

Introduction

Liturgical Modernity

Scholars of nineteenth-century literature are wandering between two worlds, one dead and one apparently powerless to be born. There is now general agreement about the inadequacy of a once-standard story of secularization, a story in which religion goes into terminal decline thanks to a host of challenges ranging from industrialization and urbanization to Darwin and the higher criticism of the Bible. Progressive secularization has died for us, then, but it remains unclear what new paradigms will replace it. Any plausible answer to this question must grasp and extend the following insight made by Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, and John Milbank: that the very idea of religion as a set of privately held beliefs about supernatural phenomena is itself, in fact, a modern invention, tied to the notion of the secular as a realm of public, neutral rationality.¹ In the wake of these thinkers, it seems amply clear that secularization entails less a loss of belief than the redefinition of religion *as* belief.

Literary scholars in particular have seldom appreciated how thoroughly the modern redefinition of religion as private belief transforms religion's relationship to aesthetics. If aesthetics – especially in its etymological sense of *aesthesis* – has to do with what we see, touch, taste, and so forth, then the interiorization of religion in a secular age removes religion from the realm of aesthetics. Taylor calls this removal “excarnation” – that is, “the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside ‘in the head’.”² Excarnation means that religion and aesthetics part ways, and that parting provides the backdrop for Matthew Arnold's famous assertion that “most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”³ Once religion is reduced to fleshless doctrines and lifeless abstractions, poetry – and aesthetic culture more broadly – does indeed emerge as a living, breathing alternative.

Of course, the notion that poetry replaces religion has had immense influence over readers of nineteenth-century literature, but this idea also

lapses easily back into the now dubious story of progressive secularization: As religious belief falters – so the story goes – poetry takes its place.⁴ How might we escape this return to a linear narrative of secularization? How might we rethink exarnation rather than unconsciously assume it and, in that assumption, remain captive to oversimplified accounts of the secular as merely the loss of belief? How might we reconfigure the relationship between religion and aesthetics? This book argues that the Romantics and Victorians themselves supply a compelling though often unappreciated answer in their persistent fascination with liturgy – with, that is, religion at its most incarnate, at its most aesthetic. For liturgy here signifies the entire ritual life of a religious tradition as embodied in physical forms and temporal patterns. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, the chanting of daily prayers in Judaism, the incense burned in a censer before the image of a saint or god, the oil and water used to anoint and baptize, the yearly cycle of holy days that structure time, the architectural form of a religious building – all these and more constitute the liturgies that fill nineteenth-century British literature and draw religion and aesthetics together rather than seeing the latter as a surrogate for the former.

Even Arnold – representative *par excellence* of poetry's displacement of religion – complicates this idea by way of liturgy. Consider, for instance, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855). There, Arnold does indeed lament Christianity's decline, but he – or at least his lyric persona – arrives at this conclusion only after disclosing his mysterious attraction to the ritual life of the Carthusian monks. Their prayers, their celebration of the Eucharist, and even the rhythm of their garden work – the material practices of the monastery – engross him until he asks himself: "And what am I, that I am here?"⁵ What is a self-confessed doubter doing in a liturgical space? The poem then anxiously reasserts its unbelief. Haunted by the accusations of his rationalistic teachers – "*What dost thou in this living tomb?*" (72) – Arnold begs forgiveness and tries to explain himself. The apprehensive tone is telling. The monks' way of life – their liturgies, their habits – render Arnold's commitments momentarily questionable and force his anxious clarification. For an instant, the line between the religious and the secular, between Carthusian faith and Arnoldian doubt, grows blurry. That, I claim, is what liturgy often does in nineteenth-century texts: it blurs boundaries familiar to modernity – boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul. Such blurring, moreover, resists the exarnating reduction of religion to merely private belief separated from material reality.

This book therefore presents an alternative picture of secularization, a picture having much less to do with doctrines – whether personally believed or doubted – and much more to do with a shared discontentment with the prevailing boundaries just mentioned. Put simply, liturgy upsets these boundaries and, in doing so, brings into view what I will define in a moment as “liturgical modernity.” At once spiritual and material, liturgy incarnates unseen realities in concrete forms – bread, wine, water, temples, churches, and so forth. Romantic and Victorian writers deploy this incarnational power for a host of interlocking reasons: to reinvest the natural world and material objects with spiritual meaning, to reimagine the human person as porous and malleable rather than as closed and mechanical, to resist the bodily practices and temporal structures of industrial capitalism, and to enmesh otherwise abstract ethical commitments.

Taking up the last of these concerns, William Wordsworth’s “Essay on Morals” (1798) laments how rationalistic philosophies – he has those of William Godwin and William Paley in mind – have no power to incarnate themselves in daily life: “I know of no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds, & thence to have any influence worth our notice in forming [our] habits.”⁶ Seeking such visceral power, Wordsworth turns not only to poetry but also to liturgy. Poetry, according to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), stimulates the passions and pleasures while also ordering that stimulation via metrical form. “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798) enacts this orderly stimulation by eliciting “sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart” – corporeal stirrings that nevertheless bring “tranquil restoration.”⁷ The liturgical site of the abbey and the poem’s titular date – July 13, 1798, the eve of Bastille Day – already point ahead to the topics of my first and second chapters, respectively: liturgical action and architecture in *The Excursion* (1814) and the French Revolution’s festivals and ritual calendar in *The Prelude* (1805/1850). This commerce between the literary and the liturgical, the poetic and the ritual, makes it harder to tell a story in which literature simply replaces religion as a secular surrogate. If religion is left in the realm of abstract dogma – a neighborhood it would share with Godwin’s and Paley’s bloodless philosophies – then poetry and aesthetic culture can quite easily seem like a living, breathing substitution. But once liturgy and poetry unite to engage bodies and passions, then perhaps a revitalized sense of religion emerges.

Perversely, then, I want to reinterpret Arnold’s maxim about poetry and religion in a way that Arnold would no doubt dislike. “[W]hat now passes”

for religion will indeed be replaced by poetry because what has passed for religion in modernity is in fact excarnated belief. Poetry offers to religion what modernity has so long denied to it: flesh, form, and vital juices. Or, to put my point more provocatively, when excarnated religion is replaced by poetry, what appears is liturgy. Perhaps this poetic revitalization of faith is why Arnold, to his own surprise, finds himself enamored of Carthusian rituals that would provoke his teachers' suspicions. Let me be clear, however: By highlighting the attraction to ritual and the resistance to excarnation on display in Arnold, Wordsworth, and others, I am not making any pronouncement on what these writers personally believe or disbelieve in the modern sense of the word belief. Indeed, I consciously avoid this question precisely because it lapses back into the definition of religion as private, cognitive assent to otherworldly propositions.⁸ If belief does emerge in the discussions that follow, it must do so in a thoroughly incarnate form.

Even the Creeds, which distill Christian doctrine, were for the early church as well as for *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde not so much abstract propositions – isolated facts accepted or rejected by individuals – but rather liturgically enacted words inviting worshippers into fathomless mysteries. As Gilbert, a character in Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" (1890), observes, "Forms are the food of faith. . . . The Creeds are believed, not because they are rational, but because they are repeated. Yes: Form is everything." And if the Creeds are forms – aesthetic structures animated through repetition – and not abstract statements of positivistic fact, then neither are they simply inwardly held beliefs. Gilbert even attacks the notion that inward convictions are the fundamental source of meaning and that external actions flow from such convictions; on the contrary, external actions – rituals – reshape inward dispositions. Again, deploying liturgical language, Gilbert asks, "Do you wish to love? Use Love's Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring" (196). To our excarnated ears, this sounds backwards: Rituals, we suppose, are merely the outward trappings of a more fundamental inner devotion. Gilbert disagrees, and perhaps surprisingly, that disagreement aligns him not only with aestheticism but also, as we will see, with the premodern priority given to ritual.

Just as aestheticism puts little stock in speculative abstraction and inward authenticity, liturgy similarly refuses to consign religion to otherworldly propositions and fleshless interiority. On the contrary, in liturgy, unseen spiritual realities take on material form, or, to put it the other way around, the material does not oppose the spiritual but rather gives access to

it. John Keats – who explicitly abjures Christian beliefs – nevertheless inhabits this spiritually charged yet thickly material space in “Ode to Psyche” (1820). Keats laments that the goddess of his title has no devotees because she ascended to the Olympian pantheon only after Christianity had displaced pagan worship. Psyche lacks an “altar heap’d with flowers,” “incense sweet,” and such material oblations.¹⁰ The speaker will not simply offer these; he will, in his prayer to the goddess, become them:

So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
 Upon the midnight hours;
 Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
 From swung censer teeming;
 Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
 Of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming.
 (44–8)

The sensory weight of Keats’s language makes worship not so much a matter of interior belief but of incantation and sensory material practice. Moreover, Keats perceives that this embodied devotion follows naturally from an enchanted view of reality – a view he self-consciously recovers by speaking of a time “[w]hen holy were the haunted forest boughs, / Holy the air, the water, the fire” (39). The materiality of Keats’s worship is but an upshot of his sense that all things are sacred.¹¹

Keats inhabits what Catherine Pickstock would call “liturgical” subjectivity.¹² In her poststructuralist account of the medieval Latin Mass, Pickstock explores how liturgy calls the self into a mystery that can be experienced but not exhausted, a mystery that can be tasted and touched but not fully mastered. Liturgy thus opens up a medial space between presence and absence and inculcates a selfhood that is “coherent but not foreclosed.”¹³ This selfhood appears in the *dramatis personae* of Wordsworth’s *Excursion* and undergoes extensive elaboration in Pater and Wilde. Already, however, we have seen Keats’s own effort to cultivate a selfhood that is at once coherent enough to become a temple – a structure – to house Psyche’s worship and yet porous enough to be possessed by that divinity. Signaling that porosity, Keats not only becomes the very oblations Psyche lacks but also – in the temple that is himself – leaves “a casement ope at night, / To let the warm Love in” (66–7). Divine traffic – Psyche and Cupid – will come and go, haunting Keats’s liturgical self. This notion of the self is amenable to Keats’s own formulation of negative capability and provides a striking counterpoint to more familiar versions of modern subjectivity. Where Descartes and Kant seek a stable

foundation for knowledge in the self-contained knower, the liturgical subject remains open to that which exceeds human certitude. Quoting the second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Jean-Louis Chrétien writes, "reason 'must force nature to answer its questions,' and . . . reason is 'like a presiding judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions put to them'."¹⁴ Chrétien observes that Kant's "approach is more soliloquy than dialogue. The chief focus is not the question but the extorted answer. In no way could the answer ever exceed our question."¹⁵ By contrast, the liturgical self awaits this excess, this answer that surpasses any rational containment.

The following chapters treat writers who seek some version of this liturgical space where matter and spirit join, where ritual opens the self to mystery. But like Arnold and Keats, these writers also intuit that excarnation somehow threatens this union – threatens, that is, to drain matter of spiritual significance. Anticipating Taylor's insight that in modernity "our religious life . . . comes more and more to reside 'in the head',"¹⁶ Keats acknowledges that the temple he builds for Psyche will reside in his own mind. Arnold, too, registers the threat of excarnation when he mistakenly says that the Carthusian monks pass the Eucharistic host from "hand to hand" (42). In fact, the host would have been placed directly on the tongue – a slight error, perhaps, but one suggesting that Arnold's liturgical images are slipping away from their concrete instantiations. Matter thus loses its spiritual meaning and religion goes inward. The texts I explore, however, blend literary and liturgical form to resist this drift toward excarnation, and that resistance in turn complicates the relationship of religion and aesthetics.¹⁷ Indeed, it is often difficult to say whether these texts are proposing literature as a substitute for religion or whether they are trying to reimagine religion as once more bodily and material. What is clear is that interior beliefs and abstract ideas that have no flesh – no connection to material practices, to sacred objects, to habits and rituals – are effete.¹⁸

Even while the Romantics and Victorians themselves frequently lament excarnation, some landmark readings of nineteenth-century literature tend to treat religion in precisely these terms. According to such readings, the Romantics naturalize the supernatural by applying Christianity's otherworldly doctrines to the human imagination, and the Victorians register the rise of religious doubt in the wake of successive challenges to dogma. As M. H. Abrams argues in *Natural Supernaturalism*, the Romantics aim to "save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation" and to

“reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego.”¹⁹ Abrams thus observes, “The title *Natural Supernaturalism* indicates that my recurrent . . . concern will be with the secularization of inherited theological ideas.”²⁰ Walter Houghton provides a similarly foundational and frequently repeated reading of how this Romantic effort to salvage Christian ideas falters in the Victorian age: “the romantic sensibility had found the divine spirit rolling through all things,” but in the wake of Lyellian geology and Darwinian biology, “nature became a battleground in which individuals and species fought for their lives.”²¹

Despite their many insights, Abrams’s and Houghton’s accounts assume rather than question the genealogies that lead in the first place to religion becoming a matter of abstract supernatural ideas – ideas that could either be naturalized or subtracted altogether in the face of modern challenges to belief. What recedes from view here is the more ancient sense – pagan and Christian – of all things sharing in the divine. Operating within this participatory vision, the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich – to take but one example – sees the whole of creation as saturated through and through with divine presence, each creature enwrapped by God’s love.²² It would be hard for Julian to grasp any sharp division between the natural and the supernatural. Romanticism’s impulse to blur the natural/supernatural boundary, then, might be read not so much as a secularizing move but rather as a recovery of creation’s participation in the divine. What is more – and as I discuss later in relation to John Keble – this participatory vision carries with it a symbolic, allegorical approach to sacred texts, an approach that most scholarly accounts of the conflict between Victorian science and biblical literalism cannot accommodate.

Beyond Abrams, Houghton, and other seminal twentieth-century scholarship, however, more recent trends in nineteenth-century studies have qualified or rejected the standard narrative of secularization already described – the narrative, again, in which religious beliefs either find a naturalized expression in the poetic imagination or wither away before the challenges of the natural sciences and German biblical criticism. Exemplifying this new trend, Colin Jager’s *Book of God* argues for the enduring significance of eighteenth-century natural theology in the Romantic period while his second book, *Unquiet Things*, more ambitiously – and more in line with my own aims – finds in Romantic texts a discontentment with the prevailing norms of the modern secular state. Where Jager attends to scientific and political discourse, Norman Vance and Charles LaPorte consider how the German higher criticism offered

Victorian writers much more than just another occasion for religious doubt. For Vance, biblical criticism provoked Victorian novelists to reimagine faith by, for instance, appropriating the “grand narrative of salvation history” for their own narratives of human moral development.²³ Similarly, LaPorte sees Victorian poets as not so much conceding the demise of biblical authority to the higher criticism but rather probing that criticism and using it to forge new notions of religious and poetic authority.

Even more relevant for my argument, though, are a few recent inquiries into both the liturgical and theological resonances of Romantic and Victorian writing. Lori Branch, for example, draws on eighteenth-century moral philosophy to argue for a surprising continuity between Wordsworth’s early celebration of spontaneity and his later attraction to Anglican ritual. Where Branch ends with Wordsworth, Kirstie Blair – as noted previously – takes him as a starting point to consider how nineteenth-century writers frequently construed literary and liturgical form as analogous. Karen Dieleman, too, observes the connection between the texts of Victorian poets and the weekly forms of worship experienced by those poets. My argument accords both with this larger effort to revise our notion of secularization and with the new attention to liturgical forms. However, I hope to excavate more fully the genealogies of the secular and the religious, for only in light of these genealogies does the full significance of Romantic and Victorian liturgy appear. As mentioned earlier, “Ode to Psyche” locates the liturgical self within a world where all things – forest, air, water, fire – are holy. This enchanted picture of reality is foreign to the modern view in which the natural world – a closed space of mechanistic causality – opposes the supernatural, which becomes imagined as a separate, otherworldly realm. This separation of natural/supernatural echoes across modernity’s other characteristic divisions: matter/spirit, body/soul, reason/faith, and philosophy/theology – or, to put the last division in more contemporary terms, science/religion.

The story of how we arrive at such bifurcations is complex and has generated many retellings of late – including those by Taylor, Milbank, Louis Dupré, Thomas Pfau, and Michael Allen Gillespie. Each of these retellings explores slightly different, though interlocking, historical and conceptual developments. These new narratives of secularization reject former accounts in which something called religion goes into terminal decline as a result of Renaissance humanism or Enlightenment rationality. Rather, the roots of the secular, it would seem, stretch further back into contingent developments during the late Middle Ages. Explaining the

position exemplified by Julian of Norwich, Dupré describes how, from antiquity through the high Middle Ages, most pagans and Christians conceived of all things as participating in the divine.²⁴ So, for instance, the Apostle Paul himself quotes pagan Greek poets – forerunners of Keats’s enchanted vision – in order to affirm that “we live, and move, and have our being” in God (Acts 17:28). In Paul’s wake, mainstream Christian theology continues to develop this participatory connection between God and creation along both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian lines. To cite two of the most famous examples, Augustine’s *Confessions* – a fourth-century text – refers to God as Being and speaks of God filling all things with himself so that all creatures borrow their existence from him.²⁵ Elaborating the same participatory metaphysics in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas calls God the very act of being from which all finite beings derive their existence. Or, in Thomas’s more succinct formulation, “God is in all things, and innermost.”²⁶

For a host of reasons, this antique and high medieval vision of creation sharing in God’s life loses its cultural and intellectual supremacy in the late Middle Ages. At this point, the natural/supernatural binary and the attendant divisions mentioned emerge. To simplify a very complex story, a number of late-medieval voluntarist and nominalist theologians, such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, scrutinize the Neoplatonic and Aristotelean elements of earlier theology. Ockham, for example, sees this pagan philosophical inheritance as a threat to God’s absolute sovereignty and power. The earlier, participatory tradition reinterpreted the Platonic forms – the archetypes of all creatures – as dwelling in and reflecting God, who was himself named by those highest and interchangeable Platonic forms: the Good, the True, the Beautiful, and, of course, Being. Ockham and other late-medieval nominalists see these Platonic forms as limiting God’s freedom, constraining his ability to act and to create in whatever way he chooses. According to the previous theological consensus stretching from Augustine to Aquinas, God acts in accordance with the goodness and rationality that simply are of his nature and therefore part of the fabric of being itself. However, for the voluntarists and nominalists, God wills whatever he pleases, and what he wills is good simply because he wills it. Ockham, for example, even goes so far as to say God could will his creatures to hate him and that “if He were to do so He would not sin.”²⁷

Ockham and others therefore fundamentally reconceive God’s relationship to creation. Creation no longer participates in God by way of archetypes and forms; it no longer lives and moves within God’s being

and goodness. Rather, God becomes an inscrutable, all-powerful agent who now exercises his arbitrary will over creation from outside. As Terry Eagleton wryly puts it, God becomes a “cosmic chief executive officer.”²⁸ Increasingly construed as an omnipotent individual rather than the fullness of being in which all things share, God starts to look like Milton’s Jehovah or Blake’s Noboddady. This picture of God as a non-participatory tyrant will eventually provoke Romantic Prometheanism. But that is to look far ahead. Much earlier, this tyrannical God starts to emerge as the participatory view recedes – a recession that opens an ever-sharper separation between the natural and the supernatural. The natural no longer shares in the supernatural but rather opposes it. Nature becomes an autonomous, closed, even secular sphere apart from the supernatural and from God, who acts upon his creation – if at all – as an outside force. So, for instance, as Rowan Williams puts it, miracles become synonymous with divine intervention and “interruption” rather than, say, the “opening” up of creation to “its own depths,” to its own perpetual sharing in and sustenance by the divine.²⁹ A gap also opens between reason and faith. Reason might apply to the natural world here below, but faith alone can approach Ockham’s inscrutable, arbitrary God.

Excarnation appears too. Because faith is now directed toward an other-worldly God, and because material reality no longer participates in that God, material objects – bread, wine, statues, icons, and so forth – lose their devotional value and even become distracting idols. Reformation iconoclasm follows quite naturally from excarnation. In this way – as in many others – the Reformation does not in fact reject nominalist–voluntarist scholasticism but extends it.³⁰ John Calvin’s picture of God predestining the saved and the damned is but an intensification of Ockham’s emphasis on absolute divine sovereignty. Likewise, Martin Luther’s assertion of individual human autonomy echoes the very same concept of freedom first devised in late scholasticism to speak of divine agency. A major consensus thus emerges from recent genealogies of the secular: The closed, mechanical, natural world of modernity – a world divorced from the supernatural realm of faith – is not simply the result of Enlightenment reason or even Renaissance or Reformation individualism, but rather the unforeseen conclusion of a deeper theological transformation.³¹ That voluntarist–nominalist transformation sought to emphasize God’s sovereign power but inadvertently encouraged the dichotomies I have been describing – dichotomies that set the stage for the construction of religion as private belief.³²

Disciplinary boundaries and literary periodization might make this genealogy seem irrelevant to Romantic and Victorian literature. This book contests

that assumption. Signaling the importance of this deeper genealogy for literary studies, Eagleton himself has recently returned to the voluntarist–nominalist moment in order to reconsider some of his own foundational claims in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. In that classic text, Eagleton invokes Arnold and the once-standard notion of literary secularization: “If one were asked to provide a single explanation for the growth of English studies in the later nineteenth century, one could do worse than reply: ‘the failure of religion.’”³³ However, Eagleton has lately revised this position in *The Event of Literature*. There, he starts with Scotus, Ockham, and their pivotal – though largely ignored – contributions to both secularization and to the postmodern suspicion of universal categories, such as “literature.”³⁴ As Eagleton notes, Scotus and Ockham – Franciscan friars – follow St. Francis of Assisi in emphasizing Christ’s individual humanity, a focus that pervades their elevation of the particular over the universal. Eagleton and many others see this move as a distant but crucial anticipation of the West’s liberal individualism and postmodernity’s hostility toward metanarratives. Indeed, Ockham’s nominalism is so influential for the development of modernity that another name for it is simply the *via moderna*.³⁵ Eagleton qualifies the nominalist and postmodern rejection of universals but, more importantly for my purposes, reveals that a nuanced approach to secularization and literary studies demands an awareness of modernity’s theological origins.

Against this genealogical backdrop, our picture of secularization in Romantic and Victorian literature changes, especially for those texts that engage liturgy. Rather than recording religion’s demise or its replacement by literature, the texts I treat use liturgy to attend to concrete particularity without losing spiritual transcendence. In other words, these texts receive the modernizing insights of the voluntarist–nominalist attention to individuality while nevertheless retaining the ancient pagan and Christian vision of all things sharing in the divine. Out of this synthesis emerges an alternative vision of modernity in which matter is not drained of spirit. I call this liturgical modernity – a modernity that is at once sensually concrete and yet spiritually robust. In their liturgical fascinations, therefore, the Romantics and Victorians take up a crucial – though rarely perceived – role in the story of modernity. They inherit the prevailing modern attention to the particular while simultaneously recovering the more ancient vision of divine participation. These nineteenth-century British writers, then, join together what centuries of Western thought – with important exceptions³⁶ – had put asunder.

To witness this liturgical modernity, consider Gerard Manley Hopkins’s early poem “The Habit of Perfection” (1866). Recalling Keats’s Grecian

urn whose figures “[p]ipe to the spirit ditties of no tone,”³⁷ Hopkins uses liturgy to purify the senses and to render them spiritually perceptive. Having stilled hearing, sight, taste, and smell in anticipation of this spiritual perception, Hopkins arrives at touch:

O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet
That want the yield of plushy sward,
But you shall walk the golden street
And you unhouse and house the Lord.³⁸

The “But” that breaks the stanza in half seems to denote a departure from the sensory yearning of the first two lines. However, this yearning finds a satisfaction both spiritual and material in the final Eucharistic image: In housing and unhousing the Lord, the speaker relishes the priestly task of placing the Eucharistic host into the tabernacle – the decorative cupboard on the altar – and taking the host out again during the Mass. The hands – which the hyphenated adjective makes as soft and fragrant as flower petals – find a fulfillment at once sensory and spiritual in touching the body of Christ. The poem enfleshes faith: it attends both to the *via moderna*’s concern for the particular while making that attention a gateway into the unseen. This synthesis of the particular and the participatory points to some of Hopkins’s most important influences. John Ruskin, for example, argues that our delight in visual or auditory beauty must “point to, or partake of, [God] Himself,” for “Beauty . . . whether it occur in a stone, flower, beast, or in man . . . may be shown to be in some sort typical of the Divine attributes.”³⁹ Each particular beautiful thing participates in God, the divine source of beauty. At an even deeper level, Hopkins would also have found this vision in his theological mentors: On the one hand, the Oxford Movement’s recovery of the participatory, sacramental tradition and, on the other, Duns Scotus’s emphasis of the “thisness” or *haecceity* of each particular creature.⁴⁰ Hopkins, then, self-consciously taps into the theological genealogy already outlined. As we shall see, other writers will likewise recover ancient sources for similar purposes.

Hopkins arrives at this union of the concrete and the unseen by way of poetic forms that quite literally become embodied by speakers who enunciate a poem’s language. By way of different means – that of color, line, and other visual forms – certain nineteenth-century pictorial artworks achieve analogous ends. And so, while acknowledging important differences between poetic and visual art, we might nevertheless find a complement to Hopkins’s poetry in Figure I.1, *The Mystery of Faith* (1870), a



Figure I.1 Simeon Solomon, *The Mystery of Faith* (1870)

painting by Pre-Raphaelite artist Simeon Solomon that depicts a priest raising a golden monstrance containing the Eucharistic host.

At once fleshly and spiritual, the priest incarnates ideal male beauty. The canvas holds that beauty before the viewer for adoration just as the priest

adores Christ's body in the consecrated wafer. The gold and white tones of the monstrance and wafer blend with the white and gold of the priest's vestments. Eucharistic transcendence mingles with the priest's sartorial richness. The liturgical calendar is also at play in the dominant white and gold tones that irradiate the image. Roman and Anglo-Catholic priests wear such gold and white robes at festal moments, such as Christmastide, Eastertide, Corpus Christi, and so forth – celebrations, appropriately, of Christ's materiality in the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Eucharist. Thus, time itself, when inflected through the church calendar, mediates between the material and the spiritual.

Here, another key feature of my argument appears. Ordinary days that unfold in a linear pattern – a pattern characteristic of what Walter Benjamin calls the “empty” or “homogenous” time of modernity⁴¹ – can themselves, like bread and wine, become suffused with spiritual meaning. Drawing on Benjamin's notion of “now-time” and the ancient Christian idea of the *nunc stans* or eternal now, Charles Taylor speaks of how the “higher time” of liturgy changes linear time: “Higher times gather and re-order secular time. They introduce ‘warps’ and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering. . . . Good Friday 1998 is closer in a way to the original day of the Crucifixion than mid-summer's day 1997.”⁴² As Wordsworth, John Keble, and others discover, the mundane materiality of each lived moment can rise – via higher time – toward the gathered simultaneity of eternity. The golden light of Solomon's painting, then, illustrates the transfiguration of both flesh and time.

The language of transfiguration and the heavenly light of the painting might suggest that higher time is a kind of escape from linear history. But liturgy abides with the material and therefore also the historical. Indeed, the entanglement of spirit and (male) flesh in *The Mystery of Faith* recalls not only the historical controversies surrounding both the Pre-Raphaelites' fleshly aesthetics and Solomon's own sexuality, but also the heated arguments about liturgical practice in the second half of the century.⁴³ Engaging in rituals reminiscent of Solomon's painting, a handful of Anglo-Catholic Ritualist priests were even jailed in the 1870s and 80s for violating the Public Worship Regulation Act – a law curtailing any practices too closely resembling Roman Catholic rites. I return periodically to this context of political contention, for it shows again that liturgy resists private interiority by impinging on public, historical debates. Since Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*, Romanticism and its nineteenth-century legacy have often been accused of retreating from history and politics into aesthetics. Liturgy, however, qualifies this charge by anchoring

Romantic and post-Romantic spiritual aspirations in material conditions. From Wordsworth to Wilde, nineteenth-century writers use liturgy, ritual, and higher time to engage the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the wider context of sociopolitical reform.

So, for instance, the higher time of the liturgical calendar and the language of the *Book of Common Prayer* enhance Charles Dickens's critique of utilitarian economics in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *Hard Times* (1854).⁴⁴ In the former – and quite famously – the holy season of Christmas creates a kind of temporal porosity that brings Scrooge's past and future to bear on his present. This temporal warping not only exposes the moral shortcomings of Scrooge's Benthamite and Malthusian doctrines but – more importantly – also reveals how those doctrines embed themselves in Scrooge's very sense of time as linear, empty, and homogenous. In the time of the market – as Scrooge well knows⁴⁵ – there are no interruptions, every day is formally the same, and each working hour yields profit. Holidays – the holy days of the liturgical calendar – upset Scrooge's homogenous time: his nephew invites him to dinner; Bob Cratchit asks for time off; charitable organizations solicit donations (35–40). Christmas, cries Scrooge, is but a “poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!” (41). It is no accident, then, that Scrooge's transformation requires not simply a rejection of capitalist ideas but a complete overhaul of his temporal paradigm: His encounter with the ghosts creates a kairotic knot in which three nights contract into one. Pithily describing the simultaneity of this higher now-time, the converted Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning and proclaims, “I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!” (111).

The now-time of Christmas marks Scrooge's final transformation, but the importance of ritual time already appears in the novel's opening pages when a personified church bell casts its gaze on Scrooge just after he snubs men collecting donations for the poor: “The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters” (39). The bell tower of this church marks the hours for the rest of the novel until Scrooge loses all sense of linear time during his Christmas morning rebirth:

“I don't know what day of the month it is!” said Scrooge. “I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!”

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding, hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious! (112)

The novel thus noisily juxtaposes two kinds of time – the homogenous time of the market and the higher time of the church calendar. The conflict between these temporalities speaks to another leitmotif of my argument: Forces that threaten human flourishing often figure not just as harmful ideas or behaviors but as rival liturgies – habits and patterns embedded, like Scrooge’s utilitarian sense of time, in whole ways of being in the world. Like Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*,⁴⁶ these competing liturgies structure reality at the level of bodily habituation and therefore precede cognitive awareness and agency.

Hard Times depicts this precognitive *habitus* in Coketown’s inhabitants, who are (mal)formed by the city’s homogenizing industrial patterns. The buildings – even the churches – are unimaginatively uniform. The streets all look the same. Time itself is homogenous: “every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.”⁴⁷ Coketown operates not just on the basis of utilitarian doctrines but on the rhythms of a utilitarian liturgy. Appropriately, the description of the town culminates in language borrowed from the Prayer Book but repurposed for the rituals of political economy:

Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. . . . [T]he relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn’t state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (28)

For Dickens, then, as for the other writers I discuss, liturgy offers not so much an otherworldly escape from history but rather a place to stage a battle between competing habits, patterns, and temporal schemes that form bodies and give those bodies a whole world in which to live. The following chapters observe the workings of such rival liturgies by drawing on James K. A. Smith and William Cavanaugh. These two philosophical theologians observe how the market, the state, and other institutions function liturgically when they inculcate desire and instill discipline by way of material practices. Moreover, by attending to how seemingly secular institutions operate liturgically, we can again rethink the religious/secular divide and the story of secularization. When Coketown’s industry appears as a “secular liturgy” or an “anti-liturgy” – to use Smith’s

and Cavanaugh's concepts, respectively⁴⁸ – we see in fact that our secular age sacralizes capital and therefore is not as disenchanting as even Taylor would suppose. Eugene McCarragher forcibly argues this point in his own recent genealogical study, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity*.⁴⁹ If Keats's antique pagan vision sees the forest, fire, water, and air as holy, then perhaps our age has not so much dissolved that holiness but rather transferred it to the market.

That Dickens can sense in political economy a rival, deforming liturgy owes something to the dedicatee of *Hard Times*: Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle's own assault on utilitarianism, *Past and Present* (1843), grew – like Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" – out of an encounter with monastic life. Carlyle read the *Chronicle* of Jocelin of Brakelond, a twelfth-century account of life at the abbey of Bury St. Edmunds. The rhythms of work and worship at the abbey – the "Past" of Carlyle's title – engender a social flourishing completely at odds with the inhumane mammon worship of the present. After recounting the history of the monks and their leader, Abbot Samson, Carlyle marvels at how such heroes – many of whom are now forgotten – help build up the forms and habits that shape human life. The development of architecture, agriculture, language, poetry, and liturgy flow together in Carlyle's exclamatory style, and he posits the last of these, the development of liturgy, as a kind of primordial work – a labor of many centuries that grows from humble beginnings into forms of worship that now fill the world. The founder of this development was the man who first fell to his knees in awe before the "Unnameable" divinity that pervades the cosmos; this act inaugurated all "Prayers, *Litanias*, [and] *Leitourgias*," which themselves arise from a long historical labor of compiling, editing, and sifting.⁵⁰ For Carlyle, this ancient liturgical work is repeated in every branch of human culture and knowledge, and those who perform such work are

all the men that ever cut a thistle, drained a puddle out of England, contrived a wise scheme in England, did or said a true and valiant thing in England. I tell thee, they had not a hammer to begin with; and yet Wren built St. Paul's: not an articulated syllable; and yet there have come English Literatures, Elizabethan Literatures, Satanic-School, Cockney-School, and other Literatures; – once more, as in the old time of the *Leitourgia*, a most waste imbroglio, and world-wide jungle and jumble; waiting terribly to be 'well-edited' and 'well-burnt!' (134–5)

All spheres of culture follow a trail blazed by the development of *leitourgia* – the Greek root word from which comes "liturgy". The etymology here is vital. As Giorgio Agamben explains, *leitourgia* comes "from *laos*,

people, and *ergon*, work” and means “public work.”⁵¹ Carlyle activates this comprehensive definition of liturgy and thereby sets the stage for my argument: “And yet there is . . . one Liturgy which does remain forever unexceptionable: that of Praying (as the old Monks did withal) *by working*” (230, Carlyle’s emphasis).⁵² An entire work of the people, a work imbricated with literary form, a work where competing material practices collide, a work that mediates modernity’s divides – this is the liturgy that the following chapters track from Wordsworth to the *fin-de-siècle*.

Neither is this liturgical work marginal to the period’s literary culture – a kind of religious sideshow to an otherwise dominant movement of progressive secularization. To demonstrate this, I focus deliberately on texts that were either massively popular in the nineteenth century – John Keble’s *Christian Year* (1827) and Mary Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888) come to mind especially – or that are canonical in our own time. Other writers and texts do appear, but I have kept the focus on more well-known figures to highlight the centrality of liturgy in the Romantic and Victorian imagination. The following chapters also fall into a tripartite structure: The first two chapters elaborate the Romantic and Wordsworthian foundations of my claims; the next two chapters explore the mid-Victorian developments of that Romantic foundation; the final two chapters describe aestheticism’s consummation of the century’s liturgical moves.

Chapter 1 explores the liturgical forms of Wordsworth’s *Excursion* (1814) and thereby unfolds my central claim that liturgy resists excarnation and the natural/supernatural binary. Rather than naturalizing otherworldly Christian doctrines – as seminal readings of Romanticism suppose – *The Excursion*’s rituals disclose how material reality already participates in the divine. That participation both inculcates a porous, liturgical selfhood in the poem’s characters and sacralizes nature in opposition to the desecrating anti-liturgies of industrialization. This porous subjectivity, this engagement of history, and the characters’ competing perspectives all complicate typical readings of Wordsworth’s poetic self-consolidation. Rather than promoting lyrical inwardness and excarnation, church architecture and the rituals of the Prayer Book draw the characters ecstatically outward toward each other and into material space. They become, to use one of the characters’ names and the poem’s title, wanderers on an excursion. In its participatory vision and liturgical subjectivity, *The Excursion* registers its discontentment with the nominalist modernity already described. The poem, however, does not simply aim at a reactionary and impossible effort to return to a premodern world. Instead, the nominalist respect for particularity appears in the individuation of the

characters and the importance given to their sometimes sharply divergent perspectives. *The Excursion* therefore seeks an alternative vision of modernity. That vision retains the antique participation of the natural in the supernatural but also recognizes that such a mystery is fathomless and therefore not only accommodates but requires many different individual vantages.

By showing how *The Excursion*'s liturgies qualify the charge that Wordsworth retreats into his own subjectivity, Chapter 1 anticipates Chapter 2's argument that Wordsworth's *Prelude* remains politically engaged via the rituals of revolutionary France – specifically the new festivals instituted by the Republican calendar. These festivals help Wordsworth to enter moments of Benjaminian now-time – such as the famous spots of time – in which the past becomes simultaneous with the present. Former readings of Wordsworth might see this use of memory as a turn inward and thus away from revolutionary history. However, I argue that such now-times allow Wordsworth to juxtapose, on the one hand, his own past calling to a poetic vocation with, on the other hand, the Revolution's founding vocation to bring liberty. In that juxtaposition, Wordsworth's own faithfulness to his poetic calling tacitly critiques the Revolution's infidelity to its origins. The higher time of ritual, then, mediates between Wordsworthian memory and revolutionary history.

Beyond simply complicating certain readings of Wordsworth, however, Chapters 1 and 2 articulate the Wordsworthian roots of many Victorian liturgies. Chapter 1 unfolds the development of liturgical selfhood, the sacralization of material reality, and the competition of liturgy with anti-liturgy. Chapter 2 explores the imbrication of memory and higher time as well as the attractions of ritual form outside Christianity. Together, these opening chapters reveal the nascent themes that undergo repeated elaboration as the century unfolds.

John Keble and his protégé Charlotte Yonge, the subjects of Chapter 3, take ritual time in a seemingly humbler, domestic direction: Rather than using higher time to engage an overarching political project as Wordsworth did with the Revolution, they see the church calendar as sacralizing even the smallest mundane tasks – the trivial round, as Keble calls it. The implications of this use of ritual time, though, are no less significant than Wordsworth's revolutionary now-time. For Keble, the transfiguration of mundane tasks performed in linear time leads to nothing less than humanity's deification or *theosis* to use the language of the Greek Church Fathers venerated by the Oxford Movement. For Yonge, higher time and the Prayer Book's liturgies not only reconcile reason and faith but

also structure the material work of parish reform – the building of a local school, the repair of a dilapidated neighborhood, the hiring of a responsible priest to replace an absentee one. In these Tractarian writers, therefore, a liturgical modernity once more emerges – a modernity that receives nominalism’s attention to concrete, particular phenomena while still seeing those phenomena as sharing in the divine. To miss this synthesis is to miss how the Tractarians – like Wordsworth – do not simply deny material conditions by seeking a reactionary escape into transcendence. On the contrary, the Tractarians revere ordinary, material life – a reverence present both in Keble’s concern for the trivial round and in Yonge’s realist attention to parish reform.

Chapter 4 takes up novels by George Eliot and Mary Ward, who might seem like interlopers given their own rejection of orthodox Christianity. Yet even as Eliot and Ward renounce Christian doctrines – a move that makes them fit easily into so many standard accounts of Victorian doubt – they remain captivated by liturgy. The rituals of Judaism attract Daniel Deronda to the faith of his father before Daniel even knows he is Jewish. The novel moreover codes in liturgical terms Daniel’s ability to expand Gwendolen Harleth’s moral awareness: he is “turned . . . into a priest” for Gwendolen, and while visiting him at his childhood home – an abbey, significantly – Gwendolen confesses to Daniel in a room “as warmly odorous as a private chapel in which the censers have been swinging.”⁵³ Similarly, Ward’s Robert Elsmere is more than just a moral exemplar who imitates a purely human Jesus by caring for the poor. Rather, he founds a new religion with its own liturgical forms, some of them – the Lord’s Prayer and the Eucharistic exhortation, “This do in remembrance of Me”⁵⁴ – borrowed directly from the traditional liturgy. Perhaps surprisingly then, Eliot and Ward too feel the threat of excarnation. If their quasi-religious ethics aren’t to suffer the same fate as religious doctrine, then those ethics need to take a concrete ritual form – they cannot, in other words, remain in the realm of fleshless ideas lest they too become marginal and finally expendable.

This drive to en flesh the universal in the particular reaches its greatest pitch in Pater and Wilde. Indeed, they might seem merely to be disciples of the nominalist *via moderna* – devotees of the particular over and against the universal. And as Chapters 5 and 6 show, the enshrinement of concrete material reality – beautiful bodies, lovely objects, stimulating experiences – is the primary motivator for the aesthete’s fascination with liturgy. But this liturgical enshrinement of physical beauty also draws the aesthetic subject into uncontainable mysteries. Just as liturgical selfhood reinforces Keats’s

negative capability, so too that selfhood affirms Pater's openness to the possibility – the mystery – of ever further aesthetic experience. Pater's novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), set in second-century Italy, incarnates this ecstatic openness in Marius, a pious youth who first delights in the pagan rituals of his boyhood and finds their fulfillment in the early Christian Mass. For Marius, the Eucharist not only sacralizes material objects but also defends matter – specifically the body – against those anti-liturgies that would degrade it. Where *The Excursion* partially develops a critique of industrialism as an anti-liturgy, *Marius* elaborates how the state power of Rome violates bodies through the anti-liturgies of empire. Pater thus receives all of nominalism's devotion to particularity but recognizes that such devotion need not entail disenchantment. Rather, the liturgical self remains open before both the aesthetic beauty and the spiritual radiance – the participatory mystery – of material reality.

For Wilde, the porosity of the liturgical subject leads to a full-blown liturgical constructivism – that is, a remaking of knowledge and reality: If the self remains open before the possibility of ever further aesthetic experience, then perhaps all things, not just the human self, are malleable. In his attacks on realism and its slavish imitation of life, Wilde rejects any artistic project that would first conceive of nature as deterministic or mechanical and then mimic that version of nature. By challenging nature's self-enclosed autonomy, Wilde recalls – and radically extends – Wordsworth's undoing of the natural/supernatural divide: If nature is not mechanically closed, then it remains pliable to the aesthetic imagination and to language. For Wilde, liturgical language and ritual action especially reveal how words remake reality: The priest's words of institution and the drama of the Mass transform – even transubstantiate – the bread and wine. Here liturgy models an incarnational aesthetic that gives flesh to imaginative concepts. Ultimately, then, the question of an alternative modernity finds its fullest expression in Pater and Wilde. Rather than being closed, disenchanting, and excarnating, this liturgical modernity venerates the spiritual mystery of each thing while recognizing that such mystery also bears constructivist possibilities. This genuinely modern insight nevertheless abides with – even while modifying – the ancient vision of enchantment and participation.

To trace the roots of this liturgical modernity, we turn now to Wordsworth.