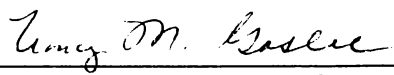


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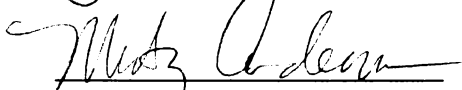
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Daniel D. Schierenbeck entitled "Sacred Culture: Religion and Aesthetics in Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



Nancy M. Goslee, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Acceptance for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

**SACRED CULTURE: RELIGION AND AESTHETICS IN BARBAULD, BLAKE,
AND THE SHELLEYS**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Daniel D. Schierenbeck
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.S33

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,
John and Sharon Schierenbeck, for their love and support,
to my children, Morgan and Hannah, whose smiles brighten every day,
and especially to Sherry, without whom this project would have never been completed.

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His critical judgement, wonderful teaching ability, and professionalism have given me a high standard to strive for in my own work. I would also like to thank Misty Anderson. She has been a perceptive reader of this dissertation, and her suggestions have indeed strengthened it greatly. She also has been a source of encouragement and inspiration throughout my graduate studies. Finally, I want to thank John Bohstedt for his role as outside reader on this project. His seminar in British history provided me a whole new understanding of British politics and social history. In this class, he prompted me to rethink my own perception of the relations between religion and politics in the Romantic era. His critical insights have helped me better understand the historical contexts that this project works through.

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the role of religion in the cultural politics of the Romantic era. Though previous studies have explored the influence of radical, plebeian religion on Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys, they have not situated these Romantic writers' discourse within the broader field of cultural production that includes conservative religious discourse. By doing so, I unfold the pervasive connections between culture, religion, and aesthetics in the Romantic era. I demonstrate how conservative religious discourse of this era aestheticizes social power through an emphasis on manners and taste. Such religious discourse thus works to internalize dominant social values more effectively by making them appear less coercive. This study traces the way in which the presumably more radical religious discourses of Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys similarly aestheticize social power and advocate hegemonic values.

I begin this study by examining the rise of Anglican Evangelicalism in the 1790s to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the discourses of religion, culture, and the aesthetic in the Romantic era and to show the important role that religious discourse plays in the aestheticizing of social power. The Evangelicals' "religion of the heart" manifests the ways in which religious discourse can reach an audience through a democratic appeal to emotions but at the same time is able to use these emotions to cultivate self-discipline and an internalized restraint. The example of Evangelicalism provides a context in which to understand the religious discourse of Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys and illustrates

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how their oppositional discourse is shaped by the forms of domination that they were working against. For example, Anna Barbauld, whose place in Rational Dissent would seem to put her at odds with the Evangelicals, similarly attempts to salvage the emotional appeal of religion while making it more refined to cater to a middle-class audience. Her emphasis on the intimate connection between manners, taste, and religion also advocates the gentle influence of the aesthetic that provides internalized restraint. William Blake's religious aesthetics, by emphasizing the role of the sublime imagination, which he figures as the Divine Body of Jesus in *Jerusalem*, promote an ideal aesthetic object that advances the universalizing aims of bourgeois ideology. For Percy Shelley, the religion of beauty that derives from his Hellenism becomes a means to mediate political power through the aesthetic, an attempt to ensure gradual, peaceful reform by providing a restraint on the lower classes that will prevent violent revolution. Finally, in *The Last Man*, Mary Shelley rejects the claim of Christianity as the means of civilization, but she instead advocates an aesthetic imperialism, which, through its emphasis on manners and self-regulation, promotes the goals of conservative religious discourse. The fictional plague that she unleashes in this novel reveals and normalizes a social order that is led by a cultural elite who conform to and promote the middle-class values that are cultivated by the aesthetic.

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Introduction

“Religious Affections” and the Example of Evangelicalism

“God has set before me as my object the reformation of [my country’s] manners.”
 –William Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (1:130)

“Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure the laws depend. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in.”
 –Edmund Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (*Writings* 9:242)

On June 1, 1787, at the urging of William Wilberforce, who had been reading up on previous Societies for the Reformation of Manners, George III issued a “Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the Preventing and Punishing of Vice.” This proclamation promoted a number of social reforms reflecting the Sabbatarian agenda of the Anglican Evangelical movement, from outlawing “dice, cards, and games”(1) to calling for “effectual prosecution and punishment of all persons who shall be guilty of excessive drinking, blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, lewdness, profanation of the Lord’s Day, or other dissolute, immoral, or disorderly practices” (1). Moreover, it called for the suppression of “unlicensed public shows, interludes, and places of entertainment” (1) and of “all loose and licentious prints, books, and publications, dispersing poison to the minds of the young and unwary” and threatened “to punish the publishers and venders thereof” (1). As Edward Bristow points out, this legal reformation was “short-lived” (39), yet its influence was felt for years to come. Indeed, after the French Revolution began, several bishops of the church looked to this proclamation as a model for combating the dangerous influence of French manners and politics. Also, the official society that was formed to enforce this proclamation eventually did become quite important and was

involved in suppressing such texts as Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* and Percy Shelley's *Queen Mab*.¹ Moreover, this proclamation, which revived the idea of a Reformation of Manners, is also emblematic of a key shift in conservative religious discourse during the Romantic era and highlights the pervasive connection of religion and culture that this study will explore.

The Anglican Evangelicals are not usually associated with studies of Romantic-era authors; however, their advocating of an emotional religion that is coupled with manners and taste is pivotal to understanding the cultural politics of religion in this age.² As Robert Ryan contends in *The Romantic Reformation*: "Religion was the crucial mediator between the cultural and political-economic spheres in England, and the Romantics directed their creative energies to this arena" (4). Though I agree with Ryan on this point, I would argue that the Romantics try to achieve political reform by trying to reform culture rather than striving solely for "an alteration in the national religious consciousness" (4). Furthermore, though in his introduction Ryan highlights the importance of "cultural critique" (4), his work tends to spend far too much time trying to discern the individual beliefs of the Romantics rather than analyzing the cultural importance of their religious discourse. I

¹For accounts of this proclamation and its society in relation to earlier and later attempts at reforming manners in England, see Edward Bristow's *Vice and Vigilance*, Maurice Quinlan's *Victorian Prelude*, and M.J.D. Roberts' "The Society for the Suppression of Vice and Its Early Critics, 1802-1812." For an emphasis on the Evangelicals' role in this movement, see F.K. Brown's *Fathers of the Victorians* and Ian Bradley's *The Call to Seriousness*. G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* also traces the history of the reformation of manners (37-103), but he focuses on sensibility and gender formation.

²Richard Brantley's *Wordsworth's "Natural Methodism"* does explore "Wordsworth's close relation to Evangelical Anglicanism and Evangelical Nonconformism" and contends that "Wordsworth's literary practice can best be understood in terms of his pervasive Evangelical idiom" (xi). Though Brantley does make some connections between Wordsworth and Wilberforce, the primary focus of his study is on "establishing the extent of Wesleyan Methodism in his heritage and in tracing lines of specific influence" (xi). Brantley's study, however, does not focus on the cultural politics of Anglican Evangelicalism.

suggest that examining the rise of Evangelicalism in the 1790s helps to historicize the connections between religion and culture that have become separated in Ryan's work and in Romantic-era studies in general. Recent studies of culture in the Romantic era by Jeffrey Cox and Andrew McCann demonstrate the importance of the "culture wars" in the Romantic period, and they show how different groups struggled to be the defining voice of culture in a new era of the democratization of literature.³ Connected in an important way to these studies of culture are related studies that analyze the emphasis on taste, manners, and sociability that is part of the emerging bourgeois consciousness.⁴ Though these studies focus on canonical literary figures as well as some of their more radical counterparts, they do not address the more conservative voices of religion, such as Edmund Burke and the Evangelicals. Thus, though these works are extremely useful in providing models for analyzing the cultural politics of this era, one of their limitations is their omission of conservative religious discourse. Since this study will investigate how culture, religion, and aesthetics intersect in the Romantic writers, an examination of the beginnings of the Evangelical movement in its historical context provides a good entry to this discussion. In this movement we can see the particular ways in which the discourses of

³Cox's work, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, argues that the Hunt circle tried to define a new "cultural literacy" (12) and that they received many vicious attacks by conservative critics who were trying to maintain their own culture. McCann's *Cultural Politics in the 1790s* reads the cultural politics of this period in connection with a nuanced version of Habermas' public sphere and the idea of cultural consumption. Jon Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences* is an important study of the democratization of literature and the cultural implications of the shifting meanings of authorship, readership, and interpretation.

⁴The concept of "taste" and "distinction" found in Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* will be important for my project, but I will also draw on recent studies of eighteenth-century taste such as John Barrell's *An Equal Wide Survey* and *The Political Theory of Painting* and Robert Jones' *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

religion and the aesthetic are intertwined in this era, which underscores religion's important role in matters of culture.⁵

My focus on the Evangelicals at the beginning of this study also points to the way in which this project supplements another important trend in Romantic studies: historicist and political studies of religion. Critics such as Jon Mee, E.P. Thompson, Michael Scrivener, and Kenneth Neil Cameron have done an invaluable service to Romantic-era studies by connecting canonical Romantic writers with the more radical and lesser known plebeian authors.⁶ By exploring exclusively the radical political dimension of religious thought, however, these studies tend to occlude the importance of the more conservative versions of religion that these authors were writing against. Furthermore, these studies frequently treat the verbal echoes and parallels between plebeian authors and the "literary" Romantics far too uncritically, often ignoring possible changes of meaning and political effectiveness as these echoes are engaged in different discourses and contexts. This study will provide a broader understanding of the Romantics' religious discourse by showing how it, like the conservative religious discourse of figures such as Wilberforce, More, and

⁵Throughout this study, the terms "culture" and "aesthetic" are used in a similar sense. I am following, to some extent, Raymond Williams' thesis that during the Romantic era the idea of "culture as a whole way of life" and "culture as art" became distinguished. I go a bit further, however, and follow Bourdieu in seeing the notion of culture as naturalizing class distinctions and normalizing standards that reproduce forms of social domination. Similarly, the aesthetic, though it appears as an autonomous discourse of art, also mediates social power and promotes hegemonic values. Both culture and the aesthetic are tied to matters of civility, such as taste and manners, and both become means to promote middle-class values more effectively. I will demonstrate how they do so more fully in my section on the theoretical contexts of this project (pgs. 6-12).

⁶See Mee's *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and *Witness against the Beast*, Scrivener's *Radical Shelley*, and Cameron's *Young Shelley*.

Burke, promotes hegemonic middle-class values.⁷ I am not arguing that the Evangelicals, or any other conservative religious groups directly influenced Barbauld, Blake, or the Shelleys; rather, I want to show the pervasiveness of the connection between religion and culture that is evidenced by their shared association with matters of the aesthetic.

In this introduction, then, I will use the example of the Evangelicals to situate the historical and theoretical concerns that guide this project. The Evangelical movement illustrates a change in the nature of religious arguments that develops in the Romantic era.⁸ In his study, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, Robert Hole delineates this shift: “One of the effects of the secularising process was to move religious arguments away from the constitutional-philosophical agenda set in the seventeenth century and to concentrate them much more on social theory—the concept of restraint and sanctions” (84). Hole contends that “religious arguments did not disappear from political thought” (250); rather, the “age-old theme of religion as a form of restraint and a sanction on social behaviour now came to the fore” (250). Conservative religious discourse, by emphasizing restraint, becomes linked with a discourse of manners, and thus becomes reconfigured as a more effective

⁷I do not want to imply here that middle-class religion is always conservative and hegemonic or that all varieties of middle-class religion work in exactly the same manner. For example, the Dissenting tradition can be viewed as middle-class but also as non-hegemonic or oppositional. This distinction becomes more problematic, however, in the case of Burke and More, for their use of religion can be seen as both middle-class and conservative. I am here trying to distinguish middle-class religion from lower-class religion while trying to avoid linking Burke and More fully with an upper-class or aristocratic view of religion.

⁸When I refer to the Evangelicals, I am referring particularly to the Anglican Evangelicals that came to the fore at the end of the nineteenth century. Though Boyd Hilton’s focus on the Evangelicals goes beyond the scope of this study, his definition provides a clarification of how I am using the term: “In this book ‘evangelical’ refers to the third and fourth generations of the revival begun by Wesley This is the world of the Clapham Sect—of William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton, Zachary Macaulay, and John Venn—as well as of Henry Elliott, Isaac Milner, Charles Simeon, Edward Bickerseth, Thomas Chalmers, Henry Ryder, Hannah More, Daniel Wilson, John and Charles Sumner” (7).

means of promoting hegemonic values. The significance of this shift lies in its illustration of the way social power is mediated through the discourse of culture and the aesthetic in this era. By making the restraint of religion appear as a matter of culture and civility rather than of power relations, the Evangelicals' conservative religious discourse effectively aestheticizes social power. When we situate the religious discourses of Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys within this larger field of cultural production, we can see the ways in which they correspond to these more conservative forms of religious discourse, for both forms of religion aestheticize social power and advocate middle-class values.

I.

Theoretical Contexts

As numerous social historians have demonstrated, the rise of commerce in eighteenth-century Britain coincided with an increased emphasis on matters of civility—manners, taste, and politeness—that became a way of coping with the effects of commerce on civil society.⁹ As Paul Langford puts it, “In a sense politeness was a logical consequence of commerce” (4). The reason for this, as J.G.A. Pocock maintains, is that with the “rise of commerce and culture, new forms of social relationships emerged and virtue in the antique sense became archaic” (114). He explains:

Since these new relationships were social and not political in character, the capacities which they led the individual to develop were called not ‘virtues’

⁹ I am referring especially to J.G.A. Pocock's *Virtue, Commerce, and History*; Paul Langford's *A Polite and Commercial People*; Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb's *The Birth of a Consumer Society*; and John Sekora's *Luxury*. For the effects that these changes have on attitudes to authorship and language, see John Barrell's *An Equal Wide Survey* and Olivia Smith's *The Politics of Language*.

but ‘manners’ The social psychology of the age declared that encounters with things and persons evoked passions and refined them into manners; it was preeminently the function of commerce to refine the passions and polish the manners. (49)

Throughout the eighteenth century what constituted civil society and what held it together was continually under debate, often with a focus on passions: whether commerce refined the passions and created a civilized, social man or led to unbridled luxury, selfishness, and barbarism. Wilberforce’s revival of the Society for the Reformation of Manners is thus, on the one hand, not surprising at all and can be seen as a bridge from the sporadic attempts to reform manners that sprinkled the 1760-80s to the more organized and popular reforms that began in the early nineteenth century and spread well into the Victorian Era. On the other hand, however, I would argue that there is a difference from these earlier attempts to reform manners and the discourse of civilization that Wilberforce popularized. This difference stems from the heightened role that the discourses of religion and manners play in the mediating of social power in this era.

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton demonstrates the importance of manners in aestheticizing social power in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. Eagleton does not treat the aesthetic as an autonomous sphere divorced from political and social concerns; instead, he connects it to the demise of absolutism and the rise of the “bourgeois social order” (20).¹⁰ Similarly, throughout this project, when I speak

¹⁰The treatment of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm can perhaps be seen most clearly in the writings of Schiller and Kant, whom Eagleton engages in his study. Marxist critics such as Eagleton and Williams, however, can also be seen as arguing against the privileging of the aesthetic that can be seen in the line of

about the aestheticizing of social power, I am not referring specifically to artistic and cultural production. Rather, I am speaking in broader terms about the shift that occurs in this era in the way in which social power is mediated through different discourses, how “structures of power” become “structures of feeling” (Eagleton 42). Eagleton provides the broad outlines of this shift: “The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism will be habits, pieties, sentiments, and affects. And this is equivalent to saying that power in such an order will be aestheticized” (20). Indeed, since the aestheticizing of social power involves the self-governance of the body and its emotions, one of the major places to see this tendency is in an emphasis on manners:

Manners for the eighteenth century signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style, deconstructing the opposition between the proper and the pleasurable. In these regulated forms of civilized conduct, a pervasive aestheticizing of social practices gets under way: moral imperatives no longer impose themselves with the leaden weight of Kantian duty, but infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact or know-how, intuitive good sense or inbred decorum. (Eagleton

humanist literary criticism that goes back to Matthew Arnold and up to modern Romantic literary critics such as Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams, and Harold Bloom. This type of criticism is specifically attacked in a similar fashion in Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology*, which argues that the uncritical acceptance of aesthetic autonomy is part of a “Romantic ideology” that modern critics have “translated and promoted” (3). For a good discussion of how Schiller, Frye, and Bloom (as well deconstructionists) all privilege aesthetic autonomy, see Stephen Goldsmith’s *Unbuilding Jerusalem* (1-24). Katherine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn’s *A History of Esthetics* presents a balanced historical overview of the development of the aesthetic that can be read against Eagleton’s more political account; Paul de Man’s *Aesthetic Ideology*, like Eagleton’s work, also presents a “demystification of the idea of the aesthetic” (Eagleton 10), but he does not view the aesthetic as potentially positive, as Eagleton does.

41)

Eagleton's insistence on the importance of manners and affections in the aestheticizing of social power provides a broad outline of the concerns I am dealing with in this study. He does not, however, analyze the important role that religious discourse plays in the aestheticizing of social power, which is a primary concern of my project.

Eagleton's theory of the way in which the aesthetic, matters of manners and taste, makes hegemonic values more "ideologically effective" by making them seem less coercive is formulated in a similar way by Michel Foucault. For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's idea of the "carceral network" is also connected to the rise of bourgeois ideology.¹¹ Focusing on roughly the same era as Eagleton, Foucault traces the decline of public executions, the disappearance of the spectacle of the tortured body, to an increase in "disciplines" that create docile and productive bodies. Public executions that manifested the power of the monarchial body and his absolute power are replaced by a network of systems and institutions that instead focus on the individual subject's bodies. The result of this new "punishment-body relation" (11) is a more subtle form of coercing obedience to the social order: "The expiation that once reigned down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the will, the inclination" (16). Since "the

¹¹Following Eagleton and Foucault, I define bourgeois ideology throughout this study not as a specific political ideology of the middle-class but rather as the connected hegemonic practices that mediate social power and ensure its reproduction. For example, the emphasis on manners and taste that is characteristic of the Evangelicals promotes self-imposed restraint and subordination to the existing government, but it also makes such restraint appear as natural rather than as part of the existing structure of power. Bourgeois ideology, then, is less about a specific, practical political agenda and more about the way in which politics and the structuring of power becomes disguised as a social agenda. Such a definition will become clearer in my chapter on Barbauld, who may be characterized politically as a radical. Through her emphasis on manners and taste that is characteristic of bourgeois ideology, however, she advocates the existing forms of social and political domination.

body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and subjective body” (26), new “projects of docility” came to the fore, a “policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour” (138). The “technicians of behaviour” and the “engineers of conduct” (294) emphasized the notion of the individual to bring individual subjects under control more effectively. Foucault describes this “scale of control”: “it was not a question of treating the body, *en masse*, ‘wholesale,’ as it were an indissociable unity, but of working it retail, individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining hold upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal control over the active body” (137). The emphasis on civility, the renewal of the Reformation of Manners at the end of the eighteenth century, then, can be seen as part of the shift in power from absolutist to bourgeois forms of domination. The individual body is emphasized but only to coerce the individual into a subjection and to normalize the power relations of society.

Manners and taste make forms of domination appear less coercive, but they also serve in providing a re-formation of social relations that are threatened by such emphasis on the individual. As Eagleton puts it, “the task of political hegemony is to produce the very forms of subjecthood which will form the basis of political unity” (24). The problem in bourgeois society is finding the means to reconcile the preeminent role of the individual while fending off the dissolution of political unity that results from such an emphasis. For Eagleton, the “fusion of the general and particular” in the “form of the aesthetic artefact” becomes this means, for “the mystery of the aesthetic object is that each of its sensuous parts, while appearing wholly autonomous, incarnates the ‘law’ of the totality. Each

aesthetic particular, in the very act of determining itself, regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particulars” (25). Matters of the aesthetic—manners, taste, and culture—are able to give the appearance of autonomy and individual choice, yet this self-determination is deceptive, for it is actually an adherence to standards of behavior that are inscribed with class distinctions that normalize and reproduce forms of domination.

Further explanation of the way in matters of manners, taste, and culture connect groups of individuals into classes even as they distinguish them from other classes is found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu defines such a “system of dispositions” (82) as the habitus, which “produces individual and collective practices” (82). Like Eagleton’s aesthetic, the habitus is “the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’” (79). In other words, rather than being natural, an individual’s taste and standard of behavior are structured from the beginning and only appear as a matter of choice. Middle-class standards of manners and taste, then, pull together individuals of certain educational and economic backgrounds into a class habitus where these standards appear natural because everyone else has similar backgrounds. It is in this sense that Bourdieu asserts that “the habitus makes coherence and necessity out of accident and contingency” (87). However, by connecting members of the same economic, educational, and cultural background, these standards also serve to distinguish one class from another and to naturalize these differences. Bourdieu writes, “Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (164). The bourgeois social

order naturalizes its own arbitrariness through an emphasis on matters of manners, taste, and culture. Furthermore, like Eagleton, Bourdieu in *Distinction* critiques Kant's notion of the aesthetic as an autonomous sphere and provides an understanding of the ways in which matters of culture structure social relations. Aesthetic taste, then become a marker of class, "the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference" (57). Cultural practices, linked standards of taste, manners, and aesthetic disposition, become a means to normalize and reproduce social differences.

Throughout this project, I will delineate more clearly these critical positions and distinguish my differences with them, but this theoretical overview provides a critical apparatus to examine the Evangelicals' emphasis on manners and taste in their religious discourse. My discussion of the Evangelicals centers on the manner in which their religious discourse, through its connection to manners and taste, aestheticizes social power and promotes hegemonic values. In turn, my focus on the historical context of the Evangelicals and their writings will provide specific examples that help illustrate the theoretical concerns of this project.

II.

Historical Contexts

Though the Evangelicals pushed through some minor attempts at social reform in the 1780s, such as the King's 1787 proclamation, the work of reforming manners did not gain great popularity in Britain until the 1790s. Indeed, the increased emphasis on manners as a means of stabilizing British society coincided with the French Revolution and the threat of similar revolution in Britain. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in*

France (1790) is perhaps the most explicit example of how bad manners were linked to revolutionary desires. For Burke, France exemplifies the disastrous results of an absolutist regime being displaced by individuals that are not bound together by an organic social order that inculcates restraint. Burke contends that “most important of all revolutions” (175) in France is “a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions” (175). He is concerned not only with the political revolution in France but also with the “considerable revolution in their ideas of politeness” (162) which he sees as the foundation of this political revolution. Since the English “learn manners at second-hand” (163) from France, Burke is concerned that this revolution of manners and all its attendant social upheaval will contaminate England.

Though Burke was one of the earliest and most vocal critics of the dangerous influence of French manners and morals, this critique gained greater popularity in the wake of the violence that occurred in France after 1792. For example, Thomas MacDonald, in *Thoughts of the Public Duties of Private Life* (1795) traces the downfall of French society to its immorality:

And such has been the effect of that various and complicated vice, in mind and manners, which so long fermented in the very bowels of a miserable country, where the bonds of society are now broken asunder, and a complete reversal has obtained of all the known principles and distinctions of human conduct; where virtue and vice have changed sides. (qtd. in Soloway “Reform” 113)

MacDonald then goes on explicitly to link morality with civility: “The private conduct of

every individual is at present of immediate importance to this country . . . Good manners are needed if Britain shall yet stand firm” (qtd. in Soloway “Reform” 120). Even Richard Price, Burke’s antagonist, wished that the French Revolution would “have ultimately in view a reformation of manners and virtuous practice” (193). Manners, then, became linked to political ideology, but, by being promoted as moral and social concerns, their political ends become more disguised. As Burke puts it, “Political arrangement, as it is a work of social ends, is to be only wrought by social means” (281). But the “social means”—matters of civility—that bring about the “political arrangements” also actually work to mask the political nature of these arrangements.

Burke’s writings, however, also illustrate the intimate connection between religion and manners in the wake of the French Revolution. In addition to castigating the French philosophy as being “destitute of all taste and elegance” (171) and promoting a “coarseness and vulgarity” (79), Burke also explicitly connects their “ferocious dissoluteness in manners” with their “insolent religion” (125). He sums up this connection: “Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have in this European world of ours depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion” (173). Burke later declares in *Regicide Peace* that “Manners are of more importance than laws” because they “are what vex or sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in” (*Writings* 9:247). The operation of manners produces a connection between individuals that appears as

natural as breathing. Manners normalize a social order that produces restraint through an internalized “insensible operation”—the “immanent law” (Bourdieu 81) of the habitus written on the body—rather than through the external dictates of the law. Yet Burke also argues in *Reflections* that “religion is the basis of civil society” (186), for it is the cement which holds society together and which provides a basis for manners. For Burke, dissoluteness in manners is both an index of irreligion and a sign of impending anarchy.

The logical connections that Burke lines up with atheism, anarchy, and bad manners on the one hand, and Christianity, civil order, and good manners on the other is one that gained more credence throughout the decades of the 1790s. The way to inoculate England against the contagion of the French was to reform its own manners and morals, and the way to reform manners was through religion.¹² Thus not only did the “religious restraint argument . . . dominate Christian political and social thought in 1793 and 1794” (Hole 134), but it also became a unifying cry that went across traditional boundaries of Dissent and the established Church (Hole 141). The message of social restraint was hammered not only from the pulpit but from popular works such as John Bowlder’s *Reform or Ruin*.¹³ As the argument for religious restraint became more popular, however, it became necessary to distinguish what type of religion best effected proper restraint. Indeed, religion that was either too emotional or too rational fostered the revolutionary

¹²For example, in James Walker’s “Individual Vice the Source of National Calamity: A Sermon” (1795), he contends: “The senses of morality and religion were so artfully sapped as to create no alarm. The people were conducted from one stage of vice to another by easy steps, till at length moral virtue and religious faith were almost entirely banished from a large portion of the nation, and, when the restraints of Christianity lost their power, it was an easy matter to undermine society, and destroy law” (320).

¹³In Shute-Barrington’s 1792 episcopal charge, he states: “It is thus that restraints on the exercise of selfish conduct, and the profession of private sentiments, are among those wholesome means of culture, which restrain the pernicious exuberancies of nature, and distinguish the citizen from the savage. This is more remarkably true with respect to religion . . . than in any other case” (22).

impulses of the lower classes.

The ruling order considered religion that emphasized emotions too much almost as dangerous as atheism, for this type of religion led to an enthusiasm that was just as damaging to morality and the stability of society. As Shute-Barrington warns in his 1792 *Charge*: “Enthusiasts had perverted the doctrine of scripture . . . they had professed principles which were calculated to dissolve the bonds of society, and release men from all their social and civic duties. Their doctrines, therefore, which were supposed to be productive of such effects were discredited in order to restore the duties of morality to their proper efficacy” (28-29). Indeed, describing religion as enthusiastic was really a shorthand for Methodism, which was of particular concern because of its influence among the lower classes. Though the Methodists professed loyalty, E.R. Norman reminds us that they “were certainly held in suspicion” (31). For example, in his 1790 *Charge* Bishop Horsley expressed his belief that Jacobins were “making a tool of Methodism” while the “real” Methodists were “kept in utter ignorance of the wicked enterprize the counterfeit has in hand” (qtd. in Norman 32). The concern was that the behavior of people, especially of the ignorant lower classes, might be influenced by the wrong sort of preachers. In 1800, the church produced a report which reflects this concern and emphasizes their fear about the spread of itinerant Methodist preachers. According to the report, some Methodists “encouraged a wandering tribe of fanatical teachers . . . from the lowest and most illiterate classes of society” (qtd. in Soloway *Prelates* 51).¹⁴ The report further describes these preachers as “raving

¹⁴The full title of this report, *Report for the Clergy Of A District In the Diocese of Lincoln Convened For the Purpose of Considering the State of Religion In the Several Parishes in the Said District, As Well As the Best Mode of Promoting the Belief and Practice of It; And of Guarding, As Much As Possible, Against the Dangers Arising to the Church and Government of this Kingdom, From the Alarming Increase of Profaneness and Irreligion on the One Hand, and From the False Doctrines and Evil Designs of Fanatic and Seditious Teachers on the Other*, reflects not only the concern about the manners and behavior of the lower classes in the wake of the

enthusiasts” who were “deluding the minds of the ignorant multitude” (qtd. in Soloway *Prelates* 51). The great concern was that itinerant preachers had no connection with the establishment and that their influence among the lower classes would erode the established church even further (Ward 47). This fear of Methodism was not only prevalent during the decades of the French Revolution but lasted into the nineteenth century. The concerns about Methodism became more pronounced once again in 1811 when Lord Sidmouth’s bill on amending the Toleration Act was introduced to Parliament. Hole points out: “Sidmouth’s correspondence after he raised the issue in 1809 show a widespread fear amongst Anglicans of the Methodist advance, and the Bill came to be directed at the issue of itinerancy and the low educational level of Methodist preachers” (195). Though the bill was eventually defeated, this controversy demonstrates the genuine fears of the Methodists’ influence on society, despite their official, repeated declarations of loyalty.¹⁵

The fear of Methodists is evidenced not only in the publications of the established church but also in more secular publications, such as the April, 1809 edition of *The Edinburgh Review*. In a reply to John Styles’ defense of Methodism from previous attacks in the *Edinburgh Review*, Styles is called a “fanatical writer” (44). The Methodists are characterized as “a nest of

French Revolution but also the danger of the wrong kind of religion influencing the lower classes. For further discussion of the Church’s “uncompromisingly negative” (41) attitude toward itinerants and their worries about these preachers’ educational level, see Dereyck Lovegrove’s *Established Church, Sectarian People*, (esp.41-42). Lovegrove traces how the changing nature of itinerancy in the late eighteenth century evoked the fears of the Established Church and also influenced all forms of Dissent.

¹⁵The extent to which the Methodists were actually a threat to the establishment is a much debated historical question, which begins with Elie Halevy, who proposes that Methodism was actually “the antidote to Jacobinism” (498) and prevented the Revolution from spreading to England. E.J. Hobsbawm, on the other hand, claims that “Methodism advanced when Radicalism advanced” (124). E.P. Thompson, however, counters with his argument of the “chiliasm of despair,” contending that Methodism provided a sort of utopian compensation for political and social inequalities. For Thompson, “religious revivalism took over just at the point where ‘political’ or temporal aspirations met defeat” (389). For more recent critiques of the Halevy thesis, see David Hempton’s *Religion and Political Culture* (esp. 31-38) and Deborah Valenze’s *Prophetic Sons and Daughters* (esp. 4-6).

consecrated cobblers” (40), and the article stresses the need to “rescue religion from the hands of didactic artisans” and “delirious mechanics” (40). The concern is that by preaching and publishing, the poor have begun “to step out of their province” (42). The effect of Methodism is thus dangerous: “Wherever Methodism extends its baneful influence, the character of the English people is constantly changed by it. Boldness and rough honesty are broken down into meanness, prevarication, and fraud” (44). A second article further locates the dangers of the “delirium of Methodism” (83), arguing that the “great body of our present fanatics are persons in the lowest ranks of society” (83). The problems arising from Methodism are similar to those seen in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution:

If these great multitudes, therefore, are suddenly let loose from their present restraints, and not placed, at the same time, under the controul of a more rational principle, there is obviously great reason to fear that irreligion and licentiousness will take joint possession of the community, and that we shall pay for the fanaticism which now deforms our society, by a long period of vice and disorder. (83)

For the ruling order, the emotional religion of Methodism does not provide any restraints; rather it produces only unruly subjects that do not conform to the cultured standards of the middle-class.

As the fears about Methodism demonstrate, religion that was too emotional or undisciplined could be linked with revolutionary desires and the lower classes; however, religion that was too rational was also dangerous, for it could be linked with the type of philosophy that was blamed for the Revolution. In his 1792 *Charge*, Bishop Shute-Barrington rails against not only enthusiasts but rationalists: “The Rationalist adopted an opposite doctrine to the Enthusiast;

and moral works were held out as alone necessary to salvation. The conclusion was founded on a common fallacy, that where one extreme is wrong, the opposite must be right. Yet this is, in truth, an error, at least as unscriptural, and of as great magnitude as the other” (29). Thus, he argues for the importance of the king’s 1787 proclamation and its ability “to rouse the people from their supine tolerance of these projects of political empiricism and to warn them against the gradual and imperceptible influence of such licentiousness” (14-15). Shute-Barrington feels that these “impracticable theories” of the French and English radicals “tend to alienate the affections of our fellow-citizens from the laws and constitution of our country” (16). In a similar fashion, Burke in his *Reflections* links the Rational Dissenter, Richard Price, with the rational “literary caballers . . . and intriguing philosophers” (93), those *philosophes*, whom he later castigates as relying too much on reason. For Burke, reason is a “barbarous philosophy” that is “destitute of all taste and elegance” (77); rational philosophy not only undermines religion but also manners. It does not engage the emotions and the affections and cannot produce an internalized and naturalized restraint.

This linking of rational philosophy and revolution became even more popular during the conspiracy controversy that reached its apex in the publications of Abbé Barruel and John Robison.¹⁶ Barruel’s *Memoirs of . . . Jacobinism* (1797) alleged two conspiracies that brought about the Revolution in France and were indeed threatening all of Europe. One of conspiracies he outlined was of the *philosophes*, especially Voltaire, d’Alembert, Diderot, and Frederick the Great; a second conspiracy he charged was of the freemasons and *illuminees* (Hole 153).

¹⁶For fuller accounts of this controversy see Soloway’s *Prelates and Peoples* (36-45), Hole’s *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order* (153-55), and Quinlan’s *Victorian Prelude* (91-100).

Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797) mainly focused on the latter conspiracy. Hole shows how their thesis "spread like wildfire and remained powerful and dominant for many years" (154). Not only did this further the connection between atheism and anarchy, but it especially questioned rational, intellectual approaches to social questions, and even questioned intellectual approaches to religion such as deism. R.A. Soloway describes the reaction of the established church to this crisis:

Before the Revolution, they had kept reason and revelation well in balance, and if there was too great a conflict, they had tended to reconcile it in favor of the former. But the scope of upheavals in the last decade of the century was too great to be coped with in a completely rational way, and gradually the defensive barriers of reason began to crumble before incredible events. . . . The voice of rational religion and natural theology was strangely quiet. It was as if it had its hearing, but now seemed hopelessly inadequate for the frenzied needs of enlightened churchmen who were no longer confident that they understood the natural laws of human nature and social cohesion. (*Prelates* 43)

The French Revolution, then, brought fears not only of unbridled emotion but also of abstract reason. As Soloway points out, though the established Church recognized and feared the growth of both Rational Dissent and Methodism and "understood the appeal of revivalistic preaching . . . they offered no real, inspiring alternative" (*Prelates* 58). This alternative would be provided by Evangelicalism.

Evangelicalism thus enters into a historical context where the establishment is concerned not only about a decline in religion and manners but also has fears about religion that is either too

emotional or too rational. Historians agree that Evangelicalism did not take off until the 1790s, and part of the reason that Evangelicalism was able to take such a strong hold in the early nineteenth century was its ability to palliate the fears brought on by the French Revolution by effectively linking religion to manners.¹⁷ Evangelicalism is a bit unique, however, in its emphasis on emotion in providing the link. The “emotional” religion of the Evangelicals can be viewed as a response not only to the fear of rational philosophy engendered by the French Revolution but also a response to the failure of the established church to move past the dry deism which had dominated it throughout the eighteenth century. For Evangelicals the “religion of the heart” produced internal restraint; manners were governed by religion, but by a specific type of religion that stressed the converted heart’s influence on manners. Thus, manners for the Evangelicals became a set of internal regulations, and their discourse produced a subject who was guided by self-regulation. By defining internal, religious emotion in relation to external manners, they were able to provide a key distinction between themselves and the lower-class Methodists as well as the dry and rational deism.

III.

The Rise of the Evangelical Movement

The concern about the dangers of the Methodism was substantive in the 1790s and early 1800s, and any sect that emphasized emotion could be linked with Methodism and the lower

¹⁷Again, I am using Evangelicalism in the narrow sense that I previously defined; evangelicalism in the broader sense, of course, was thriving earlier in the century. The following histories of Evangelicalism have been especially useful: Brown’s *The Fathers of the Victorians*, Bradley’s *A Call to Seriousness*, Ernest Marshall Howse’s *Saints in Politics*, Boyd Hilton’s *The Age of Atonement*, V. Kiernan’s “Evangelicalism and the French Revolution,” and Mark Spring’s “The Clapham Sect: Some Social and Political Aspects.” Elizabeth Jay’s *The Religion of the Heart* provides a good basic introduction to Evangelicalism, but it also provides an analysis of Victorian novels in the context of Evangelicalism that goes beyond the scope of this study.

classes. Thus, the potential confusion of the vital religion of the Evangelicals and the enthusiasm of the Methodists was indeed a real problem. As M.G. Jones points out in his biography of Hannah More: “‘Methodism’ at the time was a measure of enthusiasm, not a doctrinal term capable of definition. The clear-cut distinctions between Methodist and Evangelical accepted in later times was not then in common use, as contemporary writing testifies” (179). The extent to which Methodism and Evangelicalism could be conflated was demonstrated during the Blagdon Controversy.¹⁸ This controversy, which lasted from approximately 1800 to 1803, was brought about by More’s appointment of schoolmaster, Henry Young, which was opposed by Thomas Bere, the curate of Blagdon. Bere then wrote pamphlets accusing More of having “not only condoned but promoted Methodistical practices” (Kowaleski-Wallace 87), and the controversy waged in local papers and sources such as the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, which attacked More for her Methodistical leanings. As Elizabeth Kowalski-Wallace explains:

The enemies of Evangelicalism . . . tended to locate in religious enthusiasm the seeds of revolutionary discontent; and they equated the emotional fervor of Methodism with the unleashing of all sorts of desires leading to political upheaval. As an expression of this logic, in the pages of the *Anti-Jacobin*, More’s enemies asserted a connection between her Methodistical sympathies, sympathies implicitly engendered by her natural feminine tendency toward enthusiasm, and her putative sympathies with the cause of revolution at home. (90)

¹⁸Full accounts of the Blagdon Controversy can be found in M.J. Jones’ *Hannah More* (172-83); Kowalski-Wallace’s *Their Fathers’ Daughters* (86-93); Mary Alden Hopkins’ *Hannah More and her Circle* (185-95); Annette Meakin’s *Hannah More: A Biographical Study* (326-36); and Charles Howard Ford’s *Hannah More: A Critical Biography* (173-95).

Since the emotional emphasis of Methodism could be linked to a revolutionary enthusiasm, in order to be successful among the establishment Evangelicalism had to distance its emotional religion from Methodism, and it did so by emphasizing manners and taste. This concern with culture, however, also provides a distinction between middle-class Evangelicalism and lower-class Methodism.

More's writings are a prime example of how religion becomes linked to manners and taste as a means of upholding civil society, especially against the infectious degeneracy of the French. In her *Remarks on a Speech by M. Dupont* (1792), More claims to have supported the French Revolution in its early stages, but she argues that now the revolutionaries had gone too far in their "mischiefs of irreligion" (2:397). Echoing the fears of Burke, she voices her concern about the fear of contamination by French principles and particularly warns about the prospect of the "same astonishing degeneracy in taste, principle, and practice" (2:402) of the French influencing British society. More describes the "fantastic phraseology of the new republic" as consisting of atheism and anarchy (2:404). She then asserts that this "phraseology" is "almost disgusting to sound taste as their doctrines are to sound morals" (2:404) and contrasts it with the sound taste and manners that result from Evangelical religion's influence on the affections. For More, then, the Evangelical scheme of religion, with its ability to subdue these dangerous passions, provides the answer to the threat of the French:

Their conduct has awfully illustrated a position, which is not the less sound for having been often controverted, that no degree of wit and learning, no progress in commerce, no advances in the knowledge of human nature, or in the embellishments of art, can ever thoroughly tame that savage, the *natural human*

heart, without RELIGION. The arts of social life may give sweetness to manners, and grace to language, and induce in some degree a respect for justice, truth, and humanity; but attainments derived from such inferior causes are no more than the semblance and the shadow of the qualities derived from pure Christianity. (2:401)

According to More, then, the example of the French Revolution proves that the other supplements that were relied on to regulate manners and civil society (wit, learning, progress in commerce, advances in knowledge, embellishments of art) can no longer be trusted. Like Burke, More argues that the regulation of civil society has to come from religion influencing manners, but that religion has to be “pure Christianity” (2:401), which works on the heart and thus is distinguished from other dangerous religions.

More’s emphasis on religion’s influence on manners is seen as early as 1788 in her *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* as well as in her later work, *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* (1791). More explains that the idea of *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* “was suggested by reading the king’s late excellent proclamation against irreligion and immorality” (2:248). In this work, she focuses on the manners of the upper class because of a trickle-down theory of manners, which was also voiced by other reformers: “Reformations must begin with the GREAT, or it will never be effectual. *Their* examples is the fountain whence the vulgar draw their habits, actions, and characters. To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream while it is being poisoned” (2:281).¹⁹ Since “imitation . . . and a desire to be in the fashion, govern the lower orders of mankind” (2:281),

¹⁹For example, “Belzebub” in the June 1789 *Gentleman’s Magazine* states: “When restraints of conscience and decency are neglected or despised by the great, then *freedom* and *pleasure*, or (to speak in a common language) *licentiousness*, will quickly spread among the people” (508).

More finds the reformation of the manners to be of the utmost importance. She also voices this concern in *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*, in which she decries the effect of neglecting religion and especially focuses on “the notorious effects of the decay of this religious principle, as it corrupts our mode of education, infects domestic conduct, spreads the contagion downwards among our servants and inferiors, and influences our general manners, habits, and conversations” (2:295).

Thus More’s approach was two-pronged: she strove not only to civilize and reform the poor through her work on her tracts and education, but she also wanted to reform the manners of the upper classes. Her solution to making religion a viable force lies in writing religion onto the body, making it an active part of the affections. She thus distinguishes between religion viewed as “merely an opinion or a sentiment” (2:307) or as “an act or performance versus religion as “a disposition, a habit, a temper” (2:307) and stresses that religion should change the heart. Religion should work toward “the discipline of the heart” (2:319), and it should be “deeply engraven” (2:321) and “deeply impressed on the heart” (2:321). Though by promoting a religious discourse on emotions she could be linked with Methodistical tendencies, her overall stress on religion being linked with manners helps to allay these fears.²⁰ The person that such religion creates, then, is not the raving, ill-mannered enthusiast of the lower classes but a proper citizen, for Evangelical religion brings “an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, and a course of self-control over those tyrannizing inclinations which have so natural a tendency to enslave the

²⁰Though the Blagdon controversy points to an incident where an association with Methodism was not avoided, the 1809 *Edinburgh Review* that I cited above as linking Methodism and enthusiasm to the lower classes also clearly distinguishes between Methodism and Evangelicalism. In this volume, More’s novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, is panned for its religious didacticism, but the Evangelicals are characterized as a “class of respectable persons” (145), and the novel is praised for “showing that it is very possible to be a good Christian, without degrading the human understanding to the trash and folly of Methodism” (151).

human heart” (2:319). Such religion is indeed a “disposition, a habit, a temper” (2:319) that internalizes the social values of subordination and restraint that characterize the proper bourgeois subject. It also further naturalizes the cultural dispositions and habits of the middle-class and their distinction from both the lower and the upper classes.

In 1797, Wilberforce, another leading voice of the Evangelicals, published his *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes, Contrasted With Real Christianity*. This work had a similar focus as More’s, for he also attacks “nominal Christians” and castigates the manners of the upper classes even as he spells out a formula for Christianity that depends on emotional suasion. Wilberforce likewise advocates the theory of trickle-down morality, believing that the vices of the higher orders will descend to the lower until finally “a mischievous uniformity of sentiments and manners and morals gradually diffuses itself throughout the whole community” (312). As with More, the example of the French Revolution is still fresh in his mind. He similarly believes that in France it was proven that “superior polish and refinement may well consist with a very large measure of depravity” (345) and that “the highest degrees of civilization and refinement are by no means inseparable from the most shocking depravity of morals” (345). The corrupted manners of the French upper classes led not only to “the public disavowal of every religious principle” (325) but also to a revolt of the lower classes. Again, in the wake of the French Revolution manners alone could no longer be relied on to maintain civil society.

Wilberforce, like More, was intent on defining true Christianity as governed by emotions and thus two of the key phrases from *Practical View* are “vital religion” (350) and “religious affections” (67). In defining his version of “true Christianity,” Wilberforce attacks the

external constraints of nominal Christianity: “Robbed of its best energies, religion now takes the form of a cold compilation of restraints and prohibitions” (151). He argues further: “It is indeed a most lamentable consequence of the practice of religion as a compilation of statutes, and not as an internal principle, that is soon comes to be considered as being conversant about actions, rather than about habits of mind” (155). As an external restraint religion does not function properly; rather it should work through the “habits of mind” that are inculcated through religion’s internal influence on the individual. Christianity should not attempt to “extinguish our natural desires but to bring them under just control. . . . It is the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity not to rest satisfied with superficial appearances, but to rectify the motives and purify the heart” (190). Religion must be internalized, written onto the body, to reform the individual effectively.

Wilberforce thus argues that a believer “must not only assent to the doctrine clearly, but feel it strongly” (50) and that those who assent to Christianity must have its doctrines “engraven deeply on the heart” (116) and should “feel their power in the affections and their transforming influence in their heart” (62). Such a transformation brings about the self-internalized restraint and subordination valued by the dominant class.

In engaging the affections in order to bring about proper restraint, however, Wilberforce also runs the risk of giving his religion the emotional appeal characteristic of Methodism. Though Wilberforce maintains throughout that “it is the religion of the affections that God particularly requires” (75), he also is careful to distinguish himself from other emotional religious fanatics: “We are ready to acknowledge also, without dispute, that the doctrines of religious affections and divine assistance have almost at all times been more or less disgraced by the false pretences and extravagant conduct of fanatics and enthusiasts” (70). The terms “fanatics” and “enthusiasts,” of

course, bring up the specter of unregulated Methodism and its influence on the lower classes, its too democratic appeal to emotions. By stressing the importance of manners being linked to “vital religion,” however, Wilberforce is able to craft a path between the raving lower-class Methodists and the debauched upper classes. He is able to salvage the emotional appeal of religion while hedging it with a distinction that separates it from the lower classes. For Wilberforce, then, the true standard for judging “religious affections” is not “by the degree of mere animal fervor, by ardors and transports and raptures” (75), which all smack of rank Methodism, but by the regulating influence of manners over the appetites. In promoting religion as a matter of manners, taste, and civilization, a matter concerned with internal restraint and discipline rather than external moral imperatives, Wilberforce and More were not only promoting a conservative ideology but were using the aestheticizing of religion to make their conservative ideology more firmly grounded by making it seem less coercive.

This overview of the rise of the Evangelical movement demonstrates the connection of the legitimizing discourses of civility and religion that occurs during the Romantic era. By combining emotional religion with manners and taste, the Evangelicals were able to respond to the fears of the Revolution by carving a path between the enthusiasm of the Methodists and the rational philosophy that could be linked to the Revolution. Moreover, their emphasis on “religious affections” also provided a crucial distinction in determining who had the authority to disseminate religious arguments. The connection of religion and matters of the aesthetic in the Evangelical movement points to the ways in which this combination would be popular with a middle-class audience. Through their efforts of castigating the upper classes and trying to civilize the lower classes the Evangelicals gained popularity with the increasingly powerful middle classes. More

importantly for this study, the rise of Evangelicalism demonstrates how the employment of matters of culture, such as taste and manners, became a means to make the political appear non-political. By making the restraint of their religion appear as a matter of culture rather than politics, the Evangelicals were able to make middle-class political ideology more attractive and persuasive. I contend that the religious and literary discourses of Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys similarly aestheticize social power and advocate the hegemonic middle-class values of restraint and subordination.

IV.

The Romantics' Religion

In his influential study of Romantic religion, *Natural Supernaturalism*, M.H. Abrams argues that Romantic writers participate in the secularizing of religion; in this study I will be exploring the extent to which Romantic writers participate in the aestheticizing of religion. I contend that this aestheticizing of social power that occurs in the religious discourse of the Evangelicals, and that gains popularity with the increasingly dominant middle class, is important for understanding the religious discourse of the literary Romantics for a number of reasons. As John Brenkman argues in *Culture and Domination*: “Art . . . constitutes itself *within* and *against* the forms of domination that organize society in which the work is produced and the one in which it is received” (24). One of the most conspicuous forms of domination in the Romantic era would be religion. Thus, by uncritically accepting at face value Romantic authors' claims for a religious discourse that functions in a purified aesthetic realm is to fall into the trap of what Jerome McGann calls “the Romantic ideology.” In other words, rather than assigning the religious discourse in their writings an automatic political radicalism as many critics have done, I will

investigate the ways in which their use of religion is complicated by the social practices of religion in their era.²¹ To use Raymond Williams' terms: "It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture" (114). That is, even when using religion as an "oppositional form," one that attempts to present a more radical view of society, these writers nevertheless tie themselves to the hegemonic use of religion by conservatives, such as Burke, More, and Wilberforce. Since, as I will show, the religious discourse of these authors is likewise connected to notions of literary value, taste, manners, and civilization, they become involved in the same aestheticizing of social power that their conservative opponents promote.

I would also point out at the outset, however, that though I am focusing on the ties between "radical" religious discourse and hegemonic religious discourse, I do not want to discount totally the possibility of authors going beyond these ties and using religion for subversive means. As Williams cautions: "It would be wrong to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by the hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least significant breaks beyond them" (114). Eagleton, furthermore, also sees the aesthetic as "radically double-edged" (9), for it not only "provides a central constituent of bourgeois ideology" but "it also marks an emphasis on the self-determining nature of human powers and capacities which becomes . . . the

²¹I am referring here not only to critics such as Frye, Abrams, and Bloom, but also to more historically-oriented critics such as Thompson, Scrivener, and Cameron. In this argument I am also building on the work of Stephen Goldsmith who focuses more narrowly on the "aestheticization of prophecy and apocalypse" (109) and examines the assumption that "the 'aesthetic' dimension of apocalypse is necessarily linked to an oppositional politics" (109). Goldsmith thus contends: "In studies of apocalypse and literature, it is this semiautomatic tendency to assume that apocalyptic literary form coincides with the needs of social protest that calls for reconsideration" (109). Goldsmith's work on the aesthetic nature of the literary form of the apocalypse is especially useful for this study, but in this study I want to examine the broader connections of religious discourse to the aesthetic.

anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility” (9). It is this contradictory nature of the aesthetic and its complex connection to religious discourse that I will explore in the study.

The example of the Evangelicals and the concept of “religious affections” serves as a good base for beginning to study religious discourse in the Romantic era, for the intersections of the discourses of taste, manners, and religion that reverberate throughout the writings of such leading Evangelicals as Wilberforce and More are paradigmatic of the ways in these discourses changed throughout the nineteenth century. A useful model that will be employed in examining the intersections of discourses is found in Peter de Bolla’s notion of a discursive network. De Bolla contends that it is this network which “articulates the ‘real’” and “allows and controls the possibilities for representation” (7). He explains further: “This network is made up of a number of discrete discourses, which interact, sometimes without hostility, at other times with considerable violence, with each other” (7). De Bolla argues that proposing a network of discourses and defining the different types of discourses “allows us to note the interrelations between discrete discourses at a specific time, and in the service of a particular analysis” (10), but it also “allows us to note that the same discursive network might look very different, the connections and distances between discourses may differ enormously, from another perspective, both from our position, and within historical context” (10). Robert Jones sums up the usefulness of this model: “What is persuasive in this model of the network is its capacity to accommodate not only a diversity of discourses, but a difference of reading and function. With the interconnections of discourses conceived as an open-ended network, de Bolla’s analysis allows for different points of access and assessment within the same framework of discourses and texts” (49). Though de Bolla’s work is

on the discourse of the sublime and Jones' work is on the discourses on gender and taste, they provide useful models for explaining the connections between the discourses of religion and culture, how they become altered, and how they connect writers as divergent as William Wilberforce and William Blake. The intersections of the discourses of religion, culture, and literature thus become important in rethinking how representation becomes a highly complex matter that demands analysis of the available discourses and how they can be read.

Finally, one specific discursive connection that is vital to my study is the interrelation of aesthetics and religion.²² The Romantics' religious discourse does not simply mimic the Evangelicals stress on manners, taste, and religion; rather, the connection of their religious theories to their aesthetic theories functions in promoting the same values of bourgeois ideology—self-imposed restraint and subordination—that the Evangelicals promote. I agree with Eagleton's thesis that the aesthetic object becomes a means to model and reconcile the competing claims of bourgeois society, the autonomous nature of the individual as well as the need for that individual to be reconciled to the unified will of society. What Eagleton does not recognize, however, and what this study will explore is how these Romantic authors' aesthetic theories are intimately connected to their religious theories. Examining this connection will also reveal how these authors' religion and aesthetics promote the hegemonic values of the middle class. This study, then, begins with a closer and more immediate comparison between the emphasis on manners and taste in Anna Barbauld and the Evangelicals. I proceed next to analyze the

²²Throughout this study I will be referring to "the aesthetic" primarily as the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology that Eagleton defines. This broader definition of the aesthetic includes the importance of manners and taste in promoting middle-class values—the aestheticizing of social power—and thus includes an ideological aspect. When I speak of writers' "aesthetics" or their "aesthetic theories," I am speaking more specifically of their artistic or literary theories.

connections between aesthetics and religion in William Blake and Percy Shelley, arguing that the similarity between their writings and the Evangelicals' religious discourse is manifested not so much through an emphasis on manners and taste but in their modeling of hegemonic values through their religious aesthetics. Finally, I move to a consideration of Mary Shelley to see how her attempt to separate the aesthetic from religion ends up privileging its civilizing influence in a manner similar to the Evangelicals.

V.

Chapter Summaries

As a member of Rational Dissent, Anna Barbauld would appear to be an unlikely candidate for advocating the Anglican Evangelicals' "religious affections" and conservative ideology. As I argue, however, Barbauld also emphasizes proper religious emotions and similarly grounds her religious discourse in an emphasis on manners and taste that is characteristic of the aesthetic. By analyzing how Barbauld structures her religious discourse on the aesthetic, I reveal the contradictions within this discourse, which professes radical aims of equality even as it preaches the virtues of subordination and self-regulated restraint that is characteristic of conservatives such as the Anglican Evangelicals.

My discussion of Barbauld touches upon the deep connection between aesthetics and religion in eighteenth-century thought and demonstrates how these connections particularly impinge upon the categories of the beautiful and the sublime. My chapter on William Blake further interrogates these concerns. Whereas Barbauld and the Evangelicals attack the rational religion of deism by delineating proper religious emotions, Blake takes a different tack. He ignores the role of sensory perceptions and emotions and highlights instead the role of the sublime

imagination. By emphasizing the importance of the imagination, which he figures as the Divine Body of Jesus in *Jerusalem*, his religious aesthetics promote an ideal object that models the universalizing aims of bourgeois ideology.

The connection of aesthetics and religion in Blake's works, including his redefinition of the sublime, leads to a consideration of Percy Shelley, who counters the sublime terror of orthodox Christianity by advocating the beauty of Greek religion. Like Barbauld and the Evangelicals, he promotes a religion that is an attempt to ensure gradual, peaceful reform that stems from a cultured elite and that will prevent the lower class from leading a violent revolution. I will examine Shelley's prose, tracing his concerns about violent revolution and demonstrating how they are linked to class politics. I then show how he turns to the Greek religion of beauty as a gentle, yet coercive, means to lead people willingly to gradual political reform. Finally, I will connect these strands in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*, which provides a literary model that manifests his desire to ensure gradual reform through the religion of beauty.

Percy Shelley's Hellenism, in later works such as in *Hellas*, points toward an emphasis on the idea of civilization as a means to restrain revolutionary impulses, but a fuller development of this idea appears in Mary Shelley's novel, *The Last Man* (1826). Shelley's novel, however, also brings us back to a closer connection with Evangelical religious discourse that Barbauld's writings demonstrated. The connection of religion and civilization pervades the writings of Evangelical missionary societies and helped provide the ideological justification for Britain's imperial role in "civilizing" the heathen world. I read Shelly's novel in the context of such texts that utilize the notion of civilization to normalize middle-class values, and I argue that she promotes an emphasis on civilization that advances a similar ideological agenda. However, unlike the other authors in

this study, Shelley attempts to define the aesthetic in a more modern sense, such as promoted by Matthew Arnold, as an autonomous discourse of higher culture that replaces religion's role in society. Rather than aestheticizing religion, then, Shelley sacralizes the aesthetic. In doing so, however, she promotes an aesthetic imperialism that mimics the civilizing influence of Christianity as promoted by the Evangelicals.

Chapter One

The “Devotional Taste” of Dissent: Anna Barbauld and the Aesthetics of Religion

“The great secret of religious education . . . consists in training young men to an habitual interior restraint, an early government of the affections, a course of self-control over those tyrannizing inclinations which have so natural a tendency to enslave the human heart”

–Hannah More, “An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World” (2:319)

“As a principle regulating our conduct, religion is a habit, and like all other habits, of slow growth, and gaining strength only by repeated exertions. But it may be likewise considered as a taste, an affair of sentiment and feeling, and in this sense it is properly called devotion.”

–Anna Barbauld, “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, and on Sects and Establishments” (2:232)

“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.”

–Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (6)

In her “Address to the Opposer of the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts” (1790), Anna Barbauld calls for greater toleration of Dissenters by downplaying their theological difference with the establishment and stressing instead their similarities. She contends that Dissenters “wish not the name of dissenter to be pronounced, except in theological researches and assemblies” (2:362); rather, she says that it is those in the establishment who “make our dissent our prominent feature” (2:361-62). Since the Dissenters have been thus stigmatized, however, Barbauld urges them to capitalize on this forced difference and to change this “mark of separation” created by the establishment from a “disgraceful stigma” into an “honourable distinction” (2:365). Criticism of Barbauld’s work, both in her time and ours, has rightly focused on this “mark of separation” and has read her texts within the context of nonconformity. In fact, recent criticism almost exclusively treats of Barbauld’s relationship within the Dissenting community and has greatly contributed to a better understanding of Barbauld’s writing as

well as the nature of Rational Dissent itself.¹ In this chapter, however, I will focus on how Barbauld's desire to transform the "mark of separation" into one of distinction reveals the connection between her religious discourse and the more conservative religious discourse of the Anglican Evangelicals.² By demonstrating how Barbauld similarly grounds her religious discourse in an emphasis on taste and manners that is characteristic of the aesthetic, I reveal contradictions within this discourse, which professes radical aims of equality even as it preaches the virtues of subordination. As Isaac Kramnick suggests, such contradictions are characteristic of late eighteenth-century bourgeois radicalism:

On the one hand, it sought to liberate men and women from all forms of restraint, political, economic, and religious. On the other hand, bourgeois radicalism preached order, discipline, and subordination Bourgeois radicalism directed its emancipatory message to the aristocracy, its

¹William McCarthy's "A 'High-Minded Christian Lady'" provides an overview of the critical reception of Barbauld and demonstrates how both criticism and praise of Barbauld was attached to her status as a Dissenter. Daniel White examines the "familial mode of literary production characteristic of the Aikins and the national Dissenting community" (512) and argues that through this means of literary production they are able to create a "Dissenting public sphere" (513) that disseminates Dissenting values to the nation. In "A Regency Prophecy," William Keach sees in Barbauld a "progressive Dissenting ideology that motivates all her works" (577), and his "Barbauld, Romanticism, and the Survival of Dissent" examines the "distinctiveness of Barbauld's position within the Warrington milieu" (49), that is, as a woman within the Dissenting community. McCarthy, in "'We Hoped the *Woman* Was Going to Appear'" also examines Barbauld's position as a female Dissenter and contends that because of this status "Barbauld is ambivalent in her relationship to Dissent; although she resents its self-denial, rationalism, and emotional low temperature, she also identifies with its deprivations at the hands of the Establishment" (128).

²R.K. Webb's recent essay on rational piety also stresses the importance of regarding Dissent as having a "symbiotic relationship with the orthodoxy" (293), but he does not focus on the implications of the cultural politics of this relationship. Marlon Ross in "The Woman Writer and the Tradition of Dissent" does compare Barbauld with a member of the religious establishment, Hannah More, but he does so in regard to their similar "position of dissent" as women writers engaging in political discourse. He especially focuses on Barbauld's status of "double dissent" (93). She is not only a "political female" but a "female within a nonconforming community deprived of civil liberties" (93).

authoritarian one to the poor. (34)

I contend that such a double-edged message is inherent to the bourgeois radicalism of Rational Dissent of Priestley and Barbauld because of their intimate connection of religion and literature. More precisely, I will trace how this contradictory message of Barbauld's religion derives from the contradictory nature of the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, upon which Barbauld structures her definition of religion and literature.³ I will argue that the "honourable distinction" of middle-class Dissent that Barbauld establishes is a distinction of culture that underscores the Dissenters' superiority and establishes an exclusionary discourse that limits participation in religion and literature to those with sufficient cultural capital. Barbauld's religious discourse evinces a radical, nonconformist belief in the rights of man, but it also emphasizes taste and manners and thus is limited to the cultured middle-class and preaches the self-regulated restraint characteristic of conservatives such as the Anglican Evangelicals.

I.

Barbauld's desire to transform the Dissenters' "mark of separation" into a badge of distinction derives from the Dissenters' sense of community, which resulted from their exclusion from active political life by the Test and Corporation Acts. These Acts galvanized the Dissenters into a close-knit community and gave them the impetus to

³In *Misogynous Economies*, Laura Mandell maintains that Barbauld was able to develop "an aesthetic of her own, contrary to the emerging dominant one of high Romanticism, because of her religious beliefs as a Dissenter—in particular because she was intellectually engaged with Joseph Priestley" (131). Mandell's chapter does discuss how religion informs Barbauld's aesthetics, but she distinguishes Barbauld's aesthetic from "the aesthetic" that "promotes bourgeois hegemony" (155). Thus, though she documents a "crucial sense of superiority" (131) in Barbauld's poetics, I will unfold how this "sense of superiority" is class-based.

legitimize their role in society. As Kramnick argues, their very “marginality” from the political sphere also led to their “radical and innovative role,” for “the Dissenters themselves sensed that their creative role in English life was related to their exclusion from the mainstream” (49). In particular, this exclusion fostered a greater participation in the literary spheres as Dissenters “resorted to literature and publishing as sources of income because many other professions were denied to them by the Tests” (Philp 37). This investment in literature, however, also worked in other compensatory ways. As Paul Keen argues: “Debarred from politics by their faith . . . Dissenters discovered in literary achievements both a form of self-legitimation and a vehicle for promoting political change. They could establish their credentials as citizens by demonstrating their abilities and their integrity within the literary” (38). This sense of legitimation is precisely what drives Barbauld’s “Address,” for she argues that the transformation of the “mark of separation” from a “disgraceful stigma” to an “honourable distinction” depends, in part, on the recognition of Dissenters’ achievements in literature: “If, by our attention to literature, and that ardent love of liberty which you are pretty ready to allow us, we deserve esteem, we shall enjoy it If our writers are solid, elegant, or nervous, you will read our books and imbibe our sentiments, and even your preachers will not disdain, occasionally, to *illustrate* our morality” (365). Barbauld sees literature as way for Dissenters to enact changes through society, not through overt political actions but through influencing public opinion. She also attempts to legitimize Dissenting literature by pointing out that it comes from the middle class, “that class of community which has ever been the source of manners, of population, and of wealth” (2:366). The marginalized community of Dissent thus gains its

cultural authority from its middle-class status, and their literature derives its authority to influence public opinion from this status. The Dissenters' exclusion from the dominant class forced them "to construct an alternative culture" (Davidoff and Hall 99), but I want to suggest that in doing so, it also led them to construct "culture" as the alternative to the specific political actions from which they were debarred.

The Dissenters' marginal status in society, which brought about an intense sense of community, has brought about comparisons of their sense of community and its mission to the ideals of the public sphere; these comparisons, however, do not take into account fully the exclusionary nature of the public sphere itself nor the close connection between the literary and the public spheres, which to some extent heightens this exclusionary nature. For example, I agree with Lucy Newlyn's assessment that Barbauld's "understanding of the public sphere" was shaped by the Test and Corporation Acts and the necessity for Dissenters "to assert their political agency by alternative means" (136). Newlyn, however, in comparing Barbauld to another writer of dissenting background, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, contends that Barbauld's writings "followed a pattern of steadily widening and maturing political commitment," and thus she was able "to appeal both to the coterie audience of Dissenting intellectuals . . . and to the mass audience by which she was subsequently acclaimed" (137). Similarly, Daniel White sees the exclusion of Test and Corporation acts fostering a "Dissenting public sphere," which he sees as "a sub-category of the classical public sphere . . . that exerted critical pressure from within" (513). White argues that this "sphere of intervention was necessarily an intermediate space between the private realm and the public state, and the legal status of nonconformity thus gave added

impetus to their engagement with public opinion” (513). These readings both take into account Barbauld’s investment in literature as a means to influence public opinion beyond the political sphere from which Dissenters were excluded, but they also grant a direct translation of Barbauld’s more radical politics into this literary/public sphere, thus ignoring the exclusionary nature of these spheres.

Both the literary and public spheres arise out of a conflict among many competing voices, and it is this contested nature that leads to their exclusionary basis. As Geoff Eley points out, the public sphere developed from a conflict, which in part, was class-based: “The emergence of a bourgeois public sphere was never defined solely by the struggle against absolutism and traditional authority. Also, it necessarily addressed the problem of popular containment as well” (306). Indeed, the formation of the bourgeois public sphere necessarily entailed a type of cultural elitism, for the carving out of this sphere by the bourgeois public involved excluding alternative voices. As Nancy Fraser puts it,

. . . the elaboration of a distinctive culture of civil society and of an associated public sphere was implicated in the process of bourgeois class formation; its practices and ethos were markers of “distinction” in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense, ways of defining an emerging elite, setting it off from the older aristocratic elites it was intent on displacing, on the one hand, and from the various popular and plebeian strata it aspired to rule, on the other.

(6)

The ideal of the bourgeois public sphere is constituted on the exclusionary basis of class (as well as gender), but this sense of exclusion was further heightened in the 1790s by the

public sphere's close connection with the literary sphere. In fact, Keen maintains that the crisis of literature in the 1790s indeed comes from the "proximity of the literary and the public spheres" (7) and the "ideal of literature as a public sphere" was "generally associated with the reformist middle class, and particularly with Dissenters" (38). Since these reformers viewed literature as the "engine of social change," they became particularly concerned about who was admitted into this literary sphere and indeed what sort of people were being influenced by their writings. Keen thus would see Barbauld's investment in literature rather than politics as part of a larger shift, "a shift in focus from literature to authors, and a redefinition of politics as a struggle for professional distinction (the status of an author) rather than for national agency (revolution, government reform, the rights of man)" (8). Though Keen's model is useful for exploring the exclusionary tendencies of both the literary and the public sphere and helps demonstrate how Barbauld's concern for professional distinction subverts her ideas for reform, I want to explore how Barbauld's concern for cultural distinction works against some of her more radical ideals and how her religious discourse is connected to the ideals of both the literary and the public sphere.

In her "Critical Essay on the Tatler, Spectator, etc." (1804), Barbauld outlines the Dissenting view of the importance of the literary sphere: "Books make a silent and gradual, but a sure change in our ideas and opinions; and as new authors are continually taking possession of the public mind, and old ones fall into disuse, new associations insensibly take place, and shed their influence unperceived over our taste, our manners, and our morals" (83). Books make such a gradual influence by working in a reciprocal

relationship with manners and taste: “Books influence manners, and manners, in return, influence the taste for books” (83). Similarly, in “On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing” (1810), Barbauld states that novels “have been moulded upon the manners of the age,—and, in return, have influenced the manners of succeeding generations by the sentiments they have infused and the sensibilities they have excited” (1:1-2). Barbauld closes this essay by pointing out literature’s importance in influencing public opinion: “Let me make the novels of a country, and let who will make the systems” (1:62). For Barbauld, literature has a more profound influence than the political system from the Dissenters were excluded, for literature shapes public opinion. It does so, however, through the coercive nature of the aesthetic.

Since literature’s influence is so great, however, it becomes even more important to define who is qualified to disseminate this discourse. Barbauld is particularly concerned about the novel because of its popular appeal. For example, in “On Romances: An Imitation,” Barbauld explains the popularity of romances by arguing that they appeal to “the generality of readers” (2:172) through their effect on the emotions, for “few can reason, but all can feel; and many who cannot enter into an argument may yet listen to a tale” (2:172). Novels are popular because the author “relates events to which all are liable, and applies to passions which all have felt” (2:173). Since novels appeal to more common passions, “every one can relish them,” she contrasts that appeal with the emotional appeal of the poetry of Homer, which only a select few can appreciate: “The attraction of the magnet is only exerted upon similar particles; and to taste the beauties of Homer, it is requisite to partake his fire” (2:173). In “On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing,”

she again contrasts a taste in poetry with the more general pleasures of the “humble novel”: “Poetry requires in the reader a certain elevation of mind and a practised ear. It is seldom relished unless a taste be formed for it pretty early” (1:47). The taste for poetry is self-regulating according to class, for as Barbauld argues in “The Rich and the Poor,” taste itself can only be cultivated by those with access to money and education (48). The popularity of the novel, however, which is based on its appeal to a more general audience needs to be regulated. Barbauld’s essay on novel writing, which serves as a critical introduction to her edition of British novels, is such an effort to regulate this literary discourse. She highlights this point near the end of her introduction: “Some perhaps may think that too much importance has been already given to a subject so frivolous, but a discriminating taste is no where more called for than with regard a species of books which every body reads” (1:62-63). Her essay, and indeed her choice of novels, is indeed a way to establish not only her status as a professional author but also a way to shape the taste for novels. These examples from Barbauld’s literary criticism exemplify the exclusionary nature of the literary sphere that Keen describes. However, Keen does not point out the connection to religion. Barbauld sees religion having a similar influence on public opinion through its influence on the manners and taste. She thus views both literature and religion as powerful discourses that must be regulated. In attempting to regulate religion, however, she creates a discourse that has a class bias and focus on restraint that conforms to the hegemonic values of conservative religious discourse.

II.

Just as Barbauld realizes that novels appeal to a mass of readers, so she feels that

religion can appeal to large group of people through its similar emotional appeal. The problem for Barbauld is that both novels and lower-class religions appeal to the emotions. She wants to distance her literary and religious discourses from their emotional appeal while still retaining a more refined emotional appeal. In "Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, and on Sects and Establishments" (1775), Barbauld concedes that "as a system of opinion" the "only faculty" that "has to do with" religion "is reason" (2:232), but the focus of her essay is not on the rational aspects of religion but on its emotional appeal. Since Barbauld's focus is on the devotional aspects of religion, it is perhaps natural that she should concentrate on feelings. In fact, rather than being an aberration from Dissenting tradition, Barbauld's concept of devotion goes back to Phillip Doddridge, who also championed the importance of feelings.⁴ Unlike Doddridge, however, Barbauld uses the importance of feelings to highlight a class-based distinction between her religion and those of the lower-class dissenters. Indeed, Barbauld's purpose for emphasizing the emotional aspects of religion mirrors those that the Anglican Evangelicals would later argue for. Proper religious emotions for Barbauld become a means for defining a middle-class religion that is distinct from a too rational religion that is ineffective in influencing people and from a too enthusiastic religion that is too democratic in its appeal and grants license

⁴For an overview of Doddridge's concept of religious feelings and devotion as well as John Wesley's debt to him, see Isabel Rivers (esp. 136-38, 151-2). Rivers points out the both Doddridge's and Wesley's emphasis on feelings and devotion "aimed at reaching a wide popular audience" (151); I see Barbauld's concept of religious devotion and feelings as constructing a much narrower audience. Rivers argues that Doddridge was not as popular a figure in Barbauld's time because after his death because there was "a widespread attack by Arian Dissenters or Unitarians on those evangelical doctrines which were the basis of his concept of practical religion" (151). Webb, however, demonstrates a tradition of "Unitarian devotion" (310) that extends well into the nineteenth century. Doddridge was intimately connected with the Aikin family, and Barbauld's niece, Lucy Aikin, describes him as a "friend and tutor" (Rodgers 52) of Barbauld's father, John.

rather than restraint. Barbauld feels that she needs to concentrate on the feelings and sentiments of religion because though religion's "tenets have been defended with sufficient zeal," its "affections languish" and "thus the spirit of devotion is certainly at a very low ebb among us" and has "even fallen into a certain contempt" (2:233). This contrast between the devotional spirit and the religious affections, which are both internal, and religion's tenets, which are external, anticipates the same contrast that establishment conservatives would stress. For example, the Evangelicals stress the "religion of the heart" and "religious affections" to restrain the upper and lower-classes through a self-regulating, internal control rather than external statutes and regulations.

Also, Barbauld, like the Evangelicals, recognizes the power of religious affections and the importance of containing them. She concedes that religious affections are "apt to run into strange excesses," for she argues that if they are "directed by a melancholy or enthusiastic faith" they "are often too strong for a weak head, or a delicate frame" and thus "have been excluded from religious worship by many people of real piety" (2:233). People of "real piety," those of the moderate Arian Dissent, wanted to exclude religious affection to avoid the excesses of the Methodists' enthusiasm or the Calvinists' melancholy, but Barbauld views such exclusion as harmful:

It is the character of the present age to allow little to sentiment, and all the warm and generous emotions are treated as romantic by the supercilious brow of cold philosophy. The man of science, with an air of superiority, leaves them to some florid declaimer who professes to work upon the passions of the lower class, where they are so debased by noise and

nonsense, that it is no wonder if they move disgust in those of elegant and better informed minds. (2:233-34)

In Barbauld's view, the men of science, such as Joseph Priestley, have been so engrossed in developing the "cold philosophy" of Rational Dissent that they have gone too far in the other direction and have rejected the importance of religious affections. Consequently, the emotional appeal of religion has been co-opted by lower-class preachers, such as the Methodists, who debase them. Barbauld is trying to carve a path between the extremes of rationalism and emotionalism, attempting to salvage the emotional appeal of religion yet making it more refined to cater to a middle-class audience. Barbauld's definition of religious affections thus incorporates a doctrinal distinction (moderate Arian Dissent as opposed to the more severe Calvinism), but it also incorporates a class distinction. The "elegant and better informed minds" belong to those of "real piety" while the excess of "enthusiasm" and "melancholy" are associated with the religions of the lower class. Doctrinal distinctions are elided into class distinctions, since her project of refining the religious affections becomes one of cultural definition.

Barbauld also utilizes the notion of refinement to create a distinction between the "passions of the lower classes" and the more refined "feelings" and "affections" that serve as the proper basis of religious devotion. She distances herself from the more debased religious passions of the lower classes by contrasting these passions with a devotion that is "the child of more exalted feelings than base minds can enter into" (2:334). Throughout the essay, Barbauld limits her discussion of proper religious devotion to these "more exalted feelings," which she also refers to as the "finer feelings" (2:232)

and the “finer affections” (2:242). Barbauld wants to define more narrowly what emotions are proper to devotion because she wants to limit the potential damage from leveling sentiments found in appealing to emotions. By writing religion onto the body and by giving precedence to emotions over reason, Barbauld opens up the egalitarian nature of the aesthetic: as a discourse of the body, it is capable of removing “artificial” distinctions and highlighting instead “natural” similarities. Indeed, she argues that religious affections are part of the body, that they “rise and fall with the pulse” (2:232) and that it is “safer to trust” these “genuine feelings” which are “implanted by the God of nature rather than to any metaphysical subtleties” (2:239). These feelings appear to be natural and available to all, but by further limiting what are “genuine” feelings and by distinguishing passions from properly religious affections, Barbauld’s religious discourse works to assert class divisions rather than breaking them down.⁵

In this essay, Barbauld also states that religion’s seat is in the “imagination and the passions” (2:232). Her inclusion of the imagination signals another crucial distinction she makes between debased passions and refined affections and links her religion to the development of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Indeed, Barbauld’s structuring of a contrast between the passions and the imagination is similar to Priestley’s argument in his lecture “Of the Pleasures of Imagination in general, and of the standard of Good Taste,” which was first delivered at Warrington Academy in 1762. Priestley distinguishes the “stronger *passions* and emotions” from the “finer feelings which constitute the *pleasures*

⁵This contradictory nature of the aesthetic at work here can be related to Eagleton’s insistence that the aesthetic is “radically double-edged” (9).

of the imagination,” which he considers the “refined pleasures” (125). Priestley, citing Kames as his source, considers “feeling, tasting, and smelling” as “sensations of the grosser kind” and “seeing and hearing as something of a more refined and spiritual nature” (126). Though Priestley did have a formidable influence on Barbauld, her (and Priestley’s) distinction seems to go back further to Joseph Addison’s definition of the pleasures of the imagination. Addison singles out the sight as the most refined sense, for “it is the Sense which furnishes the Imagination with its Ideas” (3:536), and thus the pleasures of the imagination arise from “visible Objects” either when they are “actually in our view” (3:537) or when called into the mind by objects of art. Addison is thus able to argue that “The Pleasures of the Imagination . . . are not so gross as those of Sense, nor so refined as those of Understanding” (3:537). The imagination is a type of mediator: it is dependent on sense perceptions but is also able to bring about a pleasure that is not fully tied to the physical nature of these perceptions. Therefore, the pleasures of the imagination are physical and yet not fully physical and thus can be characterized as finer feelings and affections. As Michael McKeon points out, in Addison’s description of the imagination, which Barbauld follows, we have

a recognizable germ of the modern idea of the aesthetic: a particular sort of “pleasure” akin to that of sense experience yet detached from the material implications of cognition and activity. The pleasures of the imagination mimetically capitalize on the empirical powers of sense perception while avoiding the physical . . . escaping both crude literalism of empirical epistemology and the risks attendant upon physical experience. (23)

For Barbauld, the “risks attendant upon physical experience” and pure empiricism come from defining religious emotions that are too available, which would link her emphasis on religious emotions with the lower-class Methodists. Barbauld’s religious devotion, since it depends on the imagination, is able to “refine the affections from every thing gross, low, and selfish,” (2:246), the purely bodily sensations. By hinging her definition of devotion upon these finer affections, Barbauld is able to create a rationale that opens the door for religious emotions while still excluding the debased passions of the lower classes.⁶ As Pierre Bourdieu argues, this very contrast between certain types of feelings is inscribed with class difference:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venial, servile—in a word, natural—enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred spheres of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences. (7)

By hinging her definition of proper religious emotions on the distinction between passions and affections, Barbauld inscribes her religion with a cultural and social distinction. In fact,

⁶Mandell, commenting on the flame imagery in Barbauld’s work and, in particular, her Hymn VI, “Pious Friendship,” also notes that for Barbauld “religious sentiment refines rather than extinguishes sensuous passions” (*Misogynous* 143). Mandell, however, does not focus on the contrast between feelings and passions; rather, she contrasts “physical passion” and “passive physical pleasure,” the latter of which she sees as “encouraging the psyche to revert to a melancholy, masochistic, feudal subservience” (143). It should also be noted that Addison himself connects the ideas of imagination and devotion. David Morris argues: “Imagination and devotion, for Addison, have much in common. Inevitably they are found to impinge upon each other” (132). See especially *Spectator* 201 and 465.

her concept of religious devotion is informed not so much by the doctrines of Rational Dissent as by the religion of culture.

In “Devotional Taste,” Barbauld highlights even more clearly the social differences inscribed in these distinctions of emotions by invoking the concept of taste. Her thesis is that religion “may likewise be considered as a taste, an affair of sentiment and feeling, and in this sense it is properly called devotion” (2:232). She goes on to argue that religion has “its seat in the imagination and the passions, and it has its source in that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful, by which we taste the charms of poetry and other compositions that address our finer feelings” (2:232). She thus creates a distinction between these types of emotions, but she also declares that these differences are discernible only to those who have the proper taste:

Those who want this taste, want a sense, a part of their nature, and should not presume to judge of feelings to which they must ever be strangers. No one pretends to be a judge in poetry or the fine arts, who has not both a natural and a cultivated relish for them; and shall the narrow-minded children of the earth, absorbed in low pursuits dare to treat as visionary, objects which they have never made themselves acquainted with? (2:234)

By establishing taste as both “natural” and “cultivated,” Barbauld is able to curb the potential egalitarian effect of religious affections. Instead of religious affections being natural and available to all, proper religious devotion can only derive from specific feelings, which can only be discerned by those with a correct taste. Those that lack this taste are considered unnatural by Barbauld, for they actually “want a sense” and a “part of

their nature.” Barbauld feels that those who do not have this correct taste should be silent in the discussion of religious devotion, but she herself is silent about how this taste can be acquired. She explains that is not “her present object” in this essay “to vindicate the pleasures of devotion to those who have neither taste nor knowledge about them” (2:234). The pleasures of devotion, understandable only to those who have the proper taste, become, like taste, the unexplainable yet distinguishing mark of the cultivated, and as Barbauld argues in “On Education”: “There will always be an essential difference between a human being cultivated and uncultivated” (2:316). Taste becomes the marker of this difference. Though her appeal to emotions may appear to make religion more accessible, it actually makes it less so, for these emotions are limited to those who possess the “honourable distinction” of taste.

Barbauld’s limiting of religious emotions to those with correct taste belongs to the eighteenth century discourses of aesthetics and religion, which, according to Martin Battestin, are “interdependent” (1). Writers such as Addison, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Akenside, Kames, Cooper, and Alison, were all influenced by empiricism to some extent, and all see the importance of aesthetic appreciation as leading a person to a contemplation of the deity. Recent studies by McKeon and Ronald Paulson, however, locate the rise of aesthetic discourse in empiricism and thus in opposition to religious discourse. McKeon traces this opposition back to the seventeenth century and argues that “the decline of religion . . . is not only coincident with but also a function of the rise of the aesthetic” (37), since the secularization of religion leads to “the ‘replacement’ of religious by literary spirituality” (36). McKeon finds that art’s “assumption of those tasks that were

traditionally performed by religious belief and experience” stems not only from “an internalization of divine as human creativity” but also is “indebted to empiricist epistemology,” which insists that “the several spheres of discourse are more fully separable” (49) than was previously thought. Paulson follows McKeon and argues that “English aesthetics began as an antitheology” whose “origins were in the philosophical twins of empiricism and heterodoxy” (x). Paulson connects the rise of aesthetics with the rise of empiricism and traces how deism’s removal of an immanent deity places more focus on the believer and ends up replacing the deity with aesthetic appreciation: “Aesthetics is religion empirically challenged, belief turned into an appreciation of beauty” (7). Though I would agree with McKeon and Paulson that the epistemological crisis of the eighteenth century that brought with it an emphasis on empiricism did greatly affect the discourses of religion and aesthetics, especially in the way the emphasis on feelings derived from the internal sense model could serve as a means of democratizing or limiting these discourses, I would contend that at the end of the eighteenth century aesthetic discourse became a means to support and legitimize religious discourse rather than to replace it. In Barbauld’s writings, religion and aesthetics are not competing discourses but rather complementary. Barbauld does not replace religion with literary spirituality; rather, she legitimizes her religious discourse through emphasizing the aesthetic discourse of the literary. Aesthetic appreciation does not replace the deity for Barbauld; instead she founds her concept of the deity on aesthetic appreciation.

The complementary nature of the discourses of religion and aesthetics, and especially Barbauld’s connection of poetic taste to religious taste is found not only in

“Devotional Taste” but also in her “Essay on Akenside’s Poem on the *Pleasures of the Imagination*.” In “Devotional Taste,” the “relish” for poetry and the fine arts, which she describes as both natural and cultivated, and that is unavailable to the “narrow-minded children of the earth” who are “absorbed in low pursuits” is patterned after the aesthetics of another Dissenter whom she admired, Mark Akenside.⁷ In *Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), Akenside argues that God imprints on people aesthetic biases (1:84) that correspond to the “claims / Of social life” (1:80-81) that the “diff’rent labours” of society “urge” (1:81). Therefore, Akenside similarly argues that since the “unfeeling vulgar” (3:439) are “plung’d in sordid cares” (3:438), they are unable to enjoy the aesthetic “bliss” that the “well-tun’d heart enjoys” (3:437). In addition to natural differences arising from the individual aesthetic biases implanted by God, Akenside also stresses the importance of culture in improving one’s aesthetic perception: “But tho’ heaven / In every-breast hath sown these early seeds / Of love and admiration, yet in vain, / Without fair culture’s kind parental aid” (3:537-38). The differences in natural “biases” for aesthetic appreciation are multiplied by cultural differences, which leads Akenside to then conclude: “Such and so various are the taste of men” (3:567). Though there are these varieties of taste, it is only those special few with both natural and cultivated taste who can have an aesthetic appreciation of God: “Thus the men / Whom nature’s works can charm, with God himself / Hold converse; grow familiar day by day, / With his conceptions; act upon his plan; / And

⁷ Akenside was so devoted to religion in his childhood that he had an inkstand fitted to his pew so that he could take notes during the sermons at the Unitarian chapel that his family attended (Dix 14). Also, he became close friends with Doddridge (Dix 16), who is one of the most important writers on devotion in the Dissenting tradition.

form to his, the relish of their souls" (3:629-33). Barbauld, like Akenside, tries to stem the egalitarianism of the internal model derived from empiricism by describing the differences in aesthetic sensibilities, but there is a key difference. As Barbauld puts it, Akenside argues "that in admiring the works of nature, we form our taste on the conceptions of the Deity himself" (22). Barbauld, however, in "Devotional Taste," shifts the grounds of this argument. An aesthetic appreciation for the works of nature does not lead to formation of taste on the conception of the deity; rather, an appreciation for poetry and the fine arts, a literary taste, is the prerequisite for judging religious feelings. People do not form their relish for the deity upon the works of nature; rather their natural and cultivated relish for poetry and the fine arts enables them to perceive the deity in correct aesthetic terms, a concept I will be treat more fully in the next section.

Barbauld's connection of religious taste with literary taste, and specifically poetic taste, not only sets a high standard for those who are competent judges of religious feelings or even actually experience them, but it also demonstrates the way in which the exclusionary nature of Barbauld's religious discourse parallels the exclusionary nature of her literary discourse. This exclusionary impulse is seen, in fact, in the introductory paragraphs of her essay on Akenside's poem. Barbauld begins this essay by arguing that "the subject of a Didactic Poem . . . ought to be such as is in itself attractive to the man of taste" (4). Akenside's didactic poem, therefore, is "engaging" only "to minds prepared to examine it," that is, "those who have studied the metaphysics of the mind, and who are accustomed to investigate these abstract ideas" (5). To "the generality of readers," however, this poem "must appear dry and abstruse" (5). She then calls upon a biblical

metaphor to illustrate her point: “The judicious admirer of AKENSIDE will not call people from the fields and the highways to partake of his feast; he will wish none to read that are not capable of understanding him” (6).⁸ Barbauld thus uses her knowledge of aesthetic theorists upon whom Akenside drew, specifically Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Addison, as a particular cultural marker that demonstrates that she can be one of the few judicious admirers of his work. Though Akenside’s poem itself already stresses the importance of culture in leading to a correct aesthetic appreciation of God, Barbauld goes one level further and even wants to limit access to this argument about the importance of culture to the elite few.

III.

As I suggested in the previous section, Barbauld’s emphasis on the importance of taste in religion derives from the interdependence of religion and aesthetics that leads to the idea that aesthetic perception informs one’s conception of the deity. More specifically, throughout the eighteenth century, the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful became ways of structuring people’s feelings toward a correct perception of the deity. This idea of the importance of the aesthetic perception is indeed what informs Akenside’s poem on *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, and it is also part of the connection between deism and aesthetics that Paulson points out. For example, Archibald Alison, in *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), sees the importance of nature, through its

⁸Barbauld seems to be alluding to the parable of the wedding feast found in Matthew 22:1-14. After those who are invited to the king’s wedding feast do not come, he sends his servants “into the highways” (v.9) to invite “as many as they found, both bad and good” (v.10). Barbauld seems to invert the meaning of this parable with her reference, though her underlying meaning may match with the closing line of this parable: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (v.14).

“universal language of signs” as capable of “leading people to the very throne of the deity” (2:442). This language, however, is not “universal,” for he says that people need a “mighty key” to interpret the “magnificent System” of the “material Signs” of nature “as the temple of the living god” (2:447). This “mighty key” is aesthetic appreciation structured on the categories of the beautiful and the sublime. He thus concludes: “It is on this account that it is of so much consequence in the education of the Young, to encourage their instinctive taste for the Beauty and Sublimity of Nature” (2:447). As I argued above, though Barbauld substitutes an aesthetic appreciation of poetry for nature, she still sees the importance of the categories of the sublime and the beautiful in forming a conception of the deity. Moreover, this same attitude towards these aesthetic categories also informs Priestley’s writings on aesthetics and religion, a point which underscores the importance of aesthetics for Rational Dissent, but also opens up the important connection of class and gender politics of the beautiful and the sublime.

For both Barbauld and Priestley, bad aesthetics can lead to bad religion, since aesthetic perception is connected to one’s conception of the deity. In other words, different aesthetic standards can lead to doctrinal differences, which also reveal class differences. Both, therefore, are intent on laying out a correct standard of taste which ensures doctrinal correctness. In comparing how Priestley and Barbauld apply the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime toward a proper conception of the deity, I want to demonstrate how this structuring of religious discourse displays both gender and class hierarchies that are interrelated. Leonore Davidoff’s and Catherine Hall’s important study of middle-class Dissent, which rests on “the assumption that gender and

class always operate together” and “consciousness of class always takes a gendered form” (13), reminds us of the close operations of the categories of class and gender, a point that has not been fully developed by recent criticism. Though many critics emphasize the importance of gender in Barbauld’s writings, they overlook how gender categories intersect notions of class in her religious discourse.⁹ For example, in *Misogynous Economies*, Laura Mandell focuses on the importance of gender politics in Barbauld’s poetics and details Priestley’s influence upon her; however, her account does not stress the similar class distinctions that Priestley’s and Barbauld’s aesthetics exemplify. Mandell also does not analyze the significant differences in their conceptions of the deity that they provide through the gendered categories of the beautiful and the sublime. I contend that Barbauld inverts Priestley’s categories of the sublime and the beautiful in her conception

⁹ For a detailed account of how the discourse of aesthetic became structured on these gendered categories, see Robert Jones. Jones demonstrates the “critical conjunction between eighteenth-century accounts of taste and the account of woman’s social status” (7) within an increasingly commercial society. Isobel Armstrong reads Barbauld’s deployment of the beautiful and the sublime in her “Inscription for an Ice-House” in connection with Burke’s aesthetic theories as well as the political economy of Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith, and David Hume in order to better understand the complex relationships at work in the “category of gender” (16). The reception history of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, her “most widely reviewed” and “most hostilely reviewed” (McCarthy and Kraft 309) publication, provides a good example of how recent criticism of Barbauld focuses on gender without connecting it to class and religious discourse. The way in which criticisms of Barbauld, especially John Wilson Croker’s vicious attack in the *Quarterly Review*, focus on gender do show the ways in which Barbauld crosses gender boundaries in this poem (or at least gender provides a way to criticize her politics). Modern criticism rightly focuses on the issue of gender in the contemporary reception of this poem, but these readings do not take into account the importance of religious allegiance and class in these criticisms. For example, prompted by the praise of Barbauld in a Dissenting publication, *The Monthly Review*, the *Anti-Jacobin* voices its “sovereign contempt for the prophetic powers of Mrs. Barbauld” (209) by linking her with the Methodists, who were joined by members of rational Dissent in fighting Lord Sidmouth’s bill of 1811. Though the *Anti-Jacobin* criticizes the *Monthly Review* for reading poetry as prophecy, in the June 1812 edition, it praises another poetic prophecy, *The Times, or the Prophecy; a Poem* by J.M. Richardson. The review praises the poem for lashing out at “Itinerant and other raving Methodists” (117) and for praising the demise of Catholic emancipation. The *Eclectic Review* also criticizes Barbauld on the basis of her Dissenting background, arguing that this type of poem could not have been produced “without the concurrence of a particularly frigid temperament—with a system of speculative opinions which seems contrived to damp every glowing sentiment” (475).

of the deity. However, by defining the ability to perceive the deity correctly through these aesthetic categories, she limits such a perception to a cultured elite. By promoting a conception of the deity that is beautiful and associated with “home views and nearer objects” (2:239), she indeed uses the feminine to voice her religious opinions. Yet in doing so, she is also implicated in the bourgeois ideology that structures the gendering of this voice.

Priestley, like many other eighteenth-century writers, struggled to define a standard of taste that still accounted for observable differences in taste. Priestley hinges his definition of taste on the Hartleyean principle of association, which for him helps to “account for much, if not all, of the variety that is observable in the tastes of different persons” (134). By doing so, he shifts most of the burden for a difference in taste to environment rather than to nature. He still, however, wants to account for the differences in taste among people from similar educational and social backgrounds. Thus, in addition to arguing for social factors accounting for a difference in taste, he also notes that there is a natural difference. His argument that “mens [*sic*] minds are endued with very different degrees of sensibility” (134) indeed matches with Akenside’s notion of aesthetic biases. Priestley concedes that establishing a standard of taste is difficult, but he feels that the “diversity of taste would be certainly much more considerable at present” if there were not the “easy intercourse” between nations and universities which is fostered “particularly by the art of printing” (135). For Priestley, the proliferation of print will become the means of establishing a standard of taste, but it is also clear that the “*literati*” (135) will be the ones who will be responsible for determining and propagating this standard. The increase in

publications, then, is not threatening, as long as the chosen few, the literati, are establishing taste. In the meantime, however, Priestley asserts that “justness of taste will be determined by appealing to the general sense of those who have been most conversant with the subjects of it” (135). He closes the essay in words that sound very close to Barbauld’s ideas in “Devotional Taste”: “A deviation from this general taste will be reckoned a fault, and a coincidence of it an excellence . . . Persons who have not been conversant with the subjects of taste are excluded from having any vote in this case, because their minds have not been in a proper situation for receiving ideas and sensations which are requisite to form a just taste” (135). Like Barbauld’s description of those who lack taste as “unnatural,” Priestley similarly decrees it a “fault.” Furthermore, in regard to participation in this cultural and literary cultural sphere, he and Barbauld do not argue for a democracy; rather, they limit the qualifications of voting to those who have the correct taste.

Priestley’s definition of what correct taste is also intersects his writings on religious devotion, since in “On Habitual Devotion,” he, like Barbauld, advocates a devotion that derives from proper religious feelings. Though Priestley advocates a “fervour of devotion” (15:120), he is also careful to ensure that the devotion he advocates has none “of that warmth of zeal of devotion which often delights, but also misleads others” (15:120). Like Barbauld in “Devotional Taste,” Priestley wants to avoid a religious devotion that leads to the “strange excesses” of Calvinism and Methodism, which he characterizes as the result of “imperfect and unworthy conceptions of God” (15:119). For Priestley religious devotion stems from the feelings that are engendered by keeping

God in one's mind at all times, but he defines these feelings as those that stem from proper aesthetic perception. In other words, since the devotional feelings come from "an habitual regard to God" (15:109,111), Priestley feels that the way to avoid these excesses is to correct the aesthetic sensibilities and perceptions of worshipers in order that they may perceive God correctly. The problem with the enthusiastic devotion of Methodism is that it fades and leads to a "deadness of devotional fervour" (15:119). Since these feelings arise from a sense of novelty (associated with the beautiful) and come from "an excess of religious joy" (15:119), they result in "a kind of *familiarity*" (15:119) with the deity, which stems from an improper concept of the deity. The way, then, to temper these overly familiar feelings is by asserting a more sublime notion of God: "But more awful, and, on account of the preceding excessive familiarity, too awful ideas of God will follow and check that fond transport" (15:119). Furthermore, a properly sublime notion of God will also check the "superstition" (15:116) and "religious melancholy" (15:117) of Calvinism that "arises from an excess of religious fear" (15:119). In such a case, a "fear of God" has "exceeded its due bounds" and "degenerated into superstition" (15:118). A guarded religious fear, however, which is generated by a sublime notion of God and takes into account his "mercy and clemency" (15:118), will help to restrain this excessive fear. In promoting religious devotion, Priestley thus insists on a proper conception of God that structures these feelings in the correct manner. This proper conception, however, is dependent upon aesthetic judgement and taste, which he, like Barbauld, feels is limited. Priestley further limits the definition of proper religious feelings, since he privileges the sublime over the beautiful.

Priestley's connection of devotion with the sublime follows the pattern of eighteenth-century aesthetics and religious thought. David Morris notes: "Devotion and sublimity, for a number of writers, were not only analogous but also interpenetrating experiences" (131) because "terror in the eighteenth century was an emotion which often turned the mind toward God" (141). Priestley, however, wants to avoid the terror generated by a writer such as Edward Young. His linking of devotion with the sublime derives from the hierarchy of the sublime over the beautiful (which he also refers to as the "pathetic") that informs his aesthetic theory.¹⁰ Though he does admit that "when the sublime and the pathetic are joined . . . they produce the strongest and most lasting impression" (162), he ends up privileging the sublime, which is found, not surprisingly, most often in scripture, science, and mathematics (157). Sublime compositions are better because they "*shake and elevate* our souls" and thus are more affecting and lasting than those beautiful compositions which "are calculated only to *please and divert*" and therefore are only "beings of the day" (162). Though we may "*admire*" beautiful compositions, we also will "soon *forget* them"; whereas sublime compositions engender an "esteem" that "rises to reverence" (162). It makes sense, then, that in describing a proper conception of God that generates devotional feelings, he wants to connect the notion of

¹⁰Though not focusing specifically on devotion, Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, also does not mention the sublime emotion of terror as informing one's conception of God but takes up the conception of God in his section on power. However, he disagrees with those who believe that "no awe, no degree of terror, accompanies the idea of power" and that "we can contemplate the idea of God himself without any such emotion" (67). For Burke, the idea of God is not based on terror, but on "sacred and reverential awe" and a "salutary fear" (70) that derives from the contemplation of the deity's power. See also the *Monthly Review* XVI: "It is certain, we can have the most sublime ideas of the Deity without imagining him as a God of terror . . . Our astonishment at the sublime as often proceeds from an increased love, as from an increased fear" (475 n. qtd. in Boulton 67).

God with the more masculine and more superior sublime. Priestley, however, does not assign the source of beauty and sublimity only to objects themselves; rather, he locates the source in those who perceive aesthetic objects: “A genius formed for the sublime is a mind which is naturally disposed to take the most extensive view of things, whose attention is turned to view every thing in the grandest and noblest light; whereas other minds are more inclined to attend to what is *little* and *beautiful* in objects that they view” (162). In other words, the superiority of the sublime over the beautiful does not derive from the object itself but depends, in part, on the individual percipient. Indeed, since “every mind that an opportunity in indulging its own taste, by contemplating those forms of things which afford it the most pleasing gratification” (162), the hierarchy of the sublime over the beautiful is threatened by individual taste. It is this uncertainty about individual taste that informs Priestley’s concerns about devotional feelings: people’s different tastes may lead to them forming an incorrect conception of the deity. Thus, Priestley encourages a sublime conception of God, but he defines this conception as being dependent on having the correct taste, a “genius formed for the sublime.”

Priestley’s religious aesthetic informs the way in which Barbauld constructs her religious aesthetic, and his reactions to her “An Address to the Deity” (1773) which he admired, and her “Thoughts on Devotional Taste,” which he criticized, point to the ways in which Barbauld’s religious aesthetic negotiates the gendered categories of the beautiful and the sublime. In the preface to his “Discourse on Habitual Devotion” Priestley notes that when he first delivered this lecture, it “was the occasion of that excellent poem of Mrs. Barbauld’s, entitled, *An Address to the Deity*, which was composed immediately

after the first delivery of it" (15:101). He also closes the preface by quoting extensively from the poem. Priestley's admiration of Barbauld's poem and his use of it in his preface demonstrates the way in which Barbauld is able to capture in verse what Priestley presents in his discourse. In particular, Barbauld is able to capture his idea that proper religious devotion is grounded in a sublime conception of the deity.

In "An Address," the vast grandeur of nature first causes her to contemplate her insignificance, but instead of producing the religious melancholy of Calvinism, the sublime viewpoint fostered by natural philosophy provokes a sort of emotional stasis, a characteristic effect of the sublime. Rather than being overcome by emotions, she gains instead "an awful stillness" in her soul, and her spirit feels "a sudden peace" (15) as "Impetuous passion stops her headlong tide" and "all emotions cease" (14). The contemplation of the power of the deity, evoked by the sublime of natural philosophy, clears her mind of the pursuits of the world and allows her, as Priestley advocates in his essay, to focus solely on God: "all my sense is lost in infinite, / And one vast object fills my soul" (20). In addition to demonstrating these positive aspects of the sublime, further in the poem, the beautiful is figured as a pleasurable temptress:

If the soft hand of winning pleasures leads
By living waters, and thro' flow'ry meads,
When all is smiling, tranquil, and serene
And vernal beauty paints the flattering scene
Oh! teach me to elude each latent snare,
And whisper to my sliding heart—Beware! (41-46)

The poem then closes with a more bracing notion of the sublime conception of the deity that is read through the discourse of natural philosophy. She reads God's "awful name, emblazon'd high" in the sky, and the "mystic characters" of every leaf, flower, tree, and animal that she sees provide her with a sense not only of God's "forming power" (65) but also of his "providence" (66) guiding "each event" (66). By reading nature through the discourse of natural philosophy, she is able to see the sublime nature of the deity.

She then goes on to advocate the positive influence of a sublimely figured deity: "Thy hopes shall animate my drooping soul, / Thy precepts guide me, and thy fear controul. / Thus shall I rest unmov'd by all alarms, / Secure within the temple of thine arms, / From anxious cares, from gloomy terrors free, / And feel myself omnipotent in thee" (69-72). This sublime conception of God, rather than causing the "anxious cares" and "gloomy terrors" of religious melancholy instead gives her a sense of security that was lacking at the beginning of the poem, when she was "trembling" (3) and had a "feeble voice" (2). Mandell reads these closing lines as Barbauld overcoming both religious and literary insecurity and as celebrating equality: "Barbauld feels herself 'omnipotent in thee' as a fledgling poet because she knows that a just God eradicates hierarchies, whether of class or gender. Her claim to omnipotence is a virtual declaration of the rights of woman" (*Misogynous* 139). Mandell is correct in associating Barbauld's confidence in literary pursuits with confidence in her religious discourse, and the connection that she develops between religious melancholy and poetic melancholy is quite helpful. I would contend, however, that Barbauld's religious aesthetic here tends to reinscribe the hierarchies of class and gender. The "omnipotence" that Barbauld finds in this poem is derived from a

conception of the deity that privileges the more masculine sublime in the way same that Priestley's religious aesthetic does. Indeed the very positioning of the woman in the poem, one who begins by attempting to "lisp" (2) the deity's praise, whose "soul submits to wear her wonted yoke" (22) and "shackled pinions" (23), and who at the end craves a controlling power to guide her, places the female speaker in a childlike position, looking up to a masculine, parental figure. The sublime characteristics of the deity thus structure not only the difference between the male deity and the woman speaker but also the difference between a more masculine deity and a more feminine deity, which would be described more in terms of the beautiful. In addition to revealing gender categories, Barbauld's reliance on the beautiful and the sublime, like Priestley's, reveals class distinctions. She limits access to this conception of the deity to those with the correct aesthetic perception and cultivated taste that is accessible only to a certain class. To achieve comfort from this perception of the deity, a person must have the correct cultural code and have the correct aesthetic sensibilities to read nature. Thus, in "An Address," Barbauld's use of the sublime and the beautiful corresponds with the gender and the class politics of Priestley's religious discourse.

In "Devotional Taste," however, Barbauld figures the aesthetic conception of God differently, and this essay works against the hierarchies of gender implicit in the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. While Priestley admired Barbauld's "An Address," he wrote a letter to Barbauld criticizing this essay. He says that he considers "the very *title*" of her essay as "debasing of the subject" of devotion; though he concurs with the idea that devotion is "an elevated passion, or affection" (1:280), he argues that it

should not be considered “an affair of taste” (1:280). Furthermore, he contends that Barbauld’s putting devotion “on the same footing with the ‘taste for the fine arts’” instead of promoting the “‘true’ spirit of devotion” will “contribute to damp it” (1:280). Priestley also objects to Barbauld’s comparison of devotion with love and her generous treatment of the establishment Church, but his objection to using taste to measure devotion is particularly interesting, since Priestley’s conception of devotion is also informed by aesthetic taste. The comparison that structures Priestley’s criticism of Barbauld is founded upon his distinction of whether the conception of the deity is founded on “true philosophy” (1:281), which he endorses, or on “literary taste” (1:280), which he sees Barbauld advocating. In analyzing Barbauld’s essay, however, it becomes clear that this distinction is derived from a comparison between the beautiful and the sublime. In “Devotional Taste,” Barbauld rejects Priestley’s idea that a sublime conception of the deity provided through natural philosophy fosters the proper feelings of religious devotion and argues instead for a more beautiful conception of the deity, which is founded on literary taste.¹¹ In doing so, however, she still maintains the class distinctions that structure Priestley’s religious aesthetics.

¹¹Though Barbauld (or for that matter, Priestley) never cites Burke’s aesthetic theories, nor his linking of religion and aesthetics, her shifting of the conception of God from the beautiful to the sublime parallels the ways in which Burke makes a similar shift from the *Enquiry* to the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and other writings on the Revolution. Though the connections between Burke and Barbauld are too complex to be fully related here, in his *Enquiry* Burke links the more masculine sublime with a conception of the deity. In his writings on the Revolution, however, Burke shifts this argument, aligning the influence of religion with the social passions associated with the beautiful. The sublime awe and reverence engendered by the concept of God in the *Enquiry* is muted in favor of a focus of the civil function of religion, which is intimately connected with proper manners and taste. Since Burke connects religion with a proper type of emotion (an emotion which Dissenters like Richard Price clearly lack), he safeguards the implications of his aesthetic theories by narrowly defining what type of emotion is proper and by linking manners and taste to these feelings, especially in regard to religion.

In “Devotional Taste,” Barbauld outlines a concept of taste that defines which religious feelings are proper or improper and that also links religion explicitly to the fine arts. For Barbauld, the source of religion is “that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful by which we taste the charms of poetry and other compositions that address our finer feelings” (2:232). Later in the essay, Barbauld applies these aesthetic categories to what she feels the proper conception of the deity should be and tempers the sublime conception of God with the beautiful. Priestley grounds his concept of devotion in the sublime concept of the deity that natural philosophy fosters; Barbauld does not want to reject natural philosophy but to soften it. As she writes to Nicholas Clayton in 1776:

Yet I do not mean that such philosophical views should not be indulged, for they enlarge the mind, give some high pleasure & set religion upon a broad and firm basis. All I would say is, that we must correct what unfavorable tendency they may have, by often suffering our minds to dwell on those more affecting circumstances which arise in what we may call the more personal intercourse of a devout heart with its maker. The former is *sublime*, the latter the *pathetic* of religion. (qtd. in Webb 299)

In her essay, then, Barbauld defends the pathetic, the beautiful concept of God rather than the sublime perception of God that Priestley endorses.¹²

The problem that Barbauld has with natural philosophy is twofold. She argues that

¹²Barbauld and Priestley both appear to use the term “pathetic” as an alternate term for the “beautiful.” The distinction between the sublime and the pathetic perhaps derives from Addison’s use of the term from Longinus, though Addison does not use it quite the same manner in *Spectator* no. 339: “The Pathetick, as that great Critick [Longinus] observes, may animate and inflame the Sublime, but is not essential to it” (III:225).

it creates only a sublime notion of God, which can alienate people, and that it works in too abstract of a manner to influence people greatly. Barbauld argues: "Philosophy does indeed enlarge our conceptions of the Deity, and gives us the sublimest ideas of his power and extent of dominion; but it raises him too high for our imaginations to take hold of, and in a great measure destroys that affectionate regard which is felt by a common class of pious christians [*sic*]" (2:237). In tracing the works of God through natural philosophy "we grow giddy with the prospect . . . the mind is astonished, confounded at its own insignificance . . . the idea of communion with our Maker shocks us as presumption, and the only feeling the soul is capable of in such a moment is a deep and painful sense of its own abasement" (2:238). Whereas Priestley uses a sublime notion of God to counter an excessive familiarity with God, Barbauld feels that it goes too far in the other direction and alienates people from God, by causing too much abasement and fear. According to Barbauld, philosophers are also guilty of an impulse to "dwell too much in generals" and "reduce every thing to the operation of general laws" and "turn our attention to larger views" (2:238-39): "They trace the great outline of nature, but neglect the colouring which gives warmth and beauty to the piece" (2:239). The result of this impulse to generalize brings about the same effect as natural philosophy's insistence on the sublimity of God: "Philosophy represents the Deity in too abstracted a manner to engage our affections" (2:238). Barbauld believes that people "require some common nature, or at least the appearance of it, on which to build our intercourse" with God, and natural philosophy with its sublimity and abstractness (which is also a characteristic of the sublime itself) cannot fulfill these needs. She then goes on to compare the sublime notion of the

deity with a more beautiful one:

As in poetry it is not vague and general description, but a few circumstances clearly related and strongly worked up—as in a landscape it is not such a vast and extensive range of country as pains the eye to stretch to its limits, but a beautiful, well-defined prospect, which gives the most pleasure; so neither are those unbounded views in which philosophy delights, so much calculated so touch the heart as home views and nearer objects. (2:239)

Barbauld thus replaces the masculinist sublime of natural philosophy with the beautiful concept of God that is more affecting because it is associated with the more feminine “home views and nearer objects.”¹³

Barbauld closes this section by arguing: “The philosopher offers up general praises of the altar of universal nature; the devout man, on the altar of his own heart, presents his own sighs, his own thanksgivings, his own earnest desires: the former worship is more sublime, the latter more personal and affecting” (2:239). White sees Barbauld here supplementing Rational Dissent’s “unbending creeds” with the “personal and affecting,” thus mollifying her religion’s tenets by making them “more palatable to the national taste” by “associating them with sensibility and domesticity” (529). Indeed, as a female writer of

¹³This comparison between cold philosophy and the affections is similar as well to Burke’s description of the revolutionaries in *Reflections*: “This sort of people are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgotten his nature. Without opening up one new avenue to the understanding they have succeeded in stopping up those that lead to heart” (156). Burke then moves on to characterize Price’s sermon as exemplifying all these characteristics: “This famous sermon of the Old Jewry breathes nothing but this spirit through the political part” (156). Barbauld, as we shall see, like Burke, places great emphasis on the heart and its affections because she also feels that this is the way to influence political action. The nature of these implications will be explored in the next section.

the middle class, Barbauld, by focusing on sensibility, domesticity, and the beautiful, makes her religion more popular by conforming to those very gender roles that helped structure middle-class religion.¹⁴ In doing so, however, Barbauld's religious discourse becomes shaped by the class politics of the dominant discourse. Barbauld's aesthetics do differ from Priestley's and thus indicate the ways in which these aesthetics were inscribed with gender differences. Yet despite these differences, both their conceptions of God are still fraught with class distinction, since they both are dependent on the cultural code of aesthetics that is only available to an elite few. Finally, it should be noted that Barbauld emphasizes the beautiful not only because of gender but also because it engages the affections, thus having a greater influence on the heart of the worshiper. Barbauld's writing of religion onto the heart, like the Evangelicals' project, requires the ability to reach people's affections. As I argue in the next section, however, this engagement of the affections and converting of the heart, like the Evangelicals' religion, becomes a means to promote more effectively hegemonic middle-class values. Barbauld's emphasis on community, and the manners that distinguish this community, emphasizes a subordination and restraint that is accomplished through religion's aestheticizing of social power

¹⁴It is interesting that "An Address to the Deity" was published in her *Poems* (1773), which William Woodfall criticizes for not being feminine enough. He writes: "We hoped the *Woman* was going to appear; and that while we admired the genius and learning of her graver compositions, we should be affected by the sensibility and passion of the softer pieces" (133). Woodfall feels that "she . . . has . . . trod too much in the footsteps of men" (137) and that she should have "taken her views of life from among her female companions" (137). Perhaps part of the reason for Barbauld's shift from "Address to Devotional Taste" may stem from her response to this sort of criticism. For the modern debate that stems from this issue and argues to what extent Barbauld was feminist and/or antifeminist, see especially William McCarthy's "'We Hoped the *Woman* Was Going to Appear,'" which discusses the Woodfall review, and Marlon Ross' "Configurations of Feminine Reform." For the ways in which gender roles structure middle-class Dissent, see Davidoff and Hall.

IV.

As I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, part of the driving force of the Dissenters' notion of community is a sense of cultural distinction that derives from their middle-class status and their achievement in the literary sphere. This sense of cultural distinction in Barbauld's religious discourse is reinforced by her definition of taste and the proper religious feelings, but Barbauld defines even more explicitly the relationship between religion and community. In her "Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's *Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public of Social Worship*" Barbauld sets forth her idea of public worship, which stresses the importance of religion's role in creating a sense of community. She argues that public worship is able to draw people together through the spreading of religious affections: "None of our feelings are more communicable than our religious ones. If devotion really exists in the heart of an individual, it is morally impossible that it should exist there separate and apart and single. So many separate tapers, burning so near each other, in the very nature of things must catch and spread into one common flame" (2:420). This definition explains, in part, why she argues for a more beautiful conception of God that is able to engage the affections. Furthermore, public worship unites people into one voice and invites them to consider themselves as "members of a community": the prayers of the "numerous assembly" become joined into "one comprehensive prayer" (2:421). Underpinning this idea of a community is the notion of equality that public worship brings, and later on in the essay Barbauld explicitly argues for the egalitarian nature of public worship, contending that "every time Social Worship is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man" (2:448). According to

Barbauld, public worship brings together different classes of people that can meet together in a place “where all considered alike ignorant and to be instructed; and needing forgiveness; all alike are bound by the same obligations, and animated by the same hopes” (2:448). Public worship, then, for Barbauld is a powerfully transforming force which, like the ideal public sphere, brings all people together, regardless of rank or status.

This radical impulse, however, is undermined by Barbauld’s appeal to the aesthetic. Though Barbauld does argue that public worship can draw people together into a unified community, this community, like that of the bourgeois public sphere, is defined by cultural distinction. The community of public worship is formed by the spreading of religious affections and a sense of devotion that “really exists in the heart of an individual.” As we have seen, however, these religious affections and the proper devotion that they inculcate are limited to those with the “cultural code” necessary for a correct aesthetic sensibility. This community built on religious affections and true devotion, then, necessarily excludes the enthusiastic lower class preachers that Barbauld separates her religion from in “Devotional Taste.” The exclusionary distinction of taste that informs Barbauld’s writings on religious feelings thus is part of the groundwork of her definition of the concept of community. This distinction becomes even more explicit when Barbauld argues that this community of public worship will not function unless it is directed by leaders with taste and refinement, for she contends that “the attendance of men of literature and knowledge” is vital to this community for their “effects upon others” (2:451): “The unenlightened worship with most pleasure where those worship whose opinions they respect. A religion that is left for the vulgar will not long satisfy even them”

(2:451). Though this community espouses equality, it is built on a premise of distinctions: the civilization and taste of refined men will help the deficiencies of the uncivilized and vulgar. Public worship draws people together into a community but only to bring them under the influence of the cultural elite, who are the Dissenting middle class.

Barbauld's description of the means by which public worship draws people together once again highlights a desire for radical equality that is qualified by a need for restraint. Barbauld presents religion's uniting of people as a naturalized and inevitable process: the individual tapers burn so close to each other that "in the very nature of things" they "must catch and spread into one common flame." This natural process of uniting into one voice, however, is not inevitable, for it can only take place after people's "inmost wishes learn restraint" and their "desires by degree conform themselves to the spirit of moderation and justice" (2:421). Stephen Goldsmith, in a discussion of a similar "transfiguration of language from the polyphonic to the monological" (48) in apocalyptic literature points to the contradictory nature of this type of transformation: "Because the making of many voices into one is represented as an inexorable process, these linguistic transformations suggest not only a powerful egalitarian motive, a desire to eliminate rank and distinction of any kind, but also an element of coercion" (60). For Goldsmith, the egalitarian nature of apocalyptic literature remains "virtual" because it creates a "brilliantly crafted linguistic space" (46) that empties out historical and political change in favor of linguistic transformation. In this sense Barbauld's "virtual declaration of the rights of man" can indeed be seen as only "virtual," for it partakes of "the confusion of linguistic with natural reality" that Paul de Man defines as the nature of "aesthetic ideology" (11). I

would emphasize, however, the way in which such a transformation partakes of the double-edged nature of the aesthetic that Eagleton outlines: Barbauld's idea of community has the emancipatory appeal of equal access, but it also emphasizes coercion and restraint. In fact, this unity can be seen as what Eagleton describes as the "dream of reconciliation" of aesthetic ideology: "individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity," creating the "universal subject" of the "emergent middle class" (25). Laura Mandell argues that Barbauld is able to subvert such "ideological mystification" that Eagleton and de Man read into the aesthetic and thus reads that the "one spirit" that unifies Barbauld's ideal community is the "desire for radical equality" (35). I contend, however, that though Barbauld's ideal of community does have within it a desire for equality, this desire for equality is undercut by her emphasis on the aesthetic. The community that Barbauld wants public worship to bring about is a distinctly bourgeois construction, embedded with class distinctions and focused on a self-imposed restraint that leads to subordination.

This idea of religion forming a community that is founded on restraint is reinforced by a similar contention that Barbauld makes a year later in "Sins of the Government, Sins of the Nations" (1793). In this essay, Barbauld makes a strange argument for a Dissenter: she argues for a national religion. Moreover, this desire for a national religion is grounded in the same emphasis on restraint that characterized conservative religious discourse in the 1790s. She writes, "Societies, being composed of individuals, the faults of societies proceed from the same bad passions, the same pride, selfishness, and thirst of gain, by which individuals are led to transgress the rule of duty; they require, therefore, the same

curb to restrain them, and hence the necessity of a national religion” (2:385).¹⁵ As in “Remarks,” differences among individuals are collapsed in favor of their uniformity in requiring the restraint brought about through religion. She goes on to define this national religion as one that works in “extending to those affairs in which we act in common, and as a body, that regard to religion, by which we act singly, we all profess to be guided” (2:386), and thus she contends, “we are to submit our public conduct to the same rules by which we are to regulate our private actions: a nation that does this religious; a nation that does it not . . . is, as a nation, profligate and unprincipled” (2:387). The “aggregate body” (2:406) of the nation, like the community of public worship, cannot work well unless the individuals comprising that body first apply the restraints of religion. The disciplining of the bodies of individuals through religion leads to a disciplining of the body of the nation, which is also enacted through religion. Barbauld’s definition of a national religion thus ignores theological distinctions and, like conservative religious discourse, focuses instead on restraint: being a religious nation means submitting the “body” of the nation to a common regulation. I would thus argue that Barbauld’s figuration of the body of the nation, like the creation of the community through public worship, is enacted through religion, which creates unity by restraining an individual’s desires.

¹⁵For example, in *Reflections* Burke argues that “Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*. . . . Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon the passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should be frequently thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection” (151). Similarly, a year later in *A Letter to a Member of a National Assembly* Burke states: “Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters” (9:359). For Burke, restraint upon the passions comes from the combination of religion and manners, both of which the profligate Jacobins lack.

This formation of a community through the restraint of religion brings about subordination to the government. In “Sins,” Barbauld argues that “without a quiet subordination . . . the ends of good government can never be attained” (2:388). She goes on to point out that “to fix this subordination on its proper basis, it is only necessary to establish in our minds this plain principle,—that the will of the minority should ever yield to that of the majority” (2:388). This position is indeed odd for a Dissenter, since they comprised such a small segment of the population, but it is especially strange since she contends that “the religion of the generality . . . ought to prevail, and the minority should not even wish to supplant it” (2:390). This call for the minority to yield to the majority in “quiet subordination” seems to echo, however, her idea of the community. For people to join in a unified voice, there must be subordination of individual differences; for people to act as one body, there must be uniform restraint. Furthermore, Barbauld castigates both public functionaries and radical reformers for ignoring the will of the people in favor of their own agenda. She would rather influence public opinion first and thus advocates gradual change as the way to make an impact on society. For Barbauld, the question is not who has the majority voice now, but how that majority voice can be influenced by a powerful minority, which are the very “men of literature,” the cultured leaders of Dissent, who are integral to making a group function properly. The Dissenters’ emphasis on literature, morals, and manners provides them with the platform to help change the public opinion of the majority, but it is crucial how they go about influencing that opinion. Therefore, Barbauld feels that the way to change society is not through revolution, but by preparing people for a revolution, planting the seeds for gradual change rather than

forcing freedom on people “at the point of the bayonet” (2:390).

Barbauld’s view of gradual social change is the notion that connects her ideals of the community brought about through literature and religion, for they are both brought about through the aesthetic, which provides this softer and more pleasurable coercion but also limits participation in these powerful communities. The way to influence people to act in a collective manner is through the soft and gentle influence of the aesthetic, where restraint has the appearance of autonomy and pleasure. In particular, Barbauld’s connection of manners to both religion and literature manifests this emphasis on the aesthetic. She sees religion as a gentle influence that is able to change people by giving them an internalized regulation that emphasizes manners and morals, creating a more civilized and consequently more regulated public body. Barbauld’s linking of religion and manners, then, highlights not only the coercion and restraint implicit in the formation of the communities she discusses, but it also points to the pleasurable aspect of this coercion. As Eagleton argues: “Manners for the eighteenth century signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style . . . moral imperatives no longer impose themselves . . . but infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact, or know-how, intuitive good sense and decorum” (41). Though Eagleton does not discuss the importance of manners to religion, I contend that it is this “disciplining of the body” through manners, restraints that appear self-imposed, that Barbauld sees as part of the vital function of religion.

Barbauld’s “Remarks,” then, not only stresses the importance of the community of public worship and its restraint, but it also highlights the vital function of manners that end

up imposing this restraint. For example, she argues: “Religion and manners reciprocally act upon one another. As religion, well understood, is a most powerful agent in meliorating and softening our manners; so on the other hand, manners, as they advance in cultivation, tend to correct and refine our religion” (2:469).¹⁶ The reciprocal relationship that Barbauld outlines here is important, for it defines the more correct religion, once again in terms of propriety and refinement rather than in doctrinal terms, again echoing the religious discourse of the Evangelicals. Furthermore, it is this “softening of manners” which brings people together willingly but also imposes a “willing” restraint upon them: public worship not only gathers people together but it influences them to act in a “civilized” manner. Indeed, Barbauld speculates that if “a legislator were to undertake the civilization of a horde of wild savages” and “give them a principle of cohesion,” the “most effectual method” (2:440) would be to gather them together in public worship where they would join together in a common act. It is for this reason, she argues, that in the beginning of society, “legislators called in the assistance of religious ideas” and not only “gathered around them the stupid, incurious them [*sic*] barbarians” but by doing so “roused them into attention and softened them into docility” (2:441). Public worship, like literature, is important for its civilizing influence. As Barbauld puts it, “it is not easy to estimate how much of the manners as well as the morals—how much of the cultivation as well as the religion of the people is derived from this very source” (2:440). Barbauld goes on to argue

¹⁶Cf. Burke’s *Reflections*: “Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours depended for ages upon two principles; and indeed were the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion” (173).

that Shakespeare agrees with this function of public worship and thus “places the influences of social worship upon a par with the sacred touches of sympathetic sorrow . . . and makes it one of the features which distinguish the urbanity of polished life from the rude and unfeeling ferocity which belongs to a clan of unprincipled banditti” (2:441). Her quotation from *As You Like It* in this section, “Let gentleness your strong enforcement be,” is indeed appropriate, for in this non-intrusive gentle way, Barbauld’s religious aesthetic works toward the strong enforcement of bourgeois ideology.¹⁷

Manners not only represent a means of pleasurable coercion, but they are also important for Barbauld and the Evangelicals as an external evidence of the internal influences of the “religion of the heart.” In other words, they avoid the charge of Methodism by promoting manners as an index of the proper religious feelings. Religious feelings are proper if they lead to self-regulation and restraint rather than enthusiasm. Thus, proper manners equal proper religion. Barbauld, in fact, in “Devotional Taste” marks the differences between sects and the establishment not in doctrine but in manners: “A sect may differ from an establishment, as one absurd opinion differs from another, but there is a character and a cast of manners belonging to each, which will be perfectly distinct” (2:446). Thus, she is not concerned about the “*truth* of religious opinions”; rather, she wants to consider only religion’s influence “upon the manners and morals of their followers” (2:259). As in her “Address” Barbauld elides the theological distinctions and emphasizes instead the distinctions of behavior. These distinctions of behavior,

¹⁷Barbauld is quoting from a speech by Orlando in Act 2, scene 7. She does, however, change the line from “Let gentleness my strong enforcement be” to “Let gentleness your strong enforcement be.”

however, are grounded in class distinction, for she contends that a sect's vitality may be traced through an examination of its manners, an important index of class.¹⁸ According to Barbauld, a sect is most vital when a strong sense of devotion leads to a unified community of believers who display their proper manners. In the beginning, a sect that is persecuted is most vital because it has within it "the strong union and entire affection of its followers," for they "cherish devotion" that "rises even to passion, and absorbs every sentiment" (2:448). Furthermore, the religion of an infant sect can be seen as working "like leaven in the hearts of people" since this sect is characterized by "a severity of manners" (2:247). Thus, a sect's vitality is measured in the influence on the affections, but the power of these affections is measured not only in the sense of community that it evokes but also in the manners of this community. In the second stage of the sect, a spirit of "reasoning and examination" replaces the spirit of devotion and the "manners are less austere" (2:249).¹⁹ In the final stage of a sect's existence, right before it goes to "melt away into the establishment" (2:251), members of this community are no longer separate from the world and its pleasures, but become a part of it. In becoming ashamed of their

¹⁸White argues concerning the Aikins' (Barbauld's and her brother's) prose: "The universalizing move of their prose, and, indeed, of the Dissenting public sphere, does not imply that sectarian manners and beliefs should subsume national character" (523). He further asserts that they are "consistently critical of attempts to champion one cultural identity over another" (523) and reads Barbauld as finding the strength of the nation rather in the "oppositional relation between its religious communities" (528). I would argue that Barbauld is more open to difference about theological matters but is less tolerant about the distinctions of manners and morals.

¹⁹That the manners become less severe, however, may not be completely negative, for this softening of manners is praised later by Barbauld's niece, Lucy Aikin, as a signal of detachment from stricter forms of Calvinism for the milder Arianism: "Long before my time, however, my kindred . . . had begun to break forth out of the chains of Calvinism, and their manners softened with their system . . . Amongst these there was no rigorism. Dancing, cards, the theatre, were all held lawful in moderation: in *manners*, the Free Dissenters, as they were called, came much nearer the church than to their own stricter brethren, yet in *doctrine* no sect departed so far from the Establishment" (Rodgers 52-53).

differences, members try “to file off its peculiarities, but in doing so destroy its very being” (2:250). The problem that Barbauld sees in this final stage of sects is a “change of manners” (2:250). There are still “forms of strictness” and a “set of phrases” that “still subsist” but “these they are ashamed to use, and know not how to decline; and their behaviour, in consequence of them is awkward and irresolute” (2:251). In other words, the external markers of religion are really not there, for these manners are not connected to the internal regulation of the “religion of the heart.” In Barbauld’s view, then, manners and morals, in addition to taste, become the “honourable distinction” of middle-class Dissent.²⁰

Manners, as part of the “honourable distinction” of middle-class Dissent, also become the distinction that excludes not just the profligate upper classes but also the lower classes from being leading members of this community. For example, in “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations,” Barbauld argues that one of the “faults of the present age” is that “characters are not marked with sufficient character: the several classes run too much into one another” (2:193). She argues that the reason for this is that a “general conformity to fashionable manners” (2:194) rather than a conformity to manners that stem from proper devotion. Furthermore, she argues here for a more static view of society: “There is a cast of manners peculiar and becoming to each age, sex, and profession”

²⁰Barbauld’s view on the manners and morals of the French during her visit to the continent in 1785 sound much like the views of Wilberforce and More. As Betsy Rodgers observes, “Mrs. Barbauld was shocked at French morals and manners After watching a Shrove Tuesday Carnival she concluded primly, ‘there is a great deal of coarseness in the mirth of the vulgar, and of licentiousness in the gaiety of the rich’” (97). Barbauld goes on to describe the French porters as having “the air of demoniacs, with their violent gestures and eager looks, and their coarsest exclamations at every second word” and concludes that “in France the lower orders are much less respectful and more *grossier* than ours of the same class” (Rodgers 97).

(2:194). This view of society is also evidenced in “The Rich and the Poor,” where she argues that everyone has a specific rank in society. Thus, the civilizing influence of proper religion may not be able to change the manners of the lower classes because they do not possess the proper feelings: “We are often hurt by the brutality and sluggish conceptions of the vulgar; not considering that some there must be to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that cultivated genius, or any great refinement or delicacy in their moral feelings, would be a real misfortune to them” (2:194).²¹ The lower classes are thus excluded from participating in the community that her religion creates. This community, like the public sphere and the literary sphere, is inscribed with class distinctions that exclude alternate voices and particularly the alternate religions of the lower classes. This exclusion of the lower classes from the community, however, also branches out to their participation in the great body, the vast community of society. In her “Civic Sermon to the People, Number I” (1792), she says that “Government is the art of managing the affairs of a community” and that “our community consists of nearly twelve millions” (9). In part, she is using this comparison to urge those “of the lower classes” to take a greater role in understanding and participating in government. This participation, however, is enacted not through a participation in the government or in the literary sphere but in managing their

²¹Compare with Vicesimus Knox’s very similar argument in *Liberal Education*: “There are cases in which classical learning may be properly dispensed with; such is that of a very dull intellect, or a total want of parts; and such is that of the boy who is to be trained to a subordinate trade, or to some low and mechanical employment, in which a refined taste and a comprehensive knowledge would divert his attention from his daily occupation. It is certain that money can be acquired, though not enjoyed with liberality, without either taste or literary knowledge. And indeed the good of the community require, that there should be grosser understandings to fill the illiberal and servile stations in society. Some of us must be hewers of wood and drawers of water, whose minds Nature had rendered less capable of ornament” (10-11).

own affairs and in fostering love and reverence for the government. Furthermore, Barbauld is careful to point out that “not *all*” are “invited” to participate in this community of government:

You who are dissolute, idle, intemperate, savage in your manners, profligate in your principles, without care for yourselves, or for those who depend upon your labour; who prey upon the honesty of others; who are ignorant, not merely from want of information, but from a debased and besotted understanding—to you I do not speak, you *must* be governed like brutes; for you *are* brutes. (17-18)

Though Barbauld is particularly addressing those “wicked and seditious men” who formed the mobs who participated in the Church and King riots, her emphasis on taste, community, and manners that informs her religious aesthetic and her sense of community all point to this exclusion of the lower classes from “the Dissenting public sphere” (White 512). Barbauld’s desire to create social change through religion and literature is undercut by the ways in which it is influenced by the discourses of the dominant class.

V.

Though this chapter has focused on the ways in which Barbauld’s religious discourse has ties to the dominant class through its focus on aesthetics, I do not want to deny the radical impulse in Barbauld’s work. Moreover, I also recognize that Barbauld’s dissemination of that message was bound by the discursive options that were available to her. In other words, as Marlon Ross argues, because of her status of “double dissent” (93) as both a woman and a Dissenter, the way in which she makes her argument is limited. Her

construction of God as a beautiful deity and her appeal to manners and morals indeed give her the ability to speak politically and also allow her to make her message more appealing to a broader audience. By doing so, however, her religious discourse becomes shaped by the connected gender and class politics of the dominant discourse. Her writings reveal the extent to which constructing an oppositional discourse of religion and aesthetics is fraught with the difficulty of both discourses being shaped by dominant discourses of conservatism. Indeed, Barbauld's negotiation of the beautiful and the sublime is particularly instructive for the discussion of Blake in the next chapter. Blake also attempts to negotiate the complex interconnections between politics, religion, and aesthetics. Unlike Barbauld, however, Blake's religious aesthetics emphasize the sublime and the imagination rather than the beautiful and the emotions. Yet, his religious aesthetics also become implicated in promoting bourgeois ideology.

Chapter Two

The “Sublime Allegory” of Blake’s Religious Aesthetics: Imagining the Unified “Divine Body” of the Public

“In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it and the construction of a substitute universe.”

–Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (255)

“We shall not Die! we shall be united in Jesus”

–William Blake, *Jerusalem* (92:18)

“After all the noise that has been made in the world about ‘liberty,’ no people are ‘free’ but they who are made so by Jesus Christ.”

–W.B. Cadogan, *Liberty and Equality* (1)

“I know of no other Christianity and no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of the Imagination.”

–William Blake, *Jerusalem* (95)

In his annotations to Bishop Watson’s *An Apology for the Bible*, William Blake writes, “The Bishop never saw the Everlasting Gospel any more than Tom Paine” (619). Though Blake has great admiration for Paine’s radical deism, even remarking that he “is a better Christian than the Bishop” (620), for him Paine is not the best Christian because of his adherence to natural religion. Such religion, with its reliance on reason and empirical philosophy, for Blake is a “Pretence to Religion to destroy Religion” (621).¹ Indeed, Blake’s abhorrence for natural religion runs throughout his writings.² As early as his

¹ All quotations of Blake’s writings are from David Erdman’s *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. When it may be unclear from the context which work I am quoting from, I have employed the following abbreviations: AR-Annotations to Reynolds’ *Discourses*; ARO-*All Religions are One*; FZ-*The Four Zoas*; J-*Jerusalem*; M-*Milton*; MHH-*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; NNR-*There is No Natural Religion*.

² For the historical background of Paine’s and Watson’s debate and Blake’s position in it, see Florence Sandler’s “‘Defending the Bible’: Blake, Paine, and the Bishop.” Sandler argues, “When Paine’s anti-Christian Deism found its rebuttal in Watson’s Christian Deism, it was the latter which, exactly because it purported to be Christian, seemed to Blake more invidious” (43). She also sees Blake opposing both Watson and Paine because of their similar attitude toward the Bible and scriptural authority. Jon Mee, however, contends, “While Blake’s annotations . . . do not reveal him to be a Painite in any

tractates, *All Religions are One* (1788) and *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), Blake attacks the epistemology of rational philosophy, asserting that such philosophy is wrongly based on sense perception. As he argues in *There is No Natural Religion*, “Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception. he perceives more than sense (tho’ever so acute) can discover” (2). Since “God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he / is” (NNR, 3), Blake argues for the importance of the “Poetic Genius” (ARO, 1) and the “Spirit of Prophecy,” (ARO, 1), which he later designates as the imagination. Only through this imaginative perception can humankind realize its own divinity. Blake also presents a history of the loss of such imaginative perception and the rise of natural religion in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793). He contends that the “ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods, calling them by names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations and whatever their enlarged and numerous sense could perceive” (38). Under this rational approach, a “system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav’d the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood” (38). Once people “forgot that All deities reside in the human breast” (38), rational philosophy and state religion was then able to work together to normalize social inequalities, for “at length they pronounced the Gods had ordered such things” (38). Blake’s later works, *Four Zoas* (1805) and *Milton* (1808), also explicitly attack deism and rational philosophy and the

straightforward sense, they do imply that he was much more sympathetic to Paine’s attitude to the Bible than is often allowed” (14). According to Mee, “critics find it impossible to get beyond what they see as the irreconcilable facts of Paine’s deism and Blake’s explicit hostility to natural religion” (14), but he views them as sharing a “hostility to notions of scriptural authority” (14).

social injustices they support. Finally, in his last major work, *Jerusalem* (1820), Blake argues, “All the Destruction therefore, in Christian Europe has arisen from Deism, which is Natural Religion” (52). Indeed, his epic *Jerusalem* is an effort to combat deism as well as the philosophical systems of Bacon, Newton, and Locke that he saw supporting this religion.

Blake’s hostility to deism is indeed no new insight in Blakean criticism, yet critics have not deeply interrogated the politics of Blake’s attack on deism, especially in his later works.³ Part of this reluctance stems from the tendency to see a more overtly radical and political Blake in his earlier prophetic works and a less political and more Christian Blake in later works such as *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*. The more historicist and political readings of Blake focus on Blake’s pre-1800 poems and put them in the context of contemporary religious discourses, especially those of popular, radical religion. However, critics that focus on Blake’s later works, like *Jerusalem*, tend to ignore the practical political concerns of his religious discourse and highlight instead Blake’s mythic and imaginative concerns.⁴ I would contend, however, that they do not find Blake as politically engaged because they are looking for his radical politics rather than seeing how

³Mee is one critic who differs from this given in Blakean criticism, arguing that deism was one of the discursive systems from which Blake, as a “radical bricoleur” (14), borrowed. For a recent, concise, and historically informed account of Blake’s hostility toward deism, see Robert Ryan’s *Romantic Reformation* (43-79).

⁴The historicist and political critical studies include David Erdman’s *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, Mee’s *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, Leslie Tannenbaum’s *Biblical Traditions in Blake’s Early Prophecies*, and E.P. Thompson’s *Witness Against the Beast*. The mythic and aesthetic studies of Blake include Harold Bloom’s *Blake’s Apocalypse*, Northrop Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry*, and Morton Paley’s *Energy and the Imagination*. For a more involved discussion of this split in Blakean criticism, see Christopher Hobson’s *The Chained Boy* (20-45).

his aesthetics reveal characteristics of bourgeois ideology. Instead of regarding Blake as retreating from politics and creating a “substitute universe” as the critics concerned with Blake’s later works argue, I want to demonstrate how Blake actually mediates politics through his aesthetics. Specifically, I will analyze how Blake’s definition of the sublime effaces the role of the individual in favor of the eternal nature of classes. I will also show how his concept of the imagination likewise functions as a harmonizing force that mediates social power. Blake’s definition of the unified imagination, which he figures as the Divine Body of Jesus, demonstrates the intimate connection between his religion and his aesthetics. But in defining his ideal aesthetic and religious object as a unified body, Blake models a vision of society that endorses a view of a universal human subject who willingly cedes his individuality to the general will of the political body.

I have sketched Blake’s attitude toward deism at the beginning of this chapter, for Blake’s hostility toward natural religion and the philosophical systems that supported it leads him to argue for his definition of the imagination. As I argued in the first two chapters, the Evangelicals and Barbauld were able to strike a balance between rational deism and the Methodists’ dangerous enthusiasm by delineating the proper religious emotions that were tied to manners and taste. Blake, however, takes a different route in attacking deism, since he objects to its reliance on reason and empirical philosophy. Blake’s attack on deism thus ignores the role of sensory perceptions and emotions and highlights the sublime nature of the imagination, which is not connected to reason or emotion. Since religion and art are identical to Blake, his aesthetics and religion work together to wage war against reason and natural philosophy which he characterizes in

Jerusalem as “A pretence of Art to destroy Art: a pretence of Liberty / To destroy Liberty, a pretence of Religion to destroy Religion” (38:35-36). In tracing Blake’s religious aesthetics, then, I will begin by outlining the discursive connections between religion and aesthetics that Blake is working against. Then, I will examine Blake’s prose to show how he attempts to counter these religious and aesthetic systems through his definition of the sublime and the imagination, which he defines as the Divine Body of Jesus. Finally, I turn to *Jerusalem* to demonstrate Blake’s religious aesthetics in practice. Just as W.B. Cadogan’s anti-Jacobin sermon of 1792 argues for real “freedom” and “liberty” as being located only in Jesus, so in *Jerusalem*, Blake’s model of freedom in the Divine Body of the imagination promotes a self-determination and individuality that actually is subsumed by a unity that emphasizes universality of will rather than equality.

I.

The extent to which Blake disagreed with eighteenth-century aesthetics in general, and with Reynolds’ aesthetics in particular, has been a matter of significant critical debate, but I want to point to one of Blake’s statements that specifically exemplifies the concerns that I will trace in this chapter.⁵ In his annotations to Reynolds’ *Discourses*, Blake

⁵Roger Murray points out that “the high pitch of Blake’s most sweeping indictments of Reynolds does tend to distract one from their substance and from Blake’s proximity to Reynolds in some important areas” (83). He cites their “most important point of agreement” as “their shared conviction that a great work of art is necessarily the production of a genius who is steeped in past art” (85). David Bindman also contends that “on the general question of imitation Blake and Reynolds are not on the opposite side of the fence, but are in some way closer to each than Blake and, say, his younger contemporary Palmer” (97). He concludes that “Blake’s attitudes toward imitation are in a profound sense eighteenth century in spirit, and are predominantly determined even to the end by classical idealism” (98). Morris Eaves, however, argues that we should not link Reynolds and Blake as theoretical allies both espousing a “classical idealism.” Rather, Eaves maintains that “Blake reestablishes certain Enlightenment principles on romantic grounds; that he replaces the assumptions of mimetic theory, on which the dominant Enlightenment ideas about art are based, with the assumptions of expressive theory” (4). Hazard Adams’ analyses the philosophical differences between Blake and Reynolds, which he views as an “epistemological quarrel” (144).

summarizes his objection to Edmund Burke's model of the beautiful and the sublime that he sees as the basis of Reynolds' aesthetics and argues instead for the importance of "Inspiration" and "Vision":

Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions. in all this Discourses I read Burkes Treatise when very Young at the same time I read Locke on Human Understanding & Bacons Advancement on Learning on Every one of these Books I wrote my Opinion & on looking over them find that my Notes on Reynolds in this Book are exactly Similar. They mock Inspiration & Vision Inspiration & Vision was then & now is & I hope will always Remain my Element my Eternal Dwelling place. how can I then hear it Contemnd without returning Scorn for Scorn— (AR, 660-61)

Blake's statement here points toward the intimate connection that Blake sees between aesthetics and religion that I see at the heart of his debate with Reynolds, for such denial of inspiration by the "ancient poets" is what Blake linked to the rise of a system of priesthood that attempts to "abstract the mental deities from their objects" (MHH, 38). They replaced "Poetic Genius" (MHH, 38) with a "finite organical perception" (MHH, 38), knowledge derived from external objects impinging upon the senses. Blake uses Burke to trace the empirical and rational bases of Reynolds' aesthetics. By tracing Reynolds' aesthetics back to their philosophical foundations, he reveals his primary objection to such aesthetics: Reynolds grounds his aesthetics in the philosophies of the evil

triumvirate—Bacon, Newton, and Locke—that also support natural religion. For Blake, then, Reynolds’ aesthetics are not just encouraging bad art, they are encouraging bad religion by mocking “Inspiration” and “Vision,” the faculties that perceive the imagination, the correct basis of both religion and art.

Blake may reject the philosophy of Burke’s theory of the sublime, but he still sees the importance of the sublime. As Morton Paley puts it, “It is Burke’s reductive theory, not the concept of the sublime itself, to which Blake is hostile” (*Energy* 19). Indeed, Blake’s description of himself as a “sublime Artist” (544) merits close consideration. Recently, Blake critics have studied more closely the important role of the sublime in Blake’s aesthetics. Indeed, Vincent de Luca rightly argues that “Blake’s relation to the sublime is not superficial but profound” and that “the traditions of the sublime extant in his time play an influential role in his aesthetics, the style and organization of his chief poetical works, and indeed, his outlook on the world” (3). De Luca and other critics that examine Blake’s use of the sublime, however, do not explicitly connect his aesthetics to his religion, nor do they explore the political and social implications of this connection.⁶ I contend that Blake’s commitment to and his definition of the sublime indeed stem from his reaction against the philosophical premises that tie together aesthetics and religion in his

⁶De Luca presents the most developed discussion of Blake’s use of the sublime and its connection to *Jerusalem*. Focusing on the narrative effect of Blake’s sublime language, he isolates two different styles operating in Blake’s poetry, the “bardic” and the “iconic” (6). He explains: “The first is characterized by devices appropriate to temporal chronicle and to the achievement of the effects of flux, boundlessness, and indefinite extension. The second, which is hieratic, incantatory, and self-enclosed, tends, in contrast, to arrest narrative and to collapse temporality into a hard-edged now” (6). He focuses on how these modes “determine the chief forms of narrative organization in Blake’s major sublime poem” (6), but he does go beyond Blake’s texts to explore their political significance. See also Paley’s discussion of Blake’s place within the sublime tradition in *Energy and the Imagination* (1-25) and his use of the sublime in *Milton and Jerusalem* (200-60).

era. Thus, before looking at Blake's definition of the sublime and the imagination, I want to briefly sketch the historical context in which he posits these definitions, and I will focus especially on Reynolds' definition of beauty and contemporary constructions of the sublime. I argue that Blake privileges the sublime because he wants to oppose Reynolds' theory of beauty that he sees promulgating the rational and empirical philosophies that also support natural religion. Yet, in arguing for the sublime, he wants to avoid the empiricism of Burke's sublime as well the traditional association of the sublime with the Old Testament God of terror. Thus, he connects his notion of the sublime instead with the imagination, which he figures as the Divine Body of Jesus.

One of the primary reasons that Blake turns to the sublime in his aesthetics is to distinguish himself from Reynolds, who emphasizes the notion of "ideal beauty" in his aesthetics. For Reynolds, "Ideal Beauty" is the "great leading principle, by which the works of genius are conducted" (44-45). Reynolds' description of ideal beauty is what points to Blake's privileging of the sublime, for it foregrounds the connection between Reynolds' aesthetics and natural religion:

This is the idea which has acquired, and which seems to have a right to the epithet of *divine*; as it may be said to preside, like a supreme judge, over all the productions of nature; appearing to be possessed of the will and intention of the Creator, as far as they regard the external form of living beings. When a man once possesses this idea in its perfection, there is no danger, but that he will be sufficiently warmed by it himself, and be able to warm and ravish every one else. (45)

By associating the “idea of the perfect state of nature” or “Ideal Beauty” with the “*divine*,” Reynolds also associates his art with natural religion, a relationship that lends his art a religious authority but also legitimizes the philosophical premises that they both share. Furthermore, beauty takes on a religious significance; beauty is described like the god of deism who hovers over the “productions of nature” like a “supreme judge.” The artist can gain this idea of beauty only through observing “the external forms of living beings,” which external forms reveal “this idea in perfection.” Just as purveyors of natural religion such as Paley are able to find the “will and intention” of God through a study of nature, so in Reynolds’ aesthetics the artist gains an understanding of ideal beauty through empirical observation of the natural world. In the same manner that natural religion discovers the deity through a study of nature, so the artist must, like a good Lockean, build up a store of “materials” and then analyze, sort, and make a reasoned judgement about them. Indeed, Reynolds’ interrelation of beauty, generality, and the central form all are premised on empirical philosophy that grounds deism: a movement from the particular to the general in the quest for a transcendent form.⁷

Blake’s turn to the sublime, then, is a reaction against the philosophies that undergird natural religion and Reynolds’ aesthetics, but in turning to the sublime Blake also wants to divorce it from the empirical foundations that Burke had posited. In *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke builds his aesthetics on the physiological effects of the

⁷For a detailed analysis of Reynold’s interrelation of beauty, general nature, and the central and his philosophical premises, see especially Walter J. Hipple’s *The Beautiful, the Sublime, the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory*, Murray’s “Working Sir Joshua,” and Adams’ “Revisiting Reynold’s *Discourses* and Blake’s Annotations.”

sublime and beautiful objects. He believes that a clearer understanding of the beautiful and the sublime is a matter of reasoned theory that stems “from a diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions; and from a sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties are capable of affecting the body, and thus of exciting our passions” (1). For Blake, Burke’s method of determining whether an external form is sublime or beautiful by investigating its internal, bodily effects on a person’s senses smacks of Bacon, Locke, Newton. Blake thus rejects Burke’s theory of how the sublime affects the passions; he divorces the sublime from sensory perception that is the basis of empirical philosophy and aligns it with the imagination. He writes in *A Vision of the Last Judgement*: “The Last Judgment is an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science. Mental Things are alone Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place” (565). Or, as Blake explains in his *Descriptive Catalogue*: “The Greek Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne, or Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination, therefore not the authors of such sublime conceptions” (DC, 531). In a letter written to Thomas Butts which describes *Milton*, Blake describes how his “Grand Poem” will “speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory” (730): “I consider it as the Grandest Poem that This World Contains. Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry, it is also the somewhat in the same manner defin’d by Plato” (730). For Blake, mere allegory or fable that is addressed to the senses is a daughter of memory; however, allegory addressed to the “Intellectual powers,” the imagination is the “Most Sublime

Poetry.” Art, therefore, that stems from the imagination of the artist and addresses the imagination of the reader or spectator is true art, a “Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination” (730), and he labels such true art as sublime rather than beautiful.

Finally, as we have seen in Barbauld’s writing, the sublime is deeply connected to religious connotations that Blake wants to avoid. For example, Burke, whom we know Blake did read, explicitly connected the sublime to terror. As Samuel Monk argues, “The keystone of Burke’s aesthetic is emotion, and the foundation of his sublimity is terror” (87). Burke writes, “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotions which the mind is capable of feeling” (39). Burke goes on to relate the notion of terror, “the common stock of everything that is sublime” (64), to a notion of the deity: “In the scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, every thing terrible in nature is called upon to heighten the awe and solemnity of the divine presence” (69). Burke argues that when we “consider the Godhead” imaginatively, “we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him” and not even a consideration of his kinder “attributes” “can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand” (68). For Burke, the linking of the sublime to a terrible deity is an integral part of his aesthetics.

The connection of terror of the deity to the sublime is not original in Burke but derives from the sublime’s deep association with religion. For example, John Dennis, for whom “the greatest sublimity derives from religious ideas” (Morris 53), also links sublime

terror to the power of the deity: “Now of things which are terrible, those are most terrible which are the most wonderful; because that seeing them both threatening and powerful, and not being able to fathom the Greatness and Extent of their Power, we know not how soon they may hurt us” (1:361-62). Robert Lowth, likewise, connected religion and poetry and similarly argues for the elevation of the Deity. Lowth’s description of the sublime emotions of the subject contemplating the divine “attributes of God” parallels Burke’s sublime:

Here the mind is absorbed, overwhelmed as it were in a boundless vortex, and studies in vain for an expedient to extricate itself. But the greatness of the subject may be justly estimated by its difficulty; and while the imagination labours to comprehend what is beyond its powers, this very labour itself, and these ineffectual endeavours, sufficiently demonstrate the immensity and sublimity of the object. . . . Here the mind seems to exert its utmost faculties in vain to grasp an object, whose unparalleled magnitude mocks its feeble endeavours. (1:353)

In the religious sublime, an imaginative encounter with the deity produced either terror or astonishment, but both emotions are predicated on the distance between the humble perceiver and the magnificent object. As Lowth puts it, “When the Divine Omnipotence is opposed to human infirmity, the one is proportionably magnified as the other is diminished by the contrast” (1:359). Throughout the discourse of the sublime, writers associated the sublime with terror (and astonishment), an emotion that was intimately connected to a particular conception of the deity. De Luca points out, such “language of humiliation

becomes part of the standard idiom of the sublime” (24). To redeem the sublime for his own aesthetics and religion, Blake must reconfigure the deity that is perceived as the sublime object. As I will demonstrate in the next section, he does so by replacing the sublime object with the imagination, which he also figures as the Divine Body of Jesus.

II.

Blake’s aesthetics link the sublime with the imagination, but they also describe the means of delineating such imagination through an emphasis on the sublime qualities of minute particulars and the outline. I will examine Blake’s prose more closely in this section to trace Blake’s emphasis on minute particulars and the outline, thus further explicating his definition of the sublime. By showing how Blake uses these terms to fashion a concept of the sublime that stresses the accurate delineation of eternal characters and forms, we can better understand his conception of his ideal sublime form, the imagination. Such analysis will demonstrate the significance of the integrated nature of the sublime and the imagination in Blake’s religious aesthetics. His concept of the sublime leads to an accurate delineation of eternal classes instead of individuals, and his definition of the imagination subsumes the individual into the Divine Body of Jesus. The Divine Body, which functions as Blake’s aesthetic ideal, also functions as his political ideal, for it also models a public body that demonstrates the bourgeois dream of reconciliation of the individual subject to the general will of society.

One of the key ways Blake tries to distinguish his aesthetics from Reynolds’ is by emphasizing the importance of minute particulars instead of the abstraction of such particulars into an ideal general nature. For example, when Reynolds points out that a

“disposition to abstraction” and “to generalizing and classification” is “the great glory of the human mind,” Blake brusquely declares in the margin, “To Generalize is to be an Idiot To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit—General Knowledges are the Knowledges that Idiots possess” (AR, 641). He makes the same point also in his *Vision of the Last Judgment*:

General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in the Particulars that
Wisdom consists & Happiness too. Both in Art & in Life General Masses
are as Much Art as a Pasteboard Man is Human Every Man has Eyes Nose
& Mouth this Every Idiot knows but the who enters into & discriminates
most minutely the Manners & Intentions [of] the Characters in all their
branches is the alone Wise or Sensible Man & on this discrimination All art
is founded. (560)

Though Blake, like Reynolds, argues for a sense of “discrimination,” Blake does not believe discrimination is a scientific gathering of materials that allows one to move to the idea of general nature that excludes the particulars, which Reynolds labels as “accidents” and “deformities.” Indeed, Blake is vexed with the concept of a general knowledge that reveals a general nature: “What is General Nature is there Such a Thing what is General Knowledge is there such a Thing All Knowledge is Particular” (AR, 648). Blake’s stress on the particular over the general leads him consistently to attack Reynolds’ application of general nature to different forms and modes of painting. For example, he rebuts Reynolds’ ideas about history painting and claims, “A History Painter Paints the Hero, & not Man in General. but most minutely in particular” (AR, 652). Where Reynolds

traces an emphasis on general nature back to the Ancients, Blake takes the opposite stance: “The Ancients were chiefly attentive to Complicated & Minute Discrimination of Character,” and he argues that such discrimination is “the whole of art” (AR, 654). Indeed, throughout Blake’s writings one of the guiding principles of his aesthetics is that the “Greatest Artists” are the “Most Minutely Discriminating & Determinate” (AR, 646). Blake, by emphasizing the minute particulars, is intent upon opposing the empiricist model of art and religion in which reason abstracts from a study of nature a notion of ideal beauty, or a central form.

In describing the importance of minute particulars to the sublime, Blake appears to distance himself further from Reynolds’ empirical aesthetics. Reynolds privileges an ideal beauty that is achieved through defining a general idea of nature. Ideal beauty and general nature can be discovered through empirical observation that abstracts the “minute accidental discriminations of particular and individual objects” (16). Blake argues against both this concept of beauty and of general nature: “Minute Discrimination is Not Accidental All Sublimity is founded on Minute Discriminations” (AR, 643). He contends that “Without Minute Neatness of Execution. The Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas” (AR, 646). Blake tries to distinguish his aesthetics from the empiricist model of art that emphasizes the ability to reason and abstract from nature a central form, which can function as a deity that is external to human beings. Such an aesthetic would appear to privilege the individual and coincide with Blake’s more radical notion that every individual is indeed divine, since “All deities reside in the human breast.”

Throughout his writings, however, Blake's emphasis on minute discrimination and the minute particulars applies particularly to the accurate delineation of character. This distinction is significant, for Blake views character as general rather than particular, generic rather than individual. He outlines his idea of character most clearly in *Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the Nine and Twenty Pilgrims on Their Journey to Canterbury*, where he writes,

The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations: as one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same; for we see the same characters repeated again and again, in animals, vegetables, minerals, and in men; nothing new occurs in identical existence; Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay. (DC, 532)

Though "the names or titles are altered by time," the "characters themselves for ever remain unaltered" (DC, 532). Later in the same piece, Blake writes, "Visions of these eternal principles or characters of human life appear to all poets, in all ages" (DC, 536). In other words, though names may alter, the "things" they represent, the eternal characters, "never alter," and thus there will always be "classes of men" (DC, 533). Accordingly, when Blake argues for a minute discrimination of character, what he advocates as strongly delineated is not a particular individual but the universal and eternal character or classes of people that that individual represents.

Blake's idea of character also helps us understand the importance of ideal forms in his aesthetics. Blake may disagree with Reynolds' empirical/rational method of building up

a central form by abstracting the individual parts; nonetheless, he retains the importance of such ideal forms, which is revealed in his annotations to Reynolds' discussion of the central form. When Reynolds breaks down his central form into several "various central forms, which are separate and distinct from each other, and yet are undeniably beautiful"(46), Blake notes: "Here he loses sight of A Central Form. & Gets into Many Central Forms" (AR, 648). Reynolds goes on to propose that these "figures are each perfect in their kind . . . but still none of them is the representation of an individual, but of a class" (47). Blake responds to this statement by asserting that "Every Class is Individual" (AR, 648). Blake objects to the distinction between class and individual. Blake sees the individual as a class; that is, every individual represents an eternal class. Whereas Reynolds feels that central form is "the abstract of the various individuals forms belonging to that class" (47), for Blake individuals are actually already abstracts, or exemplifications, of the universal and eternal classes of men. In Blake's aesthetics, then, there is no need for scientific abstraction, for individuals already serve as abstracts of eternal qualities or classes. Therefore, the artist's duty is not to build up an abstract form but to reveal the eternal forms and classes that already exist and to delineate them accurately with minute discrimination. Thus, Blake argues, "Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else" (AR, 658).⁸ Blake's idea of eternal forms and classes is also the reason

⁸Blake here is directly attacking Burke's definition of the sublime. Though he is not speaking precisely of the sublime, Blake's defense of his own art to Dr. Trusler, however, sounds very close to Burke: "But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouses the faculties to act" (702). Robert Essick, who examines Blake's early designs, explains the discrepancy of the sublime exemplified in them and in Blake's annotations to Reynolds as a shift in Blake's aesthetic theory away from the obscurity of the Burkean sublime: "The dark, encrusted world created in the color prints of the mid-1790s and the characteristics of the Burkean

that Blake feels that it cannot progress: it is the continual revealing of the eternal forms. Blake writes, "Every age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage; we all pass on, each sustaining one or other of these characters, nor can a child be born who is not one of these characters of Chaucer" (DC, 533). Though there is a variety of classes, the move to a common humanity and the very universality of these classes erase the importance of the individual. If the classes remain the same and are just replaced by different individuals, social norms become static. Blake's valorization of the sublime, which is defined by a emphasis on minute discrimination of character, undermines the radical, democratic impulses of his art and the egalitarian emphases that they appear to reveal.⁹

Linked to Blake's preference for the minute discrimination of character is his definition of the outline as sublime. He associates a determinate outline with the strength of the sublime and links elaborate coloring with the weakness of beauty. In response to Reynolds' praise of "elaborate harmony of colouring, a brilliancy of tints, a soft gradual transition from one to other," Blake writes, "Broken Colours & Broken Lines & Broken

sublime they exemplify were not consistent with Blake's aesthetic and spiritual principals from about 1805 to the end of his life. In his comments on Reynolds' *Discourses*, Blake redefines the sublime as the art of distinct line and formal clarity—the very antithesis to the blurred patches of color printing" (150). Eaves, however, attributes this more to the meaning and medium of these works and sees "no uniform alteration in Blake's pictorial style" (42).

⁹John Barrell's comparison between Reynolds and Blake on characters and classes has informed my discussion. He writes, "... the representation of these 'eternal principles or characters of humanity' is intended to reveal to us how, when we see the images of character stripped of accident, we may all recognise that our different identities are united with those of others in one of the various classes of humanity; and to reveal to us that those classes are indeed various, though finite in number, according to the number of tasks that God has sent the various characters to perform. Thus far, and except that the audience are to identify with one or another of a specific class, rather than with a uniform central form, it seems that Blake's idea of the function of art is close to Reynolds's: art is the 'origin' of society because it reveals to us our common humanity, the ground of social affiliation; it is the 'bond' of society because it continues to do this, continually offering to us images of our common humanity." (236)

Masses are Equally Subversive of the Sublime”(AR, 652). In this section of the *Discourses*, however, Reynolds disparages the Venetians for this style. He argues that the Venetians’ “splendour of stile” is only the accomplishment of “mere elegance” and that they are “more willing to dazzle than affect” (64). Reynolds goes on to argue that coloring may achieve excellence “where nothing higher than elegance is intended” (64) but such “excellence . . . is weak and unworthy of regard when the work aspires to grandeur and sublimity” (68). Blake agrees with Reynolds here, and he writes, “Well Said Enough” (AR, 652). The agreement between these artists here derives from a notion of the sublime that stresses the effect that a unified aesthetic object has upon the imagination. Indeed, Blake’s assertion that broken colors, lines, and masses are “subversive” of the sublime correlates with Reynold’s argument that too many particulars distract a spectator and thus must be abstracted to their general nature: “However contradictory it may be in geometry, it is true in taste, that many little things will not make a great one. The Sublime impresses the mind at once with one great idea; it is a single blow: the Elegant indeed may be produced by repetition; by an accumulation of many minute circumstances” (65).¹⁰ In his *Descriptive Catalogue*, Blake compares his work to previous “masters” and links his abhorrence of “broken” aspects of painting specifically to a similar loss of form: “The

¹⁰Burke, likewise, in his discussion in the *Enquiry* of why unity is required for vastness to be sublime argues, “The mind in reality hardly even can attend diligently to more than one thing at a time; if this thing be little, the effect is little, and a number of little objects cannot engage the attention; the mind is bounded by the bounds of the object; and what is not attended to, and what does not exist, are much the same effect; but the eye or the mind (for in this case there is no difference) in great uniform objects does not readily arrive at their bounds; it has no rest, whilst it contemplates them; the image is much the same every where. So that every thing great by its quantity must necessarily be one, simple and entire” (139). Lowth, following Longinus, also argues that sublimity is “that force of composition, whatever it may be, which strikes and overpowers the mind, which excites the passions, and which expresses ideas at once with perspicuity and elevation” (1:307).

Venetian and Flemish practice is broken lines, broken masses, and broken colours. Mr. B's practice is unbroken lines, unbroken masses, and unbroken colours. Their art is to lose form, his art is to find form, and to keep it. His arts are opposite to theirs in all things" (DC, 538). The broken lines, masses, and colors that Blake detests seem very similar in description to Reynolds' idea of particularities taking away from the unity of the central form, but Blake's use of the term "form" here needs to be further clarified.

In a passage later in the catalogue, Blake explicitly links his idea of the outline to his definition of character and expression, which helps explain his notion on form. He writes,

If losing and obliterating the outline constitutes a Picture, Mr. B will never be so foolish as to do one. Such art of losing the outlines is the art of Venice and Flanders; it loses all character, and leaves what some people call, expression: but this is a false notion of expression; expression cannot exist without character as its stamina; and neither character nor expression can exist without firm and determinate outline. (DC, 549)

This statement, in fact, also clarifies Blake's description of his Chaucer painting, where he argues that since "the characters themselves remain for ever unaltered," they are "lineaments of universal life" (532-33). Character and outline are for Blake the central forms that exist unaltered, and it is the artist's duty to copy these faithfully not from nature, but from the imagination. The more determinate the outline and the more minutely discriminated character, the more sublime the aesthetic object, for it then more perfectly adheres to the divine forms revealed to the imagination: "The Man who asserts that there

is no Such Thing as Softness in Art & that every thing in Art is Definite and Determinate has not been told this by Practice but by Inspiration & Vision because Vision is Determinate & Perfect and he Copies That Without Fatigue” (AR, 646). For Blake, the proper beauty is not beauty at all but rather the sublime, for perfect beauty speaks directly to the imagination through unified forms: “The Beauty proper for a sublime artist is lineaments, of forms and features that are capable of being receptacles for the intellect” (DC, 544). Blake declares, “The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: The more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation” (DC, 550). For Blake, the outline is sublime and a fundamental aspect of art because it is through this determinate painting that the eternal forms that are present in the artist’s imagination are revealed to the spectator.

Blake’s definition of these central forms and their importance to the imagination, however, brings him closer Reynolds’ claim for the importance of an ideal, central form. Blake does dispute Reynolds’ claim that a central form implies deformity: “One Central Form Composed of all other Forms Being Granted it does not therefore follow that all other Forms are Deformity” (AR, 648). This distinction seems to lend itself to a more egalitarian and radical aesthetic, for it removes from the idea of the central form the distinction between normal/abnormal, the discursive effect of which is to naturalize class distinctions. But Blake does not dispute the notion of central form or an ideal form; rather he opposes Reynolds’ central forms because Reynolds defines such forms as abstracted from empirical observation. For Blake, there are no deformities that need to be abstracted,

since the central forms are immediately perceived as a unified whole by the poet or artist and then copied from the imagination: “All Forms are Perfect in the Poets Mind. but these are not Abstracted nor Compounded from Nature but are from Imagination” (AR, 648). He does not dispute the notion of a central form or ideal beauty; rather, he argues against Reynolds’ claim that empirical observation can filter out deformities and accidents and abstract the individual parts to a general idea: “Knowledge of Ideal Beauty. is Not to be Acquired It is Born with us Innate Ideas’ (AR, 648). For Blake, ideal form is not gained by abstracting individual parts; instead, there are no individual parts, only outlines, forms, and characters that are grasped by the imaginative vision of the artist, copied, and then apprehended by the imaginative vision of the reader. Blake’s attack of Reynolds’ notion that an individual is abstracted into an ideal, beautiful form would seem to be the basis for a more radical aesthetics that would privilege the individual. As I have argued, however, Blake’s definition of the sublime nature of the minute particulars and the outline, when seen in context of his discussion of character and form, reveals an aesthetic that is more conservative than radical. His definition of the imagination as the sublime form manifests even more explicitly his sublimation of the individual to a collective form that erases in real sense of individuality and demonstrates the intimate connection between his religion and his aesthetics.

In his prose, Blake privileges the imagination as the means of apprehending and receiving the ideal forms, but he also defines the imagination as the ideal form itself. By connecting the imagination with the Divine Body and Jesus, Blake is able to replace the importance of the sublime apprehension of a terrifying divinity with an object of

contemplation that instead reveals the divinity present in every person, the imagination. By using the divine body as his aesthetic ideal, it would seem that Blake's aesthetic artefact projects multiteity in unity, which appears to give preference to individual rather than the universal; however, this aesthetic model gives way to the universalizing tendency of bourgeois ideology. In his *Laocoon* aphorisms, Blake equates the "Eternal Body of Man" and "The IMAGINATION," which he then defines as "God himself" (L, 273). He then point out that God himself "is the Divine Body Jesus" and that "we are his members" (L, 273). Blake presents a similar equation in his annotations to Bacon, where he notes that "Imagination" is "the Human Eternal Body in Every Man" (633) and that it is also "the Divine Body in Every Man" (AB, 663). Blake's figuration of imagination as an eternal or divine body, which is Jesus himself, attempts to model an aesthetic ideal that preserves both unity and multiteity. Blake writes, "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (AB, 664). This equation of God and man is potentially radical and liberating, yet Blake's idea of the divine body still tends to subsume the individual. Though Blake appears to equate God and Man, he still preserves a distinction, for even though God "exists in us & we in him," there is still a split between "we" and "him." Though the "Divine Body" is present in "Every Man," there is still a subordination of the individuals who realize that they are "his members." The individuality of the members of the body is only realized once these members become part of the divine body. Furthermore, these parts are only members, not the ideal body itself, and thus work under the direction of and for the purpose of the whole body. Thus, their individuality is realized only inasmuch as they bend their will to the larger body.

This idea of multeity in unity is repeated in another of Blake's commentaries on the aesthetic ideal, which brings even closer to the forefront Blake's figuring of the imagination as the ideal unified aesthetic form. In a commentary on Homer's poetry, Blake writes, "Every poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity" (OHP, 269). He then goes on to describe this unity more precisely in a gloss of a sculpture: "But when a work has Unity it is as much in a Part as in the Whole. the Torso is a much a Unity as the Laocoon" (OHP, 269). In the first part of this statement, Blake provides an emphasis on the individual "part" of the ideal aesthetic object: he keeps "Part" in the singular rather than using the more expected "in the parts" and gives equality to the unity found as much "in" a Part as in "the Whole." Yet, he still preserves a distinction between "a part" and "the Whole." The part, signaled by an indefinite article, is even grammatically less realized and less important than the unity of the total aesthetic object, which is introduced by a definite article. Blake may be here echoing his preference for the definite over the indefinite, but more specifically, his attempt to meld the parts into the whole of the aesthetic object is the unified form that is able to strike the imagination at one blow.

Eagleton highlights the bodily nature of aesthetic discourse, an emphasis on emotions that Blake avoids in his aesthetics; however, Eagleton's analysis of the universalizing nature of the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology still provides a useful model for understanding Blake's definition of the imagination. Eagleton argues that "the task of political hegemony is to produce the very forms of subjecthood which will form the basis of political unity" (24). However, since bourgeois society emphasizes the role of the individual, there is the possibility of the dissolution of any political unity. Social relations

must be reconfigured to bring these autonomous subjects back to a political unity. Such reconciliation is mediated through the aesthetic, and in particular, through the way in which the aesthetic object itself models a unity that appears to emphasize individuality while actually undermining that individuality:

The citizen surrenders his 'bad' particularism—his narrowly selfish interests—and through the 'general will' identifies with the good of the whole; he retains his unique individuality, but now in the form of a disinterested commitment to a common well-being. This fusion of general and particular, in which one shares in the whole at no risk to one's unique specificity, resembles the very form of the aesthetic artefact For the mystery of the aesthetic object is that each of its sensuous parts, while appearing wholly autonomous, incarnates the 'law' of the totality. Each aesthetic particular, in the very act of determining itself, regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particulars. (25)

Blake's definition of the imagination as the ideal aesthetic object and his equating it with the Divine Body of Jesus reveals the extent to which his religion and his aesthetics are implicated in such a mediation of social power. The imagination becomes the way in which the individual's will is harmonized with the general will. The members of the Divine Body surrender their self-interest for the "good of the whole," for in order for the body to function properly all its members must work together in harmony, directed by an overriding will. The result of such determination is that the individual retains only a deceptive sense of self-determination; his membership in the body is so unified and

complete that he obeys the dictates of the body, follows the general will, while believing he is following his own will. In Blake's ideal aesthetic object, the members of the Divine Body, the parts of the unified whole, only become individualized through an abstraction of their individual will to the body of Jesus. They retain a "unique individuality" but it is only in the "form of a disinterested commitment to common well-being." Rather than being independent, each member of the body and each part of the whole "regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particulars" (25). Blake's definition of the imagination becomes implicit in bourgeois ideology's "defining itself as a universal subject" and providing it "dream of reconciliation" of "individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity" (Eagleton 25). Though Blake attacks the philosophical premises that undergird Reynolds' aesthetics and deism, he ends up defining a religious aesthetics that is just as potent a force in maintaining the hegemonic values of the dominant order.

III.

In the first two sections, I have argued that though Blake reacts against the philosophical and epistemological grounds that support Reynolds' aesthetics as well as deism, he still asserts the importance of unity of the divine body. Furthermore, he associates this ideal of his aesthetics and his religion with the sublime and the imagination. However, Blake's combined aesthetic and religious theories—his religious aesthetics—that are developed in his prose are also manifest in his most carefully constructed and complete

poem, *Jerusalem* (1820).¹¹ Indeed, *Jerusalem* provides fertile ground for considering Blake's notion of the public body that he wants his religious art to create, for it explicitly addresses the public: first in a preface to the general public, then to the more specific audiences of the Jews, the Deists, and the Christians. Also, he uses this poem to define the ideal aesthetic object, the divine body of Jesus, that promotes a social and political vision that he wants the public to emulate. The unified Divine Body of the imagination becomes a model for the public body. Nicholas Williams contends that through the figure of the Divine Body in *Jerusalem* Blake presents a model of the public that is more liberating, for the unity "is not directed from above, or invoked for purely ideological reasons, but arrived at through an exchange of differing and freely expressed viewpoints" (193). Similarly, Leonard Deen argues that "Los's mode of regenerating and reordering is . . . not hierarchical, not an imposition from above" (18) and thus the Divine Body that he preserves emulates "a democratic rather than an elitist society" (10). Such readings, however, ignore the universalizing tendency in Blake's definition of the imagination, which promotes unity at the expense of the individual. Such a public, then, is a democracy in name only, for the subject only becomes an individual through subsuming his voice to the unified voice of the Divine Body. The distinction of whether such unity is "imposed" or "directed" from above becomes negligible, for the result of such aesthetic mediation is the projection of a total unity that appears to be self-willed and that apparently removes of all such distinctions.

¹¹It is difficult to pinpoint a precise dating for *Jerusalem*. It appears that he began it in 1804, the date on the title page, but he did not finish a complete etched text of the poem until 1820. For the dating of the poem, see Joseph Viscomi's *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (339).

At first glance, the overall structure of Blake's epic appears to provide the key to understanding Blake's attempt to unify the public body. Indeed, Blake's overtly tidy division of the poem into four equal chapters has tantalized critics into trying to find a unifying theme to tie together these chapters with some unifying feature.¹² The uneven and frustrating results of these attempts, however, may speak to Blake's success in subverting the universalizing tendency manifest in his own prose. Rather than following these patterns and concentrating on the ideal form of Blake's poem, I will instead examine the "minute particulars" of its action, especially in regard to Blake's aesthetic and religious theories. In her book-length study of *Jerusalem*, Joanna Witke argues that Blake's poem is "an epic counterpart of the *Discourses* . . . and embodies a conflict between two systems of art involving two views of the world, between Reynolds' system grounded on rules that chain the soul and fetter the artist to earth, and Blake's system founded on spiritual power, which unbinds the imagination and breaks all fetters" (33). Witke's argument does provide useful insight into Blake's resistance to the philosophical premises of Reynolds' aesthetics, but she does not consider the social and political implications of either Blake's or

¹²In "Jerusalem: A Synoptic Poem," Joana Witke aligns the four chapters of the poem with the four gospels and parallels Blake's classes of readers with the gospels' different audiences. Anne K. Mellor sees the first chapter as presenting "the human form divine which Albion (mankind) has rejected" and chapters 2-4 as portraying "the perversions of the human form divine" and treating respectively the "abuse of the body; of the mind, including the emotions; and of the imagination" (595). Karl Kiralis links the movement of the chapters from Judaism to Deism to Christianity to the three ages of man: childhood, adulthood, and old age. In "The Structure of Blake's *Jerusalem*" Edward Rose contends that the four chapters "are a series of states dominated by an appropriate Zoa" (49) and that the entire work is further structured on fourfold patterns such as the seasons. Stuart Curran sees the poem as modelled on Milton's *Paradise Regained* and the Book of Revelation and argues that the poem "discloses . . . seven structures" (339) that total 53 parts. Northrop Frye sees the four chapters corresponding to the "four acts" of the fall, the struggle in the fallen world, the redemption, and the apocalypse and argues, "Each part of *Jerusalem* presents a phase of imaginative vision simultaneously with the body of error it clarifies" (357). Harold Bloom feels that *Jerusalem* is a "very orderly poem" (366) and sees the oppositions of the chapters as presenting a "gradually sharpening antithesis" (367) similar to the prophetic books of the Bible.

Reynolds' aesthetics but sees them primarily as engaged in an "Intellectual Battle" (FZ, 3:4), a "Mental Fight" (M, 1:13) that has only tangential connections with religion and politics. I contend that *Jerusalem* represents Blake's religious aesthetics in practice. By analyzing his treatment of the beautiful and the sublime and their connection to eternal classes and unity and as well as his figure of the Divine Body, I argue that *Jerusalem's* attacks on the philosophical underpinnings of Reynold's aesthetics and of deism end up promoting the universal subject of bourgeois ideology.

Blake's opening preface, "To the Public," highlights the importance of unity as well as the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. Above the archway on the first illustration, Blake describes Albion's "lovely Land": "His Sublime & Pathos become Two Rocks fixd in the Earth / His Reason his Spectrous Power cover them above / Jerusalem his Emanation is a stone laying beneath" (1:3-7). He further emphasizes the integral nature of these aesthetic categories to his epic later in the preface. Though he rejects the form of blank verse, which he describes "as much a bondage as rhyme itself" (4), he does employ an ordering principle for his poem, a principle that is derived from the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful: "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts—the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other" (4). In addition to the foregrounding of the sublime and the beautiful, Blake's first preface also highlights the importance of a unity in Jesus, whom he once again calls the "Divine Body" (3). He writes, "I also hope that the Reader will be with me, wholly One in Jesus our Lord" (3). Indeed, his purpose in awaking from his

“three years slumber” is to restore such unity in the nation: “Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be: / Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony” (3:9-10). Blake, then, wants to restore “unity” with his public, but he also wants to create a “harmony” of the public in general. His poem, which recounts the fall of Albion into division and his resurrection into a unity in the Divine Body of Jesus, models the aesthetic ideal which merges the individuals of the public into one seamless unity.

Since Blake’s prose associates the importance of the categories of the beautiful and the sublime to the imagination’s unifying force, it is not surprising to find a similar connection here in his preface. Northrop Frye argues that for Blake “the Druidic trilithon represents a geometrical or abstract form of the perversion of the relation of the three classes” that Blake identifies in *Milton*.¹³ He goes on to suggest that Blake’s opening image to *Jerusalem* symbolizes fallen aesthetics through a trilithon: the “Sublime & Pathos” are “uprights” with “the fallen reason covering them” (131). Similarly, David Baulch sees this as “an image of a divided aesthetic” (5), and he notes how it “resonates” with Blake’s description of *The Ancient Britons* “where he indicates the visible presence of a threefold division amongst postlapsarian humanity as the aesthetic qualities of the beautiful man of pathos, the strong man of the sublime, and the ugly man of human reason” (5).¹⁴ Baulch correctly identifies Jerusalem, which is the imagination, as the

¹³In *Milton*, Blake describes the “Three Classes of Men regulated by Los’s Hammer”: “The first, The Elect from before the foundation of the World: / The second, The Redeem’d. The Third, The Reprobate & form’d / To destruction from the mothers womb” (1:7:35-38). He aligns Satan with the Elect, Rintrah with the Reprobate, and Palambron with the Redeem’d (1:11:18-26).

¹⁴Paley, in *The Continuing City*, also makes this point: “Blake . . . views the sublime and pathetic as originally combined: this in fact is part of his myth according to which the disjunction of the two is a part of the fall”. Though he also notes the passage in the *Ancient Britons*, he does not see Blake arguing

“missing fourth” needed to complete Blake’s fourfold vision. While I agree with Frye’s and Baulch’s assessments, I want to push them a bit further. Blake is presenting an image of fallen perception, of the divided aesthetic, that he hopes his poem will unify. For this reason, all four elements of a four-fold humanity—reason, imagination, sublimity, and pathos—are “necessary” to create the unity of his poem. I argue, however, that as in his prose, rather than pointing toward the reunification of the sublime and the beautiful, Blake subsumes their differences as aesthetic categories to their usefulness in pointing out the eternal nature of character and form and the unity of the aesthetic ideal.

In *Jerusalem*, the fallen perception of Albion must be restored before he can be reunited with his Emanation, Jerusalem. By foregrounding the importance of aesthetic categories, unity, and the Divine Body of Jesus in the beginning of the poem, Blake signals that Albion’s fallen perception, like those of Reynolds and the Deists, is an interrelated problem of false aesthetics and religion. Before Albion can become resurrected into the Divine Body, Los must rectify his aesthetics. The question then becomes, what is fallen about Albion’s perception? What are his aesthetics and thus the aesthetics of the fallen public? At first glance, it appears that Albion’s aesthetic perception is perverted because it is grounded on the same empirical philosophy that Deism as well as Reynolds’ aesthetics are built upon. For example, when Albion hides Jerusalem and thus creates the fall, he declares, “Jerusalem is not! her daughters are indefinite. / By demonstration, man alone

for a fourfold unification. He sees Blake accepting that the “sublime and the pathetic . . . are rooted in indwelling characteristics” and that “their separation necessitates poetic styles appropriate to each” (61). He does not, however, point to their relationship to the imagination or the eternal forms of Blake’s aesthetics. Blake presents a construction similar to the one in *Ancient Britons* in his “Proverbs of Hell”: “The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hand & feet Proportion” (37).

can live and not by faith here I will build my Laws of Moral Virtue” (4:27-28). As Witke points out, Albion’s rejection of “faith” for “demonstration” neatly fits Reynolds’ aesthetics, which highlight the rejection of the artist’s divine inspiration for rules of art that scientifically abstract the laws of nature (44, 66). Similarly, the “Laws of Moral Virtue” mesh with Blake’s attack on Deism’s socially regressive standards that make use of religion to justify social inequities. Yet this parallel is complicated by Albion rejecting Jerusalem’s daughters because they are “indefinite.” This term reflects Blake’s problem with the blurred tints of the Venetians and the Flemish, his rejection of indefinite forms, and the importance of the sublime outline and character. The problem, then, with Albion’s perception is that he attempts to overcome the indefiniteness of form by resorting to the fallen epistemology of the empirical method. But instead of seeing Blake attacking this fallen perception by critiquing Reynolds’ notion of beauty as Witke does, I contend that Blake makes use of the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful not to privilege one over the other but to clarify and to argue for the unifying force of the imagination.¹⁵

Throughout Blake’s prose, he emphasizes the positive nature of the sublime and associates it with the imagination. In *Jerusalem*, however, he deploys the sublime in a slightly different fashion. For example, following the fall of Albion, he describes Britain’s landscape in sublime terms:

¹⁵For example, Witke writes that “Blake dramatizes the effects of Reynolds’ ‘great ideal’ of ‘perfection and beauty’—a phrase Blake reorders and uses repeatedly; at the same time he indirectly confirms his own views enunciated earlier concerning the necessity of unfettered arts for a nation’s vitality” (45). She sees Blake’s idea of central forms, filtered through Berkeley, as directly opposed to Reynolds’ central form. She does not consider the conjunction between Blake and Reynolds on the sublime effect of the unified imagination.

The banks of the Thames are clouded! the ancient porches of Albion are
 Darken'd! they are drawn thro' unbounded space, scatter'd upon
 The Void in incoherent despair! Cambridge & Oxford & London,
 Are driven among the starry Wheels, rent away and dissipated,
 In Chasms & Abysses of sorrow, enlarg'd without dimension, terrible (5:1-5).

By describing the darkness, the “unbounded space” that evokes infinity or eternity as well as chasms and abysses, Blake displays the typical associative images of the Burkean sublime of terror, and to make the point even more emphatic he even specifically calls images “terrible.” The terror that these images evoke in the reader, however, is a way for Blake to manipulate the false sublime of the senses in order to reveal to the reader the true sublime of the imagination that he describes in his prose. He does so by linking these traditional images of the sublime with the idea of division instead of unity: Albion’s split from Jerusalem is registered in the landscape that is described as “scatter’d,” “rent away” and “dissipated.” Later in this section, he sums up this connection between the sublime and division: “Jerusalem is scatterd abroad like a cloud of smoke thro’ non-entity” (5:13). The true terror for the reader should not be the traditional images of the sublime; rather it should be the fallen perception that sees division instead of unity and that causes the traditional images of the sublime to be terrible. The false sublime reveals the God of terror before whom mankind cowers; the true sublime is the realization of the God in man, the unity of man and the imagination in the Divine Body.

The association of Los and the sublime is particularly important, since he is artist-

prophet who is responsible for bringing about the resurrection of Albion into unity. When Los' Emanation (Enitharmon) and his Spectre (Urthona) divide from him, they both do so in "terror" (6:4), and his Spectre ends up "bitterly cursing" "terrible Los" (6:5) for his "friendship" (6:6) with Albion. Here again, Blake associates the terror of the sublime with division, and Los' reaction also suggests the wrath of the sublime God of the Old Testament: "Los rag'd and stamp'd on earth in his might & terrible wrath! / He stood and stampd the earth! then he threw down his hammer in rage & / In fury: then he sat down and wept terrified" (6:8-10). This scene exemplifies the importance of perception for Blake, as he frequently throughout *Jerusalem* cites examples of characters who "become what they behold." Enitharmon and Urthona divide from Los because they terrify him, and his wrathful reaction seems to justify their terror. However, once Los sees what he has become and is able to behold himself as a sublime object of terror, he himself becomes "terrified." He has become what he beheld—the terrors of division have transformed him into an object of terror. As he compels his Spectre to aid him in his "terrible labours" (8:15), Los sums up his transformation, "I now am what I am: a horror and an astonishment" (8:18). However, this sublime image is also that which frightens his Spectre (his reason) into submission. Los' transformation into a sublime spectacle shocks his Spectre to work with him, just as Blake tries to deploy sublime images to jolt his readers into seeing the horrors that division signals and prepares them for an understanding of the sublime unity of the imagination. The scene that causes Los to be terrified and, in turn, to become a terror is the division of Albion and Jerusalem that signals the dominance of religion and aesthetics grounded in natural philosophy, which is a "disease" that threatens

to “destroy Jerusalem” and to “devour the body of Albion”: “Every Emanative joy forbidden as a Crime: / And the Emanations buried alive in the earth with the pomp of religion: / Inspiration deny’d; Genius forbidden by laws of punishment” (9:14-16). The “Moral Virtue” of Deism and Reynolds’ rules of art work together to destroy Albion. However, Los’ work of renewing the imaginative perception, like Blake’s aesthetics, still asserts that same emphasis of unified public body that Reynolds’ aesthetics endorse.

Since the progression of *Jerusalem* is more cyclical than linear, we see Los terrified a number of times throughout the poem, most often at the repeated fall of Albion.¹⁶ For example, already again at the end of chapter one Albion’s fall provokes a sublime response from Los and his “strong Guard”: “But when they saw Ablion fall’n upon mild Lambeths vale: / Astonish’d! Terrified! they hover’d over his Giant limbs” (20:1-2). In chapter two, the image of Albion again “ready to fall into Non-Entity” (46:2) once more produces a sublime experience for Los: “Los was all astonishment & terror . . . astonished he beheld only the petrified surfaces of Albion” (49:2, 5).¹⁷ Even near the end of the apocalyptic fourth chapter, the specter of the postlapsarian world produces in Los “terrified cries” (91:58), as he sits “terrified” (91:53), almost immobilized by the spectacle. Albion’s fall and the consequent shift from unity to division, however, is not the only spectacle that produces a sublime reaction in Los. The other characters that produce the

¹⁶As Bloom points out, “The structure of *Jerusalem* is not of continuous narrative but of thematic juxtaposition” (391).

¹⁷Similarly, the Daughters of Beulah, when they see the other half of the separation/fall in the figure of Jerusalem, they are “Astonish’d” (48:29) at “the manner of the terrible separation” (48:26) and “Beheld her with wonder” (48:30). It is interesting to note the contrast between Los’ reaction to Albion which is figured as the sublime of terror and the view of Jerusalem which provokes the sublime emotion of wonder and astonishment.

terror of the sublime for Los are the Daughters of Albion and Vala/Rahab. In chapter three, for example, Los is “Terrified at the sight of the Victim” (65:73) of the Daughters of Albion’s druid sacrifices. Later in the same chapter, we find that “Los beheld in terror” Vala’s “iron Spindle of destruction” (66:10), “Her Two Covering Cherubs afterwards named Voltaire and Rousseau” (66:12), and the “Tabernacles of Bacon, Newton & Locke” (66:14). Finally, in chapter four these two forces are brought together as “Los saw terrified” (80:41) the “Cloud of Rahab vibrating with the Daughters of Albion” (80:40). Ironically, throughout *Jerusalem* Blake associates these figures that produce sublime emotions in Los with beauty. Yet, it is not their mere beauty that terrifies Los; rather, it is their association with the aesthetics and religion that is built upon rational philosophy. Blake does not portray these characters so negatively in the poem merely because Reynolds privileges the beautiful in his aesthetics. Instead, Blake, as in his prose, sees their most dangerous trait as their indefiniteness, which in Blake’s aesthetics signals a departure from the eternal forms of the imagination.

Vala, a character that is also called Rahab, is associated with nature and natural religion.¹⁸ Whenever this character appears, Blake consistently associates her with beauty and the traits that are associated with the beautiful. In chapter two, we learn that even in eternity Vala was associated with the beautiful. She says to Albion,

I was a City & a Temple built by Albions Children.

¹⁸Blake moves back and forth between calling her Vala and Rahab. As he explains in chapter three, “Her name is Vala in Eternity: in Time her name is Rahab” (70:31). The naming of Vala as Rahab occurs after the fall by Albion’s sons, who are the product of the union of Vala and Albion: “Albion’s Twelve Sons surround the Forty-two Gates of Erin, / In terrible armour, raging against the Lamb & against Jerusalem, / Surrounding them with armies to destroy the Lamb of God / They took their Mother Vala, and they crown’d her with gold / They named her Rahab, & gave her power over the Earth” (78:12-16).

I was a Garden planted with beauty I allured on hill & valley

The River of Life to flow against my walls & among my trees

Vala was Albion's Bride & Wife in great Eternity

The loveliest of the daughters of Eternity . . . (2 :36-40)

Her association with a City and Temple foregrounds a contrast between the fallen city and temple and the eternal city of Jerusalem. She is the "sweet wanderer" (43:66) and the "lovely Vala" (55:28); she has "beautiful Female features, soft flourishing in beauty" (70:23) that projects "Beams mild" (70:24). Her beauty is dangerous, however, because it is delusive. Indeed, once Albion rejects Jerusalem for her, he is lulled into staying with her and walks with her "in dreams of soft deluding slumber" (43:34) from which Los must try to rouse him. Her beauty helps keep Albion from arising, but it also precipitates his separation from Jerusalem. Jerusalem herself provides the best account of the seductive nature of Vala's beauty when she recounts to Vala herself how she was "redounded from Albions bosom" (20:37):

. . . Albion beheld thy beauty

Beautiful thro' our Love's comeliness, beautiful thro' pity.

The Veil shone with thy brightness in the eyes of Albion,

Because it inclosd pity & love; because we lov'd one-another!

Albion lov'd thee! he rent thy Veil! he embrac'd thee! he lov'd thee!

(20:31-36)

Albion rejects Jerusalem, which he thinks is a "deluding shadow" (23:1), because he thinks Vala's Veil is truly beautiful: "I see it whole and more / Perfect, and shining with beauty!"

(23:5-6). Vala has trapped Albion in her “nets of beauty & delusion” (79:78), and though she says she has been commanded by Luvah to murder him, she does not go that far: “But I Vala, Luvah’s daughter, keep his body embalmed in moral laws / With spices of sweet odours of lovely jealous stupefaction” (80:26-27). Though Albion is not dead, he is trapped in the sweet delusion of natural religion and aesthetics.

Vala’s beauty is a negative delusion because she forsakes the imagination. She has hid “the Divine Vision” (29:46) and convinces Albion that she, nature, is true beauty. She says to Albion, “Know me now Albion: look upon me I alone am Beauty / The Imaginative Human form is but a breathing of Vala” (29:48-49). Like Reynolds, who defines beauty as singular and defines it through nature, so Vala is able to delude Albion and force him into a position where he denies the Divine Vision, the imagination. Later as Rahab, she destroys both religion and art: “Imputing Sin & Righteousness to Individuals: Rahab / Sat deep within him hid: his Feminine Power unreveal’d / Brooding Abstract Philosophy. to destroy Imagination, the Divine- / -Humanity A Three-fold Wonder: feminine: most beautiful: Three-fold / Each within other” (70:18-21). Once the “Arts of Life” have been “changd into the Arts of Death” (65:16), Los sarcastically reveals the danger of Vala’s beauty: “Now: now the battle rages round thy tender limbs O Vala / Now smile among thy bitter tears: now put on all thy beauty / Is not the wound of the sword sweet! & the broken bone delightful” (65:27-30). Vala’s delusive beauty has been exposed as a force that leads people to fruitless labor in art and in life:

Kept ignorant of its use, that they might spend the days of wisdom

In sorrowful drudgery, to obtain a scanty pittance of bread:

In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All,

And call it Demonstration: blind to the simple rules of life. (65:25-28).

The Daughters of Albion play a similar role in *Jerusalem*, and Blake also associates them with beauty. Just as “Vala howld upon the winds in pride of beauty” (65:30), so the “beautiful Daughter of Albion” (68:11, 68:15, 68:41) go forth “In pride of beauty” (68:14). Yet like Vala, the Daughter of Albion’s beauty is dangerous: “O beautiful Daughter of Albion: cruelty is thy delight” (68:53). The “lovely Daughters of Albion” (30:39) also use their beauty as a “cruel delusion” (65:66). Furthermore, they likewise favor rational philosophy and demonstration: “The Daughters of Albion. divide & unite in jealousy & cruelty The oburate forms are cut assunder by Jealousy & Piety. . . . Rational Philosophy and Mathematic Demonstration / Is divided in the intoxications of pleasure and affection” (58:5-14). The Daughters of Albion and Vala are connected by their beauty, cruelty, and reliance of abstract/rational philosophy rather than the imagination, which fits in with Blake’s rejection of Reynolds’ aesthetic. They are, however, also linked by their indefiniteness. For example, in chapter four, Rahab is “like a dismal and indefinite hovering Cloud” (80:51). Also, she “Refused to take a definite form. she hoverd over all the Earth / Calling the definite, sin: defacing every definite form” (80:51-52). Though part of this indefiniteness relates to Blake’s idea that error cannot be eliminated until it is consolidated, her positive action of rejecting the definite and calling it a sin recalls Blake’s insistence of the definite: the determinate outline that reveals the eternal characters. Similarly, Los is astonished and terrified at the Daughters’ druidic sacrifice, which puts forth “soft deluding odours” (65:66) and results in “a feminine

indefinite cruel delusion” (65:67). The effect of the work of the Daughters’ beauty is pointed out more explicitly even on the next plate: “The Human form began to be altered by the Daughters of Albion / And the perceptions to be dissipated into the Indefinite” (66:46-47), which eventually becomes Albion’s tree. The beauty of Vala/Rahab and the daughters of Albion is terrifying to Los, and should be terrifying to the reader, because of their rejection of the imagination. It is not just their beauty that is rejected, but their association of the beautiful with the indefinite, the turning away from the definite forms that are available to the artist through the imagination. Blake’s characterization of the beautiful and the sublime in *Jerusalem*, though figured a bit differently than in his aesthetics, still highlights the definite eternal forms that characterize the imagination. As I argue in the next section, Blake also mirrors the aesthetics of his prose by linking the imagination with the Divine Body in *Jerusalem*, thus again promoting the unity of bourgeois ideology.

IV.

In Blake’s prose, the importance of the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime is subsumed by the overriding concern of his religious aesthetics, which is to combat rationalist aesthetics as well as deism by advancing the importance of the imagination. Similarly, in *Jerusalem*, the significance of the beautiful and the sublime lies in their connection with the unified imagination. For Blake, fallen perception consists of the separation produced by rational philosophy and the inability to resolve such separation by seeing the eternal forms that are revealed in the imagination. Indeed, this fallen perception is what hinders aesthetic theories such as Reynolds’ and religious systems such

as deism, for they are built upon a philosophy that separates the perceiving subject from the object of perception. They end up investing the object, nature, with too much power as they try to build up to a central form or a divine image through abstraction of the empirical method. For Blake, the unified whole, the ideal aesthetic object that is also the ideal God, is not to be gained by reason and abstraction but by imaginative apprehension. Thus, throughout *Jerusalem* the primary task of Los, like Blake himself, is to preserve the Divine Vision, the imagination. In this poem, as in his prose writings, the form that imagination reveals, and indeed consists of, is the Divine Body. I contend that though Blake may appear to describe an egalitarian ideal of the public body that preserves multiety within unity, the radical aspects of this body become subsumed by the unifying form of the imagination. In *Jerusalem*, Blake's image of Albion's resurrected body that merges with the Divine Body of the imagination may avoid the typical emphasis on the body that Eagleton contends structures the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, yet Blake's "divine body" nevertheless works toward a similar abstraction of individuals into a unity that subsumes difference.

Blake follows the pattern in his prose by equating Jesus, the imagination, the Divine Body, and the Divine Vision throughout *Jerusalem*. For example, when he narrates the contrast between "Abstract Philosophy" and the "Imagination," he states that the imagination is "the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus" (5:59). Also, Albion, in a moment of penance, realizes what he has done by turning away from the Divine Vision: "O Human Imagination O Divine Body I have Crucified / I have turned my back upon thee into the Wastes of Moral Law" (24:23-24). Furthermore, Blake's negative characters mock the

existence of the imagination and the divine body. For example, Jerusalem says to the Divine Voice: "Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son of God / That Thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body art all / A delusion" (60:56-58). Likewise, Albion's Spectre denies the imagination and the Divine Body while he taunts Albion, telling him, "I am your Rational Power O Albion & that Human Form / You call Divine, is but a Worm seventy inches long" (29:5-6). The Divine Vision, which allows correct perception of the Divine Body, wanes when abstracted by rational power. For example, when under the spell of Vala, Albion tells her that "the Divine Vision / Is as nothing before thee, faded is all life and joy" (29:33-34). Indeed, the central problem throughout the poem is Albion's (and subsequently Jerusalem's) separation from the Divine Vision. Jerusalem rebukes Albion, "Why hast thou hidden me, / Remote from the divine Vision: my Lord and Saviour" (23:11-12). The cause of Albion's fall is that he "fled from the Divine Vision" (57:12). On the other hand, Los "beheld the Divine Vision" (62:35). Albion is able to be resurrected in the end because Los "kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble" (95:20). This Divine Vision, imagination, reveals the Divine Body; however, the Divine Body is also described as Jesus or the imagination. In other words, the imagination is not just a mode of perception; it is also the object of perception. Yet Blake seems to be caught in circular reasoning here, for in order to preserve the imagination, one must already have imagination. As Harold Bloom points out, "The paradox of the Imagination, to Blake, is that it survives these wars of love that have already slain the wholeness of man. It survives because it is one with the Holy Ghost" (378). Blake clarifies this paradox a bit by portraying a limited fall that does not destroy the imagination but only hides it. Los' task,

then, like Blake's, is to restore the Divine Vision that provides the unfallen perception which allows humankind's unity in the Divine Body to be revealed.

In one of their confrontations, Los castigates Albion for his "Error," which caused him to be reduced from "the Image of God surrounded by the Four Zoas" (42:23-24). Albion has "slain" three of these Zoas, but he cannot kill Los, who keeps the imagination alive and is imagination itself. Los declares, "I am the Fourth: thou canst not destroy me" (42:24). Los, as the Fourth Zoa, cannot be destroyed because the Saviour has established limits to the fallen perception. Los explains,

There is a limit of Opakeness, and a limit of Contraction;
In every Individual Man, and the limit of Opakeness,
Is named Satan: and the limit of Contraction is named Adam.
But when Man sleeps in Beulah, the Saviour in mercy takes
Contractions Limit, and of the Limit he forms Woman: That
Himself may in the process of time be born Man to redeem
But there is no Limit of Expansion! there is no Limit of Translucence.
In the bosom of Man for ever from eternity to eternity. (42:28-35)

As Blake declares in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite" (39). The Divine Vision, which in *Jerusalem* is correlated with the eternal perspective of expansion, is the necessary and correct perception, and this vision, which is the imagination, is always preserved. The poet's task is to remove the bonds of natural philosophy that restrict knowledge to the senses: "For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his

cavern" (*MHH*, 39). Blake declares in his own voice at the beginning of *Jerusalem*: "I rest not from my great task! To open the Immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever Expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination" (5:17-20). The linkage of expansion as a positive "limit" is also emphasized in chapter three: "Let the Human Organs be kept in their perfect Integrity / At will Contracting into Worms, or Expanding into Gods" (55:36-37). In *Jerusalem*, the task of expanding perception so that people can be a part of the Divine Body is accomplished, in part, by Los through his art, the building of Golgonooza. Since characters throughout the poem "became what they beheld" (30:44), Los must model the imaginative vision for the Divine Body to be revealed. This task helps explain the equation of the means of achieving imagination, the Divine Vision, with imagination itself, the Divine Body. However, as the limit of expansion allows everyone to see his/her own divinity, it also merges the many individuals voices into the one Divine Voice: "Then the Divine hand found the Two limits, Satan and Adam, / In Albion's bosom: for in every Human bosom those limits stand. / And the Divine voice came from the Furnaces, as multitudes without / Number! the voices of the innumerable multitudes of Eternity" (31:1-4). Karl Kroeber points out that "Blake believes that we expand by moving inward and contract by moving outward" (358). Therefore, for Blake, "true vision" is "the power of beholding the multitude as one" and of perceiving "the unity of diversity" (398). Blake's task, like Los', is to provide an aesthetic model that changes people's perceptions even as it changes who they are, but we need to question how diversified this unity actually is for Blake. The limit of expansion in *Jerusalem* functions like Blake's model of aesthetic unity, a connection which is clarified a

bit by his prose.

The expanded and contracted perception in *Jerusalem* gains deeper significance by reading it in context with a passage from Blake's *Vision of the Last Judgment*. In this work, he first points out, "it ought to be understood that the Persons Moses & Abraham are not here meant but the States Signified by those Names the Individuals being representatives or Visions of those States as they were revealed to mortal Man in the Series of Divine Revelations" (VLJ, 556). Here again we get to Blake's ideas of the eternal forms that are revealed by the imagination, the same definite forms that Blake posits through his deployment of the beautiful and the sublime in *Jerusalem*. How a person perceives these various states, however, depends on the perspective of the viewer: "these various States I have seen in my Imagination when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations" (VLJ, 556-57). He also writes, "I have seen when at a distance Multitudes of men in Harmony appear like a single Infant" (VLJ, 557). The difference between seeing the unity of the form or the individuals within the form is one of perspective. On the one hand, this type of argument would seem to promote a more ideal aesthetic object, one that preserves multitude and unity. However, Blake seems to favor the One Man over the multitude, for it is through the privileged vision of his imagination that he sees them as One Man. He takes the same approach in *Jerusalem*, arguing for a renewed perception so that the senses can perceive "True Harmonies, & comprehending, great, as very small" (49:37). Blake's attempt to renew imagination, the limit of expansion, endorses the larger view that favors the one over the many, while the limit of contraction that he seeks to overcome only sees the multitudes of

men, the individuals, the minute particulars.

In Blake's prose, we have seen the nuances of his terms "minute particulars" and "general form." In *Jerusalem*, he seems to shift his meaning of minute particulars, which he also labels as "Mutual forgiveness" (38:61), to equate them with individuals. When Los explores the "interiors of Albions / Bosom" (45:3-4), he sees both the universal form and the minute particulars destroyed by Albion's forsaking of the imagination: "Every Universal Form, was become barren mountains of Moral / Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend into grains of sand" (45:19-20). The indication here that there is more than one universal form correlates with Blake's idea of eternal forms or characters. Los, however, also clarifies the fallen state of these minute particulars: "[He] saw every Minute Particular of Albion degraded & murdered / But saw not by whom; they were hidden within in the minute particulars / Of which they had possessed themselves" (45:6-8). Kroeber argues that here "Blake describes loss of individuality as a hardening of the minute particulars" (359). Rather, this passage indicates that the minute particulars in Albion's fallen form are "degraded" because they are too individualized: they are particular only to themselves and have not merged into the universal forms, nor do they clearly delineate the eternal forms of the imagination. Los advocates an aesthetic ideal that attempts to preserve both the minute particulars and the general form:

He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children
 One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family, & in the midst
 Jesus will appear; so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
 Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized & not as thou

O Fiend of Righteousness pretendest; thine is a Disorganized

And snow cloud

* * *

You accumulate Particulars, & murder by analyzing, that you

May take the aggregate; & you call the aggregate Moral Law:

And you call that Swelld & bloated Form; a Minute Particular.

But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every

Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus. (91:18-30)

The idea of the Divinity, which is the imagination, again appears to emphasize the individual over the whole through a highlighting of the minute particulars: to see “a Perfect Whole” one must first “see it in its Minute Particulars,” since “General Forms have their vitality in Particulars.” Blake makes the social agenda of this aesthetic model even more specific by explicitly stating that “every / Particular is a Man.” Los’s action leads Deen to conclude that “Los’s devotion to ‘Minute Particulars’ is a devotion to the individual existence and character that is the life of identity and without which community cannot exist. . . . [His perceptions] identify the unique individual with the universal form rather than burying the individual in the general: they see the universal identity in or through the unique particular” (204). As we have seen in Blake’s aesthetic theory, however, the minute particular is not a unique individual and in imaginative vision, the “Perfect Whole” takes precedence over the minute particulars. Indeed, Los’s argument that “General Forms have their vitality in Particulars” correlates to Blake’s ideas that the eternal forms are most vital, most engaging to the imagination, when they reveal the forms

present in the artist's imagination.

In a similar passage in chapter three, Los states, "Swelld & bloated General Forms, repugnant to the Divine- / Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form / To which all Lineaments tend & seeks with love & sympathy / All broad & general principles belong to benevolence / Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity" (38:18-23). Though he argues here again against the abstracting of individuals that characterizes Reynolds' aesthetics, he argues for a similar type of progress, moving from the "One" individual to "Divine Family" that goes up to the Divine Body of Jesus. Again, it is not the "General" or "Universal" form that is "repugnant" to Blake; rather, it is the empirical process of abstraction that leads to this form. Furthermore, though Blake emphasizes the minute particulars here, their importance does not lie in their individuality but in their ability to help visualize the "perfect Whole." Blake's argument that "General Forms have their vitality in Particulars" and that benevolent "broad & general principles" protect minute particulars "in their own identity" does not, however, lead to an aesthetic ideal that promotes a more democratic public body. The vitality of the general forms is revealed by the clear delineation of the general forms that are eternal in the imagination and the identity that is revealed is not individual but generic. Echoing Blake's aesthetics as outlined in his prose, these statements are not about changing society through valuing individual action; rather, they model how the static and eternal nature of the classes of society, the general forms, may be clearly revealed through minute discrimination of character.

Finally, it is notable that though Blake regards every minute particular as a man,

each man is not a “Divine Member” but in relation to Jesus. Blake argues for a process of identification that moves from the “One” individual, who moves to the “Divine Family,” and finally becomes part of the “Divine Jesus.” This model of the Divine Body of Jesus displays an identical merging of particulars into a unified whole that corresponds with the religious aesthetics of Blake’s prose. Furthermore, the same concern with preserving the particulars but subsuming them into the universal subject of bourgeois ideology appears here. With the correct expanded perception, “we behold as one, / As One Man all the Universal Family; and the One Man / We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him, / Live in perfect harmony in Eden” (34:18-21). This merging into the One Man that creates “perfect harmony,” however, is predicated upon a loss of individuality. Indeed, the emphasis on the “One Man” here seems to echo the Urizenic system of rational philosophy and religion that Blake was striving against. In the *Book of Urizen*, Urizen proclaims:

Let each chuse one habitation:

His ancient infinite mansion:

One command, one joy, one desire,

One curse, one weight, one measure

One King, one God, one Law. (4:36-40)

Edward Rose, however, contends for the liberating potential of this Divine Body, by showing how Blake developed this model from Paul: “Blake’s emphasis on union with Christ, which he takes from Paul, depends on man’s ability to cast off selfhood. Thus when he speaks to his people he tells them to *give* the self, not lose it. The union with Christ, the union that is Christ, is not achieved by losing personal identity but by partaking

in the family or community of independent and liberated selves” (401). I would argue that, as in bourgeois ideology, Blake presents here an appearance of self-determination and independence that is undermined by a unity of general will, which is revealed by a closer look at Blake’s use of the Pauline model of the divine body.

The Pauline model of the body of Christ that Blake uses in his portrayal of the divine body does not emphasize individuals but classes. Paul writes, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of another” (Romans 12:4-5). Paul’s emphasis here is not on the individualism that Rose perceives. Rather, Paul is pointing out that though all are members of “the one body in Christ,” every member has his own particular duty, or “office.” He goes on in verse six to note that all members have particular “gifts according to the grace that is given them”: some are to prophesy, others to minister, and still others are supposed to exhort, give, rule, and show mercy (12:6-8). In other words, the Pauline body of Christ here reveals a similar approach as Blake’s eternal characters: everyone has his/her own particular station which is revealed through the imagination of the Divine Body. Rather than promoting the individual, this type of body promotes the good of the whole and is a rather conservative formulation. In I Corinthians, Paul formulates the same idea of the divine body: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ For the body is not one member, but many . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (I Cor. 12:12, 14, 27). Again, though this model appears to model individuality and equality, the context of this passage is once more the diversity of

spiritual gifts, which outlines the specific roles that members have by birth and should be used to promote the good of the divine body.

Though Blake's aesthetic and religious model appears to figure a multitude in unity, it is undermined by his more conservative vision of the eternal states or characters of individuals as well the merging of particulars into the unity of the whole that is characteristic of bourgeois aesthetic ideology. The egalitarian nature of his religious aesthetics, which promotes the imagination to combat the rational philosophy that undermines Deism and the dominant aesthetics, ends up advocating the ideology of the imagination, which presents a similar vision of a unity to a general will that characterizes the Evangelicals' warfare against the dry Deism and outward religion of British society. Blake's insistence on avoiding writing his religious discourse onto the body may present a means to break with the dominant aesthetics, yet his figuring of the imagination imposes a similar mediation of social power through the figure of the divine body.

V.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Barbauld negotiated the intimate connection between religion and aesthetics by constructing a notion of a beautiful deity to avoid the associating her religion with a sublime conception of a terrible God. In doing so, however, she, like the Evangelicals, writes religion onto the body and connects the influence of a beautiful God to an emphasis on manners and taste that creates an exclusionary religion that also promotes self-imposed restraint and subordination. Blake takes the opposite route and privileges the sublime and the imagination. Yet, he also ends up privileging an emphasis on unity that promotes the subordination of the individual will.

In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how Percy Shelley negotiates these intimate connections between religion, aesthetics, and politics. Shelley opposes orthodox Christianity's sublime religion of terror, which he sees fostering tyranny and violent revolution, by turning to the Greek religion of beauty, which he feels will promote a gradual, peaceful reform.

Chapter Three

“The Gods whom we should worship”: Percy Shelley and the Beautiful Greek Religion

“If man is ever to solve the problem of politics in practice, he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom.”

—Freidrich von Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (9)

In the previous two chapters on Barbauld and Blake, I have demonstrated how they negotiate the complex interrelation between politics, religion, and aesthetics through their manipulation of the categories of the beautiful and the sublime. While Barbauld links her religion to the beautiful to avoid engendering emotions associated with terrors of the sublime deity, Blake redefines the sublime object of contemplation as the unifying force of the imagination, the Divine Body of Jesus. Percy Shelley, likewise, wants to promote a religion and an aesthetics that enact political change, but he also wants to dissociate them from the violence and terror of orthodox Christianity. He believes that this religion’s sublime conception of God has corrupted the moral teachings of Jesus, whom he views as a purely human reformer, and instead supports tyranny. Yet, he also feels that immediately removing such a religion that has so degraded people will lead only to a bloody revolution, so he wants to replace it with a religion that reflects his political goals of gradual reform. He crafts a solution to this dilemma by advocating a religion of beauty that is informed by his Hellenism. Though previous critics have studied Shelley’s religion and his Hellenism, they have not explored how both are connected through his aesthetics.¹

¹The most thorough studies of Shelley’s religious thought include Ellsworth Barnard’s *Shelley’s Religion*, Bennet Weaver’s *Toward the Understanding of Shelley*, Bryan Shelley’s *Shelley and Scripture*, and Robert Ryan’s chapter on Shelley *The Romantic Reformation*. Barnard says that his study is “not only an exposition of Shelley’s religious beliefs, but also a defense of them” (9). He admits, however, that he is so invested in this project because he himself shares these beliefs (9). Bennett Weaver studies Shelley’s use of the Bible and links him to a prophetic tradition, yet he also tries to deduce Shelley’s personal faith from

In analyzing this connection, I will argue that Shelley's Hellenism, which goes back as early as 1816 and reaches its apex in *Hellas* (1821), is centered in a Greek religion of beauty that replicates the restraint and subordination of the conservative religious discourse that the Evangelicals employed in the wake of the French Revolution. For Shelley, the Greek religion of beauty becomes a means to mediate political power through the aesthetic, an attempt to ensure gradual, peaceful reform that stems from a cultured elite and that will prevent the lower classes from leading a violent revolution. To trace Shelley's investment in the Greek religion of beauty, I will first outline Shelley's concerns about violent revolution that are manifested in his prose writings. Then, reading Shelley through the aesthetics of Johann Winckelmann, I argue that Shelley turns to the religion of beauty that is manifested by the ancient Greeks as a means to lead people to gradual political reform. Finally, I conclude by reading Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* (1818) as demonstrating his desire to replace orthodox Christianity's sublime religion of terror,

these materials. Bryan Shelley succinctly identifies the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches: "Both critics were well versed in Shelley's writings, and they unfailingly adduced the right primary texts. But each attempted to interpret Shelley as in some sense Christian, either by misrepresenting the poet or by reinterpreting Christianity as a form of altruism or humanism" (ix). Weaver and Barnard thus fall into the long-standing argument of whether Shelley is an atheist or a Christian. Bryan Shelley, in his work, tries to avoid this trap by viewing Shelley's reading of Scriptures through his "affinity to Gnosticism" (2-3), which provided "a comprehensive revisionist stance toward the Jewish and Christian Scriptures" (2). Ryan sees Shelley also as a "religious reformer," one who tries to salvage a correct perception of Christianity in order to enact political reform. He argues concerning Shelley's later works: "The poet who once lamented Christianity . . . had come to see the religion of Jesus, in its ideal form, as representing important values" (211). None of these studies, however, focuses on the cultural politics at work in Shelley's religion, nor do these studies provide a full explication of the connection between Shelley's religious discourse and his Hellenism. Two recent critical studies of Shelley's Hellenism are Jennifer Wallace's *Shelley and Greece* and David Ferris' *Silent Urns*. Wallace sees Shelley's Hellenism as "overtly political" (4). She argues that ancient Greece provided Shelley the model of "an active thinking mind" (5) which helps people to engage in political discourse. Ferris examines Shelley's Hellenism in relationship to Winckelmann's "aestheticization of history" (14). I detail my differences with Ferris at the beginning of section II of this chapter (pgs. 152-53).

which leads to tyranny and fosters violent revolution, with the religion of beauty, which leads to peaceful reform.

I.

One of Shelley's earliest political interventions is his *An Address to the Irish People* (1812), and this text exemplifies the framework of Shelley's concerns about violent revolution and his commitment to a Godwinian model of gradual reform. The historical epoch that haunts Shelley's writings is the period of violence that crushed the hopeful beginnings of the French Revolution. Though these events are often thought of in connection with the disillusionment of first generation Romantics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, they also provide guiding principles for Shelley's concept of societal change that he manifests in his *Address*. Shelley wrote his *Address* in protest of Home Rule and in favor of Catholic Emancipation, but he is also writing to help persuade his readers to avoid violent measures.² He is thus concerned that the publication of this text will lead him to be wrongly "accused of a desire for renewing in Ireland the scenes of revolutionary horror which marked the struggles of France twenty years ago" (36).³ Shelley is motivated to write his text partly because of his similar attitude toward the

²With the impending accession of the Prince Regent, and the assumption that he would crush the Irish hopes of Catholic Emancipation, these matters became subjects of intense public debate. As E.B Murray points out in his notes to this text: "In late 1811 and early 1812 the repressive measures taken against Irish militants who spoke for Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Act of Union were recurrent features of the daily and weekly press, which also advised their readers in late Dec. 1811 of a meeting in Dublin on 28 Feb. of the General Committee of the Catholics of Ireland for the purpose of addressing or petitioning the Regent in protest of their right to protest" (329). Shelley spoke at the meeting and the Dublin papers gave him fairly favorable coverage, in spite of his harsh remarks about the clergy.

³All quotations from Shelley's early prose are from *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E.B. Murray.

French Revolution, for he writes, “it is the renewal of that unfortunate æra, which I strongly deprecate, and which the tendency of this address is calculated to obviate” (36). For Shelley, violence, even if motivated by the just ends of liberty, only produces more cycles of violence that end up tarnishing the cause of liberty. He writes concerning those who advocate violence as a means to political change: “They should know that nothing was so well-fitted to produce slavery, tyranny, and vice as the violence which is attributed to friends of liberty, and which the real friends of liberty are the only persons who disdain” (27). To avoid repeating the “revolutionary horror” of 1793, Shelley encourages the Irish to employ a “resistance of the mind” instead of a “resistance of the body” (18) they should “resist oppression, not by force of arms, but by power of the mind, and reliance on truth and justice” (19).

While this program for revolution may appear idealistic, Shelley also advocates practical steps for them to achieve this “power of the mind”: “But before this can be done with any effect, habits of SOBRIETY, REGULARITY, and THOUGHT must be entered into, and firmly resolved upon” (19). In other words, Shelley does not want the restraints of government removed until the people are reformed and have acquired bourgeois habits, for their “fiery passions” (18) could erupt into mob violence. He writes, “Before Government is done away with . . . O Irishmen, REFORM YOURSELVES—and I do not recommend it to you particularly because I think that you most need it, but because I think that your hearts are warm and your feelings high, and you will perceive the necessity of doing it more than those of a cold and more distant nature” (25). Shelley is concerned about the overactive emotions of the Irish and thus contends that the “millennium of

virtue,” where government is no longer necessary, will not arrive until the Irish have replaced their violent passions and physical resistance with “an intellectual resistance” (35). He exhorts them, “I wish to impress upon your minds, that without virtue or wisdom, there can be no liberty or happiness; and that temperance, sobriety, charity, and independence of soul, will give you virtue—as thinking, enquiring, reading, and talking will give you wisdom. Without the first, the last is of little use, and without the last, the first is a dreadful curse to yourselves and others” (27). Though he does realize that such “virtue” must be combined with a more liberal-minded “wisdom,” Shelley is anxious to advocate values that sound strikingly similar to the reformation of manners that the Evangelicals advocated. He does so in order to avoid the anarchy that would ensue once the restraints of government were removed. The self-imposed habits of bourgeois society become a means of restraint that help avoid the excesses of violence that may be sparked once the restraints of government are removed. Shelley has an ardent desire to see Catholic Emancipation and the repeal of Home Rule, but he is just as anxious to avoid that anarchy that he sees resulting in a violent overthrow of government.

Shelley’s concern about the possibility of violence in Ireland derives, in part, from his anxiety about the lower classes. His emphasis on restraint, regulation, and morality stems from his desire to reach a specific intended audience in this pamphlet. In the postscript to the *Address*, Shelley writes, “I have published the above address (written in England) in the cheapest possible form, and have taken pains that the remarks which it contains, should be intelligible to the most uneducated minds” (37). Shelley’s audience for the *Address* is lower class both in financial terms and in cultural terms; thus, his pamphlet

needs to be printed “in the cheapest possible form” and made “intelligible to the most uneducated minds.” Shelley, though, does not believe that people are “slaves and brutes because they are poor” (37); rather, he feels that because of their position in society, “it has been the policy of the thoughtless, or wicked of the higher ranks . . . to conceal from the poor the truths that I have endeavoured to teach them” (37-38). The “truths” that he attempts to teach them, however, appear to be not only a stoic resistance but also a conformity to middle-class values of restraint and submission. In his *Address*, which is his pamphlet for the lower classes, Shelley advocates these values, but his *Proposals for an Association of those Philanthropists* (1812) also cites the necessity of providing leadership that will help improve “the state of the public mind” (42), which he sees as a necessary step toward reform. In order to promote such reform, he proposes an association that is not composed of the “uneducated minds” that he speaks to in his *Address*. He proposes an “association for the purposes, first, of debating the propriety of whatever measures may be agitated, and secondly, for carrying, by united or individual exertion, such measures into effect when determined upon” (44). In addition to calling for restraint among the lower classes, he feels it necessary to provide a mechanism that guides them in their efforts, and this mechanism is this association of intelligentsia. The revolution in Ireland will not, then, proceed from the bottom up but from the top down. The association’s purposes would be “for discussing knowledge and virtue throughout the poorer classes of society in Ireland, for co-operating with any enlightened system of education; for discussing topics to throw light on any methods of alleviation of moral and political evil, and as far as it lays in its power, actively interesting itself, in whatever

occasion may arise for benefitting mankind” (44-45). The association would help the Irish avoid the violence of the French Revolution by providing them living models of the “doctrines of Philanthropy and Freedom” (51): “I consider it to be one of the effects of a Philanthropic Association, to assist in the production of men such as these, in an extensive development of those germs of excellence, whose favorite soil is the cultured garden of the human mind” (52). Shelley’s metaphor of a “cultured garden of the human mind” that helps develop “germs of excellence” is key to understanding his political thought, for it brings with it the idea of gradual change as well the meaning of culture in broader sense, which for Shelley becomes a means to “produce” leaders for political reform.

Shelley’s desire for peaceful, gradual reform led by middle-class intellectuals is not limited to Ireland but also guides his *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom* (1817)—in which he calls for the need “to proceed gradually and with caution” to avoid “anarchy and despotism” (175)—and becomes further developed in *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1819), which most fully outlines Shelley’s views of political reform. Here again Shelley confronts the specter of the French Revolution. In comparing the American Revolution to the French Revolution, Shelley feels that the former was more successful because there was more enlightened public opinion, which led to less violence. He blames the violence of the revolution in France on the oppressors’ effect on the public mind: “The tyrants were, as usual the aggressors. The oppressed, having been rendered brutal, ignorant, servile and bloody by long slavery, having had the intellectual thirst, excited in them by the progress of civilisation, satiated from fountains of literature, poisoned by the spirit and the form of monarchy, arose and took a dreadful

revenge upon their oppressors” (7:13).⁴ Though the French Revolution “overthrew the hierarchy, the aristocracy and the monarchy,” it was incomplete, for it did not create a change of feelings: “But as it only partially extinguished those passions which are the spirit of these forms a reaction took place which has restored in a certain degree the old system” (7:15). The “passions,” which he cited as a cause of problems for the Irish, once again create a problem for Shelley. He thus cites an identical problem with the French Revolution and the English Revolution: “The authors of both revolutions proposed a greater and more glorious object than the degraded passions of their countrymen permitted them to attain” (7:15).

For Shelley, then, the push for political change should not come from “the mischiefs of uprisings [&] popular violence” (7:21) but through a gradual reforming of the passions. The “degraded passions” that lead to “popular violence” are located primarily in the lower classes, and for this reason Shelley points out that a violent revolution would produce a “temporary dominion of the poor, who by means of that degraded condition which their insurrection would be designed to ameliorate, are sufficiently incapable of discerning their own genuine and permanent advantage” (7:21). Shelley opposes universal suffrage, for he sees it as a temporary solution that would cause greater problems, since the people would not be ready for it: “A Republic, however just in its principle and glorious in its object, would through violence and sudden change which must attend it, incur a great risk of being as rapid in its decline as in its growth” (7:41). He thus

⁴All quotations from *Philosophical View of Reform* are from *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck.

concludes, “Any sudden attempt at universal suffrage would produce an immature attempt at a Republic” (7:43). Shelley, as he did in *Address*, repudiates the idea of a sudden and violent revolution and advocates instead “the just persuasion that patience and reason and endurance [are the means of] a calm yet irresistible progress” rather than a “civil war” that is “engendered by the passions” (7:41). Shelley writes, “If Reform shall be begun by the existing government, let us be contented with a limited *beginning* . . . it is no matter how slow, gradual and cautious be the change; we shall demand more and more with firmness and moderation; never anticipating but never deferring the moment of successful opposition, so that the people may become habituated [to] exercising the functions of sovereignty, in proportion as they acquire possession of it” (7:46). He even argues that if a similar situation as the Peterloo Massacre should occur again, the people should “expect without resistance the onset of cavalry, and wait with folded arms the vent of the fire of the artillery and receive with unshrinking bosoms the bayonets of the charging battalions” (7:48).⁵ He defends this position “not because active resistance is not justifiable when all other means shall have failed, but because in this instance temperance and courage would produce greater advantage than the most decisive victory” (7:49). Finally, Shelley in particular singles out “certain vulgar agitators” who “endeavour to flatter the most uneducated part of the people by arguing for “Retribution” (7:55). This desire for revenge is found in lower classes and thus is specifically linked to the “vulgar” and “uneducated.” He goes on to further characterize this desire for retribution: “This is falsely called an

⁵On August 16, 1819 at St. Peter’s field, Manchester, a group of militiamen opened fire on a crowd gathered to rally for Parliamentary reform. Casualties included six dead and over eighty wounded. See also Shelley’s poem on this event, “The Mask of Anarchy.”

universal law of human nature; it is a law from which many are exempt, and all in proportion to their virtue and civilization. The savage is more revengeful than the civilized man, the ignorant and uneducated than the person of a refined and cultivated intellect” (7:55). Middle-class reform, which is peaceful and gradual, is only advocated by those with sufficient cultural capital, those who are “refined and cultivated” and virtuous and civilized.

Shelley’s *Philosophical View of Reform* also articulates the connection between religion and politics that informs Shelley’s vision of gradual reform. From the outset, he traces a pattern of political despotism that is accomplished through Christianity:

From the dissolution of the Roman Empire, that vast and successful scheme for the enslaving [of] the most civilized portion of mankind, to the epoch of the present year, have succeeded a number of schemes, on a smaller scale, operating to the same effect. Names borrowed from the life; and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture; and a system of liberty and equality (for such was the system preached by the great Reformer) was perverted to support oppression. (7:5)

Shelley cites a “progress of philosophy and civilization” that helped provide resistance to the tyranny of Christianity, but in the end, philosophy is countered by religion and, in turn, overthrown, thus starting the process all over again. Philosophy still is a positive force that can unhinge the connection between religion and tyranny by questioning the mandates of established religion. In France, however, philosophy itself led to the violent excesses of the revolution:

A crowd of writers in France seized upon the most popular portions of the new philosophy which conducted them to inferences at war with the dreadful oppressions under which the country groaned, made familiar to mankind the falsehood of their religious mediators and religious oppressors. Considered as philosophers their error seems to have consisted chiefly of a limitedness of view; they told the truth but not the whole truth.

(7:9)

The writers' philosophy showed them that liberty was incompatible with the present situation, and they went on to show "mankind" their findings, which also indicted the religious system that helped make that political tyranny possible. Their error, however, consisted of removing all the restraints of religion without putting any other restraints in place. In other words, their writings worked negatively, making people aware of the interconnected links in the chains of political and religious tyranny, but they did not present any positive system of restraint to replace Catholicism. The ensuing violence demonstrated to Shelley that it was not enough to remove people's wrong religion; another restraint of some sort needed to be placed in its stead to provide especially the lower classes the restraint to avoid violence and retribution. As Shelley writes to Leigh Hunt on November 14, 1819: "I fear that in England things will be carried violently by the rulers, and that they will not have learned to yield in time to the spirit of the age. The great thing to do is to hold the balance between popular impatience and tyrannical obstinacy; to

inculcate with fervour both the right of resistance and the duty of forbearance" (2:153).⁶

The religion of beauty which Shelley finds in Greek art provides him with a model for such a gentle restraint that will hold the balance by critiquing tyranny while still inculcating restraint.

II.

Shelley's admiration of Greek culture, his Hellenism, has recently received renewed attention. These studies, however, do not address Shelley's particular attention to the concept of beauty and how it is connected to a concept of a deity, a connection that plays a prominent role in one of the most influential forces in nineteenth-century Hellenism, Johann Winckelmann.⁷ Indeed, Shelley was not always interested in classical literature, but one of the most appealing facets of it was its use as a cudgel against Christianity. In 1812, he writes to Godwin, who had been pressing him on reading the ancients: "The First doubts which arose in my boyish mind concerning the genius of the Christian religion as a revelation from the divinity were excited by a contemplation by [of] the virtues & genius of Greece & Rome" (1:307). These "doubts" that classical literature brought to orthodox religion attracted Shelley at first to the ancients, but he later saw a more positive influence in Greek culture, which would lead to his rejection of Roman

⁶All quotations from Shelley's letters are from *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones.

⁷For Winckelmann's influence on 19th-century Hellenism, see David Ferris, who argues in *Silent Urns* that Winckelmann "provided the foundation for the emergence of Hellenism in the eighteenth century" (17) and who sees the Romantics responding to this brand of Hellenism. Stephen Larrabee also contends that Winckelmann's ideas became one of "the bases of the Hellenism of the early nineteenth century, when Romantic poets, under the influence of the Antique, treated the large body of 'ideas' about Greek and its sculpture more imaginatively and poetically than the earlier English poets" (16-17).

literature and art in favor of the Greek model.⁸ This preference for the Greeks is part of a larger cultural shift toward Greek aesthetics, but part of the reason for this shift relates specifically to Shelley's ideals of gradual political reform.⁹ Shelley's preference for a milder form of social control that will replace tyrannical religion is embodied in the idea of beauty, which for Shelley is connected with the ideals of ancient Greek art that Winckelmann presents in his theory of art.¹⁰

In reading Shelley through Winckelmann, we can see how Shelley's turn to a religion of beauty provides him with a model for political reform that can be enacted through his poetry. Angela Leighton, in *Shelley and the Sublime*, traces Shelley's shift from an alignment with empirical philosophy toward a "sublime aesthetic" (1) that provides him with a more active model of the mind. Leighton argues, "It is in a sublime aesthetic, which develops along side empirical philosophy but is in many ways antagonistic to it, that Shelley finds a language to protect inspiration as the original and mysterious Power of poetry" (1). Since the sublime aesthetic is so thoroughly connected with religious belief, however, Leighton's theory comes to a bit of an impasse. Though she contends that Shelley is "perhaps the first consistently unbelieving poet of the sublime" (24), she also concedes that Shelley, as a "radical and atheist . . . cannot subscribe but

⁸Jennifer Wallace also points out that Shelley "cited the paganism of the ancient world in order to confront contemporary orthodox Christianity" (33), but she does not explore the positive model of religion that Shelley finds in the Greeks.

⁹For an account of this shift from the Roman model to the Greek model in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British aesthetics, see Wallace (8-14).

¹⁰Though Robert Jones does not discuss Winckelmann and does not go beyond the eighteenth century, his *Gender and the Formation of Taste* discusses how the idea of beauty was used to mediate political power.

uneasily and anxiously to such an aesthetic" (23). Rather than trying to negotiate the paradox that Leighton deftly maneuvers through in her study, I will demonstrate instead that Shelley's political and religious beliefs manifest a turn to the beautiful rather than the sublime. He finds that the religion that leads to political tyranny is dependent on a sublime conception of God that cows people into submission. He also realizes, however, that without restraint, violent revolution will follow the removal of such religious restraints. Thus, he argues for the Greek religion of beauty in his conception of a deity and in his aesthetic theory. Beauty, like the aesthetic itself, provides a mediation of social power and is able to provide a gentle restraint that leads to reform rather than the overt restraint maintained by the fear invoked by sublime terror.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Roman model dominated as the aesthetic model for British art. Near the end of the eighteenth century, however, Grecian taste became the aesthetic model, partly due to the influence of Johann Winckelmann. Before turning to Shelley's appreciation of the beauty of Greek religion, which is essentially the religion of beauty, it is useful to survey Winckelmann's theory of art. Though I contend that Shelley's turn to beauty begins even before he studied Winckelmann so ardently in the winter of 1818-19, it is useful to see how closely Shelley did follow him and why he saw in his aesthetic model a means to codify his own aesthetics.¹¹ David Ferris argues that the importance of Winckelmann's theory of art for Romantic Hellenism is his connection of

¹¹Though there is no documentation that Shelley read Winckelmann before the winter of 1818, Shelley's conversation about Greek matters with Peacock, Hogg, Byron, and Hunt may have involved a discussion of Winckelmann's aesthetics, especially since Fuseli's translation of *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks* (1766) became influential during the Elgin Marble controversy. For a detailed account of this historical context, see Grant Scott's *The Sculpted Word*.

art to history, his demonstration in *The History of Ancient Art* of how art is an index to freedom in society. Ferris views Winckelmann's work as a crucial part of the "development of modernity," which he loosely defines as a "historical consciousness of culture" (5) and contends that the impetus of Winckelmann's project is to link history and the aesthetic; thus, for Winckelmann, the "aesthetic is a mode of historical understanding rather than the Greeks serving as a model of the aesthetic" (24). According to Ferris, by tracing history through art and linking the ideal of freedom to the ideal of art, Winckelmann "aestheticizes history" (8), thus creating his legacy in Romantic Hellenism. Romantic Hellenism, then, also uses art to gain a critical understanding of history and freedom and similarly grapples with the problem of "the production of a concept of culture" that derives from such "aestheticization of history" (14). Ferris, in particular, is specifically attacking readings of Romantic Hellenism that see such a movement as an escape from history into art or that portray an uncritical or idealizing Hellenism as succumbing to the "Romantic ideology." I do not quarrel with Ferris' point that the aesthetic is deeply political and historical; however, I do contend that Hellenism's mediation of history through the aesthetic presents a model of historical understanding that is deeply implicated in contemporary political circumstances and needs to be more closely interrogated. Ferris studies Shelley's mediation of Romantic Hellenism through Winckelmann's "aestheticizing of history," but he overlooks another component of Winckelmann's aesthetic theory that links him closely to Shelley: his preference of beauty as the defining characteristic of art and his elaboration of the connection of beauty to religion. In his *History of Art*, Winckelmann traces the three stages of art: "The arts which

are dependent on drawing have, like all inventions, commenced with the necessary; the next object of research was beauty; and, finally, the superfluous followed” (1:29). He later elaborates this model into the three stages of style: the straight and hard; the beautiful and flowing; and the imitative (3:151). In both cases, a civilization’s focus on beauty in art marked the period of fulfillment for that society’s art, preceded by mere drawing and followed by the superfluous. Though a society’s freedom helps to foster this flowering of art, which allows an understanding of such freedom, Ferris is unclear about how Winckelmann defines this freedom. Winckelmann’s aesthetics, however, do provide a specific model of that freedom. His theory of art and his particular definition of beauty promote the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology—the apparent freedom that leads to self-imposed restraint and subordination.¹²

In defining a theory of art that he extrapolates from the remains of Greek civilization, Winckelmann insists on the importance of beauty. He argues that beauty is “the loftiest mark and the central point of art” (2:192) and that for the “ancients artists” whom he so passionately admires “beauty was the chief object of expression” (2:247). Though beauty is such an important concept for Winckelmann, he finds it difficult to define: “For beauty is one of the great mysteries of nature, whose influence we see and feel; but a general, distinct idea of its essential must be classed among the truths yet

¹²As Eagleton puts it, “Like the work of art as defined by the discourse of aesthetics, the bourgeois subject is autonomous and self-determining, acknowledges no merely extrinsic law but instead, in some mysterious fashions, gives the law to itself” (23). Eagleton’s more sweeping statements about the aesthetic are insightful and provide a general model of aesthetic ideology, but he does not analyze Winckelmann in particular, nor does he explore the interconnectedness of aesthetics and religion. In my discussion of Winckelmann, I will demonstrate how Winckelmann’s connection of aesthetics and religion were important to Shelley because of the particular historical and social context in England, a context that Eagleton often slights.

discovered” (2:193).¹³ Winckelmann’s deliberate vagueness in defining beauty anticipates Shelley’s description of the Spirit of the Universe, but it also echoes eighteenth-century debates about taste. Beauty, like taste, has “no rule and canon,” for people “differ about that which is beautiful, just as we differ about that which is truly good” (2:193). Though there are different tastes for beauty, Winckelmann does attempt to restrict its definition. Thus, even though there are different conceptions of beauty, “those who have regarded and selected beauty as a worthy subject of reflection cannot differ as to the truly beautiful, for it is one only, and not manifold” (2:198). Beauty does affect the senses, but Winckelmann is careful to limit his definition of true beauty to a perception that involves reflection as well. Winckelmann asserts that the “most cultivated” nations “invariably agree as to the general form of beauty” (2:198) because they employ reflection in addition to mere sense perception: “Beauty is felt by the sense, but is recognized and comprehended by the understanding, which generally renders, and ought to render, sense less susceptible, but more correct” (2:198). Beauty appears to have a democratic appeal through its sensory ideal, but Winckelmann is careful to limit this appeal to those who have the proper “understanding,” which renders their senses “more correct.”

Winckelmann does, however, eventually define the primary attributes of beauty. For him, beauty consists in “harmony, unity, and simplicity” (2:196). This definition of beauty leads to a promotion of a seamless unity that abstracts all individuality. Winckelmann writes: “All beauty is heightened by unity and simplicity. Everything which we must consider in separate pieces, or which we cannot survey at once, from the number

¹³See Jones’ discussion of proliferating definitions of beauty and taste in the eighteenth century (15-40).

of its constituent parts, loses thereby some portion of its greatness” (2:200).

Winckelmann later states more explicitly that an attribute of beauty is “the absence of individuality” (2:201). The lines that shape beauty in art “produce a figure which is neither peculiar to any particular individual, nor yet expresses any one state of the mind or affection of the passions, because these blend with it strange lines, and mar the unity” (2:201). Though the “shape of beauty” may be individual, that is, “confined to an imitation of one individual” (2:201), even that individual is a figure that is not a “peculiar individual” but one that is blended from ideal parts. That which is “*ideal*” consists of “a selection of beautiful parts from many individuals, and their union into one” (2:201). Since the “greater the unity . . . in the junction of forms . . . so much the greater is the beauty of the whole” (2:203), “ideal beauty” is the “selection of the most beautiful parts and their harmonious union in one figure” (2:205). Because Winckelmann argues that beauty in art flowers in societies with the most freedom, such close historical connection links the model of beauty to a model of society that fosters such beauty. These qualities of beauty echo the ideals of a bourgeois aesthetic ideology, which highlights individuality, only to undermine it with an emphasis on unity that subsumes the individual into a collective identity, a universal human subject.

Winckelmann’s model of beauty not only models the bourgeois ideal of unity, but it also emulates the disciplining of emotion that became integral to hegemonic control. Winckelmann writes concerning the emotional effect of beauty: “harmony which ravishes the soul does not consist in arpeggios, and tied and slurred notes, but in simple, long-drawn tones” (2:201). Harmony, which allows the eye to take in both the individual parts

and the unity of the structure is more effective at moving the soul than a sublime shock.

Winckelmann later explicitly compares the heroic style—which is more rugged and sublime—with the grand style, which he also terms, the “beautiful style” (3:137).

Comparing the heroic style to the grand style, Winckelmann writes, “The former hurries us, as it were, impetuously away; the latter leads us willingly along with him” (3:134). The reason for this is that the beautiful style “sought to combine with lofty beauty a more sensual charm, and to make grandeur more companionable, as it were, through an engaging desire to please” (3:137). Beauty, like the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, moves people gently, and they willingly come along and acquiesce to a governance that appears self-imposed.

Beauty specifically works to restrain the passions. For Winckelmann, “stillness is the state most appropriate to beauty” (2:246) and “the idea of lofty beauty cannot be conceived otherwise than when the soul is wrapt in quiet meditation and abstracted from all individuality of shape” (2:246). The abstraction of the individual, so important to Winckelmann’s theory of art, becomes thus intimately connected to the containment of emotions. In his comparison of the grand, or beautiful, style to the heroic style in Greek art, Winckelmann explains that the “fundamental principle of the grand style was. . . to represent the countenance and attitude of the gods and heroes as free from emotion, and not agitated by inward perturbation, in an equilibrium of feeling, and with a peaceful, always even state of mind” (3:135). Winckelmann does not argue for the exclusion of all emotion but really an “equilibrium of feeling” and an exclusion of “all excess in passions” (2:254). The disciplined emotions of the art appeal to and model the disciplined emotions

of the observer: “The ancient artists displayed the same wisdom in their conception of figures drawn from the heroic age, and in the representation of merely human passion, the expression of which always corresponds to what we should look for in a man of disciplined mind, who prevents his feelings from breaking forth” (2:250). The feelings are still present but are restrained by a disciplined mind. Thus, in the “beautiful style,” the “soul manifested itself only, as it were, beneath a still surface of water, and never burst impetuously forth” (3:138). Emotions are vital to art, but Winckelmann provides a model of beauty that contains these emotions.

Finally, Winckelmann’s concept of beauty also informs his idea of the deity. He contends that since we are human and not divine, “our idea of universal beauty is still indefinite” (2:200). He explains, “The highest beauty is in God; and our idea of human beauty advances toward perfection in proportion as it can be imagined in conformity and harmony with that highest Existence, which, in our conception of unity and indivisibility, we distinguish from matter” (2:200). Winckelmann’s description of the deity as a beautiful yet indefinite spirit that pervades the universe will be further explored by Shelley.

However, at this point, I want to emphasize that Winckelmann regards the Greek conceptions of the deities as praiseworthy precisely because they are formed along his definition of beauty. He comments on the Greek deities: “It was conformable to their idea of the immutability of the godlike nature; and a beautiful youthful form in their deities awakened tenderness and love, transporting the soul into that sweet dream of rapture, in which human happiness — the object and aim of all religions, whether well or ill understood — consists” (2:211). Since the aim of religion is “human happiness,” the

Greek deities, which awake tenderness and love, represent not only the height of art but also model what feelings a conception of the deity should awaken—not the terror of the sublime but the tenderness and love engendered by beauty. These gods exemplify their beauty and gentleness in their “repose and stillness” and are portrayed as “equally tranquil and passionless” (2:248). Winckelmann, in particular, cites a depiction of Apollo which represents to him “the highest conception of ideal male beauty” (2:215). He feels that such a depiction of a deity is worthy of notice since it “is more conformable to our idea of Apollo,” whom he describes as a “benignant and gentle deity” (2:215). He argues that such “elevated ideas of the godhead” ought to replace the “Italian manner of speaking of the deity” in which “we see an aged man with a bald head” (2:222). He goes on to disparage the conception of religious figures in modern art: “Modern artists ought to have formed their figures of the Saviour conformably to the ideas which the ancients entertained of the beauty of their heroes, and thus made him correspond to the prophetic declaration, which announces him as the most beautiful of the children of men” (2:230). Winckelmann’s concept of a beautiful deity that engenders happiness and pleasure corresponds with his idea of art, which not only is produced by free and independent societies, but also fosters that society’s unity and harmony through the aestheticizing of social power.

Shelley’s close adherence to Winckelmann’s valorizing of the beautiful can be seen in his letters from Italy that followed his reading of the *History of Art*. For example, in November 9, 1818 letter to Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley provides a survey of the art that he had seen in Italy. He first cites, as an example of great art, Corregio’s “*Christ*

beatified,” which he describes as “inexpressibly fine”(2:49). This picture is pleasing to Shelley because it proceeds along the Greek models that Winckelmann cites as excellent: “It is a half-figure rising from a mass of clouds tinged with an ethereal rose-like lustre, the arms are expanded, the whole figure seems dilated with expression, the countenance is heavy as it were with the weight of the rapture of the spirit, the lips scarcely parted with the breath of intense but regulated passions, the eyes are calm and benignant, the whole features harmonized in majesty and sweetness” (2:49-50). Shelley’s description of this painting conforms to the “equilibrium of feeling” and harmony that Winckelmann associates with the beautiful. Though the figure is “dilated with expression” and there is a “rapture of the spirit,” these emotions are contained, and the resulting depiction is that of “intense but regulated passions” that leads to calm and sweetness. Shelley then moves on to discuss Raphael’s *St. Cecilia*, and in this discussion he explicitly makes a connection to the ancients: “You forget that it is a picture as you look at it, and yet it is most unlike any of those things which we call reality. It is of the inspired and ideal kind, and seems to have been conceived & executed in a similar state of feeling to that which produced among the ancients those perfect specimens of poetry and sculpture which are the baffling model of succeeding generations” (2:51). By depicting something that is almost beyond reality, Raphael’s picture teeters toward a danger of ekphrasis, as the imitation of an imitation, that Winckelmann defines as the superfluous stage in art. What saves this picture, however, is that it exhibits “a unity and perfection . . . of an incommunicable kind” (2:51). Shelley paradoxically then describes this incommunicable perfection and unity: “The central figure St. Caecilia seems rapt in such inspiration as produced her image in the

painters mind, her deep dark eloquent eyes lifted up, her chesnut hair flung back from her forehead, one hand upon her bosom, her countenance as it were calmed by the depth of its passion & rapture, & penetrated through with the warm & radiant light of life” (2:52). As in the Corregio picture, emotions are contained: “passion” and “rapture” do not produce a violent excess; rather, they end up calming St. Caecilia’s countenance. The “intense but regulated passions” of Corregio’s painting and the countenance that is “calmed by the depth of its passion” point toward Shelley’s adherence to concept of beauty like Winckelmann’s rather than a sublime aesthetic. The importance of this aesthetic, however, is that it provides Shelley an artistic model through which to achieve gradual political reform. Rather than advocating art that engenders violence through its sublime figures, Shelley opts for art that models a restraint of the passions. Indeed, at the end of this letter, Shelley makes this connection more explicit when he laments the passing of art:

The material part of these works must perish, but they survive in the mind of man, & the remembrances connected with them are transmitted from generation to generation. The poet embodies them in his creation, the systems of philosophers are modelled to gentleness by their contemplation, opinion that legislator is infected with their influence; men become better & wiser, and the unseen seeds are perhaps thus sown which shall produce a plant more excellent even than [than] that from which they fell. (2:53)

The art of the ancients thus provides an aesthetic model, but it also models how such art helps to create a gradual and gentle change in political leaders and public opinion.

Shelley sees the role of the beautiful in art as making men “better & wiser,” but his

choice of words here reflects part of the problem that he sees. In order for literature and art to succeed, it must supplant the sublime religion that produces tyranny and slavery with a religion that provides gentle restraint. As Shelley writes in *An Address, To the Irish People*: "The only use of a religion that ever I could see, is, to make men wiser or better; so far as it does this, it is a good one"(15). Shelley thus turns to the Greek model, and to Winckelmann in particular, using the religion of beauty to replace Christianity as the means for restraining society and for bringing about its improvement. Shelley's linked conceptions of beauty and the deity can be seen as early as his "Essay on Christianity" (1816) and his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1816). Even in his earliest writings Shelley, like Winckelmann, is careful not to provide too limiting a definition of a deity and also links this deity to a concept of beauty. For example, in his prose notes to *Queen Mab*, Shelley discuss the problems of limiting definitions of the deity that lead to anthropomorphism. He writes, "By the vulgar mistake of a metaphor for a real being, of a word for a thing, it became endowed with human qualities and governing the universe as an earthly monarch governs his kingdom" (112).¹⁴ He points out that it is contradictory for people to use the "anthropomorphism of the vulgar" (99) to describe God, for it leads them to try to define what is undefinable, the "infinite, eternal, incomprehensible" (99). For Shelley, an anthropomorphic conception of a deity leads to a conception of a retributive God of terror, since it is invested with all the worst human traits. Priests and rulers then employ this god of terror to enforce tyranny. Thus, when Shelley grapples for a definition

¹⁴Quotations from Shelley's notes to *Queen Mab* are from *Shelley's Prose; or The Trumpet of Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark.

of God in his essay, "On Christianity," he proceeds as Winckelmann does in his definition of beauty. Just as there are many variations of the definition of beauty, so for Shelley the "thoughts which the word, God, suggests to the human mind are susceptible of as many variations as human minds themselves" (249). Furthermore, he asserts: "Where indefiniteness ends idolatry and anthropomorphism begin" (252). Thus, he follows Winckelmann's definition of beauty and says that the "Universal Being can only be described or defined by negatives" (252). For Shelley, God is not the being of "peculiar Providence" that interferes "to punish the vicious and reward the virtuous" (252). Indeed, this "absurd and execrable doctrine of vengeance" is "explicitly denied by Jesus Christ" (252). Shelley's conception of a deity is not one of terror that leads to "treachery and bloodshed" that stem from "the hateful superstitions which have enslaved mankind for ages" (254). Shelley instead sees a more beautiful conception of God that intersects with Jesus' conception of the spirit of the universe.

Since "scarcely two individuals of the same sect" (249) can agree on a definition of God, Shelley feels it is "interesting to enquire in what acceptation Jesus Christ employed this term" (249). Shelley's choice of Jesus and his opinion of a deity is significant because he views him not as a divine man but as a purely human reformer much like himself: "It is the profound wisdom and comprehensive morality of his doctrines which essentially distinguished him from the crowd of martyrs and of patriots who have exulted to devote themselves for what they conceived would contribute to the benefit of their fellow man" (249). Indeed, Shelley argues that Jesus realized that the concept of God had "been prophanelly perverted to the sanctioning of the most enormous and abominable crimes"

(250). Thus, according to Shelley, Jesus wages war against a “conception” of “the ruling Power of the universe” that deludes “the gross imaginations of the vulgar” (250). Jesus is seeking to bring about a change in the conception of God to enact political change, a project that Shelley would take up explicitly in *The Revolt of Islam*.

Shelley sees in Christ’s doctrines, as distinguished from the perversions of established Christianity, the idea that “God is some universal being, differing both from man and from the mind of man” (250). Shelley pictures Christ as reading the “sublime dramatic poem entitled Job,” which “familiarized his imagination with the boldest imagery afforded by the human mind” (249), and being influenced by Ecclesiastes, which “had diffused a seriousness and solemnity over the frame of his spirit glowing with youthful hope” (249-50). The effect of this “sublime” and “solemn literature” is that it “made audible to his listening heart” the influence of the religion of beauty which Shelley illustrates by quoting from Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*. These influences made Christ’s “listening heart” able to hear “The still, sad music of humanity / Not harsh or grating but of ample power / To chasten and subdue” (250). Driven by this influence, Jesus does not simply remove the sublime conception of God that restrains people; he also replaces it with a conception of God that is modeled on beauty. For Jesus, and for Shelley, the deity is a “merciful and benignant power” (253) and “gentle and beneficent and compassionate” (253), a “fountain of all goodness”(255), the “[Power] from which or thro’ which the streams of all that is excellent and delightful flow” (255). To arrive at this conception of a deity, however, Shelley feels that one must be especially moral: “Whoever is no deceiver or destroyer of his fellow-men, no liar, no flatterer, no murderer, may walk among his

species, deriving from the communion with all which they contain of beautiful or majestic, some intercourse with the Universal God” (251). Thus, though “there is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords, at will” (251), only a select few have seen this Power which Shelley names God: “And those who have seen God, have, in the periods of their purer and more perfect nature, been harmonized by their own will to so exquisite a consentaneity of powers, as to give forth divinest melody when the breath of universal being sweeps over their frame” (252). Though these visits are now inconstant, “there will come a time when the human mind will be visited exclusively by the influences of the benignant power” (255). When this time comes, Shelley envisions equality of mankind, but he also wants to defer this equality until all people are influenced by the religion of beauty.

Shelley’s preference for the beautiful over the terrible in religion is further demonstrated in his letter to Peacock in February, 1819. In this letter, he compares Greek temples with Michelangelo’s *Day of Judgment*. Like Winckelmann, who also criticized Michelangelo, Shelley feels that the “genius” of Michelangelo is “highly overrated,” for he “has not only no temperance no modesty no feeling for the just boundaries of art, (and in these respects an admirable genius may err) but he has no sense of beauty, and to want this is to want the essence of the creative power of the mind. What is terror without a contrast with & a connection with loveliness” (2:80). Since Michelangelo is guided by a privileging of sublime terror rather than beauty, “Hell & Death are his real sphere” (2:81) and “Every step towards Hell approximates to the region of the artist’s exclusive power” (2:81). Timothy Webb nicely summarizes Shelley’s critique of this painting: “Yet those very

talents which enabled Michelangelo to evoke the lurid realms of eternal punishment with such dreadful conviction prevented him from conceiving successfully either God himself or the state of beatitude” (358). More precisely, the problem for Shelley is that Michelangelo’s sublime aesthetic leads to a conception of the retributive God of the Old Testament that Shelley views as leading to tyranny and slavery. He writes of Michelangelo’s depiction of God: “In the picture to which I allude God is leaning out of Heaven as it were eagerly enjoying the final scene of the infernal tragedy he set the Universe to act” (2:80). The idea of a God of terror also influences Michelangelo’s portrayal of Jesus, whom Shelley describes as “in an attitude of haranguing the assembly” (2:80): “This figure which his subject or rather the view which it became him to take of it, ought to have modelled of a calm severe awe-inspiring majesty, terrible yet lovely, is in the attitude of common resentment” (2:81). In a letter to Leigh Hunt in August, 1819, Shelley repeats these criticisms of Michelangelo:

He seems to me to have no sense of moral dignity & loveliness; & the *energy* for which he has been so much praised appears to me to be a certain rude, external, mechanical, quality. . . . His famous painting in the Sixtine Chapel seems to me deficient in beauty and majesty both in conception & the execution; it might have combined all the forms of terror & delight—and it is a dull a wicked emblem of a dull & wicked thing. Jesus Christ is like an angry pot-boy & God like an old alehouse keeper looking out of window.

(2:112)

In contrast, Dante’s work, in spite of “the few distasteful passages of the *Inferno*” (2:112),

displays “exquisite tenderness & sensibility & ideal beauty” (2:112). Rather than providing a beautiful conception of the deity, or even combining the beautiful and sublime in his conception, Michelangelo prefers the sublime. Michelangelo’s religion, therefore, is compromised by his adherence to the sublime.

Since, according to Mary Shelley’s *Journal*, Shelley had been reading Winckelmann almost daily for the last month prior to writing to Peacock, it is perhaps not a surprise that his praise of the Greek temples in contrast with the Michelangelo painting invokes Winckelmann’s very terminology. He describes the Greek temples as evoking a “harmony of nature,” and “the interstices of their incomparable columns, were portals as it were to admit the spirit of beauty which animates the glorious universe to visit those whom it inspired” (2:73). Having seen these ruins Shelley says, “I now understand why the Greeks were such great Poets, & above all I can account, it seems to me, for the harmony the unity the perfection the uniform excellence of all their works of art” (2:74). Webb correctly asserts: “Both here and elsewhere Shelley implies that one of the features of Greek civilization which he valued most highly was its religion, whose charm, beauty, and true spirituality he contrasts with the sanguinary history of Christianity, tragically enacted in the wars of religion and unhappily embodied in the image of a sadistic and tyrannical deity” (361). What Webb terms as Shelley’s “Religion of Joy,” however, is more precisely a religion of beauty. Beauty, like the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, gave Shelley a model whereby to replace tyrannical Christianity with a worship that inculcated a gentle restraint. In a letter to Mary Shelley in 1821, he describes some tombs that are “adorned with rude & tasteless sculpture of lambs & other Christian emblems, with scarcely a trace of the

antique” (2:322). From this observation he concludes that “one of the first effects of the Christian religion” was “to destroy the power of producing beauty in art” (2:322). The Christian religion’s fault is that it destroyed the beauty of Greek art and replaced it with sublime tyranny. For this reason, in a letter to Peacock that describes more ruins he again describes how Constantine destroyed Greek art and calls “the Greeks our masters & creators, the Gods whom we should worship” (2:89). Shelley wants the religion of beauty manifested in Greek art to take Christianity’s place because its aesthetics emphasizes the production of gentle restraint and harmony which lead to a conception of God of Beauty that replaces a God of Terror. His *Revolt of Islam* provides a reworking of the French Revolution also along these lines.

III.

Though Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam* (1818) has received more attention recently, Kenneth Cameron’s statement that this poem is the “most neglected” (311) of Shelley’s works and Brian Wilkie’s nomination of it as the “orphan of Shelley criticism” (112) still both hold true.¹⁵ Part of the critical ambivalence towards *Revolt of Islam* may stem from its perceived structural and poetic defects, but I would agree with Wilkie that what may be more disarming is that this poem stands uneasily between the two periods that critics often use to divide Shelley and his work: the more radical, less artistic Shelley of *Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and *Queen Mab* (1813) and the more artistic, less radical Shelley of

¹⁵Shelley, following the advice of his publisher, Charles Ollier, revised *Laon and Cythna* into the later *Revolt of Islam*. The primary change is altering the relationship of Laon and Cythna from brother and sister to avoid presenting incest. Thus, there is some dispute as to which text should be studied. I am following the example of much Shelleyan criticism and use the text of *Revolt of Islam*.

Prometheus Unbound (1820) and *Adonais* (1821).¹⁶ Though a simplistic model of “two Shelleys” is admittedly fraught with problems, the *Revolt* does provide an interesting study in the transitions of Shelley’s thought. Readers are quick to compare the theme of *Revolt* to that of *Queen Mab*. For example, Stuart Sperry presents what is almost a commonplace in Shelley criticism. For him, *The Revolt* “represents in many ways a return to the spirit of *Queen Mab*” (41). Sperry and others, however, also point out that though the spirit of these two poems may be similar, their style and execution are quite different. Carlos Baker points out a primary difference between these two poems: “*The Revolt* will not, like *Queen Mab*, seek to proselytize by building up an irrefutable logical pattern. It will teach by example rather than precept” (63). Similarly, Stuart Curran sees in this poem an attempt to “rectify the faults” of the earlier poem by shifting “away from metaphorical internalization” (24) and focusing instead on emotions. Shelley’s shift away from a more rational and didactic style and towards an emotional appeal is more than a stylistic concern; rather, this focus on emotion signals Shelley’s desire to appeal to the aesthetic, his religion of beauty. In a poem that rewrites the French Revolution, Shelley replaces the oppressive tyranny of Christianity with the mild influence of the Greek religion of beauty, which gently leads people in the path to gradual, peaceful reform instead of provoking violent revolution. Setting his poem as a battle of the revolutionary Greeks fighting the

¹⁶As Wilkie puts it *The Revolt* “contains several ambiguities” which “[p]erhaps . . . partially account for the critical neglect of the poem, for it defines adequately neither the ‘early’ Shelley nor the ‘late,’ somewhat disillusioned one” (113). For Wilkie this poem contains the “dim-pinnacled idealism of the later poetry and the zealous impatient extravagance of his youth” (113). For a defense of the structure of *Revolt*, see Richard Haswell’s “Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*: ‘The Connexion of Its Parts.’” Haswell sees Shelley’s *Revolt* as carefully constructed around the ideals of “wholeness” and “unity.” I agree with his assessment, but he sees these concepts as derived more from Coleridge’s poetics than from classical taste. I view Shelley’s emphasis on these concepts intersecting Greek ideals of beauty.

tyrant Turks, Shelley is able to contrast the power of a religion that appeals to the Greek ideal of beauty with the power of institutionalized religion that works its effects through the sublime power of terror. Michael Scrivener argues that in *The Revolt* Shelley makes an “attempt to articulate a relevant politics” by presenting “a revolutionary culture capable of replacing the authoritarian culture of Christianity” (123). By showing how Shelley argues for the replacing of this authoritarian culture of Christianity with the religion of beauty, I will argue that Shelley’s “revolutionary culture” is not as radical as it may appear. I contend that by promoting the religion of beauty as the means of social change, Shelley actually articulates a revolution of culture that—like the conservative religious discourse following the French Revolution—models a restraint on the lower classes through the aesthetic.

Shelley explicitly points out that the purpose of his poem is, in fact, to rectify the violent excesses that the French Revolution produced while still trying to preserve its ideals. For example, in a letter to his publisher, Shelley describes his project as:

a tale illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in a European nation, acted upon the opinions of what has been called (erroneously as I think) the modern philosophy, & contending with antient notions & the supposed advantage derived from those who support them. It is a revolution of this kind, that is, the *beau ideal* as it were of the Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius & out of general knowledge. (1:563-64)

In his preface to *Revolt*, Shelley more specifically outlines the problems of the French

Revolution to support the necessity of “the influence of the individual genius” of the poem’s main character, Laon, who helps bring about the *beau ideal* of the Revolution. Shelley’s problems with the French Revolution are consistent with those outlined in his other prose writings. He feels that the French Revolution failed because of its suddenness: the Revolution took place before the people’s opinions were enlightened enough to handle their new freedom. Indeed, he argues in his Preface to *Revolt* that the “panic” and “excesses” (33) of the Revolution derived from the degraded state of France’s oppressed people.¹⁷ Violence could be expected from such a revolution because France consisted of “a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries” and thus “were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquility of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened” (33). Since the people had been so long oppressed by political and religious tyranny, “their conduct could not have been marked by any other character than ferocity and thoughtlessness” (33). As we have seen, Shelley felt that for political change to be effective, it could not be sudden and it must have direction: “Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent? This is a consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long-believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generation of men of intellect and virtue” (33). Though he is not referring specifically to Shelley’s statements, Steven Goldsmith provides an instructive reading of this line of argument:

¹⁷All quotations from *Revolt* are from *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson.

One of the most common responses to the violence of 1793 and beyond was to blame it on the revolution's prematurity: abstract social ideals had been forced upon people not ready to receive them. This explanation allowed various intellectuals from Schiller to Arnold to preserve what they valued of 1789 while transferring the mechanism of accomplishment from the precipitous work of politics to the gentler processes of culture. (219)

These "habits" that Shelley endorses are necessary supplements of culture that restrain people once the fetters of religious and political tyranny are removed; without these restraints, society falls back into a cycle of tyranny and violence. As Shelley's *Address* advocates the need for the Irish to improve their habits in their struggle for reform, so he here again argues for the necessity of disciplining of emotions that will train people in the right direction. The means to inculcating such "habits" and discipline will be the religion of beauty, the gentle influence of the aesthetic as enacted in Shelley's poem.

The need for such habits is imperative for Shelley because his view of revolution is influenced not only by the events in France but also by the violent uprising in England in 1817. As Scrivener puts it, the "frame of reference" for *Revolt* "is primarily the insurrections and riots of 1816-17" (128). These riots, often led by the more radical, working-class leaders, provided Shelley a current model of how a revolution could be wrong and motivated him to provide a correct vision of social change.¹⁸ Like Burke, who saw what he perceived as anarchy in France stemming from the removal of the restraints

¹⁸For an account of these riots and their radical leaders, see E.P. Thomson's *The Making of the English Working Class*; David Worral's *Radical Culture*, and Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld*.

of religion and manners, Shelley also sees the danger of suddenly freeing the lower classes from the influence of religious and political tyranny. Thus, he does not want “violent agitators” of the lower classes leading a revolution; rather he envisions the peaceful, gradual reform of the middle class fostered by political leaders such as Sir Francis Burdett and by literary figures such as Leigh Hunt. Instead of merely converting the masses to the ideals of liberty as the French had done, Shelley wants gradually to modify “the general state of feeling” of anger and vengeance produced by political oppression and bring these feeling in line with his goal of “the gradual abolition or improvement of political institutions” (33). Countering the disillusionment of the French Revolution which has spread an “infectious gloom” that has “tainted the literature” of his age, Shelley declares: “But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following Poem” (34). Shelley wants to encourage a “slow, gradual, silent change” that is led by men of “intellect and virtue” and is implemented by affecting a alteration in the feelings and habits of people. This desire for change also characterizes the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology that promotes hegemonic control through inculcating middle-class values. Thus, the aestheticizing of social power, which is enacted through the disciplining of feelings, not only characterizes the Evangelicals’ reaction to the French Revolution but also plays a significant role in Shelley’s rewriting of the French Revolution.

The transition of style from *Queen Mab* to *The Revolt of Islam*, which has been characterized as a shift from rational didacticism to emotional education, also reveals a shift in class values from the more radical to the more middle-class. Instead of reaching his

audience with “methodical and systematic argument” (32), the preferred method of lower-class radicals, Shelley takes a different approach, which he describes in his preface to *Revolt*: “I have chosen a story of human passion in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures, and appealing, in contempt of all artificial institutions, to the common sympathies of every human breast” (32). Stephen Behrendt argues that Shelley’s “leveling appeal for universal readership—indeed a classless one” is achieved here through his “deliberate echoes” of Wordsworth’s Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* and through his emphasis on emotions, which “recalls the democratizing impulse” (18) of Wordsworth. Scrivener also contends that “Shelley argues for the democratic tendencies of poetry” (122) through his Wordsworthian appeal to emotions. Indeed, Shelley seems to be arguing for the democratic appeal of the aesthetic: through appealing to “human passions” and the “common sympathies” that are lodged in “every human breast,” his poem can reach a universal audience, regardless of intellect or education. In a letter to a potential publisher, Shelley similarly emphasizes democratic appeal of his work: “I have attempted to speak to the common elementary emotions of the human heart, so that though it is a story of violence and revolution, it is relieved by milder pictures of friendship and love and natural affections” (1:563). This statement, however, not only reflects the necessity of the democratic appeal to the emotions but also hints at the danger of such an appeal. He knows his poem will engender the sublime emotions of “violence and revolution,” but he wants to promote instead the beautiful, “milder” emotions of “friendship and love and natural affections.” Though Shelley’s appeal to emotions is more democratic, it is also tinged with class values. As in his political writings, he does not want

to inflame the passions of the lower classes that can lead to violent revolution; rather, like the Evangelicals, he wants to promote the self-imposed restraint of emotions.

Shelley goes on in his preface to describe his project as appealing to emotions. Like Barbauld, however, he also appeals to important middle-class notion of refinement. He is careful to point out that his reason for appealing to emotions is so that he can refine them through his poetry. He details how the aesthetic appeal of his poem works actually to refine passions into a “true sense of moral dignity and freedom” that unites people to work for a “bloodless dethronement of their oppressors”:

I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle translations of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of liberal and comprehensive morality; and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind. (32)

Poetic devices that translate the author’s “human passion” into a written poem also are intended to translate the readers’ violent passions into a “virtuous enthusiasm” that seeks political reform through gradual processes but may even be allayed by a utopian “faith and hope in something good.” To accomplish this, Shelley structures his poem as “a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of the individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making

pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding, and the senses" (32). In "making pure" the "most daring and uncommon impulses," Shelley wants to refine "those violent and malignant passions" into "lofty passions" (37). He writes, "I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of pure virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which have led to my moral and political creed, and that of some the sublimest intellects of the world" (32). In his *Reflections*, Burke accuses the revolutionaries of hijacking the sublime, which he thought properly belonged to religion. Thus, he counters their appeal to the sublime with a more beautiful account of religion's role in society.¹⁹ Shelley sees orthodox religion hijacking the sublime away from the intellectuals, the artists and poets, and sowing the seeds for revolutionary violence, so he counters with poetry that directs readers to the "beauty of true virtue." Since Shelley's poem depicts the "religious frauds" which engender tyranny through its sublime terror, he also wants to model a corrective force, the religion of beauty, as a means to restrain the revolutionary violence of the masses.

Shelley's desire to appeal to emotions and limit which emotions are proper also reflects a split in his conception of his intended readers. In a letter to Byron, Shelley says that *Revolt* is a work written "in the same style and for the same object as 'Queen Mab,' but interwoven with a story of human passion, and composed with more attention to the refinement and accuracy of language and the connexion of its parts" (1:504). Shelley's balancing of "passion" with a poetic structure that provides aesthetic and artistic integrity

¹⁹For an insightful discussion of Burke's shift from a preference of the sublime to the beautiful as a means of countering revolution, see Tom Furniss's *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*.

appears to limit the appeal of the poem to those with the correct poetic taste. Indeed, a very real motive for Shelley's highlighting such poetic standards and couching his story in a Spenserian-type allegory may have been to avoid prosecution, for at this time *Habeus Corpus* had been suspended, Cobbett had fled to America, and radical authors such as William Hone and Thomas Wooler were being prosecuted for their writings. Shelley's appeal to emotions through this refined language, however, reveals a deeper motivation of his project. At the beginning of his preface, Shelley calls *The Revolt* "an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live" (32). This statement seems to indicate a split between the more general "public mind" and the more specific "enlightened and refined people" who are a subset of the public mind in which the thirst for political reform still exists. The distinction between a public mind that needs to be converted and a more enlightened subset that can provide a model for them also connects to Shelley's method of portraying "the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence" (23). Stephen Behrendt argues that Shelley's manuscript changes to this phrase "reveal Shelley's intention not to specify any particular exemplary figure but rather to indicate mind in general—the collective mind of humanity freeing itself from institutionalized tutelage and reverting to elemental impulses of love and social integration" (23). P.M.S. Dawson, however, argues that "Shelley seems to be distinguishing between a private, correct version shared by the two protagonists and the muddled, unenlightened view of the general public which combines to crush the incipient revolution" (Behrendt 24). I would

argue for a synthesis of these two views: Shelley is attempting to mold his audience, which is at present fractured, into one mind that embraces the gradual change in social relations that is mediated by the aesthetic. Shelley not only will use an appeal to beauty to change his audience, but the uniting of the disparate members of his audiences into a whole also exemplifies the Greek ideal of beauty. On the one hand, Scrivener contends that Shelley did not write this poem “for the followers of Cobbett and Wooler” (124); rather, his poem “addresses the leisure-class liberals and reformers . . . in order to inspire them with revolutionary principles and ideas” (120). On the other hand, Behrendt has demonstrated that Shelley’s letters about this poem are characterized by “an obviously burning desire that his poem reach a substantial readership” (26), and Kyle Grimes similarly sees Shelley attempting to “broadcast his revolutionary political vision to a popular reading audience” (100). I contend that these differing views about Shelley’s potential audience reveal the contradictory nature that Eagleton defines as inherent to the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology. Shelley’s appeal to the aesthetic in *The Revolt* creates a two-pronged message: his poem works toward inspiring a middle-class audience while restraining a lower-class audience. In turning from the preface to the actual poem itself, we can see that the means to achieve this dual purpose is the religion of beauty, which, like the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, works to inspire revolution but at the same time provides the means to contain it.

Shelley’s distinction between the beautiful and the sublime begins immediately in Canto I. The images of the eagle and the snake that appear in Canto I have received much critical attention, but readers tend to overlook the lines that actually begin the poem. The

images that Shelley foregrounds in the beginning of Canto I reflect his allegiance to an aesthetic of the beautiful. The poem, like the preface, highlights the dangers of the French Revolution and thus it begins after “the last hope of trampled France had failed” (129-30). As Shelley is able to rise above the disillusionment of that Revolution in the preface, so the narrator is able to rise “From visions of despair” (129) that followed the Revolution. He scales a peak that grants him a view of the landscape that is filtered through the sublime and the beautiful. The aftershocks of the revolution shake the earth and following “one blast of muttering thunder” (136), the speaker takes in a sublime scene that is followed by tranquil calm: “Hark! ‘Tis the rushing of a wind that sweeps / Earth and the ocean. See! the lightning yawns / Deluging Heaven with fire, and the lash deeps / Glitter and boil beneath, / One mighty stream, whirlwind and waves upthrown, / Lightning, and hail, and darkness eddying by. / There is a pause—the sea-birds, come forth, to spy / What calm has fall’n on earth, what light is in the sky” (145-53). The sublime violence of the storm which is followed by a beautiful calm echoes Shelley’s view of the French Revolution being replaced by a calm that encourages a “slow, gradual, silent change.” For Shelley, the violence of the French Revolution failed and must give way to the ideal revolution which follows the gentle impulses of the beautiful, and the natural scenery depicts this very transition: “For, where the irresistible storm had cloven / That fearful darkness, the blue sky was seen / Fretted with many a fair cloud interwoven / Most delicately, and the ocean green, / Beneath that opening spot of blue serene, / Quivered like burning emerald: calm was spread / On all below” (154-60). The rhymes of “cloven” and “interwoven” bring into sharp contrast the violence of the sublime passions, which are necessary but destructive,

and the beautiful, which draws together separate elements in harmony and unity. The unity of the interwoven clouds, which connotes a harmony that is produced not merely by combination but by a sacrifice of individual for the sake of the whole, evidences Shelley's (and Winckelmann's) definition of the beautiful and highlights the importance of separate individuals merging into a collective group that runs throughout the poem. Indeed, even the interlocking Spenserian stanza that Shelley employs in this poem further demonstrates Shelley's emphasis on interconnectedness and harmony. However, as Hugh Roberts notes, Shelley's reliance on Spenser goes beyond the choice of stanzaic form. Shelley's poem is also a romance that has similar goals to Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, which he wrote "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (180). This emphasis on harmony, linked with the beautiful, points toward a reading of Shelley's aesthetic as a uniting and cohesive force that imposes "gentle discipline."

This shift from the sublime to the beautiful as a mediator of political change is next enacted in a mysterious Woman who appears to Laon.²⁰ She tells him the "strange and awful tale" of the Comet and the Morning Star, that struggle between good and evil that places the flux in the universe in a Manichean framework. She also, however, cites ancient Greece as one example that seems unaffected by the cycles of history, for the Genii do come to Athens but here "they slept amidst the night of ages, / Steeping their hearts in the

²⁰ As Deborah Gutschera points out in her article, "The Drama of Renactment in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*," Shelley continually repeats and "re-introduces the theme of the proper education of the artist/revolutionary, repeating in its essentials the account of Shelley's training in the Preface and Dedication and that of the Woman in Canto I" (119). For Gutschera, Shelley's repetition is "not simply monotonous restatement" but "is allied to the characteristic Shelleyan attempt to reach the truth of a subject through a series of approximations" (125). I would only add that from the Preface through the education and dedication of Laon and Cythna, Shelley places an emphasis on a perception of beauty as the prerequisite to graduate to a revolutionary figure.

divinest flame / Which thy breath kindled, Power of holiest name / And oft in cycles since,
 when darkness gave / New weapons to thy foe, their sunlike fame / Upon the combat
 shone—a light to save, / Like Paradise spread forth beyond the shadowy grave” (406-14).

Greece’s immunity from the flux of history anticipates Shelley’s *Hellas*, but more importantly the identity of this “Power of holiest name” that steeped “hearts in the divinest flame” is the religious power of the Greek ideal of beauty. This view becomes more clear as we see the effect of this power on the Woman. Her conversion to the aesthetic power of beauty, with which she inspires Laon, is detailed like a religious conversion, which mirrors Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” as well as the opening scenery of the poem. In Shelley’s “Hymn,” the speaker rejects the “name of Gods and ghost, and Heaven” (28) which are “the poisonous names on which our youth is fed” (53). The speaker is converted to the Spirit of Beauty through a beautiful scene in nature: “When musing deeply on the lot / Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing / All vital things that wake to bring / News of buds and blossoming, — / Sudden, thy shadow fell on me; / I shrieked, and clasped my hand in extacy!” (55-60). The result is that the speaker dedicates himself to the spirit of Beauty with the hope that it “wouldst free / This world from its dark slavery” (69-70). Similarly, The Woman in *Revolt* lives alone in a sublime and rugged setting, but the beauty in her surroundings opens her up to conversion: “I dwelt . . . / By the sea-shore, in a deep mountain-glen; / And near the waves and through the forest wild / I roamed, to storm and darkness reconciled / For I was calm when tempest shook the sky: / But when the breathless heaven in beauty smiled, / I wept, sweet tears, yet too tumultuously / For peace, and clasped my hands aloft in ecstasy” (443-50).

Though she is “reconciled” to storm and darkness, the beauty in the heavens affects her emotions more deeply and brings a desire for peace rather than retribution or violence. Her conversion to the religion of beauty—the worship of the aesthetic—guides her emotions in a positive direction, for she then “loved all things with intense devotion” (464). Thus she can sympathize with the aims of the Revolution; however, she curiously falls asleep, and in her absence violence ensues.

In her dreams, the Woman is led by a “shape of speechless beauty” (550) to the Temple of the Spirit of Good where the sculptures and paintings “display” a “tale of passionate change divinely taught” (603) which “in their winged dance, unconscious Genii wrought” (604). Here also she finds the “mighty Senate” of the “Great” (605). The “tale of passionate change” that is “divinely taught” and the gathering of the Great echoes Shelley’s view that reform should be led peacefully by artists and poets employing the aesthetic rather than “violent agitators.” The narrator in particular singles out a “Form” that is sitting beneath a cloven flame. He describes this form as the epitome of beauty: “Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame, / The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm / Flowed forth, and did with softest light inform / The shadowy dome, the sculptures, and the state / Of those assembled shapes—with clinging charm / Sinking into their hearts and mine. He sate / Majestic, yet most mild-calm, yet compassionate” (631-39). The Form with “softest light” informs the assembled shapes and rather than bullying them with the sublime, it works more gently with “clinging charm” to sink into their hearts, thus modeling the gentle coercion of the aesthetic. Shelley here rewrites the scene of Pentecost. He portrays a tongue of fire appearing over a form that possesses a divine

spirit, but this spirit is the spirit of beauty, and the religion of the beauty supplants the sublime religion of Christianity.

Laon sees the significant influence of the religion of beauty in Canto I, but his story proper begins in Canto II, which describes a state of tyranny and despotism. Laon lives in a world that is dominated by a Turkish tyrant, but this world also closely resembles Shelley's England: "For they all pined in bondage; body and soul, / Tyrant and slave, victim and torturer, bent / Before one Power" (729-31). Later in this poem, we learn that this "one Power" that binds the slaves and tyrant together is a religion that functions like orthodox Christianity with its doctrines of terror and retribution and indeed becomes tied explicitly to Christianity. At this point, however, we only see Laon inspired to oppose this force by visiting the ruins "of a race of mightier men" which are "monuments of less ungentle creeds" (760-61). The ruins of the ancient Greeks that trace their "less ungentle creeds" inspire Laon to take a lesson from the past to change the present: "Such man has been, and such may yet become!" (766). As Shelley and Winckelmann are inspired by ruins that portray a religion of beauty rather than religious creeds of retribution and terror, and as Shelley desires to "awaken the feelings of the people" and guide them to social change through poetry, so Laon promises to "arise and awaken the multitude" (784-85) through his poetry.

Indeed, once converted to the power of beauty, Laon actively seeks to oppose the religious and political tyranny of the Othman with his poetry. Laon states, "I drew / Words which were weapons; round my heart there grew / The adamantine armour of their power" (840-42). Through poetry, his "Hymns which [his] soul had woven to Freedom"(915), he

finds the ability to inspire and model a conversion to beauty similar to his own:

. . . my song
 Peopled with thoughts the boundless universe,
 A mighty congregation, which were strong
 Where'er they trod the darkness to disperse
 The cloud of that unutterable curse
 Which clings upon mankind: —all things became
 Slaves to my holy and heroic verse (928-34)

The description of words as “weapons” and the use of the word “slave” highlight the danger of replacing the tyranny of the Othman with a tyranny that bows only to Laon and his poetry. Cythna’s echoes this concept of slavery when she says, “Virtue, and Hope, and Love, like light and Heaven / Surround the world. —We are their chosen slaves. / Has not the whirlwind of our spirit driven / Truth’s deathless germs to thought’s remotest caves?” (3667-70). As Roberts points out, her phrase “chosen slaves” is particularly disturbing, since “almost everywhere else in the poem ‘slave’ correlates with ‘tyrant’” (167). In this quote, though, Cythna does express some agency, and as Roberts goes on to point out, this passage “would appear” to suggest that there “is a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ tyranny . . . not *all* resistances to ‘change’ are evil” (168). At other stages in the poem, however, Cythna does not seem to have much agency, nor does she inspire such agency. Cythna, like the Hermit, becomes more of a receptacle for Laon’s thoughts; she repeats Laon’s thoughts and only makes them more pleasing. Laon indeed describes her as one who “felt the sway / Of [his] conceptions (937-38): “Hers too were all my thought ere

yet, endowed / With music and with light, their fountains flowed / In poesy” (938-40). The Hermit who later rescues Laon and helps spread his message in the Golden City is also not so much of an active revolutionary; rather, he describes himself as Laon’s “passive instrument” (1549). The subordination that characterizes Cythna and the Hermit’s reaction to Laon’s poetry is also enacted in others whom they convert. For example, in Canto VII when Cythna converts the “Mariners” working for the tyrant to the religion of beauty, she demands of them: “Be free! And even here, / Swear firm till death!’ They cried ‘We swear! We swear!’” (3440-41). In Canto XI, Laon similarly asks the multitude to “Swear by the Power ye dread” (4345). They immediately acquiesce: “We swear! We swear!” (4345). As Roberts put it, Laon and Cythna’s “attempt to forge revolutionary solidarity is uncomfortably close to tyranny’s wise prejudice” (173). Their attempt to unite people through their abdication of individual will, however, works differently than the tyranny of the Othman, for they implement control through the gentle influence of the aesthetic rather than through more overtly violent means.

A deeper understanding of the potential tyranny of Laon’s poetry may be gained by reading it in terms of the problems inherent in language itself or as a struggle between opposing discourses, but such readings overlook the importance of the aesthetic. Roberts views Laon’s poetic tyranny as evidencing the “problem of ideology” which is “the problem of how power inhabits language itself”: “Language is a problematic weapon, tending to reproduce the ideological tyranny it overthrows. Given that evil inhabits language itself . . . , the creation of a postcustom language is both imperative and impossible” (174). Similarly, Grimes points out that the opposition between poetry and

tyranny that runs throughout *Revolt* is actually more of a congruence, since Shelley “defines the aims of both poetry and tyranny as the rhetorical control over the inscrutable power of a mass reading public” (106). In other words, “poetry and tyranny, for all their philosophical incompatibility, have a great deal in common politically” (106), for they both strive for “control over the ‘public’ of the Golden City” (Grimes 106). This audience thus “has a choice not between slavery and freedom but rather between an emotional and spiritual slavery to Laon’s poetry and a social and physical slavery to Othman and his more tangible weapons of steel” (109). Though Roberts’ and Grimes’ readings are insightful, they do not explore the specific political implications of such conjunctions of tyranny and slavery. I contend that Laon’s poetry, which produces a suasion to his views of restraint through an emotional appeal, can be read as a tyranny of the aesthetic. The necessity for a tyranny of the aesthetic is found in Shelley’s view of political reform. The Hermit himself advocates Shelley’s desire to avoid the disastrous effects of violent revolution that can happen if such a mass audience is not restrained: “If blood be shed, ‘tis but a change and choice of bonds” (1657). Slaves who use violence to overthrow tyrants become caught in a cycle of violence and merely replicate the oppression they were fighting against. I would argue, though, that Laon’s revolution, is itself only a “change and choice of bonds” from the overt bondage of tyranny to the “gentle bondage” of the aesthetic. In order to avoid violence, Laon, like Shelley, does not want to just “arise and awaken the multitude” (784-75); rather, he wants to awaken them and direct them through his poetry, which advocates the religion of beauty: “These hopes found words through which my spirit sought / To weave a bondage of sympathy, / As might create some

response to the thought / Which ruled me now" (802-05). Laon here echoes Shelley's belief that the beautiful can create an emotional response that will replace the bondage of Power with a "bondage of sympathy." Laon's "thoughts" are so "invested with the light of language" that "all bosoms made reply / On which its lustre streamed, whene'er it might / Through darkness wide and deep those tranced spirits smite" (806-10). The light of beauty creates a correct emotional response in all the bosoms that it reaches, thus they are tied to Laon's view of revolution through his "bondage of sympathy."

The phrase "bondage of sympathy" indicates both the emotional appeal of the aesthetic as well as its ability to restrain emotions. Laon's words work through the gentle influence of beauty in a manner that echoes the hegemonic control advocated by the Evangelical religion; he advocates his own "religion of the heart." For example, the Hermit describes the effects of Laon's words on the multitudes in similar terms to an evangelical religious conversion: "with his sweet and mighty eloquence / The hearts of those who watched it did unlock / And made them melt in tears of penitence" (1505-07). Also, when Laon actually ventures to the Golden City, he is able to still his attackers by making their "passions pause" (1799) as they "feel the truth of love's benignant laws" (1800). He is able to gain command of violent groups through the aesthetic of beauty: "the sweet awe / Of such mild looks made their own hearts grow mild / And did with soft attraction ever draw / Their spirits to the love of freedom's equal law" (1869-72). Just as Winckelmann describes the power of beauty to attract instead of hurrying along, so Laon here exemplifies the gentle control of his aesthetic. Finally, Laon's words produce an effect on Cythna that replicates the ideal of Greek beauty espoused by Shelley and Winckelmann.

His hymns and songs produce in her “the calm which rapture doth create” (923) and before Cythna goes off to the Golden City she and Laon are pictured as “subdued” and “calm with passion” (1104). The aesthetic of beauty, which has influenced both Laon and Cythna and will influence the multitudes, is able to produce an emotional response, but it also tempers that emotional response. The religion of beauty thus, like the Evangelicals’ religion of the heart, has a double function: to motivate through emotion but also to use that emotion to subdue subjects. Rather than using manners as means to promote self-imposed restraint, Shelley follows a line similar to Barbauld and uses the discrimination of taste for the beautiful rather than the sublime to create a restraint on the passions.

The “benignant” laws of love which Laon uses to unite people in his revolutionary cause is the aesthetic—the law that does not appear to be a law, the “free bondage” (Eagleton 56) of the aesthetic. The Hermit tells Laon that due to his poetry, “the pure law / Of mild equality and peace, succeeds / To faiths which long have held the world in awe” (1541-42). Though Laon’s religion of beauty replaces sublime religion, that “held the world in awe,” it still works toward restraining the multitudes. As the Hermit says, “the sway / Of thy strong genius, Laon, which foresaw / This hope, compels all spirits to obey, / which round thy secret strength now throng in wide array” (1545-48). Laon’s “pure law” does indeed make the “tyrants of the Golden City tremble” (1531), but it also works to “compel” the multitudes to “obey” him and follow his ideals of gradual reform. The Hermit reports to Laon that his name “to the tumultuous throng / Were like the star whose beams the wave compel / And tempests, and his soul-subduing tongue / Were as a lance to quell the mailed crest of wrong” (1563-66). Indeed, since “great is the strength / Of

words" (1569-70), the need for violent revolution is reduced, but the compelling nature of the religion of beauty works toward "soul-subduing" in a more gentle fashion than the sublime religion of terror. Laon's words are able to create an "equal law," but they do so by subsuming everyone's voice to his own. When Laon quells the multitude we see this effect: "And they, and all, in one loud symphony / My name with liberty comingling lifted" (1873-74). Later he describes how an "innumerable host" (2062) is transformed into "one sound" (2063). Through the aesthetic, the religion of beauty, Laon is able to create a "harmony of choral strains" that held people "in chains / Of sweet captivity" (2328-29). This harmony and unity, however, also present a reconciling dream of unity characteristic both of ideal Greek beauty and of the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology. The polyphony of the multitude is abstracted to the univocal aesthetic.²¹

The necessity for the religion of beauty to replace a religion of the sublime is presented primarily through Cythna and by the final confrontation between Laon and the Iberian Priest. Laon's religion of beauty, which is spread by Cythna, replaces the religion of the sublime that leads to tyranny, but in doing so it provides not only the impetus for peaceful revolution but also a restraint of the multitudes. Cythna's sermon in Canto VIII echoes Shelley's argument in "Essay on Christianity" that attacks conceptions of deity that stem from anthropomorphism and advocate revenge. She asks the sailors who have come to capture her how they have rationalized their motives to serve a tyrant through religious

²¹Eagleton describes the "dream of reconciliation" of aesthetic ideology as "individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity," which helps create the "universal subject" of the "emergent middle class" (25). See also Goldsmith's discussion of the contradictory nature of apocalyptic literature which seeks a "transfiguration of language from the polyphonic to the monological," a transformation that suggests "not only a powerful egalitarian motive . . . but also an element of coercion" (60) and my discussion of Barbauld's concept of public worship in Chapter Two.

belief and questions their assumption that “some immortal power” has “Such purposes” (3231-21). She derides their belief in an anthropomorphic conception of divine power, arguing that by believing in such a conception, they “mock” themselves and “give / A human heart to what ye cannot know” (3234-40). In the next verse, she explicitly shows how anthropomorphism in religion develops into political tyranny:

What is that Power? Some moon-struck sophist stood
 Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown
 Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood
 The Form he saw and worshiped was his own,
 His likeness in the world’s vast mirror shown;
 And ‘twere an innocent dream, but that a faith
 Nursed by fear’s dew of poison, grows thereon,
 And that men say, that Power has chosen Death
 On all who scorn its laws, to wreak immortal wrath. (3244-52).

A religion that promotes fear through the doctrine of retribution is able to force submission through these very fears. A tyrant can invest his laws with religious doctrine and then threaten eternal death “On all who scorn its laws.” Next, Cythna, in the same vein of Humean scepticism that underlies Shelley’s *Necessity of Atheism*, attacks the evidence for such a Power that is purported by revelation, arguing that such evidence is dangerous because it helps to solidify the retributive conception of God. According to this evidence, the deity is “A Shade, a Form, which Earth and Heaven between / Wields an invisible rod—that Priests and Kings, Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that bring / Man’s

freeborn soul under the oppressor heel, / Are his strong minister's, and that the stings / Of death will make the wise his vengeance feel, / Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel" (3255-3261). The "invisible rod" that such a deity wields is used by "Priests and Kings" to bring people to submission through the threat of divine "vengeance." This concept of the deity, of a power who "will punish wrong" (268) takes many forms, for it is "One shape of any names" (3278). However, whatever form it takes, the effect is the same: it makes everyone either "slave or tyrant" (3278). Thus, we can see that the Power that Laon describes at the beginning of the poem as making all either slave or tyrant is the power of a retributive deity that invokes sublime fear. Indeed, all forms of political tyranny become justified by and even modeled upon this conception of a deity: "Its names are each a sign which maketh holy / All power—ay, the ghost, the dream, the shade / Of power-lust, falsehood, pride, and folly / The pattern whence all fraud and wrong is made, / A law to which mankind has been betrayed" (3279-81). The religious concepts that sanctify "power-lust, falsehood, pride, and folly" need to be replaced by one that sanctifies purer motives.

Cythna believes that only the ideals of love, truth, and joy, fostered by the religion of beauty, "can / From slavery and religion's labyrinth caves / Guide us, as one clear star the seamen saves" (3291-93). She encourages the sailors to avoid the "Dark idolatry of self" (3390), which involves worshiping in their own selves the destructive powers of the god that were originally brought by humans. Echoing both Shelley's "Hymn" and "Essay on Christianity," she charges them instead to "live, as if to love and live were one" (3303) and admonishes them: "know yourselves thus! ye shall be pure as dew" (3359). The

resulting effect of Cythna's sermon is that the sailors' "doubt and fear" (3471) has been replaced by "mutual joy" (3474). A youth among the sailors explains their conversion: "But that no human bosom can withstand / Thee, wondrous Lady, and the mild command of thy keen eyes" (3408-10). Cythna's "mild command" effected through the aesthetic that works on the emotions, the "human bosom," a change in religion. Her "human words found sympathy / In human hearts: the purest and the best" (3411). The sailors bring Cythna to the Golden City where the religion of beauty fosters a peaceful revolution. When Laon arrives in the Golden City, he sees Cythna elevated above the multitudes, while beneath her feet "writhe Faith, and Folly, / Custom, and Hell, and moral Melancholy" (2185-86). She calls for the influence of a Spirit who is "loveliness of being" (2199) to "re-ascend the human heart" (2199-2200). She knows that the effect of Laon's message of the religion of beauty will conquer the sublime fear of a retributive deity that leads to tyranny: "Almighty Fear / The Fiend-God, when our charmed name he hear / Shall fade like shadows from his thousand fanes, / While Truth and Joy enthroned o'er his lost empire reigns" (2268-71). The "Truth and Joy" of Laon's religion of beauty is able to overturn "Almighty Fear" and guide a peaceful revolution. This revolution, however, is less than successful in the end.

The peaceful revolution fostered by Laon's religion of beauty eventually turns to bloodshed and fails. Rather than resulting in an utopian bliss, this revolution's failure leads to famine, plague, and pestilence. Indeed the problems that come in the wake of this failed revolution again open the door for the influence of the sublime religion of terror. The defeat of such a religion initially causes panic among the leaders of the Golden City: "The

Princes and Priests were pale with terror, / That monstrous faith wherewith they ruled
 mankind / Fell, like a shaft loosed by the bowman's error / On their own hearts: they
 sought and they could find / No refuge" (4018-21). With the natural disasters that ensue,
 however, the cycle starts all over again as people "with trembling limbs and pallid lips /
 Worshiped their own hearts' image, dim and vast" (4054-55). Different religions take
 different forms and they all gather and cry out "Our God alone is God" (4069), but they
 are brought together in an emphasis on a retributive deity that can keep people in
 submission. The agent for uniting these conceptions of the deity in the poem is the Iberian
 priest, who "loathed all faith beside his own, and pined / To wreck his fear of Heaven in
 vengeance on mankind" (4081-82). This Catholic Priest, who has an oxymoronic "fear of
 Heaven," allies himself with the Islamic faith because it serves his advantage in seeking
 vengeance upon mankind: "So he made truce with those who did despise / The expiation,
 and the sacrifice, / That, though detested, Islam's kindred creed / Might crush for him
 those deadlier enemies; / For fear of God did in his bosom breed / A jealous hate of man,
 an unreposing need" (4093-98). These "deadlier enemies" are Laon and Cythna and their
 followers, "an impious race" who, according to the Priest, had "spurned / Him whom we
 all adore" (4104-05). The Priest counters Laon and Cythna's religion of beauty with a
 sublime sermon: "His voice was like a blast that burst the portal / Of fabled hell" (4144-
 45). By using an emotional shock to get his audience to envision hell, he reaches his goal:
 "fear killed in every breast / All natural pity then, a fear unknown / Before, and with an
 inward fire possessed, / They raged like homeless beasts whom burning woods invest"
 (4149-52). The priest's sublime voice of terror produces fear, and as we are told: "Fear is

never slow / To build the thrones of Hate, her mate and woe" (4165-66). Fear and hatred produced by a sublime religion of terror once again is able to gain the submission of the multitudes.

The immediate effect of the Priest's message is a mobilization of warriors who are willing to sacrifice Laon and Cythna. Laon, however, approaches the scene in disguise and his entrance and subsequent sacrifice make him a Christ-like figure. Byron Shelley points out that Laon specifically echoes the Christ of Shelley's "Essay on Christianity," and in doing so he also echoes Shelley's commitment to the religion of beauty in that text. Indeed, Laon appeals to them through the religion of beauty: "Earnest, benignant, calm, as from a breast / Void of all hate or terror—[he] made them start; / For as with gentle accents he addressed / His speech to them, on each unwilling heart / Unusual awe did fall—a spirit-quelling dart" (4346-50). Laon's attributes and his "gentle accents" all fit the religion of beauty which stands in stark contrast to the Iberian Priest's religion of terror. He speaks against the "dark Terror" that has motivated them and that their conception of God that they framed has brought them to perform: "An empty and cruel sacrifice / Ye now prepare, for a vain idol wrought / Out of the fears and hate which vain desires have brought" (4365-68). He disputes the Priest's claim that societal evil comes from God and points out that it comes from slavery instead. Though some of the warriors are convinced by his "eloquent accents," they are immediately stabbed in their backs as they rush toward him. Once again Laon's "Calm, solemn, and severe voice" stops violence, but only temporarily. The effects of the sacrifice of Laon and Cythna, however, brings up the potential of them serving as example of the power of the religion of beauty, for "those

who saw / Their tranquil victim pass, felt wonder glide / Into their brain, and became calm with awe" (4480). Their deaths, however, do not affect the majority of the people, nor the Iberian Priest: "And others too, thought he was wise to see, / In pain, and fear, and hate, something divine; / In love and beauty, no divinity" (4539-41). There is a potential for deep and mighty change within the crowd after their deaths (153), but this potential is undermined by the reigning religion of terror.

The disastrous outcome of Laon and Cythna's revolution has caused considered puzzlement for readers of Shelley's *Revolt*. More optimistic readings view Laon and Cythna as ideals, whose lives will serve as a guide to future revolutionaries. For example, Scrivener argues that "even though Laon and Cythna are defeated, their example lives on after them, inspiring others and keeping alive the possibility of social liberation" (124). Gerald MacNiece similarly argues: "Shelley's revolution is ideal as something really achieved and permanent in the minds of men, which remains alive as an ideal and continues to attract the roving imagination because men have demonstrated what human powers can accomplish" (216). These more positive readings are hard to balance with the bloodshed and death that ensue in the wake of their revolution, which prompts some critics to place some amount of blame for the violence on Laon and Cythna. Grimes argues that Laon "cannot be completely exculpated from responsibility for the carnage," for his poetry "instigates the people's revolution which eventually results in massive death and the reestablishment of tyrannical power" (112). The tension in the poem between Laon's desire for peace and a copious amount of bloodshed leads other readers to see a tension in Shelley's ideas. As Brian Wilkie notes: "As a biographical document the poem is

a fascinating, even frightening picture of the convulsion produced in a man, who in many ways is a born extrovert, by the painful decision to turn his energies inward, to renounce direct political action against institutions for much more frustrating indirect battle in the arena of the mind" (140). I contend that the failure of the revolution is the failure of the aesthetic in the end to provide a correct vision for the multitudes. Though a perception of the beautiful will produce gradual reform, for Shelley there is no way to ensure that people will have the correct aesthetic perception to follow the beautiful, which is why they eventually revert to violence and finally back to the religion of the sublime that supports tyranny. I read the tension in the poem, then, as one between Shelley's desire for radical reform and his fear of the violence of the mob, which he attempts to reconcile through the aesthetic. Indeed the strange juxtaposition of violence and pacifism in *Revolt* can be seen as replicating the contradictory nature of the aesthetic, which gains an appearance of pacifism by disguising its violence.²² In this manner, then, Shelley's revolution in *Revolt of Islam* perhaps can be read as inadvertently optimistic, for by unveiling the tyranny and violence that is attendant upon the aesthetic, it serves as an example for future revolutions.

IV.

In *Revolt of Islam*, Shelley connects the tyranny of the Othman and Christianity through the figure of the Iberian Priest. His religion of beauty, and his Hellenism, are in this poem clearly distinguished from Islam and Christianity, which both can be employed

²²On a similar note, Goldsmith argues that "in transferring apocalypse from politics of art and imagination" Romantic writers "did not so much suspend the problems of violence as alter its form" (210). He goes on to apply this argument specifically to Shelley: "The internalization of apocalypse brought with it an internalization of apocalyptic violence, something particularly evident in English romanticism's great belated monument to political and aesthetic idealism" (219).

by tyrants to justify their oppressive regimes. However, in Shelley's later Greek poem, *Hellas* (1821), we see a shift in his view of Christianity. In *Hellas*, he aligns Christianity with Hellenism as adversaries against Islam and the Turks. Shelley crystalizes this juxtaposition when he has the chorus of Greek slaves declare: "The moon of Mahomet / Arose, and it shall set, / While blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon / The cross leads generations on" (220-224). This symbolism is particularly striking since the military symbol of the cross invokes the Roman emperor Constantine whom Shelley consistently disparages as a tyrant who had destroyed the beauties of the Greek religion. Shelley's rhetorical appeal to Christianity in this poem is often explained as a means to reach a broader audience for this particular piece of propaganda for the Greek revolution.²³ I want to suggest, however, that Shelley's linking of Christianity and Hellenism cannot be dismissed as mere rhetorical ploy, especially in light of his promoting the Greek religion of beauty as an alternative to Christianity in his prose and in *Revolt*.

Part of the difference in the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism in *Revolt* and *Hellas* does indeed stem from the purposes and settings of the poems. Though *Revolt* ostensibly takes place in Istanbul, Shelley does not set out to depict faithfully the

²³Carl Woodring writes, "As often as Shelley had condemned the union of armed force and religion, the inclination of his presumed readers to support a Christian thrall against a Moslem master was too tempting to ignore" (317). Robert Ryan similarly contends: "Like other Philhellenes he understood the usefulness of fund-raising purposes of accentuating the Greeks' Christianity, a rhetorical strategy that is reflected in the preface to *Hellas*" (207). Ryan does, however, go on to complicate this concept by arguing that Shelley feels that an ideal Christianity is needed to supplant even the highest ideals of Greek culture (210-11). John Archer argues that in *Hellas* Shelley "attempts to redeem Christianity by reversing traditional associations, linking it with paganism rather than Judaism and linking Islam with Judaism rather than the ancient religion of the gentiles" (268). He concludes: "In his striving for relevance to the cause of the Greek fighters, then, Shelley allows his poem to become kidnaped by popular Christianity in order to infiltrate and capture popular Christianity in turn" (268).

customs and observances of the Turkish culture. Rather, his setting wipes out cultural and geographic differences. He uses the East more as a mere backdrop to present his views on the British political situation. By doing so, he safeguards himself (actually, his publisher) against prosecution for publishing seditious materials, but he also universalizes his overall view on political reform. In *Hellas*, Shelley also idealizes Greece and ignores contemporary accounts of its rebellion against the Turks, but he does so in an attempt to persuade his readers to adopt a very practical political position: support for the civilized Greeks against the barbarian Turks. In his preface, he explicitly declares that his poem will “suggest” a picture of “the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement” (446). He calls upon the “rulers of the civilized world” (447) to save “that nation to which they owe their civilization” from the oppressors allied with the “Turkish tyrant” and to “brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilization” (447). His view of the struggle between the Turks and the Greeks as one of civilization versus barbarism is what leads him to connect Christianity and Hellenism in this later poem.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the Evangelicals helped promote Britain’s imperial role by arguing for the civilizing influence of Christianity, and a similar conjunction appears in Shelley’s writing, even before *Hellas*. For example, he writes in *Philosophical View of Reform*:

Revolutions in the political and religious state of the Indian peninsula seem to be accomplishing, and it cannot be doubted but the zeal of the

missionaries of what is called the Christian faith will produce beneficial innovations there, even by the application of dogmas and forms of what is here an outworn encumbrance. (7:17)

For Shelley, the people of the non-Western world are even worse off than the lower classes in Britain. The restraints of Christianity are an “outworn encumbrance” in Britain, but because the Indian people have no European culture whatsoever, they need these stronger restraints. Furthermore, Christianity brings with it the influence of European culture, the lack of which would hamper any attempt at political reform in India. He writes,

The Indians have been enslaved and cramped in the most severe and paralysing forms which were ever devised by man; some of this new enthusiasm ought to be kindled among them to consume it and leave them free, and even if the doctrines of Jesus do not penetrate through the darkness of that which those who profess to be his followers call Christianity, there will yet be a number of social forms modelled upon those European feelings from which it has taken its colour substituted to those according to which they are at present cramped, and from which, when the time for complete emancipation may arrive, their disengagement may be less difficult, and under which their progress to it may be the less imperceptibly slow. (7:18)

Rather than viewing Indians as “enslaved and cramped” by orthodox Christianity as the lower classes in Britain, he sees their oppression stemming from their lack of non-Western

culture. Even if they do not “penetrate” the “darkness” of orthodox Christianity and recognize the religion of beauty in the “doctrines of Jesus,” they still will be able to absorb the more enlightened “European feelings” from which Christianity has “taken its colour.” The connection between Hellenism and Christianity for Shelley appears to function on a scale of civilization. Christianity can be a benefit for the uncivilized of non-Western cultures, for it at least inculcates European culture. The uncivilized in countries such as Britain, the lower classes, are a bit further up the scale, however, and are ready to throw off orthodox Christianity in favor of the Greek religion of beauty.

Shelley’s linking of Hellenism and Christianity in *Hellas* also points back to the conclusion of *Revolt* and the failure of that revolution. Shelley wants to implement the religion of beauty as the means for political reform, but he also sees the difficulties inherent in the project. Though he wants to reconfigure religion and aesthetics to inculcate restraint in the lower classes, he also knows that realistically many of his writings will not reach that audience, and throughout his career he progressively wrote more poems that were intended specifically for more cultured readers.²⁴ Thus, I suggest that part of the shift in the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity from *Revolt* to *Hellas* may be a realization that the norms of restraint may be promoted more effectively through Christianity’s mission of civilization than through aesthetic beauty. Though Shelley never fully develops this idea, we will see a similar development in the next chapter on Mary Shelley. She, however, constructs a definition of the aesthetic that is divorced from

²⁴For example, in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), Shelley declares that his purpose is to address the “highly refined imagination of the more select class of readers” (207).

religion and actually replaces religion's role in civilizing the world. In *The Last Man* (1826), Mary Shelley advocates an aesthetic imperialism that attempts to replace the civilizing influence of Evangelical religion but ends up replicating its emphasis on middle-class values.

Chapter Four

The “silver net of . . . civilization”: Aesthetic Imperialism in Mary’s Shelley’s *The Last Man*

Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (173)

Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) exemplifies the way in which conservative religious discourse emphasized religion’s role in promoting manners and civilization as a restraint that would help defend Britain from revolutionary upheaval. Similarly, the Evangelicals’ responded to events in France by connecting their “religion of the heart” to proper taste and manners, seeking to produce a civilized subject who displayed respectable middle-class values. As I argued in Chapter One, in the 1790s conservatives utilized the discourse of civilization, an emphasis on taste and manners that helped redefine virtue for a commercial age, as a means to reconfigure religion’s role in promoting a self-imposed restraint that would stabilize British society. Burke thus pits the interrelated concepts of religion, manners, and civilization against the French’s “barbarous philosophy” (171) that was “destitute of all taste and elegance” (171) and produced “sordid barbarians” (171). Indeed, for conservatives French irreligion and bad manners were seen as a contagion that could infect British society. As Burke puts it, “If it be a plague; it is such a plague, that the precautions of the most server quarantine ought to be established against it” (185). For Burke and the Evangelicals, the most effective inoculation against the revolutionary plague was a religion that fortified the body public

through its fostering of manners and civilization.

For the Evangelicals, the interconnectedness of religion and civilization provided the means to preserve Britain from revolution, but it also provided a justification to expand its role as an imperial power. One of the primary ideological sources of Britain's imperial agenda is the Evangelical mission societies. Through the work of these societies, the task of civilizing people through religion achieved an international level, and Christianity's role in improving the manners and morals of subjugated people across the British empire became a means to achieve cultural hegemony. One of the results of this greater contact with indigenous peoples was the spread of disease. Ironically, then, the discourse of civilization, which was once perceived as a potential force in staving off the plague of revolution, through its role in spreading British civilization actually helped to bring about real disease, particularly the cholera plague of 1832.¹ The threat of cholera, however, did not diminish the importance of civilization; rather, the idea of civilization became a way to understand and structure the meaning of disease in European society.

Mary Shelley's *Last Man* (1826), which presents the depopulation of the world by a plague through the perspective of its last survivor, is a text that grapples with such interrelations of religion, civilization, and imperialism. Previous critics have noted how this novel partakes in the tradition of plague literature as well as the contemporary interest in the Last Man theme. They focus on how Shelley secularizes the theme of apocalypse and thus departs from more religious examples of this genre such as Defoe's *Journal of the*

¹For a detailed examination of how Britain's "globalized expansion" promoted greater "exchange of disease" (9) and how such "colonial disease" impacted Romantic writing, see Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*.

Plague Year and Cousin de Grainville's *Omegarus and Syderia*. More recently, critics have examined how Shelley's mapping of disease throughout the world critiques Britain's status as an imperial power.² Yet, all these approaches overlook the importance of the notion of civilization, which is intimately connected to religion and imperialism. I agree that in *The Last Man* Shelley is critical of British imperialism, but I contend that she does not critique the discourse of civilization, which helped provide the impetus for Britain's imperial role. In other words, though she does criticize the connection between commerce, Christianity, and civilization that derived from Evangelical missionary societies and provided the justification for British imperialism, she does not critique the discourse of civilization itself. Instead, she substitutes the aesthetic for Christianity as the means to promote civilization. Thus, rather than aestheticizing religion through an emphasis on taste and manners as conservatives did, she sacralizes the aesthetic by arguing for the ability of literature and culture to supplant religion's role in society. Unlike the other authors in this study, Shelley divorces the aesthetic from religion and defines it in a more modern sense, like that promoted by Matthew Arnold, as an autonomous discourse of higher culture that inculcates the bourgeois values of civilization.

By reading Shelley's novel in the context of contemporary texts that utilize the

²For discussion of how Shelley's novel situates itself within the contemporary interest in the Last Man theme, see Morton Paley's "*The Last Man: Apocalypse Without Millennium*"; Arthur McA. Miller's *The Last Man: A Study of the Eschatological Theme in English Poetry and Fiction from 1806 to 1839*; Jean de Palacio's "Mary Shelley and the 'Last Man': A Minor Romantic Theme," and A.J. Sambrook's "A Romantic Theme: The Last Man." Paley (110) and McA. Miller (134-77) both especially emphasize Shelley's secularization of this eschatological theme. Shelley's critique of imperialism is discussed in Paul Cantor's "The Apocalypse of Empire: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*"; Julia Wright's "'Little England': Anxieties of Space in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*"; and Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*.

discourse of civilization in their missions to normalize British middle-class abroad, I demonstrate how she promotes an aesthetic imperialism that derives from the same bourgeois emphasis on civilization and advances a similar ideological agenda.³ Though she rejects the Evangelicals' argument for the moral norms of Christianity as the means of civilization, her aesthetic imperialism, through its emphasis on manners and self-regulation promotes the same hegemonic values. For Shelley, the aesthetic rather than Christianity becomes the means to train the uncivilized in the bourgeois values of self-restraint and discipline. Moreover, by analyzing this novel in conjunction with the cholera debates in Britain, I will demonstrate how Shelley's frames her fictional plague within the discourse of civilization and will show how such representation reveals the underlying goal of her aesthetic imperialism as the triumph of bourgeois ideology. Her fictional plague thus reveals and normalizes a social order, like that envisioned by her husband, that is led by a cultural elite who conform to the hegemonic middle-class values that are cultivated by the aesthetic.

I.

Though the Anglican Evangelicals are perhaps most famous for their work in abolishing the slave trade and their attempt to reform the manners of England, they also functioned as a formative influence on Britain's role overseas. Indeed, Wilberforce's famous declaration that God appointed him to reform British manners and to abolish the

³Paul Cantor also uses the term "aesthetic imperialism" and "aesthetic aristocracy" in his discussion of Shelley's "critique of imperialism" (206). I will be defining the aesthetic more narrowly, however, reading it in terms of how its gentle disciplining of the body through manners and taste promotes bourgeois hegemony.

slave trade should be understood not as two different propositions but as two complementary ones.⁴ As Reginald Coupland points out, the Evangelicals' desire to abolish the slave trade also entailed a positive proposition: "It was not enough, they felt, to stop injuring the Africans: an attempt should be made to help them, to give them the best instead of the worst of what European civilization offered them" (81). This positive action is what links Wilberforce's missions, for the Evangelicals predicated the civilizing of foreign peoples on the efficacy of moral improvement through mission activities. In other words, their mission activities extended the "moralising of British society" (Turley 123) to an international level: civilizing nations meant promoting abroad a religion of the heart that transformed manners and morals. The importance of the civilizing countries was indeed so important to Wilberforce that he called the Indian mission work "that greatest of all causes, for I really place it before Abolition" (5:126). Thus, though the Evangelicals are rightly remembered for their part in abolishing the slave trade, we need to view this action as part of their overall desire to civilize other nations, a desire that provided divine sanction for Britain's expanding imperial role.

The Church Mission Society (CMS), which was spearheaded by the Clapham Sect and featured Wilberforce as its first president, focused on two primary fields: India and Africa. The CMS justified the need for mission work in these countries because of their perceived lack of civilization. Wilberforce was motivated for mission work in India in large part due to the influence of his neighbor, Charles Grant, and much of the rhetoric for

⁴Wilberforce writes, "God has set before me as my object the reformation of [my country's] manners" (1:130)

the need to civilize and Christianize India and Africa derives from Grant's influential *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving It* (1797). The influence between these two men, however, was reciprocal, for Grant's critique of the Hindu religion's effects upon the Indians echoes Wilberforce's indictment of the immoral upper and lower classes in his *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious Systems of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Class, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797). Grant writes in his *Observations*:

Upon the whole then, we cannot avoid recognizing in the people of Hindostan, a race of men lamentably degenerate and base; retaining but a feeble sense of moral obligation; yet obstinate in their disregard of what they know to be right, governed by malevolent and licentious passions, strongly exemplifying the effects produced on society by a great and general corruption of manners, and sunk in misery by their vices, in a country peculiarly calculated by its natural advantages, to promote the prosperity of its inhabitants. (qtd. in Stokes 31)

As a remedy to the dilapidated manners and morals of India, Grant advocates "a proposal for the further civilization of a people, who had very early made a considerable progress in improvement, but who, by deliberate and successful plans of fraud and imposition, were rendered first stationary, then retrograde" (qtd. in Stokes 31). Grant's proposal, adopted by the CMS, featured Christianity as a means to civilize and subsequently anglicize India. Andrew Porter argues that "Grant was clear in his own mind that the civilization and

reformation of Indian society was not only necessary, but entailed nothing less than the steady introduction of Western learning. He pressed increasingly for the dissemination of Christianity, not just as a body of doctrine or collection of sublime truths, but as the essential ingredient required to bind western ways and culture together” (602). The Evangelicals believed that the civilizing of India would bring about a gradual but total change in India. As Wilberforce puts it, “the natives of Hindostan . . . would, in short, become Christians without knowing it” (qtd. in Porter 603), and in becoming Christians, they would become anglicized without knowing it.

The idea of civilizing a nation through Christianity was not limited to India but played a significant role in the larger context of mission work in general. For example, according to *Christianity the Means of Civilization* (1837), Christianity was “a complete moral machinery for carrying forward all the great processes which lie at the root of civilization” (175). Thomas Fowell Buxton’s views on Africa echoed Grant’s hegemonic position on Christianizing India. At the first meeting of the Aborigines Protection Society in 1837, he argues: “The complete civilization and the real happiness of man can never be secured by anything less than the diffusion of Christian principle” (qtd. in Bradley 85). For the Evangelicals, Christianity became the universal civilizing doctrine. The CMS saw its role as providential, and in its 1818 report it boasts that it is “situated for the influence on the Mohammedan and Heathen World” (qtd. in Stokes 121). The Society’s influence, however, is measured by the way in which it can civilize nations, which varied in their states of barbarity and irreligion. Their report sees these different nations as “varied shades of light and civilization” (qtd. in Stock 121) that require different types of missionaries. In

fact, they categorize their own mission work based on a nation's civilization, which they index by its religion:

On the review of these Missions it will be seen that the Society has to deal with man in almost every stage of civilization; from the noble but uncultivated New Zealander, upward through the more civilized African, and the still more refined Hindoo, to the acute and half-enlightened Mohammedan, and the different gradations in which Christianity is enjoyed by the Abyssian, the Syrian, and the Greek Churches. (qtd in Stock 121)

The Evangelicals' mission work was deeply implicated in the imperial project of civilizing or Westernizing of the world.

The Evangelicals were not alone in seeking to civilize the subjected peoples of the empire; they shared this aspiration with the Utilitarians. As Patrick Brantlinger argues: "The evangelicals and utilitarians insisted that the chief objects of British imperialism were the conversion and civilization of India" (108). Ian Bradley also notes the convergence of these two groups' projects: "No group of people were keener to spread their gospel of civilization and progress than the Utilitarians. In India, Evangelicals and Utilitarians worked hand in hand to further the cause of anglicization" (88). The Utilitarians made a similar argument for a lack of civilization in the East. For example, in his *History of British India* (1817), James Mill finds Indians "barbarous" (qtd. in Brantlinger 78) and argues that even in comparison to medieval Europe the "Europeans were superior" in all measures of the "civilization of a people" (qtd. in Brantlinger 78). For the Utilitarians, like the Evangelicals, this lack of civilization justified promoting Western culture, which would

lead to a cultural hegemony. Eric Stokes sums up the Utilitarian view: “If the new British Empire were to be a dominion not over territory but over the wants of a universe, it followed that it was more important to civilize than subdue” (43). For example, Thomas Macaulay felt once India had “become instructed in European knowledge” (11:586), it would always be British. Even if Britain lost military control, British culture would still be ascendant: “But there are triumphs which are still followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws” (11:586). For Macaulay “mere extent of empire is not necessarily an advantage” (11:583); rather, the advantage is the benefits “which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilization among the vast population of the East” (11:584), benefits that are realized chiefly in trade with the East. As Macaulay puts it, “To trade with civilised men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages” (11:584). This linkage of commerce and civilization, however, also characterized Evangelical thought. As Coupland points out the “positive policy of the Abolitionists” was “woven from its earliest conception of three distinct but interrelated threads—Christianity, commerce, colonization” (85).⁵ The Evangelical and Utilitarian “missions” provided a matrix that helped form nineteenth-century British imperialist ideology. The imputed

⁵The extent to which commerce and Christianity are connected in Evangelical thought is a debated issue. Like Coupland, Brian Stanley argues that the Evangelicals’ belief in providence “enabled early Victorian Christians to regard the association of commerce and Christianity as . . . a natural and harmonious alliance” (598). Andrew Porter admits that the “drawing together of Christianity and commerce was further encouraged by the general necessities of missionary strategy” (610), but he contends that the “association of Christianity and commerce, while often regarded as characteristic of Victorians, was in fact only slowly developed, and declined far more rapidly than it had arisen” (621).

barbarism of “backward” nations such as India and Africa justified Britain’s imperial aim by bestowing on it cultural, moral, and spiritual superiority.

II.

The discourse of civilization that helped normalize British culture and justify its spread abroad also plays a significant role in Shelley’s *Last Man*, a novel that grapples with Britain’s dominant position in global politics. Indeed, the theme of the transformative power of civilization opens the novel. The narrator, Lionel Verney, has turned from a vagabond shepherd boy to a cultured citizen who mixes with royalty. Verney describes himself as a youth as “rough” and “unlearned” (10) as the sheep he tended. Because of his lack of culture, he represents the vestiges of barbarism in a civilized society: “Thus untaught in refined philosophy, and pursued by a restless feeling of degradation from my true station in society, I wandered among the hills of civilized England as uncouth a savage as the wolf-bred founder of old Rome” (11). In recalling his “lawless career,” Verney traces his rebellion against society to this lack of civilization and to his uncultivated, animal nature:

My life was like that of an animal, and my mind was in danger of degenerating into that which informs brute nature. Until now, my savage habits had done me no radical mischief; my physical powers had grown up and flourished under their influence, and my mind, undergoing the same discipline, was imbued with all the hardy virtues. But now my boasted independence was becoming licentiousness. I stood on the brink of manhood; passions, strong as the trees of a forest, had already taken root

within me, and were about to shadow with their noxious overgrowth, my
path of life. (14)

Verney, however, also evidences a desire to enter society: “I clung to my ferocious habits, yet half despised them; I continued my war against civilization, and yet entertained a wish to belong to it” (14). Verney’s situation seems unresolvable because his “savage” and “ferocious” habits and his unrestrained “passions” cause him to fight against the very civilizing influence that could lead him to his rightful place in society. Shelley’s characterization of Verney echoes the Evangelicals’ view of the indigenous peoples that inhabited their mission fields: he is in need of a life-changing conversion that will civilize him and thus ensure his cooperation with the norms of society. Verney’s conversion, however, is not religious and does not come from an Evangelical missionary but through Adrian, the Earl of Windsor, who is patterned in many ways after Percy Shelley.⁶ As Steven Goldsmith puts it, Adrian is the “agent of assimilation” who “provides Lionel with an acceptable identity, a legitimate subjectivity within the social order” (286). And instead of religion working a civilizing change in Verney’s manners and morals, the gentle influence of the aesthetic converts him to the restraint and discipline needed in a civilized society.

Adrian’s civilizing influence begins even before he speaks to Verney. Verney immediately recognizes that Adrian possesses “an excess of sensibility and refinement” (19), while he views himself in comparison as the “merest ruffian that ever trod the earth”

⁶For the biographical elements of this novel, see especially Walter E. Peck’s “The Biographical Elements in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley” and Ernest J. Lovell Jr.’s “Byron and the Byronic Hero in the Novels of Mary Shelley” and “Byron and Mary Shelley.”

with a “savage revengeful heart” (20). When Adrian does begin to speak, Verney describes the effect of Adrian’s words in terms similar to an Evangelical religious conversion: “As he spoke, his earnest eyes, fixed on me, seemed to read my very soul: my heart, my savage revengeful heart, felt the influence of sweet benignity sink upon it; while his trilling voice, like sweetest melody, awoke a mute echo within me, stirring to its depths the life-blood in my frame” (20). Just as the Evangelicals’ religion of the heart produced dramatic effects, so does Adrian’s civilizing influence: “he had touched my rocky heart with his magic power, and the stream of affection gushed forth, imperishable and pure” (23). Through history, philosophy, and literature rather than religion, Adrian teaches Verney to “subdue” his “reckless and uncultured spirit” (24). He does not destroy Verney’s “manly virtues”; rather, as Verney puts it: “all was softened and humanized” (24). Verney exchanges a Hobbesian belief in the law “of the strongest” (11), for the “law of the heart” (Eagleton 56) and the “free bondage” (Eagleton 56) of the aesthetic. Rather than civilizing Verney through the gentle influences of Christianity, Adrian civilizes him through an aesthetic education. The results however, are similar, for his entrance into civilization is characterized by a middle-class notion of refinement that is predicated on the restraint of the passions.

A number of critics have noticed that Shelley uses metaphors of colonization to describe Verney’s transformation. She frames Verney’s transformation to a civilized man in terms of a savage being led from the wilderness of a distant land to the civilization of society: “The trim and paled demesne of civilization, which I had before regarded from my wild jungle as inaccessible, had its wicket opened by him; I stepped within, and felt, as I

entered, that I trod upon my native soil" (21). Adrian had found Verney as "an unlettered savage" (23) but now he was "admitted within that sacred boundary which divides the intellectual and moral nature of man from that which characterizes animals" (22). As Goldsmith argues, "Culture validates itself by means of a division, its sacred boundaries. Lionel becomes human, becomes a citizen, in other words, when he internalizes those divisions" (286). This metaphor also reflects the British imperial desire to draw indigenous people into the boundary of British culture. Alan Bewell also notes how Shelley "employs colonial language to describe Verney's change" (302) and contends: "Verney undergoes an education that colonizes him, yet strikingly he sees his 'transmigration' equivalent to coming out of the 'jungle' to recover his own native soil" (303). As Bewell argues, through her "association between Verney's education and colonialism," Shelley "applies a colonial model to England itself, seeing it as a colonial prototype, a region whose landscape and people have submitted to a civilizing process that has transformed them" (303). What these critics have not emphasized enough, however, is that the ideology of the aesthetic replaces Evangelical religion as the means of extending civilizing, Western values to the savage. Furthermore, though Verney is, on the one hand, colonized; on the other hand, his aesthetic education also empowers him to become a colonizer, for his discovery of literature and art enables him to feel like an explorer: "I felt as the sailor, who from the topmast first discovered the shore of America; and like him I hastened to tell my companions of my discoveries in unknown regions" (23). Shelley presents Verney's colonization and subsequent civilization through the aesthetic as a positive influence, and, as we shall see, later in the novel he more literally takes up the role of an imperialist.

Shelley also uses the contrast between barbarism and civilization to frame the important imperial encounter in the novel: Lord Raymond's conquest of Constantinople. The novel begins with a truce between the Greeks and the Turks, but near the end of Volume One the war revives, and Raymond resigns his protectorate to aid the Greeks in their struggle for independence. When Raymond is convincing Adrian to accompany him, he describes his mission in the same terms that Evangelicals used to convince their missionaries: the promise of adventure coupled with a sense of fulfillment of England's duty to civilize the world. Raymond thus promises Adrian, "You will behold new scenes, see a new people; witness the mighty struggle there going forward between civilization and barbarism; behold and perhaps direct the efforts of a young and vigorous population" (117). Though Raymond's speech echoes the Evangelical rhetoric that helped support an imperialist enterprise, his objectives are "liberty and order." These motives, which are much like Byron's whom Raymond is modeled after, may be viewed as anti-imperialist. Indeed, radicals like Byron and Percy Shelley viewed the Greek revolution as a compensation for the failed revolution in France. Raymond, however, is more motivated by the discourse of civilization than the ideal of liberty. Raymond's "hatred of the barbarian government" becomes the motivating factor in his resolve "to eradicate from Europe a power which, while every other nation advanced in civilization, stood still a monument of antique barbarism" (137). For Raymond, as for Percy Shelley in *Hellas*, Constantinople is the contested site between the forces of civilization and barbarism, for he feels that this city "which for many hundred years had been the strong hold of the Moslems should be rescued from slavery and barbarism, and restored to a people

illustrious for genius, civilization, and a spirit of liberty” (138). Though Raymond does fight for the Greeks’ liberty, this liberty is figured as a corollary to civilization, while the slavery the Moslems impose derives from their barbarism. Thus, his crusade is not just motivated by the mistreatment of the Greeks or the specific political situation but by the larger struggle between barbarism and civilization.

Raymond’s association of Turkish barbarism with Islamic faith also partakes of the Evangelicals’ stress of Christianity’s role in civilizing other countries. Raymond specifically correlates the tyranny and despotism of the Turks with their non-Christian faith, and Verney continues this correlation in his assessment of Raymond’s mission. Raymond becomes “the conqueror of the infidel faith” (147) and brings the “empire of the Mahometans” to “its close” (148). Adrian, though, has concerns about the Greek cause, and these concerns also shed light on Raymond’s motivations and undercut his idealistic philhellenism. Adrian still believes that the Greek cause “is beyond every other good cause” (123), yet he also feels sympathy for their enemies: “The Turks are men; each fibre, each limb is as feeling as our own, and every spasm, be it mental or bodily, is as truly felt in a Turk’s heart or brain, as in a Greek’s” (123). Shelley, however, qualifies Adrian’s sympathy, for he still evidences a bias against Islam: “They were men and women, the sufferers, before they were Mahometans, and when they rise turbanless from the grave, in what except their good or evil actions will they be the better or the worse than we?” (123-24). In other words, Adrian feels sympathy for all humans, but the Turks are only humans when they are not Muslims, before their conversion and after their death. Furthermore, as we saw in Adrian’s conversion, a person is not really “human” until he or she has been

civilized through culture. The Turks display the same “brutal appetites” (124) that Verney did in his animal-like pre-civilized state; however, the Turks are trapped in barbarism through their religion.

Shelley critiques Raymond’s crusade not only through Adrian’s comments but also through her delineation of the effects of Raymond’s mission, which unleashes the plague that eventually decimates the world. As Robert Lance Synder points out, however, this critique may be of Raymond’s pride rather than his ideology, for “she does imply that the plague’s dramatic and indiscriminate victory at Constantinople is linked to Raymond’s overweening pride and excessive ambition” (440). Lee Sterrenburg argues that linking the plague to Raymond’s victory “enables her to suggest, by implication, some of the genocidal atrocities of the Greek revolution” (343) and that the “monsterlike holocaust that descends upon the Greek revolution in *The Last Man* is a graphic fictional rebuttal of Percy’s political views” (345). Other critics are quick to point out the connections between imperialism and the plague. For Bewell, Raymond’s actions help in “transforming the ecology of the disease” and the fall of Constantinople “erases its [the disease’s] traditional boundaries”: “Just as British influence in India unleashed cholera, Raymond’s conquering the city produces a catastrophe for Europe (299). Viewed in such light, Shelley can be viewed as critiquing British imperialism, writing a “visionary postcolonialism” (Bewell 297) that “reflects the important role imperialism has played in the global spread of diseases” (Bewell 298). Paul Cantor also highlights the importance of the connection between the plague and imperialism, arguing that through her portrayal of the plague “Shelley raises profound doubts about England’s attempt to reach out and

embrace the whole globe” (195). Barbara Johnson points to the importance of the plague and imperialistic discourse:

The Plague, which extends out over the entire world from the point of encounter between East and West, is thus in a sense that which replaces the victory of the West over the East. Its lethal universality is a nightmarish version of the desire to establish a universal discourse, to spread equality and fraternity throughout the world. Thus the universal empire of the Plague would not be only . . . what is *excluded* from Western humanism; it would also be its *inverted* image. (264)

Shelley’s novel does question Britain’s imperial role, but it is necessary to distinguish between Shelley’s critique of Raymond’s actions, which these critics have linked to the imperialism, and a critique of Raymond’s ideology, which is based on the same discourse of civilization that indeed supported imperialism. I contend that Shelley takes pains to question Raymond’s method of civilizing the Turks rather than his belief in the need for civilization. Such a distinction becomes clear by noticing that once Adrian agrees to accompany Raymond to Greece, Shelley shifts the narrative back to Verney. This juxtaposition brings into sharp contrast Raymond’s civilizing mission and Verney’s own civilization by Adrian and his subsequent civilization of Perdita. Goldsmith also notices this juxtaposition and argues that Raymond’s “terms of ethnic conversion are exactly those of Lionel—the ascent from nature to culture” (291). He also contends that Raymond and Adrian “both share the same end of extending civilization”: “Despite their many disagreements . . . Raymond and Adrian speak the same language; one enacts on

the battlefield what the other valorizes in the intellectual sphere: the subjugation (or in Raymond's case, the annihilation) of the other in service of the prerogatives of Western cultural power" (291). This distinction is crucial. Raymond uses force to civilize, while Adrian and Verney, like the Evangelicals and Utilitarians, use culture. Indeed, Verney's comments on the moralizing influence of literature echo those of the Evangelicals, except that literature replaces Christianity:

For my own part, since Adrian had first withdrawn me from selvatic wilderness to his own paradise of order and beauty, I had been wedded to literature. I felt convinced that however it might have been in former times, in the present stage of the world, no man's faculties could be developed, no man's moral principle enlarged and liberal, without an extensive acquaintance with books. To me they stood in the place of an active career, of ambition, and those palpable excitements necessary to the multitude.

(120)

The paradise of "order and beauty" provided by the aesthetic replaces the "palpable excitements necessary to the multitude." For Verney, culture and morality are provided not by religion but by the aesthetic alone. Through literature, selfish passions become refined into more social feelings that provide a self-imposed order that seems like a "paradise." Indeed, Verney's lack of "ambition" stands in stark contrast to Raymond's overweening ambition, and the methods he uses to attempt to civilize Perdita also differ strongly. Verney seeks to replicate the gentle aestheticizing influence that he describes Adrian had on him: "I was an outcast and a vagabond, when Adrian gently threw over me

the silver net of love and civilization, and linked me inextricably to human charities and human excellence” (205). The violence of Raymond’s sword is replaced by the “silver net of love and civilization.” Yet, just as the less overtly violent means of civilization promoted by the Evangelicals and Utilitarians provides a more effective means of subjugation, so Adrian and Verney’s “silver net” is still a net that entangles people in the promotion of bourgeois ideology. The aesthetic merely disguises the potential violence of subjecting one’s will to another by making it appear as a pleasurable and autonomous decision.

Verney feels it necessary to civilize Perdita because, especially in contrast to the “elegant and cultivated Evadne,” Perdita was “still to a great degree uneducated” (119). He goes on to argue: “It was the pleasure I took in literature, the discipline of mind I found arise from it, that made me eager to lead Perdita to the same pursuits” (121). To bring Perdita the benefits of civilization, the “discipline of mind” found in the “paradise of order and beauty,” he proceeds stealthily: “I began with the light hand of gentle allurements; first exciting her curiosity, and then satisfying it in such a way as might occasion her, at the same time that she half forgot her sorrows in occupation, to find in the hours that succeeded a reaction of benevolence and toleration” (121). Under Verney’s tutelage, Perdita gradually becomes educated: “She sought to improve her understanding; mechanically her heart and dispositions became soft and gentle under this benign discipline” (121). Though it is “benign,” Verney’s education leads to a “discipline,” and the softening of her “heart” and “dispositions” works like the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology, for such actions bring about self-regulation: “Erringly and strangely she began

the task of self-examination with self-condemnation” (121-22). Shelley’s emphasis on the “soft” and “gentle” education, its “benign discipline” that produces the effects of bourgeois restraint and self-discipline through gentle coercion links her idea of civilization with aesthetic ideology. Furthermore, her description of Verney’s civilization of Perdita echoes the cultural hegemony advocated by the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians. Just as Wilberforce envisions Indians becoming “Christians without knowing it” and Macaulay stresses the importance of peaceful influence of pervasive Western culture, so Shelley here presents Perdita’s civilization as attained through an aesthetic imperialism: she becomes disciplined in bourgeois values through the aesthetic’s gentle influence. In contrast to Raymond’s violent attempt to overcome Turkish barbarism, Verney’s civilizing influence produces a more lasting effect. In the battle against the Turks, Adrian is dismayed to discover that “words were blunt weapons” (124). Words, however, through the civilizing influence of the aesthetic become a more lasting and effective weapon in the arsenal of bourgeois hegemony.

III.

Shelley’s emphasis on the civilizing influence of literature also helps to explain the most overriding trope in the novel, the plague, and an analysis of the plague within the discourse of civilization reveals how Shelley’s desire for political reform is connected to her aesthetic imperialism. One of the most often discussed topics in criticism of this novel is what the plague represents. I would like to address this topic, however, by taking a slightly different approach. Rather than looking at what the plague represents, I will examine how Shelley represents disease. As Charles Rosenberg argues, “Explaining

sickness is too significant—socially and emotionally—for it to be a value-free enterprise” (xiv). For Rosenberg and other cultural historians, “Concepts of disease and its causation and possible prevention always exist both in social and intellectual space Disease is irrevocably a social actor, that is, a factor in structured configuration of social interactions” (xx). Since the representation of “disease is invested with a unique configuration of social characteristics” (xvii), disease “is both a index of and monitory comment on society” (xxii). Rosenberg’s point that the way a society “frames” a disease reveals the values of that society intersects Foucault’s insistence in *The Birth of the Clinic* that medical discourse helps to naturalize ideas of normality and abnormality. Similarly, I see the cholera epidemic that struck Britain in 1832 as an example of the way disease both reveals and normalizes social relationships. I do not want to make the anachronistic argument that Shelley’s depiction of a fictional plague is influenced by the cholera debates; rather, I want to suggest that her novel does partake of the same social context that influenced the “framing” of the cholera epidemic.⁷ Thus, Shelley’s representation of a fictional plague and the representation of the actual cholera epidemic do have features in common. Both representations reveal a structuring of the social order and work to normalize this structuring. One of the most striking similarities between Shelley’s fictional plague and later cholera accounts is the framing of the disease through the discourse of

⁷Bewell also draws upon Rosenberg’s concept of framing in his broader discussion of colonial disease and Romanticism. Bewell points out that he uses “the term in a more active sense, which recognizes that the framing of disease at any time is not necessarily settled but is constantly open to negotiation, revision, and dispute” (3). This distinction is particularly important for Bewell, for he argues that “framing diseases during the colonial period was particularly uncertain and unstable for a number of reasons” (3)—the arrival of new diseases, the ability of disease to travel with greater ease, and the erasure of boundaries that had traditionally separated environments.

civilization. As Francois Delaporte argues: “Deadly disease evokes widespread fears, shaped in part by popular beliefs. In the case of cholera, faith in the superiority of Western values was shaken to a degree that some people felt the need to defend the Western, which is to say, the modern industrial world, whence the involvement of ideology” (5-6). The cholera epidemic brought in to question the efficacy of civilization providing adequate protection from disease that stemmed from what were figured as barbaric countries. If cholera affected Europe in the same way it did India, then the idea of a hierarchical scale of civilization would be overturned. Shelley’s novel evidences these fears that cholera epidemic later brought to light, and she similarly frames the disease through the discourse of civilization. She questions the power of civilization to prevent the spread of disease and interrogates imperialism’s role in spreading disease. Yet she eventually, much like Burke, figures the civilization provided by the aesthetic as the means to overcome the plague of a true democracy.

The manner in which the cholera epidemic was understood through a discourse of civilization is best exemplified by the statement of the Frenchman Larrey on the eve of cholera’s arrival in France. One argument that Larrey makes for France’s safety from the epidemic is geographical: “The topographical situation of France is so advantageous that there is little to fear in this country from cholera morbus or any other pestilential disease” (qtd. in Delaporte 2). Larrey, however, does not rely on topography alone, for he links France’s superiority in geography to their development of “rational medicine” and “rules of hygiene and health measures” which lead him to feel “perfectly secure” against cholera (qtd. in Delaporte 2). The same confidence in geography and social conditions is

registered in the British preparations against cholera. For example, in 1831 James Johnson argued that “the British climate and social conditions would draw cholera’s teeth” (Durey 114). In his study of the cholera epidemic in Britain, Robert Morris catalogues the contemporary arguments for British safety: “The varied climate, prosperity, ‘our insular position,’ ‘the modern habits of our people,’ ‘superior clothing, comfort and diet,’ and ‘the easier condition of the lower orders,’ were all suggested as factors which would protect Britain from the full force of the epidemic” (28). Britain’s and France’s notions of national superiority did not hinge solely on climate, medicine, and social conditions; rather, confidence in these factors was heightened since these were the very conditions led to these societies’ civilization. In other words, protection from the disease derived from the same factors that had fostered civilization and were now emblems of a superior civilization.

The extent to which immunity from cholera is framed in terms of civilization is evidenced especially in France. Larrey confidently asserts: “Today in no other country of the globe have civilization, industry, and commerce achieved a higher degree of perfection [than in France] and in no country but England are the rules of hygiene more faithfully observed. Cleanliness and above all sobriety, prophylactics against every sort of disease, are the leading traits of French citizenry” (qtd. in Delaporte 1-2). While cholera could thrive “only in the fetid, marshy areas in certain parts of Asia Minor, Russia, and Poland” (qtd. in Delaporte 1), a civilized country like France, where “Enlightenment has spread so widely through all classes of society” (qtd. in Delaporte 2), would be immune. While Larrey and others believed that “the virtues of civilization repel the plague,” he also felt

that “the vices of barbarism afforded it free passage” (Delaporte 12). In other words, the idea that civilization granted immunity from this disease “was further reinforced by the fact that cholera had first developed in India,” (16), a country which—as we have seen documented by Mill—was thought to be barbaric by Western standards. Another text on cholera confidently declares: “Most contagious diseases—the great scourges of the human race—originated and were spread by the barbarous peoples” (qtd. in Delaporte 104). An 1831 medical report figures cholera in precisely these terms: “It is to be feared that this scourge, similar to the barbarian invasion of the Middle Ages, will decimate nations, disrupt society, destroy commerce, and set back civilization” (qtd. in Delaporte 102). When cholera arrived in France in 1832, it provoked a watershed in the representation of the disease:

The year 1832 was thus a year of confrontation between barbarism and civilization, between despotism and liberalism, between ignorance and knowledge. This myth, the product of philosophical speculation pushed to the limit, played an important role: not only did it justify colonization by linking the disease to the alleged political and cultural inferiority of the oriental nations, but it also proved, to the satisfaction of the Europeans, that the poverty of those nations stemmed from the temperament of their people. (Delaporte 102)

Before cholera’s arrival, both in England in France, confidence in the civilization of European society helped to abate fears of the arrival of the plague, but this very confidence also led to the impulse to civilize other nations, thus justifying colonial actions

that in reality helped to spread the plague.

This confidence in civilization, of course, was proven to be unfounded once cholera arrived in these countries. Since, “the idea that the ravages of the plague could somehow reduce the West to the level of the East was unacceptable,” one way to explain its presence in civilized countries was to speculate that the epidemic was “like a natural disaster, a violent earthquake or hurricane” (Delaporte 98). The more surprising explanation, however, was based on the idea of civilization. Though cholera was ravaging “civilized” countries, the discourse of civilization and its promotion of intelligence, cleanliness, and sobriety continued to flourish. Some argued that if Europe were not so civilized, the cholera attack would have been much worse. This rationalization, however, was not as prevalent as the argument that pointed to the poorer classes as lacking the civilization necessary to protect them from the epidemic. Since cholera’s ravages had the greatest effect on the poorest members of the population, it became easy to separate them as a segment of society that was not as civilized and thus more prone to disease. Richard Evans argues, “In this way, confidence in bourgeois society as the epitome of progress and civilization was precariously maintained by ascribing the ravages of the disease to the uncivilised nature of the poverty-stricken masses” (155). As Delaporte puts it, “The working class was a savage survival in the heart of the city” (105). The construction of the working-class as the uncivilized Other also was tied to previous constructions of colonized nations as barbaric. Delaporte sums up this comparison: “Not only was the mortality of the poor acknowledged, it was also justified by an analogy: the working classes were to the privileged classes as India was to France” (12, see also 103-104). As one

contemporary doctor argues: “The wealthy classes are to the inferior classes what Europe is to the Orient, i.e., proportionally they suffer far less” (qtd. in Delaporte 106). As the Evangelicals justified their civilizing mission in India and Africa by pointing to the barbarism and lack of morality in the countries, so the high death rates among the poor could be linked to morality rather than poverty and living conditions.

When the disease was striking the poorest members of society, it was easy to justify their deaths by drawing from the discourse of civilization, but when cholera began to kill members of the upper class, greater emphasis was made on the moral component of civilization. In other words, when the disease hit both the wealthiest and the poorest, it provided fodder for the argument that the middle class was best equipped against this disease because of their morality. The cholera threat began to be figured as a “veritable moral epidemic” (qtd. in Delaporte 110) that “eliminated the dissolute from society” (Delaporte 109). In England this was especially true, for as Morris points out, the Evangelical movement “deeply influenced the response to cholera” (131). The Evangelicals viewed cholera through a providential framework (the same framework that justified their civilizing mission abroad) and argued that cholera was a punishment inflicted upon the nation. The reasons for this punishment were fairly broad. For example, the *Christian Observer*, an Evangelical publication, cited the cause as England’s “widespread infidelity and profaneness” (qtd. in Morris 133). For the Evangelicals, who had argued for the reformation of the manners and morals of the nation, cholera confirmed their belief “that decline in morality, especially decline in respect for the church, would bring social chaos in its wake” (Morris 133). The most often cited specific moral failure was

intoxication, and the abuse of alcohol was often easily linked to the lower class. For example, the *Cholera Gazette* makes this link in its portrayal of a stereotypical cholera victim: “He was a cobbler by trade, and one of those reprobates whom cholera is said to know for its victims—an idle, quarrelsome, profane drunkard, starving both himself and his family” (qtd. in Morris 117). In addition to the negative prohibition against alcohol, Evangelicals also promoted the active practice of middle-class values as a preventative against cholera. Thus, “Moral Preservatives against Cholera,” which appeared in the *Congregational Magazine*, promoted “temperance, cleanliness, hard work, fortitude and gospel reading” (qtd. in Morris 141) as measures to take to avoid cholera. As cholera progressed in both England in France, it became associated more with moral rather than social causes. More precisely, Evangelicals represented the social factors that were linked with disease as moral issues, which gave further justification for the Evangelicals’ promotion of middle-class manners and morals.

Finally, the representation of cholera as a lower-class disease is further complicated in Britain, since the coincidence of the cholera epidemic with debates about reform led to a connection between reform and disease. As Bewell argues, “cholera in 1831-32 produced an epidemic of signs, as the disease intensified class anxieties that were already high in the period leading up the Reform Bill” (253). Radicals saw a connection between cholera and reform. Some, like Cobbett who proclaimed it a “Humbug,” viewed it as a diversion from reform; others were able to use the effects of the disease on the lower classes to bolster their arguments for improved living conditions for the poor. Meanwhile, conservatives also made this connection as “Fear of cholera . . . neatly

dovetailed with fear of reform” (Durey 190). For example, John Croker in 1832 writes, “Revolution progresses and so does cholera” (2:149). Some conservatives, such as Southey, felt that cholera may even be an effectual diversion from reform, for he writes, “the cholera if it comes, which God in his mercy forbid, will be a more effectual ally in the aid of the Constitution” (4:230). The *British Critic* went so far as to proclaim that it preferred “pestilence, rather than the horrors of revolution and anarchy” (qtd. in Morris 98). Especially interesting in this analysis of the convergence of cholera, class, and the politics of reform in Coleridge’s unpublished poem, “Cholera Cured Before Hand.”⁸ As Bewell argues in his analysis of this poem, “Coleridge’s adoption of a working-class democrat was not neutral or distanced”; rather, his “linking of politics and contagion” (264) represents the conservative nature of Coleridge’s political views. In particular, the last verse of this poem brings together much of the rhetoric concerning cholera, class, and politics:

So without further Blethring,
 Dear Mudlarks! My Bretheren!
 Of all scents and degrees
 (Yourselves with your Shes)
 Foreswear all Cabal, Lads!
 Wakes, Unions and Rows;
 Hot Drams and cold Sallads;

⁸As Bewell notes, three versions of this poem occur in Coleridge’s letters. I follow Bewell in quoting from the version sent to Henry Nelson Coleridge, found in *Collected Letters* 6:916-18.

And don't pig in Styes that would suffocate Sows!
 Quit COBBETT's, O'CONNELL's and BELZEBUB's banners,
 And white-wash at once your Guts, Room, and Manners.

Coleridge's message, in the guise of a working-class speaker, damns the working-class message of leaders such as Cobbett and links this association with the cholera.

Furthermore, he echoes the Evangelicals' call for a reform of manners. Working-class radicals' call for revolution is a diseased political stance, while a more bourgeois emphasis provides the "white-wash" that will disinfect this movement. While Coleridge's response is provoked by an actual epidemic, as we shall see, Shelley's novel figures a similar response to an imagined plague.

IV.

The origin and progress of the plague in *The Last Man* is quite similar to the spread of the cholera epidemic that began in India in 1817 and spread across Europe and Asia, eventually reaching England in 1831.⁹ As the plague spreads from Constantinople throughout Asia Minor, Verney, like the British and the French facing the cholera epidemic, is still confident about Britain's safety, arguing that it is "rather absurd to calculate upon the arrival of the plague in London" (173). Though Verney doesn't feel much regret about the demise of Constantinople, his travels in Greece, Thrace, and

⁹The plague did not reach England until 1831, and Michael Durey asserts that the "British reading public first became aware of cholera when Russia was infected in 1830" (135). As Robert Morris point out, however, when the East India mails arrived in the winter of 1818-19, the British press "began to take notice" (21) of the epidemic that was raging in India. Shelley's locating the same origin and progress of her plague seems to indicate that she was familiar with the cholera epidemic and its migration even before it struck Europe.

Macedonia allow him to sympathize with the desolation the plague was causing in those civilized countries. As the plague moves from Athens and over to America, the British begin to make practical plans for its arrival, but they are still confident of their safety from it. Verney's confidence in Britain's safety from the plague derives from his framing the disease in the same manner as cholera was represented: a confidence in the civilization of the West to protect it from a plague that arises from the barbaric East. Verney even displays both rationalizations of disease being a natural disaster as well as being a societal index. He argues that though the plague has begun to disrupt British commerce, it would not reach the sacred isle:

It is of old a native of the East, sister of the tornado, the earthquake and the simoon. Child of the sun, and nursling of the tropics, it would soon expire in these climes. It drinks the dark blood of the inhabitant of the south, but it never faces on the pale-faced Celt. If perchance some stricken Asiatic come among us, plague dies with him, uncommunicated and innoxious. Let us weep for our brethren, though we can never experience their reverse. (184)

Just as Verney characterizes Muslims as human and still not human, so he here feels sympathy for his "brethren" of the East and the tropics, though these "brethren" are clearly different, since he feels that the British will "never experience their reverse." Furthermore, it is significant that even though the plague had spread through Asia Minor, Greece, and America, he locates the potential contagion coming from a "stricken Asiatic" rather than from the Greeks or even from the descendants of "pale-faced Celts" that

inhabit America. Raymond's attempt to civilize the Turks has unleashed an epidemic of global proportions, and the war is now being fought against an invasion from the "barbarous tyranny of the plague" (332), which arises from the East. Verney, however, like Raymond, is confident of the victory of civilization over barbarism.

Like the medical authorities in Britain and France, Verney also outlines the topographical superiority of England, which prevents such a civilized country from being infected: "The cleanliness, habits of order, and the manner in which our cities were built were all in our favour. As it was an epidemic, its chief force was derived from the pernicious qualities of the air, and it would probably do little harm where this was naturally salubrious" (195).¹⁰ Again, like Larrey, he characterizes the plague as a barbarian invader that will be stopped by the force of civilization:

Perhaps in no part of the world has she met with so systematic and determined an opposition. Perhaps no country is naturally so well protected against our invader; nor has nature anywhere been so well assisted by the hand of man. We will not despair. We are neither cowards nor fatalists; but, believing that God has placed the means for preservation in our own hands, we will use those means to our utmost. Remember that cleanliness,

¹⁰ Again Shelley evidences knowledge of medical literature surrounding the cholera epidemic, for one of the hotly contested debates before the cholera even struck was between the contagionists and the anti-contagionists. For example, the *Westminster Review* published two lengthy essays on the literature of this topic already in 1825 ["Contagion and Sanitary Laws" 3 (1825): 134-167 and "Plague—Typhus Fever—Quarantine" 3 (1825): 499-530]. According to the contagionist theory, cholera was spread by direct contact between persons. The non-contagionist theory traced cholera to a miasma, which came from local causes in the environment. Verney here espouses the non-contagionist position. For a discussion of the contagion theory debates as well their political implications, see especially Morris (70-84) and Delaporte (139-95).

sobriety, and even good-humour and benevolence, are our best medicine.

(194)

Verney's speech, which invokes providence and emphasizes bourgeois values as the "best medicine," echoes those Evangelicals who called for moral preservatives against cholera. Britain is the most civilized country because of such values and thus is safe against the plague.

Verney, however, is wrong in his predictions, and the plague does come to England. As we saw in the Evangelicals' framing of the cholera epidemic, the discourse of medicine, which normalizes notions of healthy/diseased and normality/abnormality, became a means for the middle-class to naturalize their position in society. In other words, since the disease was most prevalent in the lower and upper classes, middle-class proponents such as the Evangelicals could argue that cholera was purging society of its weakest elements. Similarly, in Shelley's novel, the survival of particular characters reveals the social order that she envisions and also normalizes it. As Mark Canuel points out, the plague "reconfigures the *meaning* of populations as well as the meaning of other persons to the self" (151) One way in which Shelley reconfigures the meaning of populations is to display the effects of the plague primarily in the economic structuring of class. The first group that petitioned Adrian for help "consisted of people of the middling and lower classes of society, whose means of subsistence failed with the cessation of trade, and of the busy-spirit of money making in all its branches, peculiar to our country" (197). The first effects of the plague are traced to Britain's own reliance on trade, which emphasizes Shelley's critique of commerce. Eventually though, the plague does produce a leveling

effect on the class system: “The pomp of rank, the assumption of power, the possessions of wealth vanished like the morning mist. One living beggar had become of more wealth than a national peerage of dead lords—alas the day!—than of dead heroes, patriots, or men of genius” (210). One effect of this leveling is that “the plague dramatically reshuffles the social categories of persons so that classification—or class—is no longer understood only according to the ownership of property but also according to the *relation* between a person’s property and body and the property and bodies of others” (Canuel 164). Verney points out this shift raises the labor value of the poor, since they were experienced in performing the tasks necessary for subsistence: “Poor and rich were now equal, or rather the poor were superior, since they entered on such tasks with alacrity and experience; while ignorance, inaptitude, and habits of repose rendered them fatiguing to the luxurious, galling to the proud, disgusting to all whose minds, bent on intellectual improvement, held it their dearest privilege to be exempt for attending to mere animal wants” (241). By projecting this disease as a leveler of class, Shelley presents a radical vision of society, yet this equality comes only through great destruction. Furthermore, it still displays a hierarchy that is disguised through an emphasis on the civilizing power of the aesthetic.

The plague’s reconfiguration of wealth that leads to a reconfiguration of class also causes a significant shift in politics. The political scheming and dreams of reform that dominated the first volume are wiped out after the plague hits. Raymond, who has abdicated to go fight in Constantinople, is now dead, and Ryland flees in the face of the plague, leaving Adrian to rule. Shelley’s focus on this embodiment of different political positions leads Sterrenburg to conclude rightly that “the novel is an anatomy or

encyclopedic survey of a number of political positions, including utopianism, Bonapartism, and revolutionary enthusiasms of all kinds" (328). Since all the reforming ideas are wiped out by the plague, Sterrenburg concludes: "*The Last Man* deals with politics, but ultimately it is an antipolitical novel" (328). Similarly, Mellor finds that "*The Last Man* first undercuts the dominant systems of government of the early nineteenth century and then shows that all cultural ideologies are but meaningless fictions" (144). She, like Sterrenburg, similarly concludes: "Shelley's novel is on the deepest level anti-political" (164). I would argue, however, that Shelley's novel is not anti-political, *per se*; rather, as the plague reconfigures class, so Shelley's narrative aestheticizes the political, thus making it appear non-political.

With Ryland out of the picture and the Countess of Windsor rendered ineffective, the lower-class and upper-class representatives are effaced, and Adrian—though technically a member of the aristocracy—as the embodiment of bourgeois values takes the leadership role. Cantor correctly asserts that *The Last Man* thus "becomes a kind of aristocratic fantasy" (201), in which Shelley envisions "not so much an aristocracy of birth as an aristocracy of merit" (201). Cantor goes on to argue: "Specifically, by fantasizing a situation in which first her Byron figure, and then her Percy figure rules England, Shelley seems to champion an aristocracy of *artistic* merit, going her husband one better in imagining a state in which poets might become the *acknowledged* legislators of the world" (201). I agree with Cantor, but I would add one further distinction. Raymond's leadership, because it was motivated by ambition and implemented through military power, leads to destruction. Adrian, however, is the embodiment of the aesthetic, and his leadership works

through gentle coercion and restraint. Once England has been purged by Shelley's plague, all that remains for leadership is Adrian and Verney, who lead the remaining British out of England.¹¹ This group, which Verney continually refers to as "the remnant" (257, 261, 272) or the "elect" (230) become the aesthetic aristocracy. Shelley transfers the biblical resonance and significance of these terms to a solely aesthetic significance. Motivated by the civilizing influence of literature rather than religion, Verney and Adrian set off on a journey of "aesthetic imperialism" (Cantor 206). Though Cantor uses term "aesthetic imperialism" here, he defines it more broadly, whereas I see their imperialism as representing the aesthetic of bourgeois ideology. Indeed, Adrian's "plan of emigration" in a sense reenacts the imperialist ambition, and thus when Adrian tells Verney of this plan, Verney echoes British colonial policy: "Let us go—the world is our country now, and we will choose for our residence its most fertile spot" (257). They too will conquer by the gentle and pervasive influence of the aesthetic, though unlike the Evangelicals, they sacralize the aesthetic rather than aestheticizing religion.

A key episode that occurs in Adrian and Verney's "re-civilization" of the globe is their confrontation with the impostor-preacher in France, for this confrontation

¹¹Though the plague wipes out the population of the earth, critics often overlook the fact that of the domestic circle that Shelley highlights in Volume One only Idris dies from the plague. Raymond dies from a blow to the head from falling debris (162); Perdita commits suicide by drowning herself after Raymond's death (168); and Adrian drowns (364). Evadne, who prophesies the plague, dies from "pain and fever from her wound" (142). As Bewell argues, Evadne's "uncertain nationality" and her poverty link her to both the lower-class and the foreign Other: "Crossing the boundary between the East and the pathogenic world of the urban laboring classes, she thus emblemizes their epidemiological link. As Raymond enters her apartment he notices not only poverty, but within the threshold 'a pair of small Turkish slippers'" (299). That the plague enters the novel first through Evadne points to the connection of disease and barbarism in the Other, while Verney and Adrian's survival represents the survival of the civilized middle class.

foregrounds Shelley's desire to replace religion with the aesthetic in a civilizing mission and also characterizes the gentle coercion of such imperialism. Before going to France, Adrian is visited by members of what Verney refers to as "our colony at Paris" (292). They report that the first set of emigrants to France "found Paris a desert" and "took uncontested possession" (294) of it. They also recount that three parties have formed from this first set of emigrants: the first party "assumed a superiority of rank and power" (295); the second party "asserted their independence" (294); and a third party "was formed by a sectarian, a self-erected prophet, who, while he attributed all power and rule to God, strove to get the real command of his comrades into his own hands" (294). The first party's emphasis on rank and power associate them with the upper classes, while the second party's emphasis on "independence" echoes the familiar cry of lower-class radicalism. This third party, who called themselves "the Elect" (295) had the fewest in numbers, but "their purpose was more one, their obedience to their leader more entire, their fortitude and courage more unyielding and active" (294). According to Verney, this leader was "an imposter in the most determined sense of the word" (294), who had lost "all sense of rectitude and self-esteem" (294). In the description of the roots of the impostor-preacher's ambition, he particularly singles out lower-class religion: "His father had been a methodist preacher, an enthusiastic man with simple intentions; but whose pernicious doctrines of election and special grace had contributed to destroy all conscientious feelings in his son" (294). The dangerous enthusiasm of Methodism proves especially powerful during the aftermath of the plague, for the preacher "zealously propagated the creed of his divine mission" to people who "believed that safety and

salvation were to be afforded only to those who put their trust in him" (294). Besides associating the preacher with a lower-class religion, Shelley also uses Verney to point out the class composition of his followers. He notes, "They were mostly drawn from that which, when such distinctions existed, was denominated the lower rank of society" (303). Thus, though class distinctions have been ostensibly erased, they still reinsert themselves back into the political structure. The plague has become a means to power for this enthusiastic preacher to gain power in the new colony of France, especially among the lower classes. Just as the Evangelicals, both at home and abroad, countered such dangerous, revolutionary religion with a more civilized religion that produced restraint, so Adrian and his band of the elect counteract the potential violence of lower-class religion with middle-class values.

The dispute between two of the parties in France had reached a boiling point when Adrian arrives. Even in a depopulated world, Shelley still evidences a fear of an "insane mob" (29) ready to do violence. The disputing factions, however, receive Adrian as a Christ-like figure: he appeared as "an angel of peace" on his "white charger" and "the women kissed his hands, and the edges of his garments" (297). The savior, however, now is the poet, the cultured man of letters. Even in the "wild clamour" that ensues, Adrian's voice is finally "heard" and "obeyed," and at his presence "the crowd fell back" (297). Adrian does not have the "look of victory" or the "majestic mien" of Lord Raymond, but he is able to influence the crowd in a different way: "His slight figure, his fervent look, his gesture more of deprecation than rule, were proofs that love, unmingled with fear, gave him dominion over the hearts of the multitude" (298). Adrian's influence over the mob is

gentle but complete: “No distinction was now visible between the two parties, late ready to shed each other’s blood, for, though neither would submit to the other, they both yielded ready obedience to the Earl of Windsor” (298). This scene may act a some sort of compensatory fantasy where Percy Shelley and his doctrine of love is translated in practical political action. Indeed, it seems to reenact Laon’s influence over the crowd in *Revolt of Islam*. However, it also demonstrates the power of aesthetic imperialism, represented by Adrian. Adrian, who is the figure that embodies civilization and whose aesthetic education had converted Verney, now unites the people into one voice. The gentle influence of the aesthetic is able to unite the upper-class and lower-class factions in the bourgeois fantasy of unity with restraint.

Adrian and his band of the elect then go on to reap the fruits of their success in this colony. They repose “amidst the luxuries of the departed Bourbons” (299) and forage through the castle and town of Versailles. Indeed, Verney even explicitly compares Paris to a colony: “At first I likened it to a colony, which borne over the far seas, struck root for the first time in a new country” (300). This colony life, however, was worsened by the fact that the impostor-prophet refused to be swayed by Adrian. Furthermore, even though he was based in Paris, the impostor-prophet’s “missionaries” (302) continued to visit Versailles. Even more disturbing is the power he had to influence people, for “such was the power of his assertions, however false, yet vehemently iterated, over the ready credulity of the ignorant and fearful, that they seldom failed in drawing over to their party from among our numbers” (302). Before leaving for Switzerland, Adrian’s group wants to increase their own party, but even more importantly, they desire to rescue this “deluded

crew” from the “pernicious influence of superstition and unrelenting tyranny” (302). Adrian also wants to “prevent the contagion of rebellion” (314) from reaching his own group of elect. As the conservatives in England reacted by linking the cholera epidemic with the plague of reform, here Shelley provides a link between a worldwide plague and the epidemic of lower-class rebellion. The problem is solved, however, when the plague strikes members of the prophet’s party and he kills himself. In the end, the prophet’s group of the “Elect” dies off while Adrian’s group of the “elect” goes on to explore the depopulated world. In the clash between the influence of religion and the influence of the aesthetic in an imperial setting, Shelley provides a warning about the danger of religion and advocates instead the “discipline and peace” (302) brought by the aesthetic, which is divorced from religion and indeed replaces its influence.

The figure of the impostor-prophet in Volume Three also recalls the introduction to the novel, which frames Verney’s narrative as a prophecy. These two examples of prophecy serve as bookends to this apocalyptic narrative. Shelley’s framing of this narrative as a prophecy, along with the false prophet embedded in the structure, signals her argument for the replacement of religion with literature as the means of civilization. The introduction begins by recalling an actual event, Shelley and Percy’s visit to Baiae Bay, the Elysian Fields, and Avernus on December 8, 1818. In the novel, after she and her companion wander through these classic ruins, they “entered the gloomy cavern of the Cumæan Sibyl” (1). In spite of discouragement from the guide, they press onward to narrow passages that nobody had visited, where the narrator discovers “some of the leaves strewed about” and exclaims, “This *is* the Sibyl’s cave; these are the Sibylline leaves” (3).

Though these writings “were expressed in various languages,” they are still able to ascertain that “they seemed to contain prophecies” (2). These prophecies provide more confirmation of what the narrator suspects, and she exclaims, “this was certainly the Sibyl’s cave” (3). Shelley is careful to point out that the origins of this prophecy are secular, classical, and literary.

These secular prophecies, however, are not taken verbatim but are subjected to an editorial process. The narrator says: “We made a hasty selection of such of the leaves, whose writing one at least of us could understand; and then, laden with our treasure, we bade adieu to the dim hypæthric cavern” (4). Once they discovered the treasure spot, she remarks that they often return and “each time added to our store” (4). The narrator finds consolation in “deciphering these sacred remains” (4), but once her companion dies she is left to finish them herself. The result is that Verney’s narrative has really been written by the editor: “I present the public with my latest discovery in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form. But the main substance rests on the truths contained in these poetic rhapsodies, and the divine intuition which the Cumæan damsel obtained from heaven” (4). Thus, though the narrative contains “truths” and “divine intuition,” it is still subject to the editor’s role, which Shelley highlights:

Sometimes I have thought, that, obscure and chaotic as they are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer. As if we should give another artist, the painted fragments which form the mosaic copy of Raphael’s Transfiguration in St. Peter’s; he would put them together in a form, whose

mode would be fashioned by his own particular hand and talent. Doubtless the leaves of the Cumæan Sibyl have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence at my hands. My only excuse for thus transforming them, is that they were unintelligible in their pristine condition. (4)

Shelley thus highlights the role of the artist in the creation of this secular rather than sacred prophecy, yet she closes the introduction by pulling back from this apology: “I hardly know whether this apology is necessary. For the merits of my adaptation and translation must decide how far I have well bestowed my time and imperfect power, in giving form and substance to the frail and attenuated Leaves of the Sibyl” (5).

Shelley’s framing of her prophecy in the introduction highlights several aspects. She does not argue that her prophetic discourse gains power from being derived from traditional religion; rather, she locates the source of power in classical literature, particularly the Cumæan Sibyl, and in the artist’s ability to shape and revise the prophecy. Gregory O’Dea argues that through the Sibylline leaves Shelley is able to give her “historical narrative” origins that are “supposedly supernatural rather than human” (291). I would emphasize that it instead helps place her prophecy at a double remove from traditional religious prophecy: its divine intuition is actually secular in origin and its mediation through a human editor is emphasized rather than obscured. Morton Paley, in comparing Shelley’s novel to other “Last Man” works, especially *Omergarus and Syderia*, rightly points out that Shelley’s novel “has no sovereign God and no supernatural agency” (110) and that “eschatology has been secularized to a great degree” (111), and this is precisely what Shelley is pointing toward in her introduction. In comparison to the

impostor-prophet, whose prophecies evoke fear, aggrandize power, and are promoted with a great sense of surety, Shelley's secularized prophecy is hesitant and self-conscious about its own status as prophecy. Audrey Fisch argues that "although the frame narrator believes in the 'genuineness' of the Sibylline leaves, the narrator seems strangely unaware of any public and political function for the prophetic narrative To the frame narrator, the manuscript, instead of offering lessons about politics and survival, instead of functioning as prophecy, has offered 'solace'" (279-80). In light of the argument I have been making here, the prophecy renders "solace" in the politics of the aesthetic, for the Last Man is Verney, the cultivated citizen who eventually turns author. By tracing his last steps through the world, we are brought back to classical Rome, the home of the civilization.

Adrian and Verney's trip throughout the world, with the final destination as Rome, re-enacts an imperialist mission as well as a sort of Grand Tour. After they have successfully colonized France, they move on to Italy accompanied only by Clara. Italy, now depopulated, becomes important only its aesthetic display. Adrian and Verney venture into "voiceless towns" where they "visited the churches, adorned by pictures, master-pieces of art, or galleries of statues" (336). They soon arrive in Milan where they "made laws for themselves" (336): "In the morning we rode in the adjoining country, or wandered through the palaces, in search of pictures or antiquities. In the evening we assembled to read or converse" (336). Though there are some books that are too painful too read in their solitude, they enjoy all the aesthetic pleasures of Milan. Verney reflects on their bittersweet existence:

Were we not happy in this paradisaical retreat? If some kind spirit had whispered forgetfulness to us, methinks we should have been happy here, where the precipitous mountains, nearly pathless, shut from our view the far fields of the desolate earth, and with small exertion of the imagination, we might fancy the cities were still resonant with popular hum, and the peasant still guided his plough through the furrow, and we, the world's denizens, enjoyed a voluntary exile, and not a remediless cutting off from our extinct species. (338)

Verney and Adrian do enjoy being able to enjoy the Grand Tour themselves, the only obstacle to full enjoyment is that their “voluntary exile” is permanent. In other words, the solitude to enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of classical civilization in solitude is positive, if it is only temporary. In this sense, Cantor is correct in arguing that they are experiencing “what a travel brochure would call ‘the vacation of their dreams’” (203), for it “is the realization of any English tourist’s dream—to be able tour France without having to put up with the French, and Italy without the Italians” (205). In particular, it reflects Percy Shelley’s emotions as he was traveling in Italy in 1818.¹² Cantor goes on to point out “how the emerging language of European tourism and museum going saturates the final pages of *The Last Man*” (205). He argues there is “something sinister about the tourist spirit embodied in Shelley’s characters” (203), for their actions reflect the growth of

¹²See Goldsmith’s discussion on Percy’s distaste for the Italians and their intrusion upon his aesthetic enjoyment (225-36). Goldsmith also points out: “When these letters were published years later, Mary Shelley anticipated the reaction they might provoke and tried to soften their effect. She explained in a note that Shelley was deceived in his earliest impressions of the Italians, that he ‘quickly’ realized their vices were imposed rather than inherent, the result of centuries of church and state domination” (226).

museums which was fostered by a “democratizing spirit” but also involved the “commodification of art, an attempt to market it to a middle-class public,” which Cantor sees “reflected in the way Shelley’s characters appropriate cultural artifacts for their own consumption” (205). Referring to Verney’s “appropriating an Italian palace” and even admitting he is a “robber” (362), Cantor argues: “For a novel that seems so profoundly anti-imperialist, it is curious to see the hero finally acting out an imperialist fantasy” and thus “the final movement of Shelley’s travelers through Europe recapitulates the imperialist sins that originally unleashed the plague’s destructive powers” (206). Though Verney and Adrian’s travel do recapitulate a sort of imperialism, their imperialism again is different than Raymond’s and does not produce disastrous effects. In fact, their plucking of artistic treasures seems to echo the editor’s own aesthetic treasure hunting in the cave of the Sibyl.

Adrian and Verney move on to Milan, but in their effort to sail to Athens, Verney loses both Clara and Adrian. Once Verney washes ashore on the Italian coast, he reverts to an uncivilized state. He compares himself to Robinson Crusoe and feels that the “wild and cruel Caribbee, the merciless Cannibal—or worse than these, the uncouth, brute, and remorseless veteran of the vices of civilization, would have been to me a beloved companion, a treasure dearly prized” (350). When he finally sees himself in a mirror, he looks with “renewed wonder”: “What wild-looking, unkempt, half-naked savage was that before me?” (354). As Julia Wright remarks, “Lionel figures his isolation through the imperial discourse of primitive islands which threaten the civility of the European castaway, through the rhetoric of ‘going native’” (143). His savage state is matched by the

Italian countryside:

A dark ravine was on one side, spanned by an aqueduct, whose tall arches were rooted in the dell below, and attested that man had one deigned to bestow labour and thought here, to adorn and civilize nature. Savage, ungrateful nature, which in wild sport defaced his remains, protruding here easily renewed, and fragile growth of flowers and parasite plants around his eternal edifices. (356)

His discovery of the uncivilized leads him to venture to Rome: “No, no, I will not live among the wild scenes of nature, the enemy of all that lives. I will seek the towns—Rome, the capital of the world, the crown of man’s achievements” (358). Julia Wright argues that Verney “reclaims his civility through temporality” (143), but I would assert that he regains his civility through reappropriating the aesthetic. By going to Rome he is able to saturate himself in the literature and art of the home of civilization and thus reclaim the status of civilized in imperialist discourse.

Indeed, once Verney arrives in Rome, he is immediately soothed by the comforts the aesthetic gives to his imagination. He writes: “The knowledge that I was in Rome, soothed me; that wondrous city, hardly more illustrious for its heroes and sages, than for the power it exercised over the imaginations of men. I went to rest that night; the eternal burning of my heart quenched,—my senses tranquil” (359). As he passes through Rome, the “sovereign mistress of the imagination,” he finds that “the sight of poetry eternized in these statues, took the sting from the thought, arraying it only in poetic ideality” (359). This escape through art allows Verney to gain a solace, much like the editor of his

narrative: “At length, then, I had found a consolation. I had not vainly sought the storied precincts of Rome—I had discovered a medicine for my many and vital wounds” (360). He again can almost imagine “the countless multitudes” (361), but he is alone to enjoy Rome’s aesthetic pleasures. Wright argues that though the imagination here “appears . . . a consoling mechanism” (143), this “consolation remains tenuous” (144). Similarly, Paley contends that Rome’s masterpieces do not bring solace but rather serve as “self-born mockers of man’s enterprise” (114). While the imagination may remain as a tenuous faculty, what is eternized and transcendent is the aesthetic: “With the exhaustion of political forces, Shelley finds only the realm of the aesthetic left; indeed Europe turns into an aesthetic spectacle in *The Last Man*. In effect, what Shelley shows in *The Last Man* is a posthistorical Europe turned into one vast museum, with all its cultural achievements on view” (Cantor 204). Moreover, civilization, through the aesthetic, has endured and becomes transcendent over politics, and its influence, like the one Macaulay envisioned is “the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.”

The novel, however, does not end with Verney stranded in Rome. After he has visited all the museums and libraries of Rome and written his narrative, he is ready to once again bid farewell to “civilized life” (366). His choice of phrase here, “civilized life,” is quite interesting since he is the only human still alive. If he is leaving civilized life, this really connotes that civilization—the aesthetic transcendence—exists without people. Civilized life in Rome will continue without its inhabitants, and thus the particulars of human life even are swept under the importance of the aesthetic. Verney explains his motivation to travel:

Neither hope nor joy are my pilots—restless despair and fierce desire of change lead me on. I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however slight or voluntary, for each day's fulfillment. I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume—I shall read fair augury in the rainbow—menace in the cloud—some lesson or record dear to my heart in everything. (367)

The “rainbow” recalls Noah's duty to repopulate the world, but in a sense Verney has already done this figuratively through his narrative. His “restless desire,” his need for action points toward Tennyson's Ulysses, but it also points toward the desires that undergirded British imperialism. Indeed, as Cantor points, “as Verney plots out the route of his last voyage, he does have a goal in mind and plans on following precisely the path of European civilization, indeed the route Vasco de Gama pursued to India” (207). As Verney sets out on this path, however, he is armed not with the Bible as the Evangelical missionaries but with Homer and Shakespeare. The cultural imperialism espoused by the Evangelicals and Utilitarians is here replaced by the aesthetic imperialism of Verney.

V.

Shelley's argument for the replacement of religion with the aesthetic as a civilizing force shows a development in the connections of aesthetics, religion, and culture in the Romantic era. Barbauld, Blake, and Percy Shelley all to some extent negotiate the interconnections of aesthetics and religion. Indeed, they attempt to negotiate their political concerns through the interrelation of aesthetics and religion. Shelley, however, attempts to fashion a notion of the aesthetic that is severed from religion and supplants religion's role

in a secularized culture. In doing so, however, she evidences these earlier authors' same desire for a radical revisioning of society that is undercut by the discourse she employs. She does not use religion, but she still espouses the same middle-class values of the Evangelicals. Shelley's novel, as the latest text covered in this study, highlights the supplanting of religion by culture that gains further prominence in the Victorian era. Her idea of the role of the aesthetic education in general, may echo Percy's views, but it also points to Coleridge's idea of the clerisy. Furthermore, her view of literature replacing religion also anticipates the fuller flowering of this idea in Matthew Arnold. In the conclusion, then, I want to touch on these two authors to suggest a shift in roles of culture, religion, and aesthetics that takes place in the Victorian era.

Conclusion

The Legacy of the Romantic Era: Religion and Culture in Coleridge and Arnold

“‘But is there no Religion?’ reiterates the Professor. ‘Fool! I tell thee, there is. Hast thou considered all that lies in this immeasurable froth-ocean we name LITERATURE?’”

–Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1:201)

In this study of the interrelations of culture, aesthetics, and religion, in the Romantic era, two figures loom largely in the background: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Matthew Arnold. Indeed, a decisive factor in omitting Coleridge from this project was that these topics figure so prominently in his writings. A complete delineation of the connections of culture, aesthetics, and religion in his writings would constitute an entire project unto itself. Moreover, I have excluded Coleridge from this project because the conservative nature of his religion and his literature are more self-evident. I have focused primarily on Barbauld, Blake, and the Shelleys, for I wanted to provide a deeper understanding of how the more radical impulses of their religion and aesthetics are undermined by their emphasis on matters of culture. I do, however, want to touch on Coleridge’s idea of the clerisy, for it helps shed further light on the relations between religion and culture that this study has addressed. Furthermore, Coleridge’s idea of the clerisy is important to consider, for it anticipates the shifting connections between religion, literature, and culture that reverberate throughout the Victorian Era. I will close, then, by considering a Victorian author whom Coleridge influenced, Matthew Arnold. Though the connection between religion and culture is pervasive in Arnold’s writings, I will limit myself to a brief look at *Culture and Anarchy*, which reveals the culmination of a shift in the roles of religion, culture, and aesthetics that can be traced back to the Romantic era.

Coleridge's idea of the clerisy is most fully articulated in his *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1830). Though this text is ostensibly an attempt to derail the movement for Catholic Emancipation, only a small part of text, the last section, takes up this issue explicitly. Furthermore, the Catholic Relief Bill, which repealed the Test Act, was passed in 1829, a year before *Church and State* was published. The legacy of *Church and State*, then, lies not in its explication of this particular political issue but in its broader theory of the relationship between church and state, a theory that would profoundly influence nineteenth-century views on religion, culture, and education. By first briefly outlining the underlying problems that Coleridge was confronting in *Church and State*, we can better see how his solution of advocating a National Church and a clerisy intersects the concerns of the authors that I have examined in this study. Coleridge's view of the necessity of the clerisy is brought into focus through his use of two sets of opposed but related terms: progress and permanence, civilization and cultivation.

Coleridge sees progression and permanence as two primary forces at work in forming the state: "Now, in every country of civilized men, acknowledging the rights of property, and by means of determined boundaries and common laws united into one people or nation, the two antagonist powers or opposite interests of the state, under which all other state interests are comprised, are those of PERMANENCE and of PROGRESSION" (10:24). Coleridge associates the forces of permanence with the landed interest and those of progression with the commercial interest (10:25). Coleridge believes that for the state to function properly, these two forces must balance each other out. However, as early as his *Second Lay Sermon* (1817), he found a troubling "OVERBALANCE OF THE COMMERCIAL

SPIRIT IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE ABSENCE OR WEAKNESS OF THE COUNTERWEIGHTS”

(6:169). The result of this “overbalance” of the progressive forces is a correlated overabundance of civilization rather than cultivation in British society. Throughout his writings, Coleridge provides a “permanent distinction” (1:494) between the terms cultivation and civilization that helps illuminate their meaning and their connection to his notions of permanence and progression.¹ For example, in *The Friend* (1808), Coleridge admonishes his readers to remember the “momentous fact, fearfully as it has been, and even now is exemplified in a neighbour country, that a nation can never be a too cultivated, but may easily become an over-civilised race” (1:494). In the next essay of *The Friend*, he describes “young men” who through their education have become “varnished rather than polished; perilously over-civilized, and most pitiably uncultivated” (1:500). He uses these terms in the same sense in *Church and State*:

But civilization is itself a mixed good, if not far from the corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people; where this civilization is not grounded in *cultivation*, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterized our *humanity*. We must be men in order to be citizens. (10:42-43)

Though he uses different terms, Coleridge’s point is essentially the same as that made by

¹As John Colmer points out, “In England the verbal distinction between civilisation and cultivation has not achieved wide currency, but the idea of a distinction between material prosperity and cultural health (for the individual and the whole society) that is expresses certainly has” (43, f.n. 2). See also Raymond Williams’ discussion of Coleridge’s idea of culture and civilization in *Culture and Society* (esp. 49-70).

Burke, the Evangelicals, and Barbauld. A incorrect notion of civility centers only on the externals, the affectations of manners and taste that for the Evangelicals and Barbauld is rectified by inculcating an internal “religion of the heart” that promotes a truly civilized person. Coleridge, however, sees the solution in cultivating humanity, and his emphasis on such cultivation leads to a more secular and formative definition of culture. As Raymond Williams puts it, “What Coleridge here calls *cultivation* was elsewhere. . . to be called *culture*” (61). For Coleridge, the imbalances of the commercial interests’ over-civilizing influence are rectified not by religion and manners but by a secularized culture that is diffused throughout the country by the clerisy.

The need for a group of cultural guardians who would counterbalance the over-civilization produced by the progressive, commercial interest is an abiding concern for Coleridge. As early as his 1818 Literary Lectures, he writes, “After the Revolution, the spirit of the nation became more commercial than it had been before; a learned body, or clerisy, as such, gradually disappeared, and literature in general then began to be addressed to the common miscellaneous public” (5:236). In this early definition, the clerisy appears as entirely secular (and elitist) construct, a group of intelligentsia separated from the more common “public.” Similarly, after discussing the “overbalance of the commercial spirit” in his *Second Lay Sermon*, he notes that he is “desirous . . . of shewing the importance of a philosophic class, and of evincing that it is of vital utility, and even an essential element in the composition of a civilised community” (6:174). The presence of such a group in the “civilised community” is precisely to prevent its over-civilization and to foster cultivation, and he would later develop this notion more fully in his *Church and State*. In *Church and*

State, however, Coleridge's idea of the clerisy becomes linked more explicitly with the National Church, a cultural institution that he distinguishes from the Church of Christ, which deals with matters of faith and theology. The responsibility of the "philosophic class" to prevent over-civilization now becomes "the object of the National Church" which is "to secure and improve that civilization, without which the nation could be neither permanent nor progressive" (10:44). The National Church's civilizing influence, however, is almost opposite to the Evangelicals' civilizing mission. For Coleridge, securing and improving civilization means actually preventing over-civilization. Furthermore, his definition of the clerisy of this National Church is quite secular:

THE CLERISY of the nation, or national church, in its primary acceptation and original intention comprehended the learned of all denominations;—the sages and professors of the law and jurisprudence; of medicine and physiology; of music . . . in short, all the so called liberal arts and sciences, the possession and application of which constitute the civilization of a country, as well as the Theological. (10:46)

Coleridge's definition of the clerisy thus uses the institution of the church as model to promote a more secularized notion of culture, which quite closely resembles Mary Shelley's notion of the aesthetic.

Though in this National Church there are a "certain smaller number" of the clerisy who "remain at the fountain heads of the humanities, in cultivating and enlarging the knowledge already possessed" (10:43), there is also a "far more numerous group" who are

to be distributed throughout the country, so as not to leave the smallest integral part or division without a resident guide, guardian, and instructor; the objects and the final intention of the whole order being these—to preserve the stores, to guard the treasures, of past civilization, and thus to bind the present with the past, and thus to connect the present to the future; but especially to diffuse throughout the whole community, and to every native entitled to its laws and rights, that quantity and quality of knowledge which is indispensable both for the understanding of those rights for the performance of the duties correspondent. (10:43-44)

The National Church and clerisy promote a “continuing and progressive civilization” by grounding it in a cultivation that ensures that society will not become overly civilized. Just as important, however, is the way in which the National Church works on even “the smallest integral part or division of society” and is able to “diffuse throughout the whole community” a notion of every individual’s “correspondent” “duties” and “rights.” By diffusing to all citizens a proper notion of their duties and rights, Coleridge’s clerisy provides a model to reproduce the restraint of religion through culture. As he writes in *Statesmen’s Manual*, “Through religion the working man learns the sufficiency of the Scriptures in all knowledge or requisite for a right performance of his duty as a man and a Christian. Of the labouring classes, who in all countries form the great majority of the inhabitants, more than this is not demanded, more than this is not generally desirable” (4:62). With the secularization and increasing individualization of society, however, state religion becomes less effective in inculcating into people a notion of duty. Coleridge’s

clerisy thus supplants the state religion with a notion of culture that diffuses in each individual throughout society self-regulating habits and restraints. Indeed, as John Colmer argues, “When . . . he speaks of the task of instilling civility in people, a consideration of the historical context might suggest that the vast majority of readers would have interpreted this as meaning instilling the habits of ‘docility’” (157). Considering this in its ideological context, I would argue that Coleridge, like the writers in this study, also sees culture as a way to aestheticize social power and to create docile and productive bodies.

Even as it works to inculcate civility within individuals, however, Coleridge’s clerisy also provides a harmonizing influence that pulls together individuals into a unified community that fosters order. As Coleridge told his nephew, “All harmony is founded on a relation to rest – a relative rest. . . . The clerisy of a nation, that is, its learned men, whether poets, or philosophers, or scholars, are those points of relative rest. There could be no order, no harmony of the whole without them” (14:164). As Ben Knights argues, “The development of the idea of the clerisy is inseparable from the war against mechanist philosophy and associationist psychology” and thus Coleridge calls for a “dynamic philosophy” which will create a “return to harmony” (41). I would suggest that Coleridge’s dynamic philosophy is the culture provided by the clerisy which seeks to mediate the atomistic nature of bourgeois society. Culture, rather than religion, becomes the means to harmonize individuals into a more organic society. Though culture appropriates religion’s role in society, it also functions for Coleridge as a means to lead people back to religion and its restraints. Coleridge writes, “Religion, true or false, is and ever has been the centre of gravity in a realm, to which all other things must and will

accommodate themselves” (10:70). For Coleridge, culture accommodates itself to religion; or, more precisely, culture accommodates individuals to the self-imposed restraints of religion. Coleridge believes “it is duty and wisdom to aim at making as many as possible soberly and steadily religious;—inasmuch as the morality which the state requires in its citizens for its own wellbeing and ideal immortality, and without reference to their spiritual interests as individuals, can only exist for the people in the form of religion” (10:69). Through the clerisy and the National Church, culture becomes the best method to make people “soberly and steadily religious” and to teach them the “morality which the state requires.”

Though this brief sketch does not do justice to all the nuances of Coleridge’s idea of the clerisy and the National Church, it does crystalize the concerns about religion and culture that this study has examined. Coleridge’s notion of the clerisy is a response to a cultural and political crisis that is similar to the connection of religion and culture that Burke and the Evangelicals promoted in the wake of the French Revolution, the influence of which has been traced through all the writers in this study. I would argue that with the traditional restraints of society inherent to an aristocratic order gone, the need arises to fashion supplements that accommodate the individualism inherent in bourgeois society while still retaining an organic social order that is figured in different terms. Neither religion nor culture on its own can serve as this supplement, so they are combined; religion and culture act reciprocally to instill the values of each to the other. Religion becomes more cultured, while culture becomes more religious. As we have seen throughout this study, promoting the values of such culture does create an appearance of a cohesion of

individual interests, but this cohesion is inscribed with class differences. Through the connection of religion and culture, hegemonic values become naturalized and thus disguise the structure of social power even as they reproduce it. Indeed, though Coleridge's idea of culture may be more secular than the Evangelicals, we can trace the same connection of religion and culture back to their reaction to the French Revolution and through Coleridge's Romantic contemporaries. Yet Coleridge's influence also extends forward well into the nineteenth century. Such influential Victorians as Thomas Arnold, W.E. Gladstone, F.D. Maurice, and J.S. Mill were strongly influenced by Coleridge's concept of religion and culture. His idea of the religious nature of literature is also pervasive in Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold.² Indeed, I would suggest that tracing these structures of thought back to the Romantic writers can provide a much deeper understanding of these Victorian thinkers. I will limit myself here, however, to a discussion of the figure perhaps most influential to literary studies, Matthew Arnold, to provide an example of what trajectory the connection between religion and culture took later in the nineteenth century.

Arnold's writings, like Coleridge's, reveal a pervasive connection between religion and culture. Providing a full analysis of this connection is, of course, beyond the scope of this study, but I would like draw upon one of his most central texts, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), to outline some of broad ways in which his views point back to the authors of this study and to highlight key differences from their construction of religion and culture. In

²For a detailed examination of the influence of Coleridge's idea of the clerisy in the Victorian Era, see especially Ben Knights' *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* and Stephen Prickett's "Coleridge and the Idea of the Clerisy" and *Romanticism and Religion*.

Culture and Anarchy, which is a defense of the notion of culture against contemporary attacks, Arnold boldly declares, “I am, above all, a believer in culture” (5:88). He goes on to define his task: “I propose now to try and inquire . . . what culture really is, what good it can do, what is our own special need of it; and I shall seek to find some plain grounds on which a faith in culture—both my own faith in it and the faith of others,—may rest securely” (5:89). Arnold’s “faith” and “belief” in culture itself signals a clear shift toward a more secular version of culture. Unlike the Evangelicals, Barbauld, Blake, or Percy Shelley (yet similar to Mary Shelley), he wants to supplant religion with culture instead of arguing for a necessary combination of these two powerful influences. Arnold, much like Mary Shelley, provides a notion of culture that appears to rise above political difference and works as a civilizing force to remove differences of class. Yet, like Shelley’s aesthetic, it also works to inscribe differences that are structured not on money or titles but on cultural capital, which normalizes the dominance of an educated and cultured middle-class.

Arnold is rightly viewed as a prophet of the secularized religion of culture, and his definition of culture is indeed figured as a sort of religion. For Arnold, culture, as a “study of perfection” (5:91), parallels the purpose of true religion, which by determining “in what human perfection consists . . . comes to a conclusion identical with that which culture . . . likewise reaches” (5:93-94). Culture and religion have similar purposes and they likewise achieve their purposes through similar means: “Religion says: *The kingdom of God is within you*; and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality” (5:94). His definition here harkens back to the Evangelicals’ and Barbauld’s

criticism of a merely external religion and their insistence on an internal “religion of the heart” that converts people’s emotions and thus influences their actions. Like Coleridge, however, Arnold argues that culture rather than religion brings about this perfection, and culture and perfection both for him enact “an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit” (5:95) rather than an inward compliance of the body. Thus, Arnold provides a definition of perfection more like Blake’s imagination. Culture, in an effort to promulgate an inward condition of perfection, works directly on the mind rather than the body. Also, the authors that I have discussed all tend to bolster their religion with culture or their culture with religion, but they still keep both concepts in play. Though Arnold does speak of culture in religious terms, he ultimately supplants religion with culture. Religion may be “the beginning of perfection, having conquered the plain faults of our animality” (5:101), but its “idea of human perfection is narrow and inadequate, the Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion will never bring humanity to its true goal” (5:101). Culture, however, in its development of the whole human “goes beyond religion” (5:94) and its “limited perfection” (5:99).

Arnold’s view that culture must bring about such an inward condition of perfection has affinities with the Evangelicals’ and Coleridge’s need to combine religion and culture to foster restraint. Burke and the Evangelicals were responding to the French Revolution and the possibility of lower-class revolution in their own country, while Coleridge wrote his *Church and State* at a time when Reform was beginning to be pushed more aggressively. Similarly, Arnold was writing during the heated debate that preceded the second Reform Bill in 1867. What remains constant among these writers is the desire to

fashion a means to bind people together in a effort to produce a restraint that replaces the State's waning influence. Indeed, Arnold sounds much like Burke in his reasoning for the necessity of culture. He writes, "as feudalism, which with its ideas and habits of subordination was for many centuries silent behind the British Constitution, dies out, and we are left with nothing but our system of checks, and our notion of its being the great right and happiness of an Englishman to do as far as possible what he likes, we are in danger of drifting toward anarchy" (5:117). Whereas Burke and the Evangelicals tried to supplement religion with culture as a means to protect Britain against anarchy, Arnold dismisses religion's role and sees instead only culture "as a principle of authority" which will "counteract the tendency to anarchy which seems to be threatening us" (5:123).

Arnold's conception of culture as a principle of authority, however, works in the same manner that we have seen religion work throughout this study: it brings about an internal restraint on individuals that appears to be self-imposed. Arnold also sees the atomized nature of bourgeois social order and realizes that such "a State is in reality made up of the individuals who compose it, and that every individual is the best judge of his own interests" (5:117). He therefore argues for culture as the mediating force that inculcates restraints on the individual subject, and thus turns individualism into a means to bring about control that fends off anarchy. Culture, which promotes "right reason" and the "best self," centers authority in the individual, but, in doing so, it also incorporates that individual into an idea of the state: "We find no basis for a firm State-power in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our *best self*" (5:135). Culture, then, in creating the "best self" gives the illusion of individuality only to fold that individual in to

the State, which is the “organ of our collective best self” and “of our national right reason” (5:136). For Arnold, religion cannot perform this function, for it works through an ingrained taste that is particular to each sect and promotes divisiveness rather than unity. Culture, however, removes people’s “distinguishing characteristics and shows them their common humanity” (5:147). Through culture people “rise above the idea of class to the idea of whole community” (5:135). Finally, it is significant that Arnold argues for the “sweetness and light” of Hellenism and its “*spontaneity of consciousness*” to counteract Hebraism’s “*strictness of conscience*” (165) that is ascendant in Britain. He acknowledges that both have the “same goal” that is enacted through “different currents” and that ultimately they should work together. But his choice of the gentler force of Hellenism as the means to disseminate culture is indicative of the shift from overt coercion characteristic of absolutist rule to the gentler suasion of the aesthetic that becomes manifest in the Romantic era. The difference is that, for Arnold, culture has been separated from the discourse of religion and in itself provides the mediation of social power.

Finally, Arnold bears significance for this study because his valorization of culture, and especially literature, as autonomous field situated above other discourses, such as religion and politics, dovetails with his emphasis on a “disinterested” critical judgment. Arnold’s legacy in literary studies has been the predominant view of literature as a cultural and aesthetic object that rises above its historical contexts. In Arnoldian criticism, literature’s aesthetic qualities are pursued at the expense of an analysis of its historical embeddedness in matters of class, politics, and religion. Indeed, though such criticism ignores the very real discursive connections between religion and culture that are present

even in Arnold's writings, this form of criticism still remains as a powerful influence in literary studies. As I pointed out in the introduction, Romantic-era studies have recently begun to counteract such tendencies in their studies of religion and culture. However, they narrow the field of cultural production to include only the influence of radical, plebeian authors on the literature of canonical Romantic authors. Moreover, they also ignore the formative role conservative religious discourse had in constructing notions of culture, and thus they fall short of giving the fuller picture of the intimate interdependence of religion, culture, and aesthetics which this study has sought to provide.

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