled from Eden. There is a certain naiveté in early realism—a belief that the truth might be ascertained—but by Twain’s later writing, the expulsion from Eden seems inevitable. Once the vacuousness of textual representation is exposed, there is no turning back. Naturalism emerges, offering an alternate view of cultural determinism, atavism, and primitivism as one alternative explanation for social power, and modernism simultaneously emerges, offering a view that perhaps the human mind itself limits the quest for certainty. Toward the end of his life, Twain still reiterates the Calvinist notion that human beings have little or no determinism in their own fate, and that the race is subject to outside forces. In a letter to his close friend the Reverend Joseph Twichell in 1904, he writes: “I wish I could remember that it is unjust and dishonorable to put blame upon the human race for any of its acts. For it did not make itself, it did not make its nature, it is merely a machine, it is moved wholly by outside

influences. . . . [Its] Maker, . . . solely, is responsible”(Neider 193). Twain’s ironic metaphor depicting man as machine reveals his final movement toward a determinism that merges Calvinism and naturalism by identifying humankind as helpless in relation to its own final destiny. It is a definitive step away from Howells’s earlier optimism that the human race might aid in its own social evolution.

If we historicize fundamentalism, both in its Puritan form and in the modern day understanding of the term, I believe it is no accident that it bookends realism as a philosophical and literary movement. Realism was a search for an empirical understanding of the universe, and two paths diverged following the realist-post-Calvinist aesthetic; secularism, with a scientific search for knowledge, and fundamentalism with its complete abandonment of certainty. This abandonment offers a claim to its own kind of social and literary power, which is a challenge to believe in religious doctrine without any specific understanding of what that belief might imply. We see this illustrated in William Dean Howells’s *A Modern Instance*. Howells’s character, Ben Halleck, resolves his crisis of faith by such a return to fundamentalism:

He freely granted that he had not reasoned back to his old faith; he had fled to it as to a city of refuge. His unbelief had been helped, and he no longer suffered himself to doubt; he did not ask if the truth was here or there, any more; he only knew that he could not find it for himself, and he rested in his inherited belief. He accepted everything; if he took one jot or tittle away from the Book, the curse of doubt was on him. (450)

Halleck’s return to orthodoxy is born of out a frustration with his own inability to determine absolute moral imperatives. He abandons intuition and reasoning and turns back a version of Judeo-Christian law as mitigated through the church of his youth. Fundamentalism is a quasi-return to the Calvinist idea that human beings are incapable of understanding the spiritual world. In this schema, the Bible re-emerges as a sacred text, but in American culture, the questions of textual authority have yet to be addressed.

Twain never makes the return to fundamentalism that Howells forecasts, but he does make the inextricable link between American religion and the realist text. He examines the

major religious shifts in American culture over a fifty-year period that both began and ended with Liberal Protestant reform rhetoric. He reflects these shifts, he forecasts them, and he shapes them. He finds the styles and rhetorical tools to shape the religious discourse in literature. He experiments with form more than he adheres to it, and yet he is still labeled a realist by today's scholars. In part, Twain earns this label as a debunker, which surely becomes an adjective closely associated with the realist aesthetic, but it is also his use of cultural signifiers that allow us to apply this label. Twain's texts, even those set in Heaven, allow the reader to imagine the textual world as resembling the exterior world. In this way, materiality ceases to be the defining factor of the realist text. As Gregory Jackson suggests, it is the allegorical rendering of the text that allows the reader to recreate it. Realism then becomes an allegory for the real; it is the idea that the reader can "apply" the lesson of the text to the world of the reader's own experience. It is a call to arms for social change rather than a promise of ultimate reward. Realism offers the hope of an immediate return for a change over which the reader has agency. Twain comes to doubt that agency, and he begins to consider specific types of a deterministic model. Harold Frederic closely echoes this turn in Twain's work, but Frederic's concern is less universal than Twain's, and he narrows his focus to social and scientific determinism, slowly eliminating the religious rhetoric that his early fiction first embraces. Twain's final view becomes mythic and archetypal while Frederic hones in on the social conditions of humankind and how a person operates within culture rather than across culture.

Notes

⁸⁰ See "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (184) for a discussion of the twenty-eight "Moral Qualities" of mankind. Paine and Duneka also include a section on "Moral Sense" in their rewritten version of "The Mysterious Stranger" that is taken from the "Eseldorf" version of Twain's manuscripts (Tuckey 10). Note: this version is also titled "The Chronicle of Young Satan" (Kahn xiii).

⁸¹ Gregory Jackson employs this term in his explanation of realism (*The Word* 150), but Lilian Furst offers a more thorough discussion of the techniques that realist writers employ “to make readers believe that the action takes place in a credible and close present” (77). Furst suggests that such temporal markers serve “as one of the sustaining conventions” of this genre (81).

⁸² In fact, the multiplicity of this term must also be considered in relation to nonliterary impulses such as art, music, and philosophy, as Bernard Bowron argues in 1951, when he writes: “one is strongly tempted to talk not about American realism but about American realisms” (269).

⁸³ Robert Bellah defines the subject-object relationship as symbolic realism: “Here reality is seen to reside not just in the object but in the subject and particularly in the relation between subject and object. The canons of empirical science apply primarily to symbols which attempt to express the nature of objects, but there are nonobjective symbols which express the feelings, values, and hopes of subjects, or which organize and regulate the flow of interaction between subjects and objects, or which attempt to sum up the whole subject-object complex” (93).

⁸⁴ In *Tangier*, for example, he notes: “Here are five thousand Jews in blue gaberdines [sic], sashes about their waists, slippers upon their feet. . . . Their noses are all hooked, and hooked alike. They all resemble one another so much that one could almost believe they were of the same family. . . . Their women are all plump and pretty, and do smile upon a Christian in a way which is in the last degree comforting” (*Innocents Abroad* 49-50). Later, moving away from a socio-political discussion of Jewish identity, he focuses on the tradition of the Wandering Jew in Jerusalem, noting that evidence of this doomed wanderer who refused refuge to Jesus was inscribed on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as recently as 1860 (440). Twain’s final comment on “Israel’s religion” is that “it contained no promise of a hereafter” (485), an oversight which he satirically notes stands in marked contrast to “enlightened religion with future eternal rewards and punishment in it” (485). Twain is referring not to Christianity but to Egypt. He is writing an anti-progression model by pointing out that many of the “advances” of Western civilization existed in Egypt thousands of years ago. These several but fleeting comparisons of the Jewish people culture by culture seem to offer a commentary on civilization; backwards civilizations stereotype the Jewish people and discriminate against them, as seen in the blue robes in *Tangier*, while “enlightened” civilizations did not persecute the Jews. Twain never finishes the implicit comparison in relation to the Jewish Jesus, but the political aspect of religious identity emerges in relation to a larger discussion of Christianity and civilization.

⁸⁵ Here, again, we have the problematic moniker “Christian” being invoked. Does the narrator mean to imply that *all* Christians in America treat all members of the Jewish faith with equal tolerance? Twain seems to be using the term “Christian” as a synonym for “American” and it is helpful to see this label as a particular unfolding in a larger rhetorical development of American religious culture.

⁸⁶ There are multiple versions of “The Mysterious Stranger” in print. Twain wrote at least three versions of the story between 1896-1910, and he revised these several times. After Twain’s death in 1910, the story remained unpublished until 1916 when biographer A. B. Paine “discovered” the manuscripts. Paine and Frederick Duneka actually found several versions of the story, and they edited and rewrote several passages before publishing the story in 1916. Critics continue to examine the story today and debate the question of intention and authenticity, but the Paine edition has been discredited as a Twain manuscript because of the new text added by Paine and Duneka (Rasmussen 329 and Reiss xiii). In 1963, John S. Tuckey discovered the fabrication, and he identified at least three holographic versions and several other manuscripts and fragments (14). Tuckey published his findings in 1963, and he later published Twain’s manuscript in 1969 with the title *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. For this reason, any edition based on a copy text prior to the 1969 version is most likely to be the unauthorized Paine and Duneka version, which continues to remain in print, incorrectly identified with Twain as the sole author. Contemporary scholars distinguish between the two versions by referring to Paine’s version as *The Mysterious Stranger* and Tuckey’s version as *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. See also Kahn (8). Robert Hirst points out that Paine and Duneka based their version on the earliest rather than the latest of Twain’s *Stranger* manuscripts: “They took extraordinary liberties with what Mark Twain had written. They deleted fully one-fourth of the author’s words; they wrote into the story the character of an astrologer, who did not even appear in the manuscript. . . . And, since the ‘Chronicle’ version was incomplete, they appropriated the concluding chapter Mark Twain had written for his latest and longest version, ‘No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger.’ . . . The editors said nothing about their alterations, and the facts were not known even to scholars familiar with the manuscripts until John S. Tuckey published *Mark Twain and Little Satan* in 1963” (198). Ironically, Twain himself predicted Paine’s downfall when discussing Paine’s enjoyment of some of his later manuscripts during the time they spent together at Twain’s house, Stormfield, in his final days. In a 1909 letter to his friend Betsy Wallace, he writes: “Paine is going to be damned one of these days, I suppose” (Neider 315). Because the story offers an examination into Twain’s later views on Catholicism, it is

valuable as a comparison to *The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Innocents Abroad*. At the same time, as with many of Twain's later stories, it is difficult to ascertain which passages of text reflect Twain's views at specific "stages" of his literary and religious aesthetics. In my analysis, I've chosen to focus on the philosophical views that seem to work in tandem with *Connecticut Yankee* without placing a great deal of emphasis on Twain's theology but focusing instead on Twain's consistency in relation to Catholicism and his experimentation of visionary literary forms in connection with Catholicism.

⁸⁷ Thomas Jenkins writes that romanticism is a celebration of the "passionate and primitive. This romantic vision of history involved rediscovering lost, original capacities in human beings. History was not progressive. The human race was not becoming more capable with the development of civilization. Rationality and gentility repressed its native instincts. To recover these, people had to restore in themselves ancient imaginative capacities" (80).

⁸⁸ Hegel writes: "For it is only among civilized people that alteration of figure, behaviour, and every sort and mode of external expression proceeds from spiritual development" (640). Hegel goes on to analyze different stages of art in order to derive "the doctrine of the *forms of art*" (640). These forms include a mere search for portrayal, classical art, and finally romantic art (640-63). In the nineteenth century, the logical extension of the Hegelian view of progressive history correlates to Social Darwinism in which abstract concepts such as art, including literature, and society evolve and move towards perfection. By examining realism as an expression of a corresponding spiritual age as Twain does, he places his own aesthetic into a Hegelian discourse. For a discussion on Hegel and realism, see Brown 233-38.

⁸⁹ Twain is speaking anachronistically to his late-century readers since the Doré illustrations did not appear until the 1860s. "The work of one engraver became almost synonymous with family Bibles. The art of French illustrator Gustave Doré (1823-32) first appeared in an expensive English Bible in 1866. Throughout the late nineteenth century, Doré's engravings drew the reader into a fairytale land of mighty pharaohs, seductive women, and powerful redeemers" (McDannell 93).

⁹⁰ Here, I argue that scriptural hermeneutics and Bible reading practices cast doubt on the authority of all texts to depict an absolute notion of unchanging truth. Suzy Anger relates scriptural hermeneutics to the recent history of literary criticism. She isolates various approaches to ascertaining truth in Bible reading, and she follows the line of changing literary practices in the manner in which texts are read. She writes: "Recognition of the historicity of Scripture resulted in two broad trends in hermeneutic methodology. The first, influenced by German Romantic hermeneutics, concluded that the biblical narratives must be understood in the context of the time they were written. Since Scripture is a record of the consciousness of that time, one must seek to put oneself in the place of the original writer. Biblical meaning is fixed in the past and is reconstructed through historical and philological criticism. A second method of reconciling the text with history held that, although there is (in practice) some ultimately fixed thing behind Scripture (that is, God's message), the text, in order to preserve that message, must constantly transform, become something new. Meaning can only be unfolded historically" (24).

⁹¹ Thoreau's Transcendentalism can best be found in the following statement: "Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us" (70).

⁹² See also Alan Gribben, *Mark Twain's Library*. Two volumes with continuous pagination. (Boston: Hall, 1980) 63 and Philip Williams, *The Biblical View of History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1964) 111.

⁹³ Harold Bush attributes this increasing skepticism to the very manner in which the Bible itself came to be read and interpreted in the nineteenth-century. He writes: "Above all, the spiritual crisis of Twain's era largely derived from a crisis in the understanding of the Bible, especially as an authoritative source of truth. . . . [The] old ways of knowing truth were not just being challenged by the intellectuals; they were crumbling before the eyes of regular folks as well. It was indeed becoming a 'New Bible'" (122).

⁹⁴ "Another was 'Friendship's Offering,' full of beautiful stuff and poetry; but I didn't read the poetry. Another was Henry Clay's Speeches, and another was Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine, which told you all about what to do if a body was sick or dead. There was a Hymn Book, and a lot of other books" (103-104).

⁹⁵ Twain is also poking fun at the American privileging of *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by alluding to the immense popularity of Bunyan's religious allegory. Gregory Jackson writes: "*Pilgrim's Progress* caught on and maintained popularity in colonial America because it anticipated the inadequacy of the providential type to align fully with lived experience. As an *ur* template of homiletic forms, the story of Christian's pilgrimage became a universal one awaiting the overlay of personal details" (*The Word* 115).

⁹⁶ Marshall Brown makes the point that realism as a literary movement arose in response to anxieties about conceptualizing the idea of the real: "realism developed into a central issue in mid-century precisely because the conception of reality had become increasingly problematic" (227). He elaborates on the idea of representing reality as a textual problem that arose specifically in the novel. He writes: "Hegel called our attention to the prevalence and function of such inversions and reversals in the nineteenth-century novel at moments when romantic illusion is unmasked and when realistic judgment is about to become possible" (237-38).

⁹⁷ There were, in fact, a plethora of Bible dictionaries available during this era although Dr. William Smith's was one of the better known editions. Some of the others include: *The Westminster Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1880), *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1880), *The Handy Bible Cyclopaedia and Bible Reader's Assistant* (New York: Hurst, 1880s), as well as several other editions of Dr. Smith's Bible Dictionary issued by various publishers.

⁹⁸ Thomas Carlyle also invokes the figure of Adam in his chapter entitled "Adamitism" in *Sartor Resartus* pointing out that Adam existed "in a state of Nakedness" (47). In this sense, in his unclothed state, Adam represents a pre-doctrinal purity that not only predates Christianity but Judaism as well.

⁹⁹ Some of the biographies include: Frederic William Farrar's *The Life of Christ* (1874), Henry Ward Beecher's *The Life of Jesus, the Christ* (1871), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Jesus, the Christ: An Interpretation* (1897). Other popular Jesus-literature includes: Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur: A Story of the Christ* (1880), William Stead's *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1893), Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1896).

¹⁰⁰ In his brief turn to scientific secularism, Twain illustrates his expertise in scientific developments such as fingerprinting and other modern technological developments, such as the telephones and electricity of *Connecticut Yankee*. Once again, he engages with an important cultural shift in religious rhetoric even as he challenges it. Jon Roberts writes: "[There was a transfer of] cultural authority and prestige from theology to science, [leading to] the impoverishment of the religious vision of the world" (xv). Mark Twain, however, will later undermine the reliance on science as a sole means of providing access to the real when he simultaneously both employs and dismisses science as a means of legitimizing race identity. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), Twain's scientific discourse all too aptly demonstrates that using race identity as a means of predicting behavior must be understood as a social effect rather than a biological one. At the murder trial of Luigi Cappello, when the fingerprint pantagraph is used to reveal that Tom Driscoll and Valet de Chambre, the slave son of Roxie, were switched as infants (Twain *Pudd'nhead* 137-38), Twain shows how reinstating biological inheritance cannot undo twenty-five years of a socially-produced identity: "The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitude, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh—all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave" (*Pudd'nhead* 140). While Howells wants the realist to construct a recognizable world, a scientific one, Twain demonstrates that the realist's aim is as flawed as the scientist's mission when dealing with the complexity of human behavior. The field of scientific study cannot be viewed as "more real" than the sociological approach, just as the language of the Bible cannot be understood as more authoritative than the words of the dictionary. Within realism, different discourses of authority are tried and considered, but by the end of Twain's career, his texts begin to reflect his disillusionment with the possibility for any kind of certainty or systematic approach to truth.

¹⁰¹ Twain seems to be poking fun at the use of analogy in religious discourse as in Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and the Course of Nature* (1736). According to Butler, presumption amounts to nearly a certainty. Butler's analogies were popular in nineteenth-century American religious discourse, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps drew on Butler's text in *The Gates Ajar* (1868).

¹⁰² Reynolds is obviously referring to the Paine and Duneka rewritten version of *The Mysterious Stranger*, but his point about the visionary mode is applicable to the 1969 version of the story as well given that the passage of text in question appears in both versions of the story.

¹⁰³ Although published in 1907-08, Baetzhold and McCullough recount the long history of this story, showing that Twain began writing it in 1868 and that most of the major work for the story was done from 1878-81 (131). The edited collection, *The Bible According to Mark Twain*, includes three “Stormfield” passages from different stages of the story’s revision. See Appendix 5 (299-305).

¹⁰⁴ In fact, Pellowe had made this same point in 1945 when he wrote: “[Twain’s] spiritual itinerary is also the mirror of his nation’s life” (xi).

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Jenkins asserts that utopian writers such as Bellamy were a major influence on social gospel ideology, a doctrine that married liberal Protestant Christianity with social reform. Of Bellamy, he writes: “[he] absorbed evolution and industrialism into a vision of historical progress unifying all of humanity” (160). For further discussion of Twain and Social Gospel Ideology, see Bush (126-60).

CHAPTER 5: HAROLD FREDERIC AND REALISM: THE DAMNATION OF RELIGION

In the American literary canon, Harold Frederic is best known for his realist novel *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896). Although Frederic published fourteen novels, two posthumously, and a multitude of short stories, essays, and journalistic reports, his novel about an American Methodist preacher stands out as a testimony to his expertise in the conventions of American literary realism.¹⁰⁶ In *The Damnation*, Frederic utilizes some of the common strategies of realist writers: a concern for detail and verisimilitude, a realistic setting drawn from his own childhood experience—in Frederic’s case, Utica, New York¹⁰⁷— and a protagonist who insists on his own enlightenment with an underlying concern for exposing the hypocrisies of American cultural life in order that some larger truth may be known. Like the other realist writers included in this study, Frederic exhibits a preoccupation with American religious culture, and he presents religion as a fluid institution that shifts and reinvents itself in response to modern culture. In other words, like realism itself, religion is both a cultural force and a cultural response simultaneously. Frederic suggests that, by the late nineteenth century, religion as a social institution has lost its underlying authority, and he examines several reasons for that decline, such as modernization, economics, and Social Darwinism. Unlike his predecessors, Frederic shows little interest in exploring religious reform or replacing institutional religion with competing social ideologies; instead, he offers a glimpse into a culture where all forms of social benevolence are suspect because of the fallibility of humankind itself. Further, in his examination of upstate New York and the social forces modernizing the fictional town of Octavius, Frederic offers an example of late-century realism that strongly suggests the impending rise of naturalism in American literary culture. Frederic’s nod toward naturalism merits further scrutiny, particularly in his later fiction, but it is Frederic’s preoccupation with the

religious subject that first lays the groundwork for his interest in social and cultural change in the Gilded Age.

As will happen with Mark Twain, the religious rhetoric in Frederic's realism vacillates between two conventional archetypes that realist writers often employ: the Christ-figure and the Adam-figure. In one sense, Frederic reduces this competing symbolism to a simple aesthetic struggle between Hellenism and Hebraism, and, in fact, with this framework, Frederic, like Howells and Twain, places his fiction into a larger discourse that Heinrich Heine began and Matthew Arnold continued.¹⁰⁸ The opposition of Hellenism and Hebraism emerges not only in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) but again in *Gloria Mundi* (1898) and *The Market-Place* (1898) when Frederic revisits this theme via the Jewish characters he includes. Frederic parodies this aesthetic opposition, and he suggests that social force and power manifest themselves in different forms at different cultural periods, but that power, ultimately, lies in man's struggle for dominance over his fellow man and the need to establish cultural hegemony. The underlying debate suggests that Hellenism and Hebraism are the two main forces in western culture that humankind embraces as a means of maintaining a system of social ethics. Reinhold Niebuhr loosely defines Hellenism as individual freedom and Hebraism as social order (18-19). The first concept, Hellenism, relies on intuitive conscience and a transcendent notion of justice while the second, Hebraism, evokes an irrevocable law as handed down through the ages. Frederic offers many variations of this opposition as he examines modern-day enactments of both dimensions. John Lyons notes Frederic's comical twist on Arnold's dichotomy: "What he does is to take [it] and twist it so that fervent Hebraic monotheism becomes heartless experimental science [in the model of Dr. Ledsmar in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*], and the glory that was Greece becomes the frivolities of the *Yellow Book* era" (11).¹⁰⁹ In his novels, he presents these two cultural "forces" in a satirical manner with characters such as *The Damnation's* Celia Madden

claiming to be a “Greek” without being able to explain what the term means, but mostly meaning that she wants to lead her life by whim without censorship.

Before considering Frederic’s prominent focus on Methodism, in particular, in the development of this aesthetic discourse in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, it is important to compare this subject to his previous glimpses into American religious life in his other early works of regional fiction also set in upstate New York. Several important ideas emerge in relation to institutional religion in these early works, ideas which he later expands in his subsequent fiction. First, religion becomes encapsulated into a regional nostalgia, so that as soon as the operation of a small town church can be described or understood, this manifestation fades from everyday practice, splintering from itself. Religion in the American realist novel is always a portrait of what was rather than what is. The conflict exists because the institution has diverged from its former incarnation. Frederic, in fact, repeatedly emphasizes that religion in agrarian culture was far from stable, and it was often the site of a power play within the region. Second, there are several “conditions” that influence how institutional religion operates in America, which include competing religions and other important social ideologies and even significant shifts in population and the ensuing class struggles that are encoded in this perpetual splintering. In realist literature, we find the church repeatedly measured as a social yardstick and it is usually found to be inadequate. Third, even in rural and seemingly isolated Octavius, ethics, finances, and religion begin to enter into a dialogue as religion itself adopts the financial language of value, worth, and exchange in such a way that theology itself becomes irrevocably linked with the Industrial Age. The function of the church begins to be re-evaluated for its social utility, such as a means of policing the crowd, but the inherent power struggles also reveal an ongoing problem with a church’s need to police itself.

In a larger sense, Frederic allows us to see religion operating as a metaphor for realism itself with its focus on exposing larger and previously unknown truths in its demand for a

comparison between the present moment and the cultural conditions immediately preceding that moment. A similar kind of rhetoric links these two subjects to such an extent that it becomes impossible to separate the aims of realism from the aims of religious and reform discourse. By embracing the religious subject, Frederic, like so many of these writers, allows us to read realism through the religious lens—that is, symbolically, hermeneutically, and metaphorically. Realism itself becomes an allegorical mode, but it functions as a reverse allegory in which larger, more universal themes are reduced into the smaller and more containable world of experience. The subject of religion, which for Frederic at first gives access to rural culture, expands into a literary aesthetic, and Frederic's early writing offers a multi-faceted opportunity to examine that connection.

Even in his first novel, Frederic's alignment of realism and religion emerges as a central concern. *Seth's Brother's Wife* (1887) immediately invokes the Bible because in the Book of Genesis, Seth is the son of a one hundred and thirty year old Adam (5:3), whom he closely resembles, and he was born after his brother Abel's death as a replacement for him (4:25). Although in American culture we must acknowledge the frequency of given names of biblical origin, Frederic's title suggests an underlying concern with the Adam myth, which he reinforces by the further reference to the word "brother" in the novel's title and the story's theme of tracing the American experience from farm displacement to urban development just as Adam and Eve are displaced from Eden. As the novel opens, Frederic hints at the idea of a new myth, or a revised myth, invoking the story of Adam and the Fall. This expectation is fulfilled when Seth faces the temptation of by his brother's wife, the "wicked woman" Isabel. The layered title subtly emphasizes the very idea of replacements suggested in Genesis.

In *Seth's Brother's Wife*, Frederic does not develop the religious allegory as fully as he will in his later works, but he does introduce the politics of theology as a struggle for power in agrarian culture. The book begins deceptively as a work of regionalism, with servants gossiping

in a native dialect about the family dynamics. Later, when the narrative focus shifts from rural Thessaly to metropolitan Tecumseh, the problems and challenges of the family become correspondingly more complex involving politics, finances, and crime. And it is worth bearing in mind that Tecumseh was also the name of a fictional town in Indiana in William Dean Howells's 1882 *A Modern Instance*, where it was similarly the site of a distinctively modern social crisis involving the question of divorce. Here, it is a small city in upstate New York, but its name carries with it complicated connotations: Tecumseh is the name of the Shawnee Indian chief who tried to repel a horde of pioneers in the War of 1812,¹¹⁰ and it is also the middle name of William Tecumseh Sherman—himself named for the Shawnee chief—who was a Union general in the Civil War. The use of such a name represents the conflict of both westward expansion and the strife of the Civil War. The political election in the book involves two other towns called Sodom and Tyre. Frederic's use of Biblical and national symbolism hints at his intention to link his subject to the larger project of realism. He appears to be writing about the region, initially, but, as with presumably all works of regionalism, the author's limited geography should not be taken to mean he is writing a subject with a restricted scope. He writes the history of the region into the history of the nation, and Tecumseh carries with it a heavy burden of past events that continue to impact the narrative present. Theology gets caught up in this transition.

The initial conflict in the book occurs between the Fairchild and the Richardson families. Frederic focuses on subject of the family feud only initially, almost as a convention of the book's regional flavor. At the funeral of Cicely Fairchild (of the Richardson family), Seth's Aunt Sabrina instructs the Episcopal minister, Mr. Turner, that he is only there under the express last wishes of the dead woman, and that the Fairchilds are Baptists. Where the marriage had apparently unified the two families, the funeral now divides them again. She invites the Baptist minister, Reverend Stephen Bunce, to attend to the funeral as well and to preside over the

ceremony. These two gentlemen encounter each other in a humorous scene in the chapter entitled “The Funeral.” Mr. Turner appears for dinner and even he seems baffled at his own presence. Isabel, Seth’s brother’s wife, notes his ineffectuality, perceiving him as “the Episcopalian minister of Thessaly, a middle-aged, soft sort of man, with short hair so smooth and furry that she was conscious of an impulse to stroke it with a seal-skin, and little side whiskers which reminded her of a baby brush” (Frederic, *Seth’s Brother’s Wife* 36). Mr. Turner, ill at ease, is equally puzzled by his three-tined steel fork and the superfluous presence of Mr. Stephen Bunce, the other clergyman present at his table. Bunce says, ““We all know that the Mother in Israel who has departed was formerly of your communion, and if she wanted to have you here, sir, at her funeral, why well and good. But the rest of this sorrowin’ family, sir, this stricken household, air Baptists”” (38). Bunce’s words acknowledge an internal power struggle within the family over which Sabrina has seized control.

Even as Frederic depicts the battle of the clergymen, he similarly depicts a cultural tension between the highbrow Episcopal congregants and the lowbrow Baptists enacted through the reactions to the flatware used for the meal: “If quiet Mr. Turner was ill at ease, the Rev. Stephen was certainly not. He bestrode the situation like a modern Colossus. The shape of his fork did not worry him, since he used it only as a humble and lowly adjunct to his knife. The presence of Mr. Turner too, neither puzzled nor pained him” (36). Turner is out of place among these farm folk, but the Baptist Bunce comfortably shovels his food down with little concern for cutlery. Here, Frederic draws on sectarian differences to distinguish between the stereotypes of the region. He will do this again later when he creates a Methodist minister in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, who must read a book to learn how to properly care for his hands and fingernails, juxtaposed against a Catholic priest who employs a servant and wears a silk dressing gown. He codifies his rhetoric with a class tension and cultural stereotyping that his reader presumably recognized. In this first novel, Frederic begins an evaluation of religion by denomination that

helps him to construct the region and then later, larger society, as he considers the role of religious indoctrination in American cultural life.

As uncomfortable as the dinner and service may be with the Episcopalian and Baptist contingents struggling for dominance, the arrival of the choir further complicates the scene: “The singers came. They were from the village, belonging to the Congregational church there, and it was understood that they came out of liking for John Fairchild” (42). Clearly, although the area is not densely populated, there are a number of religious alternatives shaping the town, from Anglican to Puritan¹¹¹ to evangelical. Each faction of the family is determined to have his or her denomination represented at the funeral. During the formal ritual, Bunce begins to emerge as the victor. The funeral begins with the Baptist minister’s prayer and eulogy: “What he said was largely nonsense, from any point of view, but the voice was that of the born exhorter, deep, clear-toned, melodious, there seemed to be a stop in it, as in an organ, which at pathetic parts gave forth a tremulous, weeping sound, and when this came, not a dry eye could be found. He was over-fond of using this effect” (43). At this point, spectacle clearly wins the game, and Turner, who offers little promise in the way of oratory, seems to be aware of his own diminishing position. Everyone is confused by the lack of participation by the Episcopalian clergyman, but when asked, he replies, “I officiate at the grave” (44). Ironically, the Episcopal rite seems to receive its own kind of burial in this scene, and Sabrina’s victory within the family seems secure. The Baptists have won this feud, and in *The Lawton Girl*, Frederic will dispense with the Thessaly Episcopal Church altogether as a force of spiritual or social salvation in the town.

Although the evangelical branch of the Fairchild family seems to dominate the funeral, their religious preference, which seems to be brought out more for convenience than relevance, is merely part of a larger power play. In the next chapter, for example, Sabrina presides in her borrowed mourner’s dress with her bonnet and spectacles sitting on a table next to the

“unnoticed Bible” (Frederic, *Seth’s Brother’s Wife* 47). In spite of the struggle that was played out in the parlor, religion is merely a tool of battle rather than an ideological concern in and of itself just like Sabrina’s costume: “The mourning dress, borrowed for the occasion from a neighbor, was cut in so modern a fashion, contrasted with the venerable maiden’s habitual garments, that it gave her spare figure almost a fantastic air” (47). Like Sabrina’s garment, the family borrows religion and dons it on for the occasion like the mourner’s dress, while they otherwise neglect it like the unnoticed Bible.

The contrast between the habitual and the borrowed religious habits, or the traditional and the modern, is paralleled in the power struggle that emerges at the funeral between the Episcopalian and the Baptist ministers and the Congregational choir. All are “borrowed” for the day, and nothing quite seems to fit in the expected manner, but some form of modernization underwrites the scene. Again, the ironic placement of the Bible as an accoutrement of the ritual deflates its formerly prominent role in American religious culture. The “unnoticed Bible,” whose status appears to be only slightly higher than that of the borrowed dress but on par with the mourning bonnet covered in crape, highlights the irony of the sectarianism or denominationalism because Bible itself is so disassociated from the battle between the various creeds. If we see this scene as setting the stage for Frederic’s examination of the more primitive Methodism in comparison to these other denominations, we can recognize a critique of American religious culture similar to that which Rebecca Harding Davis had attempted. We begin to see that nothing quite “fits” anymore in any of these religious models.

Unfortunately, in *Seth’s Brother’s Wife*, the religious battle, as with the family feud, is more or less dropped after these early chapters. Perhaps to Frederic these denominational disputes are the battles of the region rather than of the nation because when Seth departs for Tecumseh, Frederic introduces a political battle that explores the larger mechanisms of society, that is, the futility of battling the political machine and its ensuing social corruption. In any

event, he certainly writes in a tongue-in-cheek manner as he stages the battle of the splintering Protestant sects in the living room of the Fairchild family home, and this struggle for power recurs in the political struggles that follow. In fact, Frederic uses religion, location, and characterization as cohesive devices linking *The Lawton Girl* (1890) to *Seth's Brother's Wife*.¹¹² The plot of *The Lawton Girl* reverses the premise of *Seth's Brother's Wife*, with the ruined Jess Lawton returning to Thessaly to try to reclaim her life under the mentorship of Alice Fairchild, Seth's wife. Austin Briggs notes that the two novels share a common theme of self-disillusionment. He writes: "In *Seth's Brother's Wife* and *The Lawton Girl*, although his ostensible subject remained the struggle between good and bad, his real concern was consistent and apparent: the illusions of those who think themselves the reformers of the world" (Briggs 98). Although Frederic focuses only briefly on the institutional church in this second novel, he once again draws attention on the ineffectual actions of the Turner family, suggesting that the church fails to meet the needs of the town.

The hypocrisy of small town reformers is the main focus of *The Lawton Girl* and even Jess Lawton proves to be unredeemable as she repeats her folly at the end of the story by sacrificing herself for Horace Boyce in an effort to prevent his incarceration. Briggs interprets the novel as a satirical examination of human foibles. He writes: "To read *The Lawton Girl* simply as a realistic rendering of small town life is to overlook the more impressive achievement: Frederic's wry and good-natured exposure of the comic contrast between the grand roles that people plan for themselves and the roles they actually play" (Briggs 96). Briggs's analysis captures the irony of the novel in which the pattern of the scoundrel is re-enacted in the small town of Thessaly with all of his female victims insisting on protecting him rather than holding him accountable for his crimes. It reads well as an allegory for domestic violence in this way by examining the way these women develop a kind of dependency on their abuser. The novel ends with a conventional sentimental trope of the self-sacrificing female who risks her own

health in order to redeem the man. This is a far cry from *The Market-Place* (1899) in which the central manipulator, Joel Thorpe, “gets away” with his actions through his own cunning and stealth. In *The Lawton Girl*, the women of the town refuse every opportunity to exact justice against their resident rogue, Horace Boyce.

The church in Thessaly is the Episcopal congregation of the same Mr. Turner who first appeared in *Seth’s Brother’s Wife*. Here, the church plays a very minor role in the ethical and spiritual shaping of Thessaly, and almost no role at all in Jess Lawton’s search for redemption. When former prostitute Jess, the hooker with the heart of gold, returns to open a millinery shop, she is apparently so successful that she is able to support herself, her sister, and her illegitimate child who boards with a distant family. Jess also provides her shiftless father with pocket money while she simultaneously she sponsors a charity rest home with the additional assistance of Kate Minster, a wealthy heiress. The resting home opens its doors to factory girls providing that they are “good girls” who seek to occupy their hours with the safe society of other “good girls” with whom they gather to socialize and knit in the dangerous evening hours. Jess’s homecoming is filtered through the lens of the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the narrator foreshadows the unhappy reception she receives from her siblings:

The parable of the Prodigal Son has long been justly regarded as a model of terse and compact narrative; but modern commentators of the analytical sort have a quarrel with the abruptness of its ending. They would have liked to learn what the good stay-at-home son said and did after his father had for a second time explained the situation to him. . . . Did he deceive the returned Prodigal, for example, into believing in the fraternal welcome? (Frederic, *Lawton Girl* 73)

It is clear that Jess’s return fulfills the “modern” analysis of the Prodigal’s return when Jess’s siblings all but shun her upon learning that she did not return with a trunk full of fashionable dresses. Thanksgiving is a bitter celebration for Jess, and she moves out of the family home to set up her millinery shop.

In contrast to the dismal Lawton Thanksgiving, the wealthy Minsters celebrate an uncomfortably lavish holiday under the watchful eye of their newly-hired British butler whose

overly solicitous attendance nearly ruins the celebration. These pragmatic industrialists would rather select their own drumsticks from the turkey platter, and they soon dismiss the butler from the room. Dinner conversation at the Minster home focuses on the Episcopalian church and the attendance of the town. This conversation reveals the vacuousness of the role of Thessaly's church in relation to habit, tradition, and social ethics. Mrs. Minster, the wealthy widow, is in the habit of going to church, but she attends as a matter of duty rather than faith and to fill up her otherwise uninspired hours:

She went to the Episcopal church regularly, although she neither professed nor felt any particular devotion to religious ideals or tenets. She gave of her substance generously, though not profusely, to all properly organized and certified charities, but did not look about for, or often recognize when they came her way, subjects for private benefaction. . . . When she did not know what else to do, she ordinarily took a nap. (59)

Mrs. Minster carefully contains her religious habit to a carefully proportioned item on her social schedule. In contrast to Mrs. Minster is her longtime friend Miss Tabitha Wilcox, who “sat in one of the most prominent pews of the Episcopal church, and her prescriptive right to be president of the Dorcas Mite society had not been questioned now these dozen years” (60).¹¹³ Mrs. Minster attends church for no particular reason other than that she has always done so, while Tabitha attends for social prestige and a sense of civic responsibility. Tabitha wishes that Thessaly's favorite son, Horace Boyce, would take an interest in church affairs in order that he might “rent a pew, and set an example to young men in that way” (67). In Tabitha's eyes, a town leader must link ethical actions to church attendance, emphasizing her belief that the church offers a policing role in the ethical actions of the townspeople. Ironically, Tabitha is unaware that Mr. Boyce's example would lead to the ruining of women's virtue, the fathering of illegitimate children, and the swindling of his clients. The church is implicated in covering up his crimes simply by his ability to use it as a cloak and as a means to bolster his reputation.

Kate Minster offers a third approach to religion in contrast to the patterns of habit or duty. She believes the role of the reformer lies outside of the church, and she presents the central argument of the novel in regard to the matter of the utility of institutional religion. She states:

It is worth while to have an occasional good man or woman altogether outside the Church. They prevent those on the inside from getting too conceited about their own virtues. There would be no living with the parsons and the deacons and the rest if you couldn't say to them now and then: "See, you haven't a monopoly on goodness. Here are people just as honest and generous and straightforward as you are yourselves, who get along without any altar or ark whatever." (67)

Here, instead of relying on the church merely to keep the people in check, Kate wants to keep the church itself in check. She takes a cynical attitude toward it, locating a pompous paternalism in its exclusivity. Her cynicism is upheld when Miss Tabitha later reveals her own observations of the hypocrisy that reigns supreme in Thessaly's church. In a subsequent discussion of Jess Lawton's desire to change her ways, Tabitha notes that Jess has attempted to find her redemption, at least in part, through the church. Tabitha says, "Come to think of it, she has been to church twice now, two Sundays running. And Mrs. Turner spoke to her in the vestibule, seeing that she was a stranger and neatly dressed, and didn't dream who she was; and she told me she was never so mortified in her life as when she found out afterward. A clergyman's wife has to be *so* particular, you know" (169). Tabitha's words underscore the irony of Mrs. Turner's refusing to help a prostitute, making the point that the aims of the Turner's ministry do not parallel the gospels in relation to the actions of Jesus when he reaches out to Mary Magdalene. Here, Frederic presumably condemns this church for its elitist practices. Frederic includes these little vignettes of how the church operates in the region presumably to explore the possibility that the institutional church might play a mediating role in bringing about the kind of reform Jess seeks, both for herself and for the factory girls whom she hopes to save from following in her own footsteps. His later interest in Methodism represents a turn toward a more primitivist creed, and it is not surprising that he will compare it to Catholicism in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* given that he neatly dispenses with the Anglican Church in *The Lawton Girl*.

In the end, effective social reform emerges as *The Lawton Girl's* central concern: Reuben Tracy's idea for a Men's Social Club seemingly parallels Jess Lawton's Resting Home for Girls. At first, Horace Boyce overtakes Tracy's vision and replaces it with his own reform initiative, which comprises improved cooking at railway stops, porters to carry one's luggage, the drinking of light beers and wines instead of whiskey,¹¹⁴ improved architecture, and "a penal law against those beastly sulphur matches with the black heads" (112-13). Tracy himself at first envisions a social club, the Thessaly Citizen's Club, where the leaders and prominent business men—whom Boyce calls "at once the most progressive and most conservative in Thessaly (150)—determine how best to police social reform and municipal improvement, but, in the end, Tracy turns the club over to the "unemployed artisans of Thessaly" (358) in order that they may find employment during the factory lockout. The club will alternately function as a reading room, coffee house, and soup kitchen, as needed (386-87). When the unemployed artisans and factory workers find work, the club will then revert back to the "citizens" of Thessaly so that the club may function on a "business basis" as originally intended (387). The multiple and shifting aims of the social club emphasize the lack of substance in both Tracy's and Boyce's visions for reform.

Tracy's slightly more democratic notion of reform exists outside the church in the vein of Kate Minster's description, while Horace Boyce's autocratic reform is associated with Tabitha's more traditional model of mediating altruism by centralizing power in the institutional church. The irony of the novel is that both are doomed from the onset. Boyce reports on why he and Tracy do not get along very well, and he offers the model of the church to encapsulate their ideological differences:

I asked him one day what church he'd recommend me to join; of course I was a stranger, and explained to him that what I wanted was not to make any mistake, but to get into the church where there would be the most respectable people who would be of use to me; and what do you think he said? He was actually mad! He said he'd rather have given me a hundred dollars than had me ask him that question; and after that he was very cool, and so was I, and we've never had much to say to each other since then. (120)

For Boyce, the church is about cultural status, and he realizes its vast potential for making social and economic contacts, while Tracy distances himself from institutional religion, and he explores instead various models of benevolence with no clear notion of how to enact his vision.

In the end, the failure of the Thessaly Citizen's Club again finds its parallel in Jess Lawton's abandoned Resting Home as class wars and economic tensions disrupt the reform initiatives. The factory girls shun the retreat due to Kate Minster's sponsorship, blaming her for the town's economic woes. Kate, for her part, feels disillusioned with the lack of appreciation by the town's unfortunate citizens: "Her own class-feeling, too, subtly prompted her to dismiss with contempt the thought of these thick-fingered, uncouth factory girls who were rejecting her well-meant bounty" (397). Boyce's self-serving search for a house of worship and Kate's half-hearted altruistic impulse reveal the extent of Frederic's cynicism about the possibility for effective reform either inside or outside the church. Even Tracy's limited vision of constructing a temporary soup kitchen that will revert back to the town's real citizens once the crisis has passed supports Briggs's observation about Frederic's satire. Frederic follows the so-called conventions of realism with his attention to detail and his exposure of the town's social hypocrisy, but the novel is clearly comical rather than reform-oriented as good intentions repeatedly fail, keeping the status quo of the town intact.

Ultimately, like Twain, Frederic offers little hope for the possibility of the advancement of civilization, believing instead that humankind is most likely to repeat and reiterate its own patterns of sociological self-interest and even resort to decay or decline. In this novel, however, he clearly contemplates the idea of human progress without quite rejecting it. Thoughts of the past invoke nostalgia, but the present is not necessarily condemned as a form of decay so much as viewed as inevitable result of the lost abolitionist ideology that once united the town's philosophers. In short, Thessaly is simply in search of a new ideology. Modern Thessaly compares unfavorably to its preceding golden era, which was disrupted or possibly completed by

the Civil War. An abandoned seminary, once a site of intellectual enlightenment, stands as a forgotten symbol of the town's former prestige. The narrator states: "I suppose that in this modern Thessaly, with its factories and mills, its semi-foreign saloons, its long streets of uniformly ugly cottage-dwellings, there were many hundreds of adults who had no idea whether the once-famous Thessaly seminary was still open or not" (144). In the antebellum period, the narrator recalls, "There was maintained each winter a lecture course, which was able, not so much by money as by the weight and character of its habitual patrons, to enrich its annual lists with such names as Emerson, Burritt, Phillips, Curtis, and Beecher" (145). The lack of agreement regarding the current reform initiatives illustrates the intellectual discord in the town that is centered now on class and economic status. Frederic examines existing social institutions and finds them inadequate to the ethical and spiritual demands of the modern age, and he even hints at the idea of atavism that will emerge more strongly in his later fiction.

The novel ends with two significant vignettes that reveal Frederic's interest in trying to discern the relationship between the Old World and the New World in the formation of modern American culture; he offers Tracy's reflection on the early alcoholic death of the young Stephen Minster, Kate's brother, and Kate's theory of how Mrs. Minster's Old World character has led her to be duped by Horace Boyce. Both situations describe a form of decay that Frederic associates not with the new working class invading the town but with the reigning upper class and its European roots. First, when Reuben Tracy contemplates a picture of the dead heir, Stephen Minster, Jr., his thoughts reflect what has become the nature versus nurture question of human development: "There was no visible reason why Stephen Minster's son should not have been clever and strong, a fit master of the part created for him by his father. There must be some blight, some mysterious curse upon hereditary riches here in America" (265). Reuben contemplates a notion that inheritance leads to a life of vacuity, a Calvinist notion that Andrew Carnegie famously expounds in the *Gospel of Wealth* (1899).¹¹⁵ Only later, in *Gloria Mundi*,

does Frederic himself more fully explore the idea of actual decay in a more scientific manner that reflects his turn toward naturalism, but in many of his novels he suggests that boredom leads to unhappiness. Significantly, Kate's summary of her mother's character recalls the nature versus nurture debate. In discussing her mother's stubbornness and how it has led her mother to financial ruin, she states: "That's Mamma all over Isn't it wonderful how those old race types reappear, even in our day? She is as Dutch as any lady in Haarlem that Franz Hals ever painted. Her mind works sideways, like a crab'" (386). Tracy's reflection on Stephen Minster's financial inheritance curse contrasts Kate's suggestion of a genetic inheritance; both types of inheritance connote social decay, but it is not yet clear on which side of the debate Frederic will emerge. He seems to be mocking the Old World ancestry of Colonial America rather than targeting the influx of immigrants and factory workers who are changing the composition of Thessaly. In this novel, he reiterates popular sociological theories and debates, but also in the manner of his mentor Howells, he does not necessarily preach a specific reform: his project appears to aim at debunking rather than replacing a specific social reform agenda.

In his early writing, Frederic constructs a self-conscious realism that explores the cultural and intellectual themes that he believed were exerting an important influence over both rural and urban American cultural aesthetics. Throughout his literary career, in fact, he experimented widely with genre. Stanton Garner divides Frederic's novels and short stories into larger groupings that include the Mohawk Valley literature, Civil War materials, a Revolutionary War grouping, and then a European/economic grouping. Garner also points out some little-known medieval Irish folk tales that arose out of Frederic's interest in the Irish immigrants in his hometown of Utica, New York.¹¹⁶ *The Damnation of Theron Ware* is the last of the Mohawk Valley literature, and, in Garner's view, it displays the characteristics of both realism and romance Frederic instills in his larger body of work. Garner also sees this work as pivotal in

illustrating Frederic's shifting interest from matters of the region to a larger scope of national and eventually international literature.

Garner is not the only reader to note the significance of *The Damnation of Theron Ware* as a pivotal work in Frederic's repertoire. In the introduction to this novel, Everett Carter writes that Frederic was placing his work into dialogue with his literary predecessors, and most notably with William Dean Howells. Carter writes that "Frederic considered himself a disciple of this acknowledged dean of American realism" (xii)¹¹⁷ and believes that Frederic adopts a Howellsian approach but then changes this formula to reinstate a mythological dimension to realism: he writes: "The technique of Frederic, then, was one of the landmarks in the change from a method which unobtrusively used symbols and allusions to reinforce the logical, natural, surface of the narrative, to a 'symbolism' which insists upon itself as the embodiment of a fable's otherwise obscure significance" (xxiv). This emphasis on allegory appears to be a common argument for promoting a specific work of realism; Carter implies that earlier works place a higher value on verisimilitude whereas this work aims for a combination of accuracy and mythological significance, making it, then, more sophisticated than the work of Howells. Carter's assumption reinforces a critical position that realism works as a mirror rather than an allegory, which creates a problem with textual hermeneutics. To view realism as a mirror requires a literal hermeneutics whereas realist writers repeatedly confront the challenge of hermeneutics within the framework of the realist text, as in Howells's *A Modern Instance* when Ben Halleck struggles to comprehend how to adapt his system of ethics to the modern age.

Once we begin to view realism through the lens of religion, it should become clear that realism itself always works allegorically, even Howellsian realism. The text serves as a material allegory for some abstract ideological concept. Even Charles Darwin in trying to explain the complexities of the human eye, relied on the "reverse" allegory by using a material object to illustrate the complex and nearly incomprehensible process of evolutionary selection that

allowed the lens of the eye to evolve. Darwin writes, “It is scarcely possible to avoid comparing the eye to a telescope. We know that this instrument has been perfected by the long-continued efforts of the highest human intellects; and we can naturally infer that the eye has been formed by a somewhat analogous process” (145). In Darwin’s famous analogy, the telescope is a material allegory for the complicated and abstract function of the human eye. He poses the question: “Have we any right to assume that the Creator works by intellectual powers like those of man?” (145). When Darwin asks this rhetorical question, he indicates that he is using a reductive analogy in order to make an abstraction more easily understood, but he expects the reader to be able to reverse the logic by imaginatively turning the empirical example back into abstraction. The manner in which realist writers such as Frederic, Howells, and Davis constructed the religious subject in their texts relies on an analogy through which we can deconstruct the ontological significance of the religious symbolism. The emphasis these writers place on verisimilitude is part of a technique to lend credence to the idea that the underlying abstractions of the texts are reliably true, but we must learn to read the representation as both expansive and reductive at the same time. To invoke Darwin’s example, realism allows us to look through the wrong end of the telescope in order to see what remains in the image when everything is reduced.

The *Damnation of Theron Ware*’s paradoxical setting of a backwards small town dealing with an influx of immigrants and technology illustrates Frederic’s interest in depicting an important intersection between the past and the present. Having established the conditions leading to the demise of small town ethics in his earlier novels, Frederic here turns toward a more modern scenario as if to capture a key moment of cultural change in Industrial America. George Johnson writes that the novel was “written in the 1890’s, a pivotal period in American culture when an agrarian mythology was contesting the hard facts of industry and urbanization” (361). In *The Damnation*, Frederic depicts a social world in which the small town of Octavius is

rapidly modernizing not only technologically but sociologically. A number of contemporary intellectual movements such as Darwinism, German High Criticism, and New Woman feminism each bring to bear specific social and scientific ideologies that collide with the puritan orthodoxy that has reigned supreme in Octavius. Johnson writes: “The book opens in the ‘modern’ community of Tecumseh, presented with some authorial irony and considerable elegiac feeling for a more ‘heroic’ past” (367). The setting then shifts to Octavius as if to travel back in time to that “heroic” past that Johnson describes. Octavian Methodists uphold their creed by following *The Discipline*, a Wesleyan supplement to scripture that interprets how to apply biblical law to everyday life. Unfortunately, these rules cannot easily explain how to incorporate technological advances, such as the possibility of riding a streetcar to church, a move that requires transportation operators to work on Sundays, which violates the precepts of *The Discipline* but increases overall church attendance. This utilitarian dilemma poses a quality versus quantity analysis in relation to the salvation of souls. In the end, the trustees determine that even the act of riding the streetcars will damn the very souls they wish to save, and Octavians are left adhering rigidly to the law as laid out in *The Discipline* while subsequent conflicts arise.

Frederic does not directly impugn the Bible, but he does so indirectly by showing the incongruity of *The Discipline* in this rapidly-changing community. Again, the question of hermeneutics arises: if the text must be re-interpreted for each new generation, can a notion of trans-historical truth be safely ascertained? The townspeople battle for the authority to interpret Hebraic Law into modern ethics. Stephanie Foote writes: “The members of the congregation participate in the same conflicted staging of what is primitive and what is novel. Although the Methodists are insulated from the town’s modern developments—going so far as to shun the streetcars because they run on Sundays—their trustees are implacable capitalists” (60). In his depiction of this ideological clash, Frederic draws on theology and hermeneutics to illustrate different ways in which the modernization of the town has impacted institutional religion and

vice versa. In Frederic's writing, and particularly in this novel, he hones in on organized religion as the primary cultural institution that operates as a source of power and social control in both rural and urban settings.

Although many readers have noted the intricate portrait of American Methodism that Frederic depicts in the late nineteenth century, few readers seem to have noticed that Methodism, in this novel, is far from stable. It is so unstable, in fact, that it is not clear what, exactly, Methodism is: it remains intangible. Religion in regional and realist fiction offers an elusive subject because it is always at odds with itself as if religious culture is in search for verisimilitude. The perpetual splintering within and across denomination suggests an ongoing search for a newer and more truthful expression of holiness. The novel opens with a conflict within Methodism between liberal and conservative sects, and that conflict plays out in various settings throughout the novel. For example, Methodism in the small town of Octavius clearly looks different than Methodism as practiced elsewhere, such as the fictional Tecumseh, a town Frederic mentions in all three of his upstate New York novels. There are vast differences between the New Methodists, the Free Methodists, and the Methodist Episcopalians even though, strictly speaking, all are operating as Wesleyan Methodists. When Theron arrives in Octavius, Brother Pierce informs him "“We ain't had no trouble with the Free Methodists here . . . just because we kept to the old paths, an' seek for salvation in the good old way. . . . Why, they say some folks are goin' round now preachin' that our grandfathers are all monkeys”" (Frederic, *Damnation* 30).¹¹⁸ In this novel, Methodism becomes the site upon which many competing ideologies battle for cultural control. The conversation about sectarianism between Theron Ware and the trustees summarizes several competing forms of church polity, from the move away from an episcopate to an individual church-based (i.e. congregational-style) creed, through to the rising application of Darwinism in sociological and religious rhetoric. Frederic demonstrates

that the instability of Methodism corresponds to a larger power play within American religious culture.

Frederic himself was not a Methodist and so he conducted extensive research in order to present his subject accurately.¹¹⁹ One wonders: why Methodism? Why does Frederic hone in on this specific denomination for his portrait of American rural life? One reason may be that Methodism was, in fact, a rising religion during this era, replacing the Calvinist Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. The opening scene of the book at the Nadahma Conference has the Tecumseh congregation hoping to “acquire” Theron Ware as their new minister because of his superior oratory skills, a clear necessity in a land where there is no national religion or mandatory tithe. They want him in order to have the edge on the Presbyterian church in town:

For a handsome and expensive church building like this, and with such a modern and go-ahead congregation, it was simply a vital necessity to secure an attractive and fashionable preacher. They had held their own against the Presbyterians these past few years only by the most strenuous efforts, and under the depressing disadvantage of a minister who preached dreary out-of-date sermons, and who lacked even the most rudimentary sense of social distinctions. (7)

The Tecumseh coterie clearly wants to replace a minister who cannot modernize; his sermons are “out of date” and he apparently does not realize the importance of cultivating relationships with the wealthy in order to “grow” the church. This deeply ironic desire for a more financially savvy clergyman, one who can market the church, demonstrates the extent to which the church operates as a business in this capitalist economy. Poor economic habits prove to be Theron’s downfall. Tecumseh does not acquire Theron Ware, of course, and he finds himself in the less cosmopolitan Octavius, punished because of his lack of household frugality in his previous post.¹²⁰ Yet, strangely, in spite of Frederic’s research into the Methodist Episcopal Church, Octavian Methodism reads like Puritanism: Theron’s wife Alice even refers to it as a Puritan practice (14). Foote notes: “The text parodies this brand of Methodism as practiced by Americans who seemed to have emerged from the age of Puritanism” (60). So while Tecumseh is battling the Presbyterians for membership, Methodism is battling itself from town to town as

Brother Pierce points out to Reverend Ware when he brags that: “We ain’t gone traipsing after strange gods, like some people that call themselves Methodists in other places” (29). This battle is being fought on two fronts, across and within denomination boundaries, but by the 1890s, Methodism was growing by leaps and bounds while the Calvinist denominations were struggling to retain their dominance of other Protestant denominations. Methodism, in whatever form it was being practiced, was flourishing in American culture, and so it plays a prominent role in the late nineteenth-century’s changing religious landscape.

Another explanation for Frederic’s choice may be that Methodism is, in many ways, a malleable institution, and it is that reputation that makes it an interesting subject for the realist writer. Walter Benjamin writes: “Some [historians] stressed Methodism’s mediating theology, which saved the gospel from being wrecked between the Scylla of ‘old theological predestinarianism’ and the Charybdis of Unitarian rationalism and the Universalist sentimentality” (318-19). As Benjamin points out, theorists can construct Methodism in a number of ways, and Frederic’s multifaceted model illustrates his own understanding of this denomination’s flexible practices. He offers several views into the splintering Methodism of nineteenth-century America and, by doing so, he offers a larger glimpse into the fragmentation of American Protestantism as a whole during this era showing how divided the nation had become. The realist’s aim of discerning what can be known with certainty through empirical observations of the world meets its challenge in religion because even within a single denomination, it is impossible to determine what it means to be a Methodist as Frederic illustrates.

In literary studies, the prevailing tendency is to deal with the complicated nature of denominationalism by simply labeling everything as “Protestant” or even “Christian” without trying to discern the distinction that writers like Frederic were trying to make. Gregg Camfield points out that there is a subtext to the term Christianity that made subtle distinctions in creed and hermeneutics hugely important to the developing political ideology of American culture. He

traces that subtext through the sentimental literary tradition, but he nevertheless argues that it appears in all popular literary forms in the nineteenth century. He writes:

Calvinism came under attack in the United States in part because the doctrine of predestination violated a liberal sense of human dignity; without free choice to earn redemption, Christianity seemed crabbed and dogmatic. A more expansive sense of human choice militated for a sentimental version of Christianity, one in which Christian nurture provided a framework for moral freedom. Not surprisingly, then, most political crusades of the late nineteenth century were also religious crusades, at first working to undercut the harshness of Calvinism, then using the successful battle against Calvinism to attack the new political conservatism and determinism of the Social Darwinists. (“Sentimental” 60)

Camfield asserts that regardless of genre, American writers assumed that their audiences were well acquainted with the theological distinctions between Calvinism and liberal Christianity. He cites Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s 1886 story “A Conflict Ended” as an example of a doctrinal dispute between the Calvinists and the Arminians. He writes: “Freeman assumes her audience will know the history of Christianity over the preceding 50 years” (Camfield, “Sentimental” 61). In the case of Harold Frederic, it is clear that he scrutinizes the religious habits and beliefs of various denominations and sects within those denominations carefully. He filters his novel through the lens of Methodism because it represents an important ideological shift that he associates with the ethical crises of the modern moment.

Through his contrast between the rigid Methodism of Octavius and Methodism as it is practiced elsewhere, such as in Tecumseh or in Theron’s previous ministry in Tyre, Frederic offers a specific vignette of American religious culture in which the ethics of social control encompass everything from sexual politics to consumerism. Theron Ware is denied the Tecumseh position because his overspending in Tyre culminated in a debt of over eight hundred dollars (Frederic, *Damnation* 21), so when he arrives in Octavius, he begins to assess his new post in terms of dollars and value. This shift towards a capitalistic sensibility will emerge more strongly as the novel unfolds, but Frederic ties it specifically to the age of capitalism, as the language of faith assumes an economic dimension in Octavius.

In *Myths America Lives By*, Richard Hughes summarizes the early history of Protestantism in America and he suggests an increasing sense of nationalism is the cause of the changes that occur in the nineteenth century. Like Frederic, Hughes makes note of the growing popularity of Methodism, which represents the most significant division within American Protestantism. The major distinction in Methodism is the breaking away from the Calvinist influence that characterizes the earlier Puritans:

[D]uring the Revolutionary period and into the nineteenth century, the majority of Americans who claimed the Christian faith were Calvinists of one stripe or another. Roman Catholics were still a distinct minority. The Anglican Church—or the Church of England—still thrived, especially in the South, but had lost considerable credibility, especially since so many Americans associated that church with Britain, not with America. Methodism—a distinctly non-Calvinist faith—was growing by leaps and bounds and would soon take the American frontier by storm. (Hughes 68)

Hughes's summary provides a fairly clear overview of the scope of major church divisions and the general sense of geography that accompanied the splits. Again, Methodists rejected Calvinist notions of predestination and limited grace (Wentz 154), and the Methodists believed in individual autonomy in the matter of salvation.

Frederic's complicated picture of a dogmatic Methodism in *Octavius* depicts a religious institution that mimics the very denominations it seeks to replace. In this way, *Octavian* Methodism functions allegorically for this process of splintering that occurred more largely in the American religious landscape. Frederic examines how it will hold up to some of the challenges that modern culture and competing social philosophies present. Similarly, realism itself is an allegory for the real. As Camfield points out, "No fictional account of reality can be anything but a radical abstraction" (56). The realist text, like the religious allegory, is continually trying to capture that elusive moment when something is depicted in opposition to what it used to be in order to locate some notion of universal truth that can be applied to our knowledge and experience of the material world. The layered use of literary allusion in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* highlights the complexity of trying to read religion in works of

realism. Even in a work as specific about place and religion as *Theron Ware*, the larger context of social and religious thought needs to be examined in order to discern how the writer codifies his text. Frederic challenges both skepticism and conversion by undercutting every authority figure in his fictional landscape while clearly satirizing Theron for the ease with which he discards his own inherited religion. The direct use of modern symbols in Octavius, the streetcars that run on Sunday, the modern electric doorbell of Father Forbes, and the New York City setting of the novel's climax, strongly associates the work with the same struggle seen so repeatedly in nineteenth-century American realism, and that is the simplicity of the rural ideal juxtaposed against the pressures and emerging economic focus of the modern, urban tableau.

Religion and realism also share a dependence on analogy as part of the imaginative process to convert its subject. The success of the conversion depends on the credibility of the imaginative representation. For example, in the camp meeting scene in *The Damnation*, Frederic examines the allegorical experience of the campfire revival to invoke the possibility of descending to Hell. When Theron Ware leaves the campfire meeting and encounters the Catholic picnic happening in another field, he and Father Forbes discuss the differences between the two spectacles. Ware notes that Methodism was first bolstered by “the cholera year of 1832” (Frederic, *The Damnation* 246) because this crisis brought people face to face with the prospect of their own mortality. He describes the conversion process of that experience, which the camp meetings try to duplicate. He states: ““Even to this day our most successful revivalists, those who work conversions wholesale wherever they go, do it more by frightful pictures of hell-fire surrounding the sinner’s death-bed than anything else. You could hear the same thing at our camp-meeting tonight, if you were there”” (246). Father Forbes concurs with Theron on this point. He states: ““There seem to have been the most tremendous changes in races and civilizations and religions, stretching over many thousands of years, yet nothing is in fact altered very much. Where religions are concerned, the human race are still very much like savages in a

dangerous wood in the dark, telling one another ghost stories around a campfire” (Frederic 247). In this sense, Methodism seems to work as synecdoche within the text, standing in for the larger splintering of American Protestantism and sectarianism, but it also works mimetically upon its subject, the religious convert, much as realism works analogically upon the reader. To render a successful conversion, the rhetoric must achieve verisimilitude. Theron’s derision regarding the conversion experience ironically parallels his own counter-conversion in which the truths he once believed no longer seem credible.

Theron’s counter-conversion from faith to disbelief plays with the conventions of the sentimental conversion novel. He begins to read Renan, Sayce, Budge, Smith, and Lenormant (130), and he begins to question his own faith.

Then, little by little, it dawned upon him that there was a connected story in all this; and suddenly he came upon it, out in the open, as it were. It was the story of how a deeply devout young man, trained from his earliest boyhood for the sacred office, and desiring passionately nothing but to be worthy of it, came to a point where, at infinite cost of pain to himself and of anguish to those dearest to him, he had to declare that he could no longer believe at all in revealed religion. (130)

Elmer Suderman argues that Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* derives its cultural authority by subverting the conversion situation found in works such as Charles Sheldon’s *In His Steps*: “Harold Frederic took a commonplace situation in the life and literature of his time . . . and by transforming and inverting the convention gave literary life to ordinarily stereotyped characters and plot” (Suderman, “The Damnation” 61). He explains the complicated layering of parody when he describes the convention that Frederic was acknowledging:

The skeptic [of a sentimental religious novel] . . . must be a young man between twenty-five and thirty years old He must come from a Christian home, and have recollections of a praying mother, now dead. Having strayed from the Christian path, he has become skeptical of or at least indifferent to religion. He reads Renan, has heard of Ingersoll, and believes in evolution. (62)

Suderman’s synopsis of the typical protagonist in the conversion convention demonstrates that while Frederic is employing realism, specifically a regional realism, to parody a type of sentimental religious work by inverting it, the sentimental religious novel, like *In His Steps*, in

turn, relies on contrasting itself with biographical work depicting the historical life of Jesus. Sheldon's model shows a minister intuiting a mystical trans-historical allegory of Jesus by imaginatively re-creating biblical ethics in posing the question "What would Jesus do?" In theory, the Methodist reliance on *The Discipline* follows this model of re-interpreting scriptural ethics in modern circumstances, but Frederic once again inverts the situation by connecting the transcendent model with the Hebraism embedded in puritan orthodoxy.

Gregory Jackson notes that realism works in the same allegorical manner as the revivalist conversion process that Theron Ware notes with his derision of hell-fire. Both modes rely on the subject's imaginative ability to realize the allegory as a material possibility. Jackson writes: "The realist novelist thus tends to work by selecting representative cases to reveal a social truth, to describe particulars in order to reveal the truth about the whole" (*The Word* 13). If the experience of reading the novel offers a credible sense of the reader's subjective experience, then the message of the text becomes a realizable consequence to the reader. He writes: "In this sense, both the realist and homiletic novel bespeak not a struggle to be 'realer than thou,' but merely to be real *enough*" (13). Jackson believes that the homiletic process arising out of sermonic discourse is a common link between the religious conversion experience of the revivals and the representation of reality that the realist writer constructs. The realness of the allegory correlates to the strength of the conversion, and the allegorical discourse derives from the homiletic form of sermonic discourse.

In fact, the question of hermeneutics is central to the novel; it arises when Ware expresses his desire to supplement his income with what Jackson calls a "parabiblical" text. Ware soon realizes that reading and explicating scripture is far more complicated than he had anticipated because of the many different critical approaches to its interpretation. Following a popular trend, Ware decides to write a contemporary commentary on a passage of scripture: "Latterly his fancy had been stimulated by reading an account of the profits which Canon Farrar had derived from

his 'Life of Christ.' If such a book could command such a bewildering multitude of readers, Theron felt that there ought to be a chance for him" (Frederic, *Damnation* 40).¹²¹ Ware is more interested in the commercial potential of his publication than the theological need for scriptural exegesis, but, finally, he decides to revisit the Book of Genesis: "He had not, it is true, gone to the length of seriously considering what should be the subject of his book. That had not seemed to matter much, so long as it was scriptural. . . . The book should be about Abraham!" (40).

This review of a difficult Old Testament passage is a common move by liberal theologians seeking to reconcile Old Testament scriptures with New Testament teachings. The rationale is that Christianity will be strengthened if the two parts of the Bible can be brought into alignment so that Christianity can be validated by showing how the life of Jesus meets the "conditions" of the Messiah as laid out in the Old Testament. Once Ware begins his project about this Old Testament figure, Abraham, who links Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he encounters a crisis of confidence in his own lack of expertise regarding the Hebrew Bible.

For Theron Ware, what begins as a whim ends up shaking his faith and leads him on a journey of self-doubt. He turns to Father Forbes for advice, and Forbes and Ledsmar subsequently indoctrinate Ware into the theories of German High Criticism. In short order, Ware loses the foundation of all he thought was true when his literal hermeneutics fail him. He had believed the Biblical material to be so real that he had failed to read the text as allegory. Forbes and Ledsmar explain the hermeneutic of reading eponyms. Father Forbes says: "I fear that you are taking our friend Abraham too literally. . . . Modern research, you know quite wipes him out of existence as an individual. The word "Abram" is merely an eponym,—it means "exalted father." . . . Abram is not a person at all: he is a tribe, a sect, a clan" (72). Theron is shocked by this theory and asks if it is something new. In fact, as Forbes points out, these ideas are not new at all, going back nearly fifteen hundred years to Saint Augustine (72). Theron is learning something quite old; it is simply new to him. In fact, everything he encounters from Celia

Madden, Father Forbes, and Dr. Ledsmar—the new hedonism, the new science, and the new theology—are all actually quite old, as Briggs points out: “Dr. Ledsmar’s one book is an anthropological history of serpent worship, and he is the foremost authority on Assyriology in the United States. Celia, when she is not playing Hypatia, wants to be a Greek pagan” (128). Father Forbes points out that knowledge and truth should not be confused as one and the same: ““The earth was just as round in the days when people supposed it to be flat, as it is now. So the truth remains always the truth, even though you give it a charter to ten hundred thousand separate numskulls to examine it by the light of their private judgment”” (73). Father Forbes is not trying to teach Ware the truth, but he does try to teach him new hermeneutics, and he continues on to discuss “this Christ-myth of ours” (74), showing him how to apply these hermeneutics to the New Testament as well as the Old. Ware is shocked by the notion of reading religion in this manner, but he feels pleasure as well. He is unaware that his spectators view him as an allegorical subject. To them, he is a rural type, the embodiment of innocence, but he fails to acknowledge his role properly.

Ware’s problems with the Bible underscore larger problems of textual authority in relation to hermeneutics. Within the novel and specifically within the reading of the Bible, codes of representation repeatedly fail with no clear alternatives for substituting a new understanding of knowledge for Ware’s former method; he becomes increasingly aware of the inadequacy of his own exegeses. Once grounded in his faith, Ware loses the security of the only sacred document that has supported his beliefs once he examines the Bible and realizes he does not really know how to read or interpret it beyond the confines of his sermonic discourse. Foote writes: “When even the figures in the Bible begin to assume overtones of foreignness, Theron loses his sense of himself, of his own place and position in relation to texts he once thought of as inviolable and sacred. His belief that Abraham is a ‘real’ man and not a type works in the text as a symptom of his unfamiliarity with codes of representation as a whole” (62). When he turns to

Father Forbes, Ware learns that there are other methods of reading texts, and those other methods change his literal hermeneutic to an allegorical one. This turn forces Theron to confront the notion that all he thought was true can no longer be assumed to be true. He begins to see his faith as merely a system, but he finds no replacement system that seems any truer to him. He examines Catholicism, but even Father Forbes sees his own faith in a Positivistic light.

As a brief aside, we should also note that there was a duality within Catholicism in Octavius as well. The Catholic Church contains a social class system that, in Octavius, Father Forbes controls. The trustees scornfully attack the Catholic churches in town, linking them to the influx of immigrants: “‘The place is jest overrun with Irish,’ Brother Pierce began again. ‘They’ve got two Catholic Churches here now to our one. . . . [T]hey ain’t Christians at all. They’re idolaters, that’s what they are!’” (31). As Pierce points out, the term Christian becomes highly subjective, representing a contested faith rather than a shared one. The fact that there are two Catholic Churches in the town of Octavius further suggests the divided view toward Catholicism in American culture at this time. On the one hand, there is the elitist European Catholicism with a minority presence in America, a kind of Enlightenment intellectual aesthetic that Father Forbes represents, while, on the other hand, there is the emerging growth of the low Catholic Church accompanying the flux of immigrants that the Octavian Irish factory workers represent. Father Forbes argues that the success of the Catholic church lies in its “one-size-fits-all” approach; through priests and scholars, Bible interpretation and theology can be translated into a practical model for the masses. Oehlschlaeger writes: “As Dr. Ledsmar explains, the Catholic Church represents a [model of] unqualified acceptance. Whereas Protestant churches exclude the sinner, ‘there’s no problem to the Catholic Church. Everything that’s in, stay’s in.’ Virtue does not inhere in the parishioners but is part of the church” (251). Either way, Forbes believes the institutional church is necessary in order to oversee social ethics. He says: “‘What you must see is that there must always be a church. If one did not exist, it would be necessary to

invent it. It is needed, first and foremost, as a police force. It is needed, secondly, so to speak, as a fire insurance” (Frederic, *Damnation* 250). For Forbes, theology and the institution of the church do not need to be particularly consistent, so long as the church meets the needs of contemporary culture. In this way, he parallels Sister Soulsby who believes, ““A Church is like everything else. . . . It’s got to have a boss, a head, an authority of some sort”” (174). Forbes and Soulsby are pragmatists, and each sees organized religion as an integral part of moral and ethical development, but the underlying problem with authority emerges in each of these models, as Theron will discover. By the time Frederic writes *Gloria Mundi*, his satire of the so-called bosses, heads, and authorities becomes quite cutting.

To understand the religious composition in American culture during the late nineteenth century, it is imperative to understand that vast change and splintering was ubiquitous in every denomination. The power struggle plays out through the representations of institutional religion. Again, the battle has two fronts: within the creed and across creeds. Both Methodism and Catholicism increased their numbers significantly by the late nineteenth century as Calvinist denominations declined, but there were socioeconomic and class struggles within these denominations as Frederic’s depiction acknowledges. Father Forbes predicts that the Catholic church will become the dominant institutional church in America—he calls it the “Church of America” (248)—and he specifically credits its success to the “lager-drinking Irishman” (248). Again, Frederic’s satire of Matthew Arnold should not be missed here. John Lyons comments on the parallel between Arnold’s analysis of Celtic languages and Father Forbes’s speech on this new American type in which he “imagines the mingling of the Celt and the Saxon through the agency of beer [turning] Arnold’s high seriousness into low comedy” (13). The deliberate juxtaposition of Catholicism against Methodism allows Frederic to examine each alternative as a system of societal and ethical control for integrating and managing social change: he challenges his readers to consider which system offers greater advantage to the changing American

landscape. He pokes fun at contemporary social philosophy even while he challenges his reader to consider various enactments of Hebraism and Hellenism in contemporary culture.

Methodism, free from the constraints of Calvinist orthodoxy, also provides a link to the Adam archetype because of its focus on religious primitivism with its mystic focus that attempts to shed the fetters of creed. This variation of the Adam story will prove to be a recurring theme in Frederic's writing, which he examines in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, *Gloria Mundi*,¹²² and *The Market-Place*. R. W. B. Lewis points out that the Adam figure was a frequent literary trope even before the rise of realism specifically because the story in Genesis was uniquely suited to the idea of a New World and the chance to begin a new story of civilization. He writes: "A century ago, the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (Lewis 1). He calls this characterization "an emergent American myth" and insists that there exists a dialogue that is "a collective affair" (4). Lewis cites several variations of this myth in the publications of early nineteenth-century writers and philosophers such as Holmes, Whitman, Henry James, Horace Bushnell, Copper, Hawthorne, Melville, etc. He traces the Adamic myth throughout several decades, and he links its surrounding rhetoric to transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau and "the long New England preaching tradition" (21). Lewis captures an interesting transition in American religious culture during which Calvinism declined and first Unitarianism and later Protestant reform movements began to supplant Congregationalism as the mainstream American church institutions. At the same time, the Old Testament influence of Calvinism remains encapsulated within the Adam discourse, and Lewis argues that the Adam myth and the American experience are well-suited as each draws on the idea of a new history of humankind. He writes: "The American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously

fumbled in the darkening Old World” (Lewis 5). Theron Ware emerges as a modern-day Adam whose downfall reflects what Carter summarizes as intellectual America’s fall from innocence into knowledge (xvii). Frederic specifically depicts the Adam myth through the theology of Methodism to challenge the notion of a creedless creed. With or without a restrictive theology, mankind is destined to repeat its own actions.

Whereas the Biblical title of *Seth’s Brother’s Wife* subtly alludes to Seth as an Adamic figure, Theron Ware’s resemblance to Adam is a little more indirect. His initial innocence and subsequent fall suggest the Adamic allegory, as do the numerous references to serpents in the novel.¹²³ Frederic also toys with an Eve figure in these stories complete with the garden imagery more clearly reminiscent of an Edenic setting and a fall from grace, in such characters as Alice Ware in *The Damnation* and Edith Cressage in *The Market-Place*. Both women, frustrated by their marriages, try to revive abandoned gardens in their own back yards. Alice’s garden becomes tainted with her potential infidelity and it shrivels, while Edith Cressage simply becomes bored as she attempts to sublimate her sexual desires into a flourishing landscape. Several scholars have noted the story’s mythical allegory, including George Johnson, who calls Ware “an Adamic American” (367), and Stanton Garner, who calls him “a young American Adam” (137). Austin Briggs also points out that “appropriately, Tecumseh is located in Adams County” (114). The real issue of Theron’s “fall” revolves around the question of whether he was ever an innocent at all. He is a problematic Adam because he falls easily and abandons his beliefs and moral code without a backward glance, but perhaps that is Frederic’s point. Ware’s ignorance sustains his innocence only until he discovers new ideas and challenges to his faith, both sexual and intellectual. He has no basis for sustaining his beliefs; he was innocent only because he knew no other way to be. Ware embraces his fall, and he welcomes his more worldly perspective, but as Garner points out, he doesn’t become more enlightened so much as more bawdy as he allows himself “to descend from the freshness of innocence and of loyalty to his

creed and his marriage to the barkeeper level of mean suspicion and intentions” (137). In this model we see the fundamental tragedy of the Adam myth: the fall is inevitable and unpreventable. To identify one’s own innocence necessarily implies the impossibility of retrieving that lost innocence, and again, that state may not be one of innocence so much as ignorance. The sense of discovery and loss are one and the same. There follows a sense of nostalgia that competes with an immediate desire to know more. The Adam myth is not as much about the loss of innocence as it is about the acknowledgment of a temptation that can never again be denied.

In the regional model, that idea of acknowledgement plays out in the story as well. Celia Madden admits to Theron that she, Father Forbes, and Dr. Ledsmar had “acquired” him for his innocence; once it is lost, he is of no further interest to them. She states: ““We liked you, as I have said, because you were unsophisticated and delightfully fresh and natural. Somehow we took it for granted you would stay so”” (Frederic, *Damnation* 331). Stephanie Foote points out that Theron Ware defies expectations as a regional figure from the beginning of the novel by failing to be “acquired.” Foote writes: “The word *acquisition* highlights a problem within regionalism as a whole. The lyrical desire for an innocence of character and experience is clear in Celia’s initial desire for Theron” (68-9). Tecumseh could not acquire Theron, nor can Celia because what each wishes to acquire is different from the elusive version Ware presents to them. He refuses to remain stable but changes immediately from what they wish him to be. For Tecumseh, Theron is a problematic orator because he brings with him a disreputable history for fiscal management, so they are denied their fashionable exhorter because of his equally fashionable materialism. For Celia, Theron cannot be acquired without betraying the knowledge he has gained from his exposure to her and her compatriots. They cannot possess his innocence without his acquiring their cynicism. Foote writes: “It is perhaps the great tragedy of this novel that Theron proves to be a regional figure who does not recognize himself as such and who will

not be still in the curio cabinet of this genre” (59). Foote’s point is that the object insists on his own subjectivity. She adds: “He commits the unpardonable sin of pastoral regionalism: he attempts to modernize himself as he is being observed” (59). This self-awareness is the tragedy of the Adamic myth as well: the fall is accompanied by the instant awareness that desire cannot be undone. The subject no longer wishes to be without it: this Adam is not the object of depravity, but rather he insists on his own subjectivity. As an American allegory, the implications are numerous: the West cannot be uncivilized, the city cannot be unbuilt, knowledge cannot be unlearned, and man can no longer inhabit the garden because the tragedy is that he no longer wants to. He is forever fallen; there is no progress or possibility for a rewritten history because the state of innocence cannot be maintained as soon as it is understood to be a state of innocence.

What is most significant about the Adam reference is Frederic’s departure from the Christ figure that Davis and Howells offer in their realist fiction.¹²⁴ The allegorical Adam suggests a man unfettered from civilization and theology, with a one-to-one correspondence between man and God while the Christ figure more typically accompanies the notion of progressive man and intuitive conscience that transcends the law as it is handed down in the Old Testament. In one sense, it is a difference of hermeneutics with larger implications about how to read and apply textual authority to the question of ethics. Here, the question of Hebraism versus Hellenism again emerges. There are many examples in the novel of Hebraism and Hellenism, but this dichotomy is not so much absolute as measured by degrees. For example, John Lyons reads Celia Madden as an example of Hellenism, and indeed she identifies herself as “Greek” and she espouses Arnold when she states: “I divide people into two classes, you know,—Greeks and Jews. Once you get hold of that principle, all other divisions and classifications, such as by race or language or nationality, seem pure foolishness” (200). We soon learn, however, that Celia’s Hellenism is as subjective as the Methodist’s sectarianism: she incorporates it into her notion of

Christianity via Catholicism, and she finds her Catholicism as malleable as the Methodists in the novel find their creed. She says: “The Catholic religion is my jug. I put into it the things I like. They were all there long ago, thousands of years ago. The Jews threw them out; we will put them back again” (265).¹²⁵ This malleability permeates the text: Sister Soulsby also formulates her own religion, as does Father Forbes, and even Alice. Lyons points out that Celia cannot even explicate her own subjective Hellenism, and he draws attention to a passage in the text where Celia is unable to define her own notion of the “Greek idea” except in the vaguest of terms such as “lots of things” and “so on,” finally settling on “Absolute freedom from moral bugbears, for one thing” (208). In short, Lyons describes Celia as “Hellenism gone to seed” (10). In one sense, nearly all the figures in the text offer examples of Hellenism in the way each feels free to intuit the religious model rather than by following the implied law of Hebraism. If Hellenism offers a way to adapt religious theology to the modern age by intuiting abstract ideas of divinity, Frederic illustrates the very danger it represents; it is so highly subjective that it cannot be represented in any concrete manner. Hellenism gone to seed is pure abstraction as it is incrementally represented in the text, culminating in Celia’s Classical Christian Catholicism.

The Hebraic figures in the novel also exist by degree. For Lyons, if Celia is Hellenism gone to seed, Ledsmar represents Hebraism gone to seed (10), but he also acknowledges a “cartoon version of Hebraism” in the trustee Loren Pierce (10). He writes: “[Pierce] will have no other gods before him, and so is opposed to church choirs, fancy ladies’ hats, and knows that geology gives no clues to the age of the earth” (10). Pierce’s puritanical dogma allows him to impose *The Discipline* on every activity that deviates from his rigid interpretation of his faith beginning with his insistence that Alice remove the roses from her bonnet and Ware remove the word “epitome” from his sermon because it is not plain-spoken as the law dictates (Frederic, *Damnation* 37). From the beginning, Frederic also brings the question of Judaism into play although he does not present Judaism and Hebraism as synonyms. In Frederic’s fiction, Jewish

identity is always presented in terms of race rather than theology. For Bridget Bennett, an important link to Hebraism exists between the various ways Frederic depicts Jewish characters in his novels, especially the later novels. She writes: “Like all his passions, his interest in Judaism spills over into his fiction—*The Damnation of Theron Ware*, *Gloria Mundi* and *The Market-Place* contain, respectively references to Hebraism, Anglo-Jewish characters, and [an anti-Semitic] protagonist” (121). Carrie Bramen also points out the anti-Semitic theme of not only Frederic’s later novels, but in the less than subtle implication in *The Damnation* that the money-lender trustee, Levi Gorringer is Jewish as well. She notes Alice’s advice to Theron before his meeting with the trustees when Alice advises her husband not to let the trustees “jew” him down (Frederic, *Damnation* 25). Bramen believes Gorringer’s characterization is an example of “otherness” in the novel, and she cites several examples of where the language points to his occupation (lawyer who works as a money-lender), and his “dusky” and “Arabian” aspect as well as Ware’s suspicions about Gorringer’s origins (Bramen 73). Gorringer is certainly a strange character in the novel, and he is intimately connected to the hypocrisy of Ware’s sexual awakening with Celia as it is paralleled in Alice’s encounters with Gorringer. There are many such parallels within the novel with patterns of two and patterns of three (three trustees, three female characters, the Celia Madden, Father Forbes and Dr. Ledsmar triangle). The Hellenism versus Hebraism dichotomy offers a basis for evaluating how to place each of these figures in the philosophical subtext of Arnold, but clearly, Frederic is having fun instilling various figures with this aesthetic opposition mainly to undercut the seriousness of it. If, as Celia Madden suggests, there are only two types of people, part of the enjoyment of the novel is in viewing these various characters through this classification.

At the same time, Gorringer does not exhibit the link to orthodoxy that the other Hebraistic figures do. Instead, he offers a link to the world of finance and capitalism that becomes so strongly associated with the religious rhetoric of the text. In many ways, the novel

depicts the commodification of ethics and religion in Octavius. From the very beginning, Theron must learn to adopt the language of capitalism in his dealings with the trustees as their discussion degenerates into a negotiation of interest rates, salary, and sidewalk repair costs.¹²⁶ The trustees refuse to lower their interest rates, quoting the Discipline for justification: ““You know how strong the Discipline lays it down that we must be bound to the letter in our agreements. That bein’ so, we seen it in the light of duty not to change what we’d set our hands to” (Frederic, *Damnation* 34). Theron is able to return to the same logic in his refusal to cut his salary or pay for a repair that preceded his arrival in Octavius. He has mastered the application of materialist and capitalist logic. The measure of success of Theron’s ministry will rest on his ability to raise revenue to free the church from its debt.

Financial language slowly replaces the language of faith, which Theron Ware exhibits by adopting the modern industrial concept of value into his ethical life. It is only when a dollar amount is assigned to Alice’s garden that Ware begins to believe she has committed adultery, and then her garden soon shrivels. Again, the two instances of infidelity work in tandem in the novel: Theron accepts Celia Madden’s gift of a piano for Alice, and he sees Celia’s checkbook as a potential source of liberation from his now stifling life. When he escapes the Methodist camp-meeting and encounters Celia at the Catholic picnic, he begins to equate his liberty with her wallet: “She had kissed him, and she was very rich. The things gradually linked themselves before his eyes” (271). The almighty dollar, which is so liberating to Theron, is stifling and restrictive to Alice. Shortly after the picnic, Theron overhears two ladies discussing the “sinful waste” of Alice’s new garden. He is shocked to learn she has planted “fifty dollars’ worth of dahlias” (274). Theron has given little thought to Gorringer’s gifts to Alice until a dollar amount is attached: “It was no good deceiving himself any longer: of course these were the plants that Gorringer had spent his money upon, all about him” (274). Once Theron becomes obsessed with the notion of Alice’s potential infidelity, her new Eden symbolically dies: “The gayety and color

of the garden were gone, and in their place was shabby and dishevelled [sic] ruin. . . . He looked about him, surveying the havoc the frost had wrought among the flowers, and smiled” (292). In fact, in either gift scenario, Alice is implicated in Theron’s fall because the piano was a gift for her as much as Gorringe’s donated flowers are. Either way, she is the recipient of the money that becomes associated with sin. The financial language that Frederic weaves throughout the novel from Theron’s initial debt, the sidewalk repairs, the debt-raiser Soulsby, the garden, the piano, and the checkbook culminate in Celia’s accusation that Ware has been a disappointing acquisition: he did not retain his value. Theron’s mastery of the economic language of the novel colors his entire view of religion and society; it is inextricably linked to his fall. Presumably, this new “system” replaces the old one, and Frederic’s subsequent novels continue his examination of various social and economic systems that replace the antiquated one of Theron Ware’s simple faith.

The Damnation of Theron Ware is Frederic’s last comprehensive examination of American religious culture, and it concludes his Mohawk Valley grouping of upstate New York regional fiction. Frederic’s last two novels, *Gloria Mundi* and *The Market-Place* were published posthumously. These latter works deal with a declining European aristocracy and a burgeoning urban capitalism in turn-of-the-century London, and, like the New York fiction, Frederic connects some of the characters such as Christian Towers and Edith Cressage textually and geographically allowing us to read the novels as a thematic set. These final two texts also include significant social commentary on late nineteenth century anti-Semitism when Frederic delves into economic and cultural stereotyping of money-lending and usury, creating sympathetic Jewish characters in the *Gloria Mundi* and avaricious economic hustlers who get their comeuppance in *The Market-Place*. In both cases, Frederic’s turn toward naturalism emerges, and he begins to examine various types of social forces in which man exercises power over his fellow man. Briggs writes: “Standing at the end of the nineteenth century, Frederic

looks back upon nearly one hundred years of power garnered in the name of progress, and, turning to the century ahead, he asks just what that power implies” (200). He does not offer a socialist solution as Upton Sinclair will later in *The Jungle* (1906), but he does examine the socio-economical conditions that could as easily lead to socialism or fascism.

The title of the first of these two novels, *Gloria Mundi*, is a Latin phrase that translates to “the glory of the world.”¹²⁷ The story focuses on the French-born Englishman, Christian Towers, who inherits the Dukedom of Glastonbury and an ancestral home, Caermere, from his late father’s estranged family. As Christian journeys to England to claim his inheritance, he encounters various aspects of British society and social philosophy, including feudalism, aristocracy, socialism, democracy, anti-Semitism, and the New Woman ideology. Christian ultimately melds these various “systems” but with little clear resolution of his own social philosophy. In the end, he reclaims his inherited position in the British aristocracy, but he promises himself to “reign” over his kingdom with a modern sensibility. Mainly, he intends primarily to avoid the pomposity of his ancestors. The irony of the novel is that in his search to be unique, Christian merely reiterates the traditional role enjoyed by his class; he returns to Caermere but with the vague intention of remodeling it to let in more light.

There are two brief commentaries on the role of institutional religion in the novel: the first comes from Christian’s kinsman Emanuel, who is Jewish by birth but Anglicized in his upbringing and the second comes from Christian who was raised Catholic but adopts the Anglican Church as a condition of his inheritance. Both Emanuel and Christian see some positive traits in the national church, but neither views it as the primary institution for the development and regulation of social ethics. Instead, each sees the role of the church as complementary to the maintenance of other social institutions; the church is a means to an end. For Emanuel, the curates in his utopian community function merely to help him police the community and maintain the tenets of his social philosophy. For Christian, the church is a

historical archive that preserves cultural traditions through ritual and artifacts. In short, both men view the church as a useful aid in maintaining cultural hegemony. At his grandfather's funeral, Christian finally awakens to an understanding of family history, and he begins to comprehend the social power of the British aristocracy. The interesting aspect of these two vignettes of the church is that one model serves the needs of the lower working classes while the other attends to the upper echelon of the European class system. Both allow the institutional church a role in contemporary culture, but its function is very much associated with socio-economic class. In Frederic's depiction of it, the national church exists to maintain the status quo.

Frederic's association of social class with religion in the novel is not surprising given his focus on British society at the turn of the century. In fact, the novel itself may have a much larger scope in relation to British history. Editor Larry Bromley reads the text as a mythic quest that serves as an allegory for European civilization. He writes:

Christian, a Catholic, is compared to a half-brother who never appears in the book, Salvatore, a Protestant. Both brothers set out from France, but Salvator travels to America, where he becomes a Freemason and a socialist liberal; symbolically, Christian's journey suggests the Norman conquest, and Salvator's the colonization of the New World. Indeed, there are many such metaphorical connections to England and her past in the novel. Caermere itself is allegorically significant: like the British Isles as a whole, it is invulnerable on three sides and approachable only from an easily defended fourth side; like the empire it represents, Caermere and its environs contains all the strata of English society. (Bromley 346)

Even so, Bromley believes that Frederic's quest motif fades from the text after the opening chapters, and he sees the allegory lose strength as the focus of the novel shifts. In fact, it may be that Frederic begins with the nod to European history in an attempt to "place" modern social philosophy into a side-by-side perspective with Europe's earlier age to argue for causality. By doing so, he establishes a relationship between the past and the present at what he locates as a key moment of social transition, much as he did with Methodism in Octavius with the puritan versus liberal encounter within the creed.

Within the novel, Frederic suggests that while the Anglican Church is tied to significant social and political ideologies, its primary function is as a social force rather than a spiritual one. In *Gloria Mundi*, he does not even depict the Church of England in relation to theology or hermeneutics, but rather he examines its utility as a force to maintain cultural hegemony. For example, Emanuel believes the age of feudalism was the golden age of European civilization, and he has attempted to create what Thomas O'Donnell calls "a pseudo-social Utopia that is actually feudal in design" (121). In his model, he envisions the church functioning in the manner of a labor guild, and he reforms it to resemble the Roman Catholic Church of centuries past. Emanuel treats Christian hospitably, and he attempts to indoctrinate him into the tenets of the "System," which is a Ruskinian attempt at social benevolence within which the fundamental purpose seems to be to maintain the status quo of a class-based agrarian life.

Implicit in this model is an assumption that the human race is capable of managing its own "progress" if the upper echelons can contain the threat of unrest. In this way, a gradual social progression prevents a radical revolution even if that "advancement" requires revisiting an earlier era. Emanuel even explains his model using a scientific schema relying on a Darwinian premise that evolution is genealogical. Emanuel uses an analogy of the road much as Darwin explains the idea of divergence via branches in *The Origin of Species* (1859).¹²⁸ Quoting social philosophy in passages that appear to be generally lifted from John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860)¹²⁹ and closely related to the Arts and Crafts movement associated with William Morris, Emanuel "saw clearly that mankind could right itself only by retracing its steps, and going back to the scene of its mistaken choice of roads" (Frederic, *Gloria Mundi* 129-30).¹³⁰ Emanuel wants to return to a period before a specific variation occurred in human society, and like a domestic breeder, he wants to select the variants he will preserve in his society. On Emanuel's six-village estate, he has managed to reform the Church of England: "Each village had a small church edifice of its own, quaintly-towered and beautiful in form, and each possessing or simulating

skillfully the graces of antiquity as well” (130-31). Emanuel describes the role his celibate curates perform in “the System.” He says:

I don't suppose you know much about the Church of England. Well, it drives with an extremely loose rein. You can do almost anything you like inside it, if you go about the idea decorously. I didn't even have the trouble with the Bishop which might have been expected. These young men—my curates, we may call them—have among themselves a kind of guild or fraternity . . .; they are quite agreed upon an irreducible minimum of dogmatic theology, and an artistic elaboration of the ritual, and, above all, upon an active life / consecrated to good works. . . . Without their constant and very capable oversight, the System would have a good many ragged edges, I'm afraid. . . . They especially watch the development of the children, and make careful notes of their qualities and capacities. They select the few who are to be fully educated from the mass which is to be taught only to read and do sums. (132-33)

In Emanuel's system, the celibate curates comprise simply another form of guild, and their primary function is to know the families and especially the young children so that each individual within the village may be carefully sorted according to his or her most promising function. He has little interest in theology at all and in fact all but eliminates it from his model. The clergy are the social police, and they are able to serve in this role in large part because they do not have any competing interests in the acquisition of land or property.

The fatal flaw in Emanuel's system is that he alone is the sole guardian of its ideology. He can find no one else to share his vision and take over the ownership of it. Christian affronts Emanuel by asking him if the System is not merely a form of socialism (140). Any resemblance to socialism is merely superficial because the ultimate irony of the System is that Emanuel has, in fact, managed to reproduce a feudalism that has primarily benefited himself. He states: ““In the eyes of the law, it is all mine, and from that point of view I am a richer man than I was before the system began. . . . I take enough to benefit as befits my station; each of the others has enough to maintain *his* station, comfortably and honorably”” (140). Emanuel's insistence on maintaining a system of social class reveals his anti-socialist philosophy that he hopes his reformed church will help him maintain. The women in the novel level two criticisms at this System. His wife Kathleen points out that there is no room for advancing the interests of women

in it (145), and Christian's New Woman paramour, Frances Bailey, points out that the main triumph of the system is its cultural hegemony that benefits the upper classes. She states: "When you consider it, what has he done? Merely discovered, by tremendous labor and energy, the smoothest possible working arrangement of the social system which his class regards as best for itself, and hence for all mankind—the system which exalts a chosen few, and keeps all the rest in subjection" (235). She acknowledges that Emanuel does not pretend to be working for social progress so much as reacting to current socio-economic conditions by taking "a long step backward" (236). She faults his narrow vision as "a Jewish limitation" (235), which ironically overlooks Emanuel's inclusion of the Church of England in his utopian community. Frederic presents two different views of determinism here: Emanuel offers a model of cultural determinism while Frances Bailey hints at genetic determinism and the role of race. This is the dichotomy that links these final two novels, and it replaces the earlier dichotomy of Hebraism versus Hellenism as Frederic examines the influences of social and scientific determinism much more clearly than he did in *The Lawton Girl* when he first alluded to social versus genetic inheritance.

If organized religion is reduced to a social police force for Emanuel, for Christian it serves primarily as spectacle. The physical dimensions of the church architecture press upon him the inherited social dimensions of the church as an historical archive: "The interior of the old church—dim, cool, cloistral—was larger than Christian had assumed from its outer aspect" (289). It is not the service or ritual itself that moves Christian, but rather the history encapsulated in the church: "Through the reading of the Psalm and the Epistle, he gave but the most vagrant attention to their words. The priests read badly, for one thing; the whining artificiality of their elocution annoyed and repelled him" (289). Christian makes a direct parallel between the institution of the church and the institution of the monarchy: "The burial of a Duke of Glastonbury had nothing to do with personal qualities or reputation. It was like the passing

away of a monarch. People who cared nothing for the individual were stirred and appealed to by the vicissitudes of an institution” (289). Christian realizes that the church ritual upholds the power of that position by incorporating its grandeur into the funeral procession and then by training the lower classes to participate in the ritualistic observation, thereby reinforcing the Duke’s social position. Ironically, as is the case with Emanuel, Christian determines to uphold the institution from which he personally will realize the greatest gain. As soon as the church institution is associated with that gain, he comprehends its utility. He has a deeply passionate conversion to the social utility of the Church of England: “There was a sense of transfiguration in the spectacle. The purple mantle had become imperial Tyrian to his eyes—and something which was almost tenderness, almost reverence, yearned within him toward that silent, encased figure hidden beneath it. The mystic, omnipotent tie of blood gripped his heart” (291). Christian’s new view the church is strikingly similar to Emanuel’s. He appreciates the artifacts and the reverent attendance that are preserved in the church even as the words and ceremony repel him. There is a strange ambivalence in how the church operates as a cultural force. And, in fact, it is the “force” that draws Christian: “Yes, even in this Protestant religion to which he had passively become committed, force was the real ideal!” (290). Christian’s religious awakening is merely an acknowledgement that he wants to align himself with its power.

As with *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, the issue of race underscores the question of class and power in this novel. On one side of the family are the Jewish cousins. This line includes Lord Julius and his son Emanuel, whom Frances Bailey insists on calling “the Jews.” In fact, they turn out to be vultures who infuse money into the dukedom and then hold it for ransom at exorbitant usuries, but then, inexplicably, they forgive all debts at the end of the novel, conveniently ending their hold over Christian Towers. Lord Julius’s willingness to marry outside of the British aristocracy and his subsequent infusion of wealth into the family coffers is associated with his pureness of blood, unlike the “strange blood of the Torrs” (91). Yet, he is

thereafter referred to as one of “the Jews.” His wife is from “an old family in the Netherlands, Jewish in race but now for some generations estranged from the synagogue, and reputed to be extraordinarily wealthy” (105). In other words, they are Jews who are not “too Jewish” and their social status in London is unproblematic because “Smart London rarely saw Lady Julius save at a distance” (106). In any event, this branch of the family will die out with Emanuel because he and his wife Irish wife Kathleen have been unable to produce children. Another line of the family is the aforementioned strange-blooded Torrs, the British aristocracy who represent an atavistic inbreeding that has produced few worthy heirs for the dukedom until the French-born Christian Towers is discovered. In a lengthy discussion about Christian’s mother’s maiden name, Coppinger, Kathleen surmises that his mother must have been from County Cork, Ireland, and she deduces that Christian must have Celtic ancestry. As he did in *The Damnation*, Frederic seems to enjoy toying with the idea of Celtic nobility in contrast with a Jewish racial stock. The question of ancestry features prominently in the novel, and it points to Frederic’s turn toward naturalism. He begins to explore the question of sociological and biological influence, and the institutions of culture begin to serve as instruments of power through which each man promotes his own interests.

In Frederic’s final novel, *The Market-Place*, Joel Thorpe’s single-mindedness is the driving force in his capitalist scheme, and religion is almost nonexistent in this text except as it appears in connection with the idea of a Jewish race. Thorpe, one of the most interesting of Frederic’s protagonists, is a ruggedly individualistic self-made man. He is, however, as Bennett observes, “a protagonist whose most loathsome characteristic is his violent anti-Semitism” (121). Having been defrauded by a group of primarily Jewish stockbrokers who have attempted to undercut the price of his company stock, Thorpe embarks on a scheme to bankrupt what appears to be each and every Jew he encounters. Thorpe is reminiscent of an Old Testament God of revenge who inflicts his wrath on a race that he believes dishonored him: “He cannot divorce the

idea of success from that of revenge: He desires a fortune, yes, but at the expense of the Kaffir Jews, on whom his wrath concentrates because they represent the last men in a long sequence who have seemed to lead him on only to disappoint him later” (Blackall 391). A strange product of modern capitalism, he brings a New World primitivism back to an Old World marketplace. Jean Blackall writes: [A] psychological product of two worlds, the old and the new . . . [he] is a type of financial buccaneer, whose commercial prowess is attended by moral ambiguities” (388). Throughout the novel, Thorpe realizes that it is not so much money that drives him but the unadulterated pleasure he feels from exercising power over his fellow man. He says: “The thing to do is to make up your mind carefully what it is that you want, and to put all your power and resolution into getting it—and the rest is easy enough. I don’t think there’s anything beyond a strong man’s reach, if he only believes enough in himself” (Frederic, *Market-Place* 171). The image of reaching and grasping in association with the arm and the hand recur throughout the text, with Thorpe inscribing a man’s physical anatomy with racist characteristics once he openly admits to his anti-Semitism.

The complement to Thorpe’s power is his focused cruelty. The book takes on naturalistic tones as he targets the “Jews” who attempted to bankrupt him. He takes every step possible to prevent them from declaring bankruptcy, which would offer them protection from making additional restitution to him. Mainly he bleeds each one dry systematically until each depletes his fortune and Thorpe has pocketed it. His rationale is the law of the jungle; he believes that not one of the fourteen men he intends to impoverish came by the money any differently than he himself has come by it:

Not one of those fellows ever earned a single sovereign of that money. They’ve taken the whole of it from others, and these others took it from others still, and so on almost indefinitely. . . . Well—money like that belongs to those who are in possession of it, only so long as they are strong enough to hold on to it. When someone stronger still comes along, he takes it from them. They don’t complain: they don’t cry and say it’s cruel. They know it’s the rule of the game. (205)

He then takes his philosophy to a racial level by honing in on the physical attributes of his Jewish foes, inscribing the Jewish anatomy with a physiological weakness that mimics what he believes is an inferiority of character as determined by race. He examines his own bulky fist and compares it to the hands of his enemies. He describes it as ““the kind of hand . . . that breaks the Jew in the long run, if there’s only grit enough behind it. I used to watch those Jews’ hands, a year ago, when I was dining and wining them. They’re all thin and wiry and full of veins. Their fingers are never still; they twist round and keep stirring like a lobster’s feelers. But there ain’t any real strength in ’em” (205). He embeds a survival-of-the-fittest rhetoric into economic battle with his metonymic use of the fist to demonstrate his overall physical superiority.

As an example of a twentieth-century Adam, Thorpe is a formidable figure. He is both primitive and modern, and he displays little desire to return to the comfortable innocence of the garden. Thorpe himself initially mistakes his motivation. Cashing in his last stock, he muses “Fruition was finally complete: the last winnowing of the great harvest had been added to the pile. Positively nothing remained but for him to enter and enjoy” (319). He himself believes he desires a place in the upper echelon of British society, but he soon realizes his mistake. Garner writes: “Thorpe is, at least, a moving object, a living organism, set against the background of decay and defeat in *Gloria Mundi*. When he wins his fortune, his first impulse is to buy with his purse the station and the privilege that he has been denied by inheritance” (139). Once Thorpe attains his goal, his estate, and his titled bride, he soon realizes that he is far from satisfied, and Lady Edith Cressage, his Eve, finds little fulfillment in either the domesticated, refined Thorpe or her time spent in cultivating flowers for their country estate. When confronted, she admits her dissatisfaction: ““I am attracted by a big, bold, strong pirate, let us say, but as soon as he has carried me off—that is the phrase for it—then he straightway renounces crime and becomes a law-abiding, peaceful citizen. My buccaneer transforms himself, under my very eyes, into an alderman!”” (274-75). She makes it clear that her life has been about the thrill of the chase as

well. She no longer wishes to deny the temptation and return to the safety that her former position as landed gentry offers. The story ends with her observation about Thorpe that “the really important thing is that he should pursue some object—have in view something that he is determined to master. Without that, he is not contented—not at his best” (401). And symbolically, she yields her title and assumes her married name. Alice’s garden in *The Damnation* perished in spite of her best efforts, but Edith Cressage eagerly departs hers. For her, the fallen Adam is far more appealing than the comfortable companion who inhabits her country estate. In the end, Frederic undercuts even the Adam myth by showing that man is not only destined to fall but that he desires the life outside the garden and willingly seeks it.

If power is Thorpe’s temptation, he demonstrates that he will go to any lengths to attain it. If cultural determinism factors into his innate drive, then the socio-economic conditions of the late nineteenth-century forecast a dim future because Thorpe’s power is at its most dangerous in the capitalist market and specifically in the rise of the modern city. It is not money that drives Thorpe, as his brief sojourn to the country reveals; he is destined to return to the urban tableau because it is there than he can channel his drive for social power. Luther Luetdke writes: “Like Sister Soulsby, a prideful and unfeeling manipulator of people, Thorpe is an ominous presage of modern fascism: demagogic, anti-Semitic, totalitarian, willing to purchase authority by dispensing philanthropy to the masses” (98). Like Soulsby, Thorpe sees the institutions of culture as instruments through which he can exercise power whether for purported good or purported evil. For him, there is little distinction between the two. Whereas Sister Soulsby presents a comic figure of American pragmatism and practical grit, Thorpe wastes little time making any pretence or justification for his actions. He heads right back to the city and determines to concentrate his efforts on mastering the working class: “His old, dormant, formless lust for power stirred again in his pulses. What other phase of power carried with it such rewards, such gratitudes, such humble subservience on all sides as far as the eye could reach—as

that exercised by the intelligently munificent philanthropist?” (Frederic, *The Market-Place* 383). Thorpe does not even make a pretense of altruism in his philanthropic plans. He desires only to “make himself master of the town” (384). In a sense, Thorpe does not need religion to manage a relationship with a deity because he sees himself as godlike. He only requires a vehicle through which to exercise his power.

There are two important aspects of Frederic’s writing that strongly foreshadow the impending rise of literary naturalism: these are his use of allegory and his examination of naturalistic themes such as atavism and the animalistic instincts that lie outside of social control. Some of Frederic’s contemporaries, such as Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, will later elaborate on these themes and make them more central concerns in their writing, but, even in some of Frederic’s earlier works such as *Seth’s Brother’s Wife* (1887) and *The Lawton Girl* (1890), his cynicism about human nature clearly emerges and he begins to examine various theories of determinism such as genetic inheritance or economic conditions.¹³¹ Further, although the use of allegory itself does not separate the realistic elements of Frederic’s writing from the romantic elements, his frequent use of the Adam myth emphasizes a religious lens that focuses on the idea of primal man. Frederic introduces this allegory in his writing most famously in *The Damnation of Theron Ware* in rural upstate New York, and he revisits it again in *The Market-Place* (1898) in urban London with its economic setting reflecting the concerns of the financial world. Increasingly, Frederic explores the idea of an underlying social decay, and he examines several causes for that decay that include devolution and man’s own primal nature itself. Garner describes Joel Stormont Thorpe as a new aristocrat who feeds off of the older, “moribund” society: “He is a brilliantly conceived character, seemingly torpid, heavy, single of purpose, ruthless, and a portfolio of psychological complexes and brute lusts. He is an Englishman, but he belongs so little to any single culture that he is sometimes mistaken for an American. Thorpe is Thorpe, as the world will learn” (Garner 128). He demonstrates what unfettered power can

achieve both in a naturalistic environment in Mexico where he supposedly he staked his rubber plantation claim and even within the presumably constrained world of modern-day London. Unlike Horace Boyce who survives his schemes only because of the foolish benevolence of the women he cheats and defrauds, Thorpe survives because he continually outsmarts and out-schemes those who try to undermine him. Boyce is the weak male vestige of sentimental fiction, Theron Ware is the floundering fool who searches for knowledge but settles for lust, but Thorpe is the conscienceless individual whose sheer cunning and determination allow him to justify any action that suits his purpose. Unlike Boyce and Ware, Thorpe has little time for the institutional church other than to briefly entertain an image of himself in a squire's pew as he considers how best to channel his power (Frederic, *The Market-Place* 321).

Frederic's concern with religion belies the notion of social progress. He examines religion as an institution, but he pays little attention to theology and scant notice to the role of the Bible in the church. It features most prominently in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, where characters frequently quote and reference Bible verses, particularly Sister Soulsby when discussing her own highly subjective theology. In his final novels, set in England, Frederic mentions only the Church of England, which is not surprising, and he presents it as a vague influence that functions mainly to preserve the social class system particularly in the rural regions. Throughout his fiction, Frederic's focus returns again and again to the Adam archetype as a fundamental depiction of man's fallen nature. It is as if he pulls the complicated layers of modern theology away bit by bit until he uncovers the primitive power that seems to predate monotheism. If we can locate where twentieth-century fascism and socialism might emerge from the conditions Frederic lays out, we can just as easily determine how fundamentalism might emerge from these same ashes. In *The Damnation*, the trustee Loren Pierce is so dogmatic that he cannot vary one iota from his interpretation of *The Discipline* because he has so little faith in the nature of mankind that he distrusts any liberal or intuitive model toward conscience and

ethics. In *The Market-Place*, the figure of Joel Thorpe arises as if to justify Pierce's distrust, representing the unfettered quest for power and an Old Testament conception of vengeance. There are many different ways in which Frederic represents religion textually: he presents a discourse of habits, architecture, ethics, law, and even sermoniac rhetoric in Sister Soulsby's speeches. He also represents religion allegorically and symbolically via the Adam archetype and the funerals in *Seth's Brother's Wife* and *Gloria Mundi*, but the recurring association of funerals with the institutional church seems telling in Frederic's vision of twentieth-century life. He seems to write religion out of his realism as he moves into a more naturalistic sensibility. In clear contrast to Rebecca Harding Davis, who seemed to find in religion the themes that propelled her fiction forward, Frederic moves beyond the religious subject by ceremonially burying it and bidding it farewell.

Notes

¹⁰⁶ Lilian Furst offers a broad template for realist fiction: "[R]ealism is invested with its own aesthetic and stylistic conventions: these comprise not only chronology, particularity of circumstance, everyday subject matter, and ontological restriction to kinds of beings belonging to the actual world, but also the shaping and patterning of these materials through webs of analogies and contrasts designed to reveal the significance of the experiences portrayed" (23).

¹⁰⁷ "The opening chapter describes action in what is now Utica's Central Methodist Church. Following are scenes in which Uticans will recognize as St. John's Church and rectory on Bleecker Street. And the long, climactic scene describes both a Methodist meeting at Trenton Assembly Park and an Irish Catholic picnic at nearby Downer's Grove, near Trenton Falls" (Bergman 51).

¹⁰⁸ In the twentieth century, Reinhold Niebuhr also enters this discourse in his essay "Two Sources of Western Culture" (1957).

¹⁰⁹ The *Yellow Book* was a quarterly periodical published from 1894-1897. See Mark Samuels Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Checklist and Index* (London: The Eighteen Nineteen Society, 1998).

¹¹⁰ He was a great unifier of Midwestern tribes, an advocate of Native American solidarity.

¹¹¹ Although, generally speaking, the term "congregational" refers to a type of church polity, Wentz writes that "Those scholars who characterize America as a Puritan nation would almost certainly be forced to rely heavily on the role of the Congregationalism to enhance their case. Congregationalism emerged in direct lineage out of the Puritan movement" (70).

¹¹² The Fairchilds and the Turners appear in both of these novels, linking the stories geographically and temporally.

¹¹³ Dorcas Societies are church-based organizations that collect and donate clothing to the poor. The reference to Tabitha (Dorcas) is from Acts 9:36. Tabitha's right to preside over the society presumably derives from her name, which also translates to Dorcas.

¹¹⁴ In *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, Charles Loring Brace makes a nearly identical appeal when he discusses the possibility of producing "light wines" (69), which might satisfy the passion for alcohol without danger of public misrule.

¹¹⁵ Carnegie discusses inheritance on pages 12-14, and he grants only that a man should provide "for the wife and daughters moderate sources of income" (13) and "very moderate allowances . . . for the sons . . . ; for it is no longer questionable that great sums bequeathed often work more for the injury than the good of the recipients" (13-14).

¹¹⁶ Garner writes: "In this alloy of realism and romance through which he was enabled to write simultaneously of social matters and of their moral implications, Frederic achieved a unique success. Having done so, he paused to write a series of four medieval Irish tales that, though admirable, are off to one side of the main stream of his development. They are beautifully crafted, a tribute to the Irish and to the Ireland that he had come to love since he had first become acquainted with the Irish cause on Utica, and since perhaps no more than a dozen living persons have ever read them all I will list their names here: 'The Path of Murtoogh,' 'The Truce of the Bishop,' 'In the Shadow of Gabriel,' and 'The Wooing of Tiege.' Fine work, as I have said, but done with the left hand" (137). See also (129-31).

¹¹⁷ Harold Frederic corresponded with William Dean Howells only on a few occasions, but he was clearly an ardent admirer. In 1885, he wrote to Howells, passing along a compliment he overheard about *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. He writes: "So that when I do hear justice done by Englishmen to the chief of American novelists I am too proud and glad to keep it to myself" (Fortenberry et al 58). In 1897, he wrote to Hamlin Garland about his wish to know Howells's opinion of *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. He wrote, "He never would tell me. All the same, I'm a Howells man to the end of the war" (455). Fortenberry writes: "Frederic never learned Howells's opinion of his greatest novel, though after his death Howells praised it and referred to it as one of his favorite books" (455) in *Munsey's Magazine* in 1897 (503).

¹¹⁸ The organization of the Free Methodist Church in 1860 is detailed in Benjamin 355. It was a primitive Methodist movement attempting to maintain the precepts of early Methodism, such as Camp Meetings, Love Feasts, and unadorned, non-degreed ministers and clergy. As Brother Pierce points out, the Octavian Methodists have been able to resist splintering off from the Methodist Episcopal Church mainly by operating as Free Methodists without formally severing ties.

¹¹⁹ In a source article for *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, Robert Woodward quotes a statement by Frederic in which he details his extensive research when writing the novel: "I set myself the task of knowing everything they [the characters] knew. As all four of them happened to be specialists in different professions, the task as been tremendous. . . . I have had to teach myself all the details of a Methodist minister's work, obligation, and daily routine, and all the machinery of his church" (Woodward 46).

¹²⁰ Theron and Alice Ware end their first year of marriage almost eight hundred dollars in debt (Frederic 21). They scrimp and save to pay off their debt, but it is through the generosity of "an elderly and important citizen of Tyre, by name of Abram Beekman" that the debt is wiped clean (23). Beekman also appears in *Seth Brother's Wife*. After Ware's third year in Tyre, the debt is paid, and he and Alice leave Tyre with a savings of over one hundred dollars.

¹²¹ Frederic William Farrar's *Life of Christ* appeared in 1874. Several prominent theologians and popular writers published parabiblical texts and lives-of-Jesus biographies in the nineteenth century, beginning with David Friedrich Strauss's 1835 *Das Leben Jesu*. This work spawned several others, including Ernest Renan's 1863 *La Vie de Jésus*, Henry Ward Beecher's 1871 *The Life of Jesus, the Christ*, Thomas De Witt Talmage's 1894 *Talmage's Life of Christ*, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's 1897 *The Story of Jesus, the Christ: An Interpretation*, to name a few. Farrar was an Anglican minister, and his religious biography is the only non-Calvinist one in this group. Methodism arose out of the Anglican Church, so Ware's familiarity with Farrar's best-selling text is logical. See also Lisa Moody, "The American 'Lives' of Jesus: The Malleable Figure of Christ as a Man of the People," *Christianity and Literature* 58.2 (2009): 157-84.

¹²² The allusion in *Gloria Mundi* is in the opening line: "The meeting of the man and the woman—it is to this that every story in the world goes back for its beginning" (Frederic 1).

¹²³ Luther Luedke notes several references to Sister Soulsby and serpents, and he writes: “Neither dove nor sheep, Sister Soulsby expresses in modern dress the ancient legacy of serpentism which became embodied in the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve” (94). Within the novel, Dr. Ledsmar also renames his lizard. He picks it up and says: “Your name isn’t Johnny any more. It’s the Rev. Theron Ware” (Frederic, *Damnation* 233).

¹²⁴ See also Suderman, “Jesus as a Character in the American Religious Novel: 1870-1900. Suderman categorizes Jesus as a mythological archetype embodying external patterns of existence. Suderman also argues that there are three possible settings that accompany the character of Jesus in American fiction. These are: a return to earth in a contemporary setting, a historical/Biblical setting, and a heavenly afterlife (101-104).

¹²⁵ Celia credits the German philosopher Arthur Shopenhauer (1788-1860) for this philosophy (Frederic, *The Damnation* 265).

¹²⁶ Bramen provides the historical context for the sidewalk discussion: Utica was somewhat unique in making individual homeowners responsible for their own pieces of sidewalk, a controversy Frederic captured when the trustees confront Ware with the repair bill. The question of ownership of the rectory and the church parallels the larger question of ownership of public versus private property in civic practices (72).

¹²⁷ It is very likely a reference to the Latin religious phrase *sic transit Gloria mundi*, which translates literally to “thus passes the glory of the world” and more loosely to “all things are fleeting.” The religious implication is that Christ (the glory of the world) lived for only a short time. There is a 1418 work by Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, that offers the phrase *O quam cito transit gloria mundi* with a similar meaning. In any event, the phrase recurs in British popular culture, and it is still in common use today. Austin Briggs identifies the title as an “evocation of Ecclesiastes” (200).

¹²⁸ Darwin writes: “Only those variations which are in some way profitable will be preserved or naturally selected” (127). Later, Darwin uses a similar analogy to Emanuel’s roads when he discusses evolution in terms of branches (153). Darwin also discusses the idea of the natural system being “genealogical in arrangement” (155), an idea which Emanuel’s “earlier time” also implies.

¹²⁹ For example, in “The Roots of Honour” in *Unto This Last*, Ruskin describes the ideal relationship between a workman and his master in terms of feudalism. He writes: “Again: in his office as governor of the men employed by him, the merchant or manufacturer is invested with a distinctly paternal authority and responsibility. In most cases, a youth entering a commercial establishment is withdrawn altogether from his home influence; his master must become his father” (152-53). Ruskin believes that modern political economists mistakenly assume that the interests of the master and servant are antagonistic to each other (141), and this assumption results in labor strikes.

¹³⁰ Emanuel describes feudal England as the age of human character (Frederic, *Gloria Mundi* 129): “It was the age of the cathedrals, and of the Book of Kells, of the great mendicant orders, of the saintly and knightly ideas. It was in its flowering time that craftsmanship attained its highest point, and the great artisan guilds, proud of their talents and afraid of nothing but the reproach of work ill-done, gave the world its most magnificent possessions among the applied arts” (129). Note: The book of Kells is a lavishly illuminated medieval manuscript containing the four gospels.

¹³¹ For example, in *The Lawton Girl*, Reuben Tracy enjoys re-reading Carlyle’s early essays (Frederic 101), which presumably influence his social benevolence plans for the town. In his later fiction, the European/economic novels, Frederic includes a Carlylian theory about the value of work, which seems to come from Carlyle’s essay “Labour” in *Past and Present* (1843): “In Idleness alone there is perpetual despair.” Clearly, Frederic contemplates economic determinism as an underlying influence on modern industrial culture and as an alternative to natural determinism theories such as atavism.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The religious subject is central to the study of realism, it seems to me, and yet very little work has been done in examining the relationship between religion and realism. This absence of critical scrutiny is puzzling considering how important religious culture is in the late nineteenth century (in any age of America, for that matter), and considering that realism, at the very least, can be viewed as an examination of contemporary cultural conditions specifically related to the Industrial Age. This omission of linking religion and realism has been noticed by recent scholars such as David Reynolds (*Faith in Fiction*) and Gregory Jackson (*The Word and Its Witness*) both of whom assert that examining fiction's engagement with religious culture will shed new light on our understanding of realism as a literary mode that responds specifically to a changing religious vista. Jackson writes: "What critics of literary realism have missed is the extent to which its narrative strategies have emerged from the much older—yet still dynamic—tradition of homiletic realism" ("What Would Jesus Do?" 645). Jackson attributes the narrative strategies of both secular realism and religious realism to "older [Protestant] sermonic and religious pedagogical traditions" (643). He argues that all of these literary forms led to the formation of the Social Gospel movement by demanding an active response. He links this reform call to "the hermeneutic of religious allegory [because] homiletic readers . . . learned to collaborate with characters through acts of identification, to find in types lifelong role models" (657), and he sees realist texts working similarly demanding a participatory social response. For Jackson, there is a fundamental link between religion and realism in the area of ethics, and this link has important ramifications for the study of realism as popular novelists negotiate a position of influence in matters of social reform, a position once largely allocated to the clergy.

In this study, I have taken a Foucaultian approach to examining what Michel Foucault labels the "manifest discourse" of an era. By this he means an examination of what a document does not say relative to that to which it is being compared. Here, in the case of religion, our

subject provides a pattern once it is placed in context of other forms of discourse, other forms of fiction, and the larger scope of a writer's work. Many levels of comparison allow us to construct this subject, follow its discourse, and use it as a benchmark to examine the limits of realist representation. Foucault argues that a study of continuities and discontinuities in the transmission of cultural knowledge—and he includes the text in this transmission—is useful because it allows us to examine the process of pattern formation (5). He writes that in the history of “thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature” (6) it is not the document but the “reconstitution” of the document that shapes knowledge both of our present and of the past. Specifically, in this kind of comparison of the religious subject, patterns of hermeneutics, archetype, and allegory emerge as important cohesive links in American realism. Once we identify these categories, we can see that they recur repeatedly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century as part of a larger cultural discussion of socio-ethical identity and behavior centered on the religious subject. These patterns and themes underscore my hypothesis that religion is a catalyst in both the formation and decline of American literary realism.

These categories, which include Bible reading habits, particularly following the advent of the German High Criticism, the popular debate of Hebraism versus Hellenism à la Heinrich Heine and Matthew Arnold, and the recurring figures of Adam and Jesus, allow us to locate an important discourse within late nineteenth-century realism. As Suzy Anger has pointed out, scriptural hermeneutics have impacted critical textual reading habits and led to the significant changes in the recent history of literary criticism. Within realism, these same scriptural hermeneutics and Bible reading practices cast doubt on the authority of all texts to depict an absolute notion of unchanging truth. Writers begin to examine religious culture and its associated habits in order to derive how ethical behavior will be shaped in the Industrial Age. This discourse on religious culture and morality contributed significantly to an exploration of other forces of cultural determinism that is both scientific and sociological in its scope.

Within American religious culture, specifically, one finds a kind of democratic administration of the established church of denomination and sect, which seems to have fostered the belief that organized religion provides a system of checks and balances in American cultural ethics in the same way that the Constitution was intended to do. The famous Presbyterian orator, Thomas De Witt Talmage, espouses this tradition in the American religious landscape, even as he calls for a reform that would end such sectarianism. He writes:

The different denominations were intended, by holy rivalry, and honest competition, to keep each other awake. If one denomination of Christians should garble the word of God, there would be hundreds to cry out against the sacrilege. While each denomination of Christians ought to preach all the doctrines of the Bible, I really think it is the mission of each denomination more emphatically to preach some one doctrine. For instance, I think it is the mission of the Calvinist Church to present the complete sovereignty of God; or the Arminian Church to present man's free agency; of the Episcopal Church to show the importance of order and solemn ceremony; of the Baptist Church to show the importance of ordinances; of the Congregational Church to show the individual responsibility of its members; of the Methodist to show what holy enthusiasm and good hearty congregational singing can accomplish. ("Bigotry" 344)

Talmage's words reveal that religious denominations encapsulated specific stereotypes in American culture, and when we read about such denominations in realist fiction, we must understand the intense scrutiny these texts offer regarding how religion should operate in American culture. With this evaluation, writers begin to wage a battle for authority, both in relation to the authority of the text and in the conception of an abstract Deity. Davis, Howells, Twain, and Frederic all reflect a distinctly post-Calvinist rhetoric in their texts, but the ways in which each deals with the religious subject differs greatly. These varying religious constructions reveal diverse conceptions about how religion operates and they display the challenges these writers faced in trying to give tangible representations of abstract ideologies.

In spite of a shared Liberal Protestant philosophy, there are, however, many differences in the manner in which each of these writers conceived of and discussed the religious subject that have important ramifications for our understanding of realism. Whereas Davis and Howells seem intent on establishing a sociological text calling for a sympathetic collective identity,

Twain and Frederic take a far more cynical stance that moves into a modernist subjectivity by the turn of the century. Davis and even Howells examine a Liberal Protestant Social Gospel ideology, which hones in on the idea of establishing the kingdom of heaven here on Earth and supports the notion of a progressive civilization. We do not see that degree of optimism in the writing of Twain and Frederic. During Twain's fifty-year discourse on religion and ethics, we can see his final departure from the realist text correlating with his acknowledgement of the impossibility of a materialistic understanding of abstract spirituality. Twain particularly focuses on the subjective understanding of the mind and the impossibility of certainty through empirical observation. He seeks to locate something fundamental in humankind that might be a reliable indicator of man's primal nature, but he has little faith in the ability to conceptualize and reify such a notion of immutable truth. In the end, he acknowledges the possibility that all knowledge is no more certain than that which the mind might imagine as if in a dream. For Frederic, especially, a positivist approach emerges, but unlike earlier realists such as George Eliot, he sees little promise that the church will function as a benevolent institution; he sees it as an instrument of power. Frederic begins to examine cultural forces other than religion, such as Social Darwinism, which he incorporates into his final two novels. His writing begins to display hallmarks of naturalism, as he presents themes of atavism and devolution. His early death meant that he had just begun to explore these themes without offering any final resolution on the religious subject. The return to naturalism, however, bookends the fifty-year examination of realism that this study offers and provides a cohesive link back to Davis's seminal realism.

Essentially, I argue that Davis moves from sentimentalism into realism with some naturalistic considerations about the primal nature of humankind. She uses religion as a means to an end within her realism, embedding religion in the realist text. She resolves her naturalistic undertones by substituting a belief that humankind can manage its own social progression, advancing civilization if an ethical framework can be constructed. Howells elaborates on this

idea, enlarging it to the Hellenism versus Hebraism model as he considers various social alternatives and the role of religion in American culture in the formation of ethics. Howells is ambivalent, but he establishes a relationship between religion and culture without resolving it. Twain operates in a similar manner in the way he wishes to see Calvinism replaced as a socio-ethical force, but his realism moves into a modernistic aesthetic rather than a naturalistic one. He focuses more on the complexities of the human mind than the complexities of human nature, giving a psychological subjectivity to his characterizations. Frederic captures the loss of religious authority and moves his realism in the direction of naturalism, ultimately seeming to conclude that religion is a means to an end as a source of cultural determinism and class stratification. He displays a strong interest in institutional religion, particularly in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, in which he makes religion his central subject, but his religious consideration omits any discussion of an abstract deity or a concern for salvation that was so prevalent earlier in the century. Twain and Frederic both consider the concepts of force and evil, but Frederic sees these as foibles of human nature whereas Twain still works with evil allegorically, never losing his Calvinist roots: Satan is still Satan; Satan is never mankind itself.

For a realist writer drawing on a primitivist model, Davis's system has a problem of representation. There is no viable method for examining primitive Christian perfection because it is formed by a unity between behavior and creed, which becomes intensely problematic when calling for a form of religion that is "creedless." Further, such a unity becomes highly individualized to such an extent that it is difficult to develop it as a general social model without falling back on the necessity of writing doctrine, and that is, in fact, what happens again and again in American culture. Any movement that forms as a protest faces the inevitable outcome of maintaining the values that spawned it; any newly-forming sect must face the dual challenge of evangelizing and setting boundaries for preservation, but America's fluid culture prohibits the possibility for any stable model of ethical administration that exists without a creed. As we learn

from Howells's *Altrurian Traveler*, what these writers seek is a method for regulating desire in a model of collective consciousness so that change can be managed.

If we were to examine realism on a literary timeline, Davis's work is in the formational stages of breaking away from Calvinist practices by writing against some of the literary conventions associated with Calvinism, such as sentimental fiction, but clearly, we can see the beginning of a larger problem of representation that creates some serious problems for subsequent realists. The protean nature of Liberal Protestantism begins to lose its authority when challenged by the material requirements of literary realism to the point that realism itself begins to lose its authority unless parameters are established to maintain it as a convention. Much as Protestantism bifurcates and splinters, realism does as well, to the point that authority itself becomes problematic. There is no "Christianity" but rather there are Christianities, no Protestantism, but Protestantisms, and no realism, but realisms.

Within Davis's stories we can see that there are many versions of certainty. She turns to individual conscience as a form of resolution as does Howells. Both Davis and Howells stop short of becoming cynical as opposed to Frederic, Twain, and even Wharton. Davis and Howells continue to believe that altruism and egoism can co-exist if a greater sense of collective consciousness unites the self to society. Both echo a sense that Calvinism has failed to unite these two entities but neither is quite comfortable embracing the Liberal Protestant model fully because they see institutional religion as more of a social performance than a true source of knowledge.

As the degree of comfort with a need for certainty regarding truth and knowledge begins to decrease, so does literary realism as well because once again a new form of writing is needed that embraces different types of social authority, such as the scientific determinism that naturalism expresses or internal subjectivity that is the locus of modernism. It is fair to say that, on some level, each of these writers experiences a degree of disillusionment with the "masses" as

well. Marx's socialism and the Christian Social Gospel movement both ennoble the underprivileged with a certain degree of worthiness. Social Darwinism assures us that the worthy will rise to the top tier of society. At some point, both assumptions lose their momentum and the notion of salvation and eschatological concerns re-emerge and fundamentalism finds a new foothold in American culture. Howells already foreshadowed this in *A Modern Instance* and it now comes to pass as Liberal Protestant reform begins to decline. It is worth noting that no religious trend in American culture ever goes away; it simply gets absorbed in emerging milieus. Quakerism and Swedenborgian mysticism are still very much in play as is Liberal Protestantism. People still wear bracelets asking "What Would Jesus Do?" rather than "What DID Jesus Do?" indicating that hermeneutical debates of trans-historical ethics versus strict interpretations of Judeo-Christian Law still exist in today's culture.

Both in "David Gaunt" and *Margret Howth*, Davis invokes a model of primitive Christianity, which is not without contradiction. It is a pre-doctrinal model of spiritual beliefs that seeks to find lessons in the Bible that can be applied to the modern world even while the so-called literal authority of the Bible diminishes. It is a contradictory model because it relies on the very text it seeks to replace. In larger culture, skepticism regarding Biblical text, such as German High Criticism, implicates all texts by extension, and thus realism becomes an aesthetic of skepticism even with its subtle utopian undertones calling for a progressive social order. We can easily identify that realism contains this inherent contradiction from the onset, which is, perhaps, why defining the parameters of realism has proven to be so difficult. The text serves as an allegory for the real even as it systematically undercuts the idea that locating such realness is possible. It is a genre that, like primitivism, resists a doctrine or dogma, and thus it is defined by what it is *not*, such as sermonical discourse, reform tracts, or articles of faith in the case of primitivism and the romance, the sentimental domestic novel, or homiletic fiction in the case of realism.

The reciprocity of religion and realism is a subject that warrants further study. Many other writers have contributed to this discourse, such as the aforementioned Henry James and Edith Wharton, of course. In particular, other late-century writers such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Henry Blake Fuller, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair offer a body of fiction that bears examining in relation to this discourse on hermeneutics, Hebraism versus Hellenism, and the archetypes and allegorical figures of Jesus and Adam. A similar study might be done of British literary realism, beginning with George Eliot, and continuing with Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, and Samuel Butler. Eliot, in fact, conducts a similar scrutiny to that of Davis in her examination of institutional religion by denomination in some of her early writing, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), and the title character of *Adam Bede* (1859) must surely be placed into this discourse of Adamic figures. The ongoing influence of British Victorian philosophy, specifically the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, in American literary realism, reveal the extent to which this discourse is an international one, and acknowledging this connection allows us to reconsider realism not only within American print culture but in a transatlantic study.

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