Protestant Institutionalism: Religion, Literature, and Society After the State Church

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Abstract

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Even as the Church of England lost ground to political dissent and New England gradually disestablished its state churches early in the nineteenth century, writers on both sides of the debates about church establishments maintained their belief in religion’s role as a moral guide for individuals and the state. “Protestant Institutionalism” argues that writers—from Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe to George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell—imagined through literature the institutions that would produce a religiously sound society as established churches began to lose their authority. Drawing on novels and poems as well as sermons and tracts about how religion might exist apart from the state, I argue that these authors both understood society in terms of institutions and also used their literature to imagine the institutions—such as family, denomination, and nation—that would provide society with a stable foundation. This institutional thinking about society escapes any literary history that accepts Protestant individualism as a given. In fact, although the US and England maintained different relationships between church and state, British authors often looked to US authors for help imagining the society that new forms of religion might produce precisely in terms of these institutions. In the context of disestablishment we can see how the literature of the nineteenth century—and nineteenth-century novels in particular—was about more than the fate of the individual in society. In fact, to different degrees for each author, individual development actually relies on the proper understanding of the individual’s relationship to institutions and the role those institutions play in supporting society.
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Introduction: Institution, Religion, Literature

The disestablishment of state churches in New England combined the sacred and the mundane. It put up for debate the very meaning of religion in the US but also revolved around the ownership of specific churches and endowments. It pushed evangelicals to codify their vision of voluntary religion apart from the state but also produced acrimonious squabbles at the level of town and parish. It contentiously restructured religious and political alliances but also seemed to be a foregone conclusion by its completion in 1833. By the 1820s in Massachusetts, for example, the Federalist alliance between orthodox, evangelical Congregationalists and liberal Congregationalists that had protected the state’s religious and political hierarchy was falling apart. The orthodox Congregationalists began to side with Baptists, Methodists, and smaller denominations against the religious establishment in favor of “the Voluntary Principle.” Although these debates concerned fundamental religious principles, they often took pedestrian form. Orthodox church members sued Unitarians over property, which left the State Supreme Court to try to disaggregate the legal and religious grounds for their decisions. Especially for orthodox Congregationalists, disestablishment was simultaneously a principled decision about the nature of the Christian church and also a practical reaction to liberal legal victories.

The demise of the most prominent religious institution in the US, rather than turning attention away from institutions, paradoxically stimulated thinking about the relationship between religion, institutions, and society. In New England, where the most intricate debates took place, disestablishment both fueled and was made possible by the existence of alternative institutions that offered to perform the duties of the state church. This was especially the case in Massachusetts, where the core of the debates about established religion concerned what kinds of religious institutions should exist and what the function of those institutions should be. Unitarians defended
the religious establishment by arguing that only a state-supported religion could guarantee a broadly accessible, moral education for the citizenry. In contrast, many evangelicals attacked this establishment by arguing that a church cannot subordinate itself to the control of the state; to be a true church, they argued, a church must be able to choose its leadership and to exclude unregenerate members. As Protestants embraced voluntary religion in the first half of the nineteenth century, associations of all kinds—voluntary religious societies, reform organizations, corporations, utopian communities—proliferated regionally, nationally, and transatlantically.

Attending to the debates surrounding disestablishment and its aftermath alerts us to the vibrant thinking about institutions, and associations more generally, in the nineteenth century that has been overwhelmed by our critical attention to liberal, Protestant individualism. Even the term disestablishment itself might mislead us into overemphasizing the individual. Disestablishment only tells us that an established religion has been left behind, as if religion then becomes simply a matter of individual conscience. To be sure, individual freedom was important. All these Protestants, whether supporting a religious establishment or advocating for voluntary religion, maintained that their plan for religion best protected the individual’s religious and civil liberty. But dismantling these religious establishments did not straightforwardly leave religion to concerned individuals apart from a secular state; nor was the individual the only concern of those on either side of these debates. The decades-long process of disestablishment primarily redefined what constituted a religious institution and, in so doing, stimulated interest in the possibilities of institutions for religion and society. Through these disputes, Protestants—both evangelical and non-evangelical—renegotiated the institutions through which they defined religion and society.

From the Protestant culture concerned with these debates came a wide range of nineteenth-century authors in England and the US. Some, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, took this Protestantism as a point of departure. Emerson literally leaves Protestant institutions
behind when he resigns his position as minister in 1832.\(^1\) Others, such as Frederick Douglass, understood Protestantism as, at least, a necessary conduit through which they could reach a broad audience. But many others continued to concern themselves sincerely with Protestantism and its institutions. After returning to the Church of England in the 1810s, Samuel Taylor Coleridge published *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830), which defended the principle of the state church against its flawed implementation. In this effort, Coleridge joined Robert Southey, poet laureate from 1813 to 1843, who criticized Methodism’s effect on English religion and government. While authors in the US rarely (if ever) defended the Church of England, Protestantism remained for many a matter of family and inheritance. Harriet Beecher Stowe, raised in a family of ministers, grew up defending Protestantism and specifically its vital institutions. Although Nathaniel Hawthorne lacked Stowe’s evangelical zeal, he too looked back to his family’s Protestant roots for inspiration and clues about his own vocation. Living and working in this Protestant culture, these authors felt—directly and indirectly—the dramatic redefinition of institutions for Protestantism in the US after disestablishment.

The core of my argument in the following chapters, therefore, concerns an important subset of these writers—including Stowe and Hawthorne as well as Herman Melville, George Eliot, Catharine Sedgwick, Maria Cummins, and Elizabeth Gaskell. These authors both understood society in terms of institutions and also used their literature to imagine the institutions that would provide society with the kind of stable foundation that a religious establishment had provided. While each chapter looks at distinct sets of institutions and authors, three principal claims unite the chapters. First, disestablishment provided an occasion for imagining the possibilities of a new society with improved institutions. The authors I discuss used the decline of religious establishments in New

\(^1\) Richard Grusin discusses Emerson’s departure at length in arguing that the dynamic between intuition and institution in Emerson’s thought is more complicated than an unreserved celebration of the individual, see 9-54.
England and in England to think about the relationship between religion and society; and, in doing so, they engaged with a variety of sociological thought—in the broadest meaning of the phrase—that conceived society in terms of institutions. Second, the concern with religion and institutions was transatlantic. Writers and thinkers in Britain discussed the dismantling of the religious establishment in New England and used the example of US religious institutions to understand the condition of the established churches of England and Scotland. We can understand the importance of Stowe for Gaskell and of Hawthorne for Eliot only when we attend to this transatlantic concern with religion, institutions, and society. Third, each of these chapters suggests that the literature of the nineteenth century—and nineteenth-century novels in particular—was about more than the fate of the individual in society. In their novels, stories, and poems, these authors narrate the construction and effects of the institutions that structure the interactions among individuals. In fact, to different degrees for each author, individual development actually relies on the proper understanding of the individual’s relationship to institutions and the role those institutions play in supporting society.

To begin to understand nineteenth-century thinking about religion and institutions, we might look to William Ellery Channing, the most prominent advocate in the US for Unitarianism as an alternative to orthodox Congregationalism. Channing’s Unitarianism simultaneously elevated individuals’ agency in their own salvation and also reserved a crucial role for institutions in binding religion to the ostensibly secular world. In his 1820 sermon “Religion a Social Principle,” for instance, Channing defends Massachusetts’ religious establishment by arguing that the establishment as an institution integrates religion with the rest of society. Delivered amid a state constitutional convention—held from 15 November 1820 to 9 January 1821—that was convened in part to address state-supported religion, the sermon attacks those who would disaggregate religion from the

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2 In arguing that Channing imagined a vital relationship between individuals and institutions, I break from a tradition of criticism that sees Channing and Unitarianism primarily as precursors to Emerson and Transcendentalism, e.g. Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism*, 23-54.
world by making religion the individual’s “private concern” (Religion 6). In contrast, Channing insists that we recognize government as itself a “moral and religious institution” (Religion 16). For Channing, not only does government rely on religion for its foundation but government also has a duty to solidify religion among its people. Channing, therefore, concludes his sermon by encouraging his audience to continue to support the religion which their Puritan ancestors “mingled with, consecrated, and bound together, all their social institutions” (“Social” 19). Whereas many of his orthodox colleagues look to the Puritans as the paragon of regenerate church membership, Channing here sees in the Puritans a model for a society that infuses every institution with religion.

This invocation of the Puritans’ establishment, however, is not an unequivocal defense of the principle of religious establishments. In contrast to the Puritan establishment’s violence against rival sects, Channing denounced throughout his career the sectarianism that acrimoniously divided the Christian community against itself. In keeping with this anti-sectarianism, Channing is less generous with the religious establishment in England. At the opening of an 1829 review of François Fenelon’s work, for instance, Channing holds England’s establishment responsible for the lack of “original and productive thought in the English Church” (Works 1:168). According to Channing, the Church of England curtails the freedom of thought necessary for religious improvement. Nine years later, in a letter to William Rathbone—a merchant and, from 1837 to 1838, the mayor of Liverpool—Channing similarly laments that the “intolerance—grasping spirit of the established church are [sic] the great obstacles to spiritual education.”³ Channing faulted the Church of England for granting privileges, both de jure and de facto, to one sect while denying them to others even

³ William Ellery Channing to William Rathbone (copy), 11 Dec 1838, Reel 3, Microfilm edition of the William Ellery Channing papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. The memoir of William Ellery Channing compiled by his nephew cites a similar opinion in a letter to an unnamed German correspondent, whom I have not yet identified, Memoir, 1:147-148. On Channing’s establishmentarianism, see Sassi, 160.
though he had supported a religious establishment in Massachusetts that, in practice but not in theory, favored Unitarian interests over those of other sects.

In defending the Massachusetts establishment and criticizing the Church of England, Channing seems inconsistent. We can take this inconsistency in one of two ways. Channing may be playing a delicate political game. We might read his attacks on tyrannical sectarianism in this same address, as Nathan Rives argues we should, as an implicit defense of Massachusetts’ (and not England’s) religious establishment. From this perspective, Channing recognizes that he is on the losing side of this conflict in 1830 and therefore prioritizes his long-standing attack on sectarianism over the principle of a church establishment, even an establishment that could technically support different denominations in different towns. Indeed, Channing often preferred to preach Christian unity rather than to correct—or even to engage with—what he saw as theological errors in rival ministers. But, alternatively, Channing may simply have changed his mind about the efficacy of religious establishments in the eighteen years between this 1820 sermon and his letters with Rathbone in 1838. After all, Channing broadly dismissed religious establishments in his 1830 election sermon to the Massachusetts legislature. In this sermon, Channing argued that government must “ennoble the mind of the citizen” by promoting freedom and improvement but “not by making the various virtues matters of legislation, not by preaching morals, not by establishing religion” (Works 4:92). Moreover, in the 1830 edition of his Discourses, Reviews, and Miscellanies, Channing includes only four pages from “Religion is a Social Principle,” renaming it as part of a miscellany, “Importance of Religion to Society.” This selection retains the sermon’s argument about how religion is inseparable from the institutions that make up society but cuts the sermon’s entire defense of the state’s establishment.

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4 Rives, 250.
5 Channing, for instance, initially engages with orthodox attacks against Unitarianism in 1815, with public letters to Samuel C. Thatcher and Samuel Worcester, but quickly drops such polemics as counter-productive, see Delbanko, William Ellery Channing, 92-93; Howe, Unitarian Conscience, 142.
However we interpret Channing’s inconsistency about religious establishments, we can see in Channing a consistent institutional thinking about how religion needs to exist at the foundation of a moral society. Throughout his career, Channing argued not only for the intrinsic benefits of institutions for religion but also for the influence that religion should have on all worldly institutions. According to Channing, religion provides the “only foundations of liberty” (Religion 11) and all of the “virtues and principles on which social order rests” (Religion 9). And in his 1830 election sermon, he still maintains that, as long as religion undergirds society, society itself becomes “throughout a moral institution” (Works 4:91), in which “Civil institutions” must work for “moral or spiritual good” (Works 4:90). Even in a speech in 1841 a year before his death, Channing urged his audience to support religion and society “by upholding religious institutions” (Works 6:221). In these sermons and speeches, Channing articulates the relationship between religion and society in terms of institutions; he describes religion not only in terms of individual belief but also in terms of how it must protect the institutions that enact and disseminate its truths.

Even as Channing thinks through the possibilities of institutions, he does not himself provide a consistent taxonomy for such institutions. Consider, for an example, his “Remarks on Associations,” published in the Christian Examiner in September 1829. Seeing the immense growth of associations, Channing warns against the popular tendency towards organizing masses of individuals to address any and every need. In describing the limitations and advantages of these organized groups, Channing switches indiscriminately between “associations,” “institutions,” “societies,” and “establishments;” and yet, Channing does differentiate between two specific types of such associations. The first kind of association produces the foundation of society. These associations—such as family, church, nation, and humanity itself—“spring from our very constitutions, and are inseparable from our being” (Works 1:297). The second kind of association, according to Channing, is instrumental. These associations—such as domestic and foreign missions, reform organizations,
and asylums—are formed only “for particular times and exigencies” (Works 1:297). Although Channing’s actual vocabulary offers little here, the distinction in his essay between foundational and instrumental associations helps us understand what was at stake in the disputes over disestablishment. The established church was waning in the US, but Channing and others imagined the institutions that would take on the foundational duties of the religious establishment.

**Institution**

Institutions, as I will use the term, refer to associations that people imagined as foundational to society. Institutions both provide a set of rules and norms governing the interactions among members; and, because their members see them as foundational, institutions seem to carry intrinsic value in themselves. In turn, because members locate authority in an institution, the rules and norms of that institution can produce a society with a predictable structure.\(^6\) Through that structure and authority, institutions—such as family, nation, market, slavery, church—provide a way for writers in the nineteenth century to imagine how society functioned and what society could become. Four features of institutions in particular allow us to capture how writers with a variety of investments—literary, religious, economic, political—thought about society. First, institutions always exist in relation to other institutions. The authority and the norms of one institution must always be defined and weighed against the authority and norms of another. The relationships between institutions can range between symbiotic and antagonistic; but these institutions do not exist in isolation. Second, institutions cut across supposedly discrete arenas (or “spheres”) of society. The family, for instance, for almost every writer I discuss here, involved aspects of religious, secular, economic, political,

\(^6\) Phillip Selznick differentiates organizations from institutions based on roughly these criteria, stating that the “test is *expendability*” or how readily a group will be “refashioned in response to practical or instrumental demands,” 234. For a more general survey of various approaches to the distinction between institutions and organizations, see Richard W. Scott, 21-54, 181-218.
private, and public life. Even though these “spheres” increasingly claimed autonomy as disciplined sets of principles in this period, these aspects of society manifested themselves most tangibly in terms of heterogeneous institutions. Third, institutions require continuous support. Without the care and attention of their members, institutions decay; and their decay would undermine, as their members saw it, the foundation of society. By thinking about the nineteenth century in terms of institutions, we can recover a way of thinking about society that saw whatever structure society did have as constantly in flux and in danger of losing its foundation. Finally, although they need continuous support, institutions provide longevity. If supported by their members, institutions offer a predictable future with a stable foundation. This possibility of longevity allows writers to imagine a lasting society emerging as a product of the interplay between the contingent and heterogeneous institutions at its foundation.

The study of society, and of institutions’ role in structuring society in particular, has attracted the interest of not just sociologists and political scientists—the traditional authorities on institutions—but also economists, historians, and some literary scholars. Not surprisingly, then, institution as a term has taken on so many meanings that recent accounts of institutions in political science and sociology have spent their own introductions surveying in depth its range of meanings. These definitions can be broad or narrow: sociologists will discuss informal social norms as institutions while political scientists might limit the term to only formal, governmental associations. These definitions can also derive from methodological premises. The economic study of institutions, for instance, tends to rely on rational choice theory to explain institutions as the rules governing interactions, which individuals agree to obey based on their analyses of the benefits of cooperation against the costs of constraints on behavior. To speak of institutions, in other words, is not simply
to speak of a stable (and external) context for nineteenth-century literature, but to define a particular analytic category.\footnote{Richard W. Scott diagnoses three pillars of institutionalism: regulative, normative, and cognitive/cultural, \textit{Institutions and Organizations}, esp. 55-86; Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor discuss historical, rational-choice, and sociological institutionalism; Hugh Heclo parses five schools: Statist (old-school political science), Social Systems (sociology à la Durkheim), Historical-Institutionalist (political science and history), Rational Choice (economics), and Cognitive (cultural studies and psychology), 45-79. Guy B. Peters goes into greater depth on more categories of institutional theory in each chapter of \textit{Institutional Theory in Political Science}. On the influence of economics on sociology in institutional theory, see Victor Nee as well as Victor Nee and Paul Ingram in \textit{The New Institutionalism in Sociology}.}

My own use of institutions as a unit of analysis owes the most to Bruno Latour, who has theorized “associations” explicitly against a tradition in sociology that takes the structure of society as a given. Rather than imagining some predetermined system—be it figured as “spheres, pyramids, monuments, systems, organisms, organizations” (\textit{Reassembling} 171-172)—that structures society, Latour insists on defining society by “tracing associations” (\textit{Reassembling} 7). Without a ready-made structured space called “society,” Latour describes society (or “the social” to differentiate his idea from that of traditional sociology) as the product of the endless “forming and dismantling” (\textit{Reassembling} 29) that emerges from “contradictory group formations” (\textit{Reassembling} 29). Actors—both human and non-human—create a network by choosing certain forms of association over others. For Latour, society is nothing more or less than this constantly fluctuating network.

Latour’s intervention is especially important for me because, for the authors in each of my chapters, this process of contradictory group formation occurs at two distinct loci. At one locus, disestablishment prompts the forming, reshaping, and dismantling of associations. At another, these authors engage in their own sociological thinking by imagining the possibilities of new institutions and the dangers of rival institutions and associations. Stowe, Gaskell, and Cummins, for instance, weigh family, church, and market against one another in part because disestablishment and the growth of market capitalism changed major and minor associations in the US and Britain. But
Stowe, Cummins, and Gaskell also used these conflicts to imagine a society with a securely religious foundation. In doing so, they engaged with contemporary definitions of family, church, and market, defined these institutions for themselves, and, perhaps most importantly, articulated how their versions of these institutions would best guarantee society’s religious foundation.

In investigating how writers in the US and Britain described institutions, I am investigating a nineteenth-century tradition of—to borrow Hugh Heclo’s phrase—“thinking institutionally.” To understand what “thinking institutionally” means, it might be useful to distinguish it from other approaches historians and literary historians have taken to institutions. I am not looking at how institutions have created the conditions under which literature came into being. In a pioneering recent study, Mark McGurl takes this approach to the university—and creative writing programs in particular—as the institution that defines the conditions of production for twentieth-century writers in the US, especially after World War Two. Institutions theoretically construed are less important for McGurl than these specific educational institutions as a social structure. Nor am I looking at institutions to understand the dynamics of power and domination in the nineteenth century. A suspicion of institutions as sites of domination, drawn in large part from a poststructuralist critique of oppressive discourses and ideologies, has been the more common approach in literary studies.

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8 Already this interest in institutions moves away from a tradition of scholarship that sees the breakdown of institutional authority in New England as a precursor for the emergence of a literary culture. On the importance of Transcendentalism for US literature and its emergence from Unitarianism, see Barbara Packer, 1-19; Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism*, 23-54. In contrast, Richard Grusin emphasizes the importance of institutions in Emerson’s thinking, esp. 3. That said, I am not then investigating the brick-and-mortar institutions of the Early Republic that we can see in accounts by Albrecht Koschnik or Andrew Schocket.

9 In this context, too, McGurl notes the essentially “conservative” nature of institutions “in the sense that their function is to establish continuities of practice in advance of individual action,” 155. Because McGurl is interested in just one institution, his definition does not need to offer any more conceptual clarity than this one does.

10 Philip Selznick, for instance, criticizes Foucault and Habermas as representatives of poststructuralist scholars that “indict modern institutions as irredeemably oppressive,” 250. Selznick explains that this suspicion derives in part from an “Indifference to variation” in how such critics—from Marx onward—view “a whole array of institutions,” 257. In a different context, Michael
Christopher Castiglia’s compelling account of nineteenth-century “institutionalism” is one particularly pertinent example. Drawing on Foucault and Althusser, Castiglia attacks a “theory of institutionality” that “diminished citizenship and democratic participation” (Interior 62). In the work of Lyman Beecher and Francis Lieber among others, Castiglia faults this theory for robbing individuals—past and present—of the “capacity to negotiate needs, values, and aspirations” by imposing upon them a “democratic paternalism” (Interior 5). In an account such as Castiglia’s, the dominant theory of institutions threatens individual freedom because it envisions society in terms other than the individual. This threat of oppression stems not from a dynamic set of institutions but from an institutionalism that elides the differences among institutions.11

The vitality of institutional thinking in the nineteenth century, however, consists precisely in the differences and the conflicts among institutions. Through these conflicts, the authors I discuss in each chapter can imagine both society’s religious foundation and also how individuals can build that foundation. In envisioning how to secure society’s foundation, these authors use familiar conventions in unfamiliar ways. Take, for instance, the convention of inheritance so important to the nineteenth-century novel. In Hugh Heclo’s attack on the modern distrust of institutions, he characterizes institutional thinking as primarily a “faithful reception” (On Thinking 101) that “views the present as thoroughly enriched by inheritance and legacy” (On Thinking 128). Inheritance, for Heclo, offers a set of choices in the present about the past and future rather than only a set of constraints on action (and perhaps interminable lawsuits like Jarndyce and Jarndyce). Within this framework, I discuss how contemporary conflicts among institutions allowed authors to describe

Igantieff also notes the tendency in Foucault and his inheritors to “reduce all social relations to relations of domination,” 184. Caroline Levine rejects Foucault’s fear of totalizing institutions which, in actually, are more often “messy and uncoordinated,” 65.

11 Although both Heather Love and David Alworth put Latour to intelligent use, their discussions of institutions tend to refer to similarly monolithic entities. For this reason, they look to Erving Goffman’s theory of the “total institution.”
what they wished the future to inherit from the past.\textsuperscript{12} Catharine Maria Sedgwick, for instance, premises the improvement of society upon the individual’s careful consideration of the advantages and limitations of such institutions as family, nation, and church. Hawthorne and Eliot’s historical novels, in turn, invoke the parish of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in order to challenge what the church and state of the 1840s and 1850s had chosen to inherit from the past. For all three authors, the longevity of institutions provides the opportunity to represent concretely not only what is possible for the future but also how that future might improve upon the past.

Religion

This definition of institutions illuminates how and why the transition from the established church to disestablished churches actually energized religious writers, from Channing to Lyman Beecher, to think institutionally about the relationship between religion and society. To see disestablishment from this perspective is to recognize the weaknesses of the secularization thesis put forth in the twentieth century. In its most persistent and compelling forms, the secularization thesis describes modern religion (and modern society in general) as undergoing a process of structural differentiation. Structural differentiation, according to this theory, splits society into autonomous—or at least semi-autonomous—spheres, such as the state, the economy, science, etc. In these narratives of secularization, the separation of church and state often provides a paradigm for differentiation: what had been a single facet of society suddenly became two differentiated spheres of a social order. Disestablishment, from the perspective of secularization, removed religion—and Protestantism in particular—from public life in the US.\textsuperscript{13} For many of these scholars, the

\textsuperscript{12} On the temporality of institutions, see Anthony Giddens, 170; Peters, 19.

\textsuperscript{13} A full accounting of secularization would be too long a footnote. But a simple trajectory might run from Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic, through the pluralism of Will Herberg in \textit{Protestant, Catholic, Jew}
differentiation of religion from the state and the economy in particular also entailed its declining importance in a world that increasingly relied upon the nation-state for its structure. And, although one pair of critics has simply stated that there “is no doubt whatever” that the “secularization thesis is dead” (Hickman and Coviello 645), the death of this long-standing thesis can help us understand precisely what attending to institutions can offer the study of nineteenth-century religion.

The secularization thesis dies as we see how the model of structural differentiation struggles to account for the real and imagined functions of religion. Talal Asad articulates this critique pointedly in his description of modernity. For Asad, modernity is an effort “at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes conflicting, often evolving) principles” that range from “moral autonomy” to “freedom of the market” to “secularism” (Formations 13). At the center of this version of modernity, Asad places the nation-state as an institution that simultaneously defines itself through the secular and also promotes secularism as a self-justifying doctrine. Asad encourages us to see the limitations of this thesis in the form of the “modern ‘hybrids’” that emerge from the “legitimate entry of religion into” (Formations 182) debates about, for instance, how the economy should be run or whether to nationalize education. Through these modern hybrids, the supposedly autonomous spheres—especially the spheres of religion and politics—“turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought” (Asad, Formations 200). These hybrids, Asad argues, highlight the

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in 1955, 13-17, or the “post-Protestantism” of Sydney Ahlstrom in A Religious History of the American People, esp. 1079-1096, in 1972 to the reconceptualization of secularization in the past thirty years as a form of differentiation. José Casanova refers to secularization as technically a “subtheory of general theories of differentiation,” Public Religions, 18. On secularization as differentiation, see Ingolf U. Dalferth, 318-319; Jon Gjerde, 8; Colin Jager, 1; Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, 5; William Swatos and Kevin Christiano, 213; Olivier Tschannen, 400-401, 404.

This claim about the decline of religion has come under attack for not only being inaccurate but also for occluding the ways that the modern nation-state defines itself by cultivating an opposition between the religious and the secular, see Talal Asad, Formations, 13-14, 200; Hickman and Coviello, 645; Michael Kaufmann, “The Religious,” 621; Jager, 39; Jordan Stein and Justine Murison, 14; Swatos and Christiano, 224; Gauri Viswanathan, 475.

In slightly different terms, Swatos and Christiano argue that, insofar as “Religion is the institution of doing better par excellence” then “secularization’ is the process by which societies in the experience...
weaknesses of a theory of structural differentiation while also forcing us to recognize the hegemony of the modern nation-state as an institution that naturalizes contingent definitions of the religious and the secular. Precisely the importance of these hybrids in Asad’s argument underscores what institutions can offer our understanding of religion and literature in the nineteenth century. Whereas the rhetoric of spheres makes the hybrid the exception to the rule of a differentiated society, institutions encourage us to see hybrids as the rule and the autonomous sphere as the exception.16

In focusing on religion in terms of institutions, therefore, I am prioritizing how writers imagined religion’s influence on the structure of society during this period of ostensible secularization. Even for a writer such as Melville, who struggled for decades with the problems of how individual belief changed in the nineteenth century, I focus on the aspects of his writing that connect to concerns about institutions that more explicitly dominate the work of, for instance, Maria Cummins. In doing so, I move in a different direction than recent scholars, who, in taking their cue from Charles Taylor, have re-examined Protestant individualism from the perspective that Taylor provides of a phenomenology of modern religion in “a secular age.” (Taylor calls this phenomenon the “conditions of belief” [4] in which belief is optional.) Setting themselves in opposition to the narrative of a movement from Puritan theology to Emersonian experience, these scholars have traced the consequences for religion and literature of the increasingly available opportunity to choose not only what to believe in but also whether or not to believe at all. These studies have broadened where we look to see religion in the antebellum US beyond New England Protestantism of ‘modernization’ have created competing institutions for doing better,” 224-225. Crucially, here, Swatos and Christiano also maintain the importance of conflicts among and between institutions in the production of society. In his fascinating contribution to a collection of essays on political theology, Pope Benedict XVI claims that precisely the opposite of structural differentiation is underway in modernity. For Benedict, we live in a society in which the “individual political, economic, and cultural powers depend, more and more, on each other, and come into contact and permeate each other in their different spheres of life,” “Prepolitical,” 261.

16 In this switch, I build on Mary Poovey’s definition of the “domain” in Making a Social Body. Poovey both introduces the idea of an autonomous sphere in the domain and also describes how such domains never live up to their claims to autonomy, esp. 6, 13-14.
while also incorporating the social history of “lived religion” into a field that has primarily focused on the writings of theologians. As enlightening as these studies are, however, they tend to overlook the institutional framework that Asad locates in secularism. To attend primarily to individual belief risks missing how secularism, as a political doctrine that institutionalizes certain principles, invites authors to think about society in terms of institutions.

To show how authors from Sedgwick to Melville engaged with religious thinking about institutions, I am drawing on recent scholars whose work interrogates the imagined and concrete religious institutions of the nineteenth century. One particularly important branch of this scholarship—especially in the work of Candy Gunther Brown and David Paul Nord—has illustrated how US Protestants organized an interdenominational religious marketplace for the printed word. These concrete organizations maintained the networks and produced the objects that could define new institutions for religion by bringing people together in thought, word, and action. More abstractly, John Lardas Modern has elucidated the epistemology of these evangelical associations in the circulation of evangelical tracts, especially in the colportage system. Heavily circulated print, according to Modern, offered evangelicals a form of “non-mediating mediation” (60) through which

17 Stein and Murison critique the model of “experience” from Perry Miller onward for too often explaining away religion, 14. For recent examples of rejuvenated approaches to individual belief in nineteenth-century literature, see Toni Wall Jaudon’s excavation of Hannah Adams’ Dictionary of All Religions in relation to the European encounter with indigenous North American religions; Grant Shreve’s account of “American secularity” in terms of disestablishment’s effect on Taylor’s idea of the “conditions of belief.” The study of Mormonism has been one place that scholars increasingly look to see individual belief outside of the confines of New England theology, see Jared Hickman, Book of Mormon; Elizabeth Fenton, Open Canons.” On the need to attend to “lived religion” in literary studies, see Lawrence Buell, “Religion on the American Mind.” Dawn Coleman analyzes the rise of the US novel through “lived religion” in the figure of the preacher and the performance of the sermon.

18 Scholarship on the organizational and material aspects of Christianity in this period is of course not limited to book history. For one of the most comprehensive accounts of what Latour calls non-human actors in US Christianity, see Colleen McDannell.
they could “represent and manage the individual opinions that made up the public” (94). Modern’s account of “evangelical secularism,” in particular, allows us to see how a robust investment in Christianity could work in tandem with secularism’s push to imagine society as clearly divided between religious and secular. These scholarly accounts of new antebellum religious associations help us understand what institutions US Protestants fostered after disestablishment and, indeed, how those institutions redefined religion in the antebellum period. In turn, through these concrete and imagined institutions, we can see how the overlapping and contested boundaries between institutions redefined religion in terms of how religion could transform ostensibly secular aspects of the world.

Thinking institutionally about nineteenth-century religion in the wake of the secularization thesis, therefore, involves two major shifts in perspective. First, it entails an understanding of religion that we tend to associate more with Roman Catholicism than with Protestantism. As Jon Butler reminded us almost twenty-five years ago, a Catholic model for US religious history can push us to see “how institutions attempt to shape lay faith,” which a Protestant focus on “individualism and antiauthoritarianism” (288) tends to overlook. Given that institutions have been associated more often with Roman Catholicism, scholars of literature understandably have attended to religious institutions most explicitly in dealing with anti-Catholic fiction. Elizabeth Fenton, Tracy Fessenden, and Jenny Franchot have shown how many North American writers—from John Williams in The Redeemed Captive through Lyman Beecher in A Plea for the West—attacked Roman Catholic institutions in the US not only for corrupting individuals’ beliefs but also for threatening the integrity of the US as a nation. As these scholars argue, a broadly inclusive Protestant identity in the US emerged in the

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19 In labeling print as a form of non-mediating mediation, Modern is trying to capture the nuance of the evangelical emphasis on the individual’s direct (non-mediated) relationship to God that evangelicals increasingly structured through the technology of print (mediation).
nineteenth century precisely in opposition to Roman Catholic institutions. Indeed, the logic by which we label institutional thinking among Protestants in this period as “secularization” actually seems to derive from this nineteenth-century opposition between Roman Catholic religious institutions and the ostensibly secular institutions that furthered Protestant goals for a society with a Protestant foundation.

In each of these chapters, therefore, we will see writers negotiating their own relationship to Roman Catholicism in order to differentiate institutions that can benefit Protestantism from the institutions that foster the flaws of Roman Catholicism. For George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Catharine Sedgwick as much as for William Ellery Channing or British defenders of the established church, this negotiation involved trying to reclaim aspects of Roman Catholic institutions that they felt could improve Protestant institutions. In contrast, for Herman Melville, travelling through Jerusalem and Palestine, this negotiation meant weighing the poverty of desiccated Roman Catholic and Orthodox institutions against the transience of individual belief. In none of these texts is individual belief sufficient without some attention to the institutions that will support, spread, and maintain that belief.

Second, thinking institutionally about nineteenth-century religion invites us to think about how institutions bring space and time together. Asad’s intervention in the study of secularism is largely spatial: he forces us to rethink how and why we define certain spaces as religious or secular. But to consider only the spatial relationships that structure society at a given moment risks missing how writers imagined—or even ignored—change over time. An approach that primarily privileges

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20 On anti-Catholic literature and US literature that engages with Catholicism, see Elizabeth Fenton, Religious Liberties; Tracy Fessenden, Culture and Redemption, esp. 1-12, 60-83; Jenny Franchot Roads to Rome. For anti-Catholicism in transatlantic literature, see Susan M. Griffin.

21 In a recent special issue of American Literature, Jared Hickman and Peter Coviello pick up this spatial logic in defining the postsecular as “Replacing secularity with globality as the background condition of modern life,” 649. In contrast, Ann Douglas, whose attack on sentimental writers in The Feminization of American Culture remains a staple in introductions to books on religion and
only structure or only history, that is, cannot do justice to why these authors focus their literature on institutions. All of these writers, from Sedgwick to Gaskell to Melville, turn to institutions because, through institutions, they can address society both spatially, in terms of structure, and temporally, in terms of inheritance and change. For this reason, when Melville sets his poem in Jerusalem and Palestine, his point is not only that religion is more global than provincial US Protestantism but also that religion is part of a history that is much longer than that of the nation-state or even Protestantism itself. Through institutions, these writers imagine spaces that carry history with them.

Literature

In the same decades that these authors were working through the consequences of disestablishment for religion and society, they also experienced the slow institutionalization of literature in the US. Even if few claimed that US literature would be as foundational an institution as the family or the nation itself, literary critics and authors of all kinds debated what relationship literature should have to the nation, how it would affect the family, and what, if any, religious function literature could fulfill. In other words, these writers were thinking institutionally about both religion and literature, often simultaneously. The core of my literary argument, therefore, follows from a contingent cross-pollination of ideas about institutions in the wake of disestablishment and in the emergence of a literary market in the US. While the specifics of this cross-pollination differ from author to author and chapter to chapter, here, I will briefly point to three consequences of this cross-pollination that relate to secularization, transatlanticism, and literary form.

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Douglas, the spatial thinking of nineteenth-century sentimental writers, theologians, and reformers, ignored the dynamics of history.
First, in considering their own vocation in an increasingly institutional context, these writers often drew upon thinking about disestablishment. The nineteenth-century literary market in the US was neither centralized nor consistent. Booksellers and publishers in the three literary centers of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—not to mention the small rural presses—faced different demands based on local audiences and infrastructure.\(^{22}\) Even though the printing and distribution infrastructure in all three places relied on Protestant associations and almost limitless readers of the Bible, the expectations for what a book should do differed in Philadelphia and New York from those in Boston, where a powerful (and rich) elite had firmer ties to religious organizations.\(^{23}\)

In this piece-meal progression toward a sustainable market of books printed in the US and (sometimes) written by US authors, I aim to show the overlap between how these authors think about the institutions that will perform the essential functions of religion and how they conceive their own vocation.\(^{24}\) Nineteenth-century authors’ thoughts and opinions about the purpose of religion blend with their thoughts and opinions about the purpose of literature. But these authors do not easily fit into a single story of secularization in which imaginative literature gradually replaces Protestantism. George Eliot, for instance, did understand her role as authors as secularizing the mediating function of the parish priest. But others do not fit into this narrative: Catharine Maria


\(^{23}\) Compare, for instance, the emphasis Lawrence Buell places on the paradoxical effect of religious moralism in New England, *New England Literary Culture* 56-83, esp. 56-57, with what Samuel Otter calls the “Philadelphia Story,” which focuses on the dynamic of freedom and slavery in the first “Northern” city, *Philadelphia Stories*. For literary culture in New York City, see Van Wyck Brooks; Edward Widmer.

\(^{24}\) For recent, short summaries of the debate about literature as a secularizing form, see Kevin Seidel, 642; Jordan Stein, “Secular Aesthetics,” 341. Colin Jager takes up the trope of “design” precisely because it reveals the middle ground between religious and secular in Romantic discourse, 12.
Sedgwick, for instance, did not see herself as replacing religious authorities or even producing religious writing per se. Throughout her career, Sedgwick negotiates how to balance her readers’ demands for literature with a form of writing that maintains the religious principles of improvement that she develops in response to disestablishment. And, as is not infrequently the case, Herman Melville finds himself less easily categorized on either side of this binary when he explores the advantages and limitations of institutional religion in the modern world.

Second, the impact of US literature on British literature in the context of disestablishment nuances our understanding of a transatlantic network. In challenging the nation as the basic unit of literary culture, critics in the past twenty-five years have presented new networks in which we must interpret nineteenth-century literature. Evangelicals, abolitionists, temperance activists, and many other reform societies worked and wrote across national boundaries with relative ease. Moreover, the actual market for literature in the US was thoroughly flooded with British reprints, muddying the material distinction between US and British literature.²⁵ At the same time, literary nationalists, such as the Young America movement in New York, called for a national literature produced by Americans and featuring American customs. Confusingly enough, claims to national specificity came both from those who rejected British influence and also those who deferred to a British heritage.²⁶

In following the transatlantic concern with the purpose of established religion, I draw on both lines of scholarship to elucidate a situation in which, on the one hand, writers on both sides of the Atlantic share an interest in religion and society that fits into a larger set of intellectual affinities but,
on the other, writers also identify distinctly national features in their writing based on those religious themes. For instance, faced with growing denominationalism in the 1840s and 1850s, British writers looked to US writers to understand better religion and literature in their own country. This contribution to the emergence of US literature, therefore, is neither subsumed in a transatlantic marketplace nor the result of self-consciously nationalist efforts; rather, its national contribution is a by-product of authors trying to understand religion and society in terms of institutions.

Thinking about religion and thinking about literature intersects most straightforwardly when these authors thematize a common set of conflicts at the foundation of society. These conflicts occur not only between the state and voluntary religion; they also occur between those institutions that authors imagine can take over for the church and those that threaten to corrupt society. In these themes, disestablishment can be both subject and catalyst. Taking disestablishment as a subject in *Clarel*, Melville contrasts explicitly among theo-political institutions—in Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox—and between established and voluntary religions—Christian establishments, on the one side, and Judaism, the Druze, and voluntary Protestantism, on the other. As a subject, disestablishment allows Melville to address what he sees as a latent hypocrisy in US Protestant anti-institutionalism in the context of a paradox about the relationship between institutions and religion. In contrast, taking disestablishment as a catalyst in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe is less concerned with the merits of disestablishment than with the subsequent conflict between the institutions she argues have a religious basis—the family and the voluntary church—and those that do not—slavery and the market economy. Stowe’s institutional thinking builds directly from her family’s experience in the debates about disestablishment in Massachusetts and Connecticut; but, by 1850, the pressing problem was not disestablishment itself but its aftermath.

This focus on theme is methodologically familiar. The surprising part is that disestablishment and institutions appear thematically at a time we associate with Protestant
individualism. The third and final literary consequence that I suggest that arises in the aftermath of
disestablishment is less familiar. Insofar as these authors are thematizing the temporal and spatial
aspects of institutions after disestablishment, they turn to the critically less popular formal elements
of plot and character to structure their narratives around those institutions. Through nuances in plot
and the intricate dynamics among characters, these authors explore the spatial and temporal
possibilities of the institutions that are central to their narratives’ themes.

My own interest in plot and character builds on recent revisions to the study of these formal
elements that illuminate their utility for representing institutions. Most recently, Caroline Levine has
rescued plot from its excommunication under Cleanth Brooks’ heresy of paraphrase. Levine argues
that plot is the formal element of narrative that primarily “privileges the interaction of forms over
time” (20). Only plot, because it traces these interactions, can capture the “patterns of duration and
repetition over time” (56) that define institutions. Although Levine and I use the term “institution”
slightly differently, her point about plot is crucial. Plot structures the relationship among the many
characters in a narrative while simultaneously situating those characters in time. Indeed, these
features are the very definition of plot.27 A plot can both move characters in physical space and also
reorder characters’ relationships to one another, as in the many plots of familial reunion and
formation; or a plot can depict changes in a character or an institution over time, as in a character’s
development or a church’s adjustment to new members. In both cases, plot establishes the logic by
which we understand time and space to exist in the society that a narrative presents us.28

27 Although Peter Brooks is interested in plot for a psychoanalytic interpretation of narrative form
that is far from my interest in institutions, he provides a useful gloss on plot and its functions: plot is
the “concept for the design and intention of narrative … a structuring operation elicited by, and
made necessary by, those meanings that develop through succession and time,” Reading for the Plot,
12.
28 Nina Baym notes that, for readers and reviewers in the mid-nineteenth century, “the formal
principle of the novel was plot,” Novels, Readers, and Reviewers, 81. And, although Baym shows how
reviewers tended to categorize as superior those novels with probable plots—as opposed to those
that “relied on improbabilities,” Novels, Readers, and Reviewers, 79—these narrative works are
As a structuring force, plot works in tandem with character to establish the nuances of institutions and narrate their change over time. Even as plot elucidates the dynamics of institutions over time, the set of relationships among characters gives plot the content of the institutions it can move and reorder. Through the interactions between characters in the plot, authors can reshape the institutions that those characters create. In thinking about institutions, therefore, the structure of relationships among characters matters more than the individual psychology of any single character. Of the recent revisions to our approach to literary character, Alex Woloch’s aptly named “character-system” most succinctly draws our attention to the structure that the set of relationships between characters gives to narrative. For Woloch, much as cities seem threatened by too many people under conditions of scarce resources, the novel is “destabilized … by too many people” under conditions of scarce attention.

But not even Woloch’s definition of the character-system, which takes the structuring principles of market capitalism as a given, can account for the interplay of institutions that I argue animates the themes of these narratives. While we can (and have) read these narratives in terms of individual protagonists, these protagonists—be it either the titular characters of Eliot’s Adam Bede and Melville’s Clarel or the ostensibly central Tom in Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin—rarely balance quite so neatly against “the many.” Moreover, to apply a character-system defined by the logic of economic institutions to all these narratives risks missing how these authors use the structure of relationships among characters to imagine the conflicts among institutions. Thus, Maria Cummins simultaneously defining what counts as probable precisely through their plots in ways that do not always line up with the desires of their reviewers.

29 I am looking at character differently, therefore, from scholarship that either tries to understand the relationship between individual characters as imagined people and as formal elements, e.g. John Frow, or that looks to the relationship between reader and character as a model for ethics or empathy, e.g. Wayne Booth; Martha Nussbaum.

30 In stressing the system in conflict with the individual, Woloch’s “character-system” steps away from Ian Watt’s classic argument that the novel’s “primary criterion was truth to individual experience,” Rise of the Novel, 13.
replaces a vision of society as individualistic and built upon only economic institutions with one built upon institutions that promote reciprocity by orienting her novel around interlaced pairs of characters rather than a single protagonist surrounded by many minor characters. We can only see how these authors envision society as a whole when we stop looking for the deepest individual characters and start looking for the institutions defined by the relationships among the many characters. In turn, we can only fully appreciate these relationships among characters within these plots in the transatlantic network that brings these authors together. Sedgwick borrows plots and characters from Maria Edgeworth and Walter Scott; Gaskell translates Stowe’s North/South dichotomy to England, bringing with it certain central characters; Eliot’s *Adam Bede* rewrites into late-eighteenth-century Britain Hawthorne’s story of Puritan transgression in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Of the authors I discuss here, only Melville, who thematizes his own belatedness to these problems, writes his long poem outside of such a literary network.

To be sure, many more factors than disestablishment and its aftermath contribute to the network that emerges from these rewritings. Stowe’s intense popularity alone already makes her a useful source for Gaskell and Cummins; Eliot and Hawthorne share a skepticism of the reformist impulse; and Sedgwick finds in Scott a model that helps her understand a provincial—or even post-colonial—relation to England. But the shared interest in the institutional consequences of disestablishment, although not primarily responsible for this transatlantic literary network, helps us see how the novel is more than a vehicle for liberal subjectivity. Unlike the novels Ian Watt describes, these narratives do “take their plots from mythology, history, legend, or previous literature” (14); and, while their characters often feel like individualized persons, they are not

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31 Here we can recover the kind of “social, horizontal complexity” that Deidre Lynch finds in the “characteristic writing of the mid-eighteenth century,” 156. As Lynch argues, the critical preference for “particularized, rounded characters,” 126, over the flat characters of the eighteenth century derives from a critical tradition grounded in the romantic period’s rejection of eighteenth-century aesthetics and its anxiety about the rise of a consumer society.
exclusively “named ... to suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals” (19). The names of these characters and the plots in which they act display the indebtedness to other writers and established institutions in the core relationships that make up the societies of these narratives. Eliot’s Hester—embedded within a plot and set of characters that recall Hawthorne’s own plot and characters—allows Eliot to build upon the institutional dynamics of church and state in *The Scarlet Letter* even if those dynamics are only an ancillary reason for using character in this way. By rewriting the well-known authors around them, these writers invoke familiar institutions in order to imagine an improved society by adapting those institutions. Since institutions promote and depend upon forms of inheritance, it would hardly make sense for these writers to do otherwise.

Although the foundation of my argument elucidates the persistent interest in the consequences of disestablishment in US and British imaginative literature, I am also inviting us to reconsider the basic assumptions we carry about individualism at the center of US literary history. In making these arguments, each chapter traces the biographical connections these authors had to the debates about established religion in the US and Britain. In turn, these debates broaden beyond that biography, as they involve the rise of Unitarianism, the meaning of Voluntaryism, and what should be “national” about a religion no longer legally bound to the state. In these narratives, I show how these ideas about religion and society after disestablishment become sustained thought experiments through which authors imagine what society would be like—for better or for worse—with different institutions. A literary history that accounts for disestablishment requires that we better understand

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32 Here too Baym notes the preference of reviewers for “original,” *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 86, rather than “manifestly typical,” *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 87, and who are “individuals” as opposed to “simply individualized,” *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, 88. But the desire for original characters does not seem to have hindered the popularity of these borrowed and reworked characters.

33 Nor are these borrowings what David Brewer has labeled a practice of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “imaginative expansion,” 10—or, more specifically, “character migration,” 78—in which writers and readers imagine the “afterlife” of Falstaff, Pamela Andrews, or Jeannie Deans. Eliot’s Hester Sorrell does not carry forth the individuality (or even the psychological complexity) of Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne.
how writers continued to imagine the future of religion in terms of institutions; but a literary history that accounts for disestablishment also invites us to see how these writers used institutions to imagine the future of society as a whole.
Institutions in Conflict: Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Literature of Improvement

Catharine Maria Sedgwick grew up amid institutional turmoil. In statehouses and newspapers during the nation’s first few decades, politicians fought about what the new nation would be. In sermons and religious periodicals in Massachusetts, ministers fought about what a church should be. In literary magazines in Boston, New York, and London, reviewers fought about what a novel—particularly an American novel—should be. Beneath all of these questions about definition were questions about function. To answer what the US should be as a nation meant answering what role it should play for its citizens. To define what a church should be meant defining what function religion—and Protestantism in particular—should fulfill in relation to this as yet undefined new nation. And to decide what American literature should be meant deciding not only what would be American about it but also what it would do—religiously, politically, aesthetically—for Americans. Amid this confusion, Sedgwick chose to become a writer.

Sedgwick became one of the first well-respected US novelists. Her career tells two distinct, but intersecting, stories about the relationship between religion, institutions, and the emergence of US literature. In the first story, Sedgwick chose to become a writer to imagine how her society could strengthen its religious foundation during and after disestablishment in Massachusetts. Persuaded by Unitarianism’s liberal version of Protestantism, she understood religion in terms of improvement and not, as evangelicals would have it, in terms of conversion. By imitating Christ and learning from the institutions around them, individuals were capable of improving themselves to become better suited for eternal life. God was no longer, for these Protestants, a Father out for vengeance but a Father committed to fostering their improvement. Sedgwick harnessed this concept of improvement in the wake of disestablishment in order to preserve the most important functions of religion as new institutions sought to claim a foundational role for society. From her debut novel in 1822 to her last
in 1857, Sedgwick devoted her literary career to imagining how individuals can improve themselves and their institutions by carefully selecting what to inherit from family, from nation, from books, and even from fashion.¹

In the second story, Sedgwick negotiates between her own motivations for becoming an author and the demands of her readers and reviewers within a growing US literary marketplace. In the thirty-five years of her career, Sedgwick experienced a dramatic change in what it meant to be an author in the US. More people, better machines, and stronger infrastructure all made being an author at least a viable, if not a respectable, vocation; they contributed to the institutionalizing of US literature. Of course, literature differed from the family and the nation as an institution in terms of what it could offer. Few made the same claims, for instance, about the place of literature and the place of the family at the foundation of society. But Sedgwick’s experience during the emergence of US literature illuminates the contingent intersection between the changing meanings for US society of religion and literature. As Sedgwick responded to her reviewers in her novels, we can see how Sedgwick’s theory of religious improvement blends with an aesthetic demand that reviewers made for a less imitative national literature. A corollary to religious improvement coalesces in Sedgwick’s fiction that tries simultaneously to inculcate the process of improvement in her readers and to dramatize her own improvement upon her literary forbearers. Both these stories begin with Sedgwick’s father.

The Sedgwicks and Massachusetts’ Institutions

When Thomas Jefferson was elected president, Catharine Sedgwick’s father had been a relatively prominent Federalist politician for two decades. Theodore Sedgwick served in the

¹ Melissa Homestead has put forth the most compelling case for considering Sedgwick—and, indeed, female authors more generally—in the context of their careers, “Shape,” esp. 199.
Constitutional Congress, in the House of Representatives, and finally in the US Senate. With a Federalist loss in the presidential election, Sedgwick looked finally able to put aside his long career in Washington and return to his family. But, although he understood the hardships his frequent and sustained absences created for his wife and children, Sedgwick did not remain in Stockbridge for long. Upon returning to Massachusetts in 1802, Theodore Sedgwick took a place on the State Supreme Court where he served until his death in 1813.2

On the court, Sedgwick was an able—if not a distinguished—judge. His most earnest efforts were actually more institutional than legal. He improved the relationship between the justices and lawyers and outlined a more efficient structure for how the court should hear cases.3 As Sedgwick explained to a newly elected governor, these reforms “would do more for Massachusetts than any man has hitherto done.”4 On the court itself, Sedgwick was present to rule on five cases that protected the state’s religious establishments from its challengers—mostly Baptists and Universalists. In the 1807 case, *Joseph Avery v. The Inhabitants of Tyringham*, for instance, Sedgwick argued against the town’s desire to dissolve their minister’s contract at will without first calling an ecclesiastical council to evaluate any differences in doctrinal opinion. Sedgwick’s ruling warned that relying on the goodwill of the people in at-will contracts would undermine the ministers’ ability to be an “impartial and effectual reproof of vice and immorality” (3 Tyng 176). In this decision, Sedgwick articulates what he and his fellow justices understood to be the definition and purpose of the religious establishment. Wary of private religious societies and voluntary associations composed of unrestrained individuals, Sedgwick saw the state’s Protestant establishment as an institution that

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2 For the most comprehensive account of Sedgwick’s political career, see Richard E. Welch, *Theodore Sedgwick*. Mary Kelley refers to the Sedgwick patriarch as “one of the early republic’s most influential Federalists,” *Power*, 6.
3 The literature on Sedgwick’s judicial career is limited, see Frank W. Grinnell, 508-541; Richard E. Welch, “Parsons/Sedgwick.”
4 Theodore Sedgwick to C. Gore, Box 7 Folder 22, Sedgwick family papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
instructed individuals in public virtues. For Sedgwick and his fellow justices, religion in the form of state churches offered broadly applicable lessons on morality that would be lost if voluntary associations completely took over religious instruction.  

Catharine Sedgwick found her father’s example instructive. Even though her parents had made sure she had formal schooling, Sedgwick gave more credit to the informal lessons of the environment her father and her family fostered. Their intellectual “daily habits, and pursuits, and pleasures” gave Sedgwick a model for activity. In particular, Sedgwick found in her father’s injunction that she “devote [her] mornings to reading” the foundation for her often self-directed education. Although we have no evidence of Sedgwick reading her father’s decisions closely, her journals and letters recognize in him a “self-devotion to his country’s good” even at the cost of leaving his wife every winter “tottering under her burden of care” of the children he left behind (Power 65). At the same time, Catharine Sedgwick also found her father too attached to the hierarchies of the monarchical society in which he was born. She laments in her journal that her father tended to refer to “the people” en masse—not coincidentally, a group that increasingly gathered in voluntary religious societies—as “‘Jacobins,’ ‘sans-culottes,’ and ‘miscreants’” (Power 64). In remembering her father and his importance in her education, Sedgwick is careful to recognize the

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5 Sedgwick was not present for the most famous case during his tenure on the court—Barnes v Falmouth occurred during the 1810 Cumberland session (in what is now Maine). Barnes denied the allocation of religious taxes to ministers of voluntary, unincorporated churches. The Barnes case initiated a series of legislative and legal actions that redefined—and eventually disestablished—the state’s tax-support of religion. Sedgwick did, however, join the court’s unanimous decisions upholding the Barnes decision to limit tax-support to incorporated religious societies later that year in Turner v Brookfield in the Hampshire circuit and in Lovell v Byfield in the Essex circuit. After Barnes, the state legislature passed the “Act Respecting Public Worship and Religious Freedom,” which allowed money to be paid to unincorporated religious societies, see John D. Cushing; Jacob Conrad Meyer. In recent accounts of the Unitarian support of the establishment, this concern for the “public” aspect of the church has been a central feature. An educated ministry and religious instruction sponsored by the state would preserve what Nathan Rives calls “public morality,” what Johann Neem calls the “common good,” or what Jonathan Sassi calls “public Christianity,” 145-163.  

6 Mary Kelley includes both quotations from Sedgwick’s letters in Power, 21.
good and the bad of her father’s example. In her own writing, she tries to build on the former while leaving the latter behind.

Sedgwick makes this break from her father’s legacy most explicit in her story, “A Reminiscence of Federalism,” which draws liberally on her own experiences as a child in Stockbridge and Bennington. The story’s allegory is straightforward. Although the wealthy, Democratic landowner and the Federalist, orthodox clergyman refuse to interact, the grandson of the one and the daughter of the other marry. Not surprisingly, their marriage offers a compromise between their families’ positions. Their marriage combines a more generous view of humanity than the clergyman’s abstract belief that heaven was for “none but federalists and the orthodox” (TS 23) with a keener “moral sense” (TS 37) than the grandfather’s Democratic zealotry for party politics. In this allegory, Sedgwick tempers her father’s distrust of “the people” with a belief that individuals can, and must, “improve[] and almost perfect[]” their character through “self-denying and painful duties” (TS 43). This story illustrates in microcosm the investments that Sedgwick maintains throughout her career. She strives to find the value in diverse (and often conflicting) institutions; and she does so by depicting how individuals must negotiate the various claims those institutions have upon them.

Even though Sedgwick abandoned some of her father’s political beliefs, she stayed true to his belief that institutions were crucial to the prosperity not only of the nation but also of society in general. In her fiction and letters, Sedgwick respects the institutions that Massachusetts and the nation had inherited while also insisting that individuals must interact with those institutions thoughtfully. To set up these interactions, Sedgwick broadly creates a backdrop out of institutional conflict in her two historical novels. The American Revolution in *The Linwoods* (1835) reminds readers of their ancestors’ suffering in order to “increase their fidelity to the free institutions

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7 Homestead, “Shape,” 195; for Sedgwick’s early memories of her father and the source of this story, see *Power*, 77-82.
transmitted to them” (LW 5). In Hope Leslie (1827), Sedgwick triangulates the religious sensibility of her protagonists with the suddenly repressive “religious republic” of the Massachusetts colony and the Church of England from which they fled for religious freedom. The titular character’s adopted father moves to New England and abandons the hope of marrying the woman he loves precisely because he refuses to swear “unqualified obedience to the king, and adherence to the established church” (HL 10). Particularly in this earlier novel, Sedgwick pushes readers to contemplate the equivocal debt their society owes to Puritan institutions whose members, almost immediately upon gaining their religious independence, foisted “those shackles on others from which they had just released themselves at such a price” (HL 16). In both novels, these broad historical settings often classed in terms of the desire for independence—either politically from the monarchy or religious from the Church of England—instead motivate debates about what to reject and what to inherit from long-standing institutions.

When discussing her own experiences with the state’s religious establishment, Sedgwick often looks back with bemusement. In the first of the two long letters that double as Sedgwick’s memoirs, Sedgwick relates to her niece’s daughter the time in Sedgwick’s youth when a town’s clergyman’s “salary was paid by taxation” (Power 95). In describing this period in personal and national history, Sedgwick couples sincere praise with light mockery. On the one hand, in the stern, Calvinist minister that her town supported from 1759 to 1818, Sedgwick finds an “unsophisticated nature as pure and gentle as a good little child’s” (Power 96). But, on the other, she exclaims to her niece’s daughter, “Heaven forbid” that she should experience these Calvinists’ “splitting of … theological hairs” (Power 95). In this short anecdote, Sedgwick simultaneously admires the sincerity of Stockbridge’s minister and also uses humor to acknowledge and move past the personal and institutional flaws that existed there. After trying to capture a bit of the intricacy of the state establishment of the early 1800s, Sedgwick jokingly dismisses the worry that without such an
establishment now “a man may revert to heathenism (and some do!)” (Power 95). The individual Calvinist minister and the established church, Sedgwick implies, had merits even if the dangers of atheism and damnation that they claimed to forestall were never really as threatening as they seemed. Sedgwick depicts these institutions—and the institutions of religion in particular—as interacting with and adapting to one another in the wake of disestablishment. In these autobiographical letters, for instance, Sedgwick can look optimistically upon the influx of Irish immigrants; she is confident that their good qualities will enrich the nation even as their “ignorance” and “despotic religion” will not be able to survive “in the midst of free institutions” (Power 51). These nationally specific, free institutions seem to improve any religion that interacts with them notwithstanding anti-Catholic fears of a tyrannical union of church and state. With this strong sense of the purpose of institutions, Sedgwick doubts in a letter to Susan Channing (William Ellery Channing’s sister-in-law), that foreign travel really assists ministers in attending to their domestic congregants. Sedgwick argues instead that US ministers must “study the institutions of their own country” if they wish to serve effectively “in our soil and climate.” In both these statements, we can start to see why Sedgwick might choose moments of institutional conflict for her historical novels. Sedgwick emphasizes how institutions necessarily negotiate their various—and often conflicting—needs. Religious institutions—such as the churches run by ministers considering foreign travel—cannot succeed without fully digesting the political and cultural institutions that surround them. At the root of this negotiation, in Sedgwick’s mind, is the drive for individual and institutional improvement that religion must secure at the foundation of society.

Catharine Sedgwick’s Unitarian Theory of Improvement

8 Sedgwick to Mrs Channing 9 Dec 1834, Reel 6 Box 7 Folder 4, Catharine Maria Sedgwick papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
Disestablishment became a viable option in Massachusetts precisely because the differences between Unitarians and orthodox Congregationalists—who had both supported the state church—involved not only doctrinal disputes but also debates about the meaning and purpose of Christian religion, established or not. For the Unitarians, the purpose of the church was bound up with a new definition of the relationship between the individual and the divine. At the forefront of the Unitarian community, William Ellery Channing described a rational Christianity, in which Sedgwick, among others in New England, discovered a heartfelt “filial relation to God” (*Power* 86). In turn, as Channing wrote to Sedgwick in 1827, exploring this “purer, nobler piety” also involved looking for ways to reform “the church, not the world only.”9 Attending to one’s own piety, that is, involved improving not only oneself but also religious and secular institutions. In defining improvement for herself and investigating its consequences for the relationship between individuals and their institutions, Sedgwick carefully built upon the writings of Unitarian ministers throughout her career.

In opposition to Calvinist tenets of God’s incomprehensibility and humankind’s innate depravity, Unitarianism advocated a rational Protestantism that emphasized individual interpretation of scripture and the potential for moral growth. Channing argued against innate depravity in sermons and essays by representing, as he titles it in one such essay, “The Imitableness of Christ’s Character.” For Channing, to be able to imitate Christ is to believe in the human capability to “become one with him in thought, in feeling, in power, in holiness” (*Works* 4:149). As a liberal form of Christianity, Channing’s Unitarianism attracted listeners and readers because it offered the potential to approach Christ. Channing not only presented a loving version of Christ, whose “calm and rational character” personifies “disinterested love and self-denying service” (*Works* 4:18); Channing also allowed his audience to approach that divine figure “by imitation of his virtues and obedience to his word” (*Works* 4:29). In redescribing the individual’s relationship to the divine in

9 William Ellery Channing (Boston) to Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 11 Jan. 1827, Reel 2, Microfilm edition of the William Ellery Channing papers, Massachusetts Historical Society
terms of imitation, therefore, Channing also redescribes the purpose of religion in terms of the
individual’s character. In contrast to forms of piety predicated on innate depravity or upon the
ritualism of the Church of England, a sincere and moral character becomes both a means toward
piety and an end itself.\textsuperscript{10}

While imitation concisely revises the individual’s relationship to God, imitation is only one
example of a Unitarian concept of improvement. In his polemical “Unitarian Christianity,” for
instance, Channing replaces orthodox Calvinism’s angry Father with a gentler “Parental character”
\textit{(Works 3:84)}. Not searching to punish or condemn, this God instead desires his creatures’
“improvement” and finds “joy in their progress” \textit{(Works 3:85)}. This process of improvement,
crucially, relies on a revelation directed at individuals “as rational beings” who will “interpret it by
the help of the faculties” \textit{(Works 3:67)}. Taking his cue from Channing, Henry Ware Jr. in a New
Year’s sermon even more emphatically stresses “the duty … of continual improvement” \textit{(Ware,
Works 3:96)}. For Ware, God has placed humans in the world not merely to glorify God, as the
Westminster Catechism would have it, but to “form [their] character for eternity” \textit{(Works 3:102)} by
improving themselves upon the model of Christ.

Unlike the ideal of imitating the flawless example of Christ, improvement tries to describe a
broadly applicable action that accounts for the many worldly examples that combine both good and
bad traits. In this context, Channing warns against the “servile imitation” of even a hypothetically
“perfect individual” \textit{(Works 1:288)}. For Channing, all individuals must form “a character of [their]
own” \textit{(Works 1:288)} based on the particular qualities they have been given. In his sermon, “Spiritual
Freedom,” Channing explains in more detail why improvement in this world requires more than
imitation. According to Channing, individuals must strive for more than “the mere absence of sin”

\textsuperscript{10} On the doctrinal differences between Unitarianism and New England Calvinism—its emphasis on
individual rationality, its dismissal of isolated experiences of conversion, and its vision of God as a
loving father—see, Ahlstrom, \textit{Religious History}, 388-402, esp. 391-392; Buell, \textit{Literary Transcendentalism},
23-54, esp. 26; Holifield, 197-217; David Walker Howe, \textit{Unitarian Conscience}, 93-150, esp. 120.
in the pursuit of a “free mind” (Works 4:71). A free mind “does not mechanically repeat itself” nor is it “passively framed by outward circumstances” (Works 4:72). A free mind instead “bends events to its own improvement” based on religion’s “immutable principles” (Works 4:72). Improvement in Channing’s Unitarianism is a method for availing ourselves of God’s parentage because without God, Channing reminds his listeners and readers, “our improvements” have “no permanence” (Works 4:80). Improvement, therefore, describes a way of independently drawing from institutions and exemplars based on religious principles.

Taking his cue from Channing, Henry Ware Jr. also stressed the importance of independence for improvement. As Ware argues in his popular On the Formation of the Christian Character (1831), the religious character must be “independent of other men and of outward circumstances” (Works 4:313). And, even though Christ provides the “model which you are to imitate” (Ware, Works 4:294), religious improvement requires a studied combination of reading, meditation, prayer, preaching, and the Lord’s Supper. Without these efforts and “much and persevering watchfulness” (Works 4:382), we cannot, according to Ware, cultivate a “responsible and filial relation” (Works 4:290) to God. To do justice to what humankind has inherited from God as a loving parent, Channing and Ware both set forth improvement as a combination of the imitation of Christ and a thoughtful, sustained application of the religious principles collected in the Bible.

In revising the relationship between the individual and God, Unitarianism altered the function and purpose of religious institutions to support improvement. When Ware labels preaching and the Lord’s Supper as two means of religious improvement, he also suggests that two major functions of the church are meant to support individual improvement. Ware, for instance, emphasizes that Protestants must not see participating in the Lord’s Supper as the ultimate spiritual accomplishment but rather as “the means and incitement of greater improvement” (Ware, Works 4:368). The Lord’s Supper is less about demarcating who is and who is not part of the Christian
community and more about reminding individuals about their own responsibility to improve themselves as Christians.

In defining the purpose of a church in terms of improvement, the Unitarians struck at the fundamental purpose that orthodox Congregationalists advocated for religious institutions in debates about disestablishment. In their efforts to retain control over parish churches, orthodox Congregationalists claimed that they only wished to separate from those who rejected certain beliefs that the orthodox felt were so foundational that “true Christianity cannot exist without them” (Stuart 22). For these orthodox Congregationalists, one of the church’s most important functions was to retain purity of belief and community. James Walker, a prominent Unitarian in the 1820s and president of Harvard in the 1850s, explicitly attacked this definition of a church in his sermon, “The Exclusive System” delivered in 1827 and reprinted as a Unitarian tract in 1830.11 As Walker outlines it, the Exclusive System attempts “to deny christian fellowship, the christian name, and all christian privileges to such as differ from them” (“Exclusive” 3) in certain fundamental beliefs that they claim—mistakenly in Walker’s view—to have the authority to decide. For Walker, no church member or group of church members can deny church membership to another since the religious principles of improvement depend not on conversion but upon rational interpretation and sincere belief. The tension between improvement and purity through separation made it impossible for Unitarians and orthodox Congregationalists to continue to share a single religious institution.

The debates about the function of religious institutions formed the crux of the institutional conflict between Unitarians and orthodox Congregationalists during the fight over disestablishment. The one looked to the church as a site for personal improvement that is based upon individual,

11 Sydney Ahlstrom cites Walker as, “after Channing, probably the most respected figure in the Unitarian movement,” “Scottish Philosophy,” 263. Walker is one of the four Unitarians that feature as central figures in David Walker Howe’s book-length study of Unitarianism, The Unitarian Conscience. Howe similarly compares conversion among orthodox and the formation of character among Unitarians, 116.
rational interpretation of Scripture; the other looked to the church as a boundary that could separate regenerate from unregenerate, consecrating those who have accepted Christ through conversion and—for some at least—encouraging those who have not by the potential to enter into that institution. The historical irony of disestablishment is that the institution founded by Puritans two centuries earlier to purify the too worldly Church of England proved itself more amenable to this Unitarian theory of improvement than it did to the orthodox Congregationalist insistence on purity and separation.\textsuperscript{12}

In her fiction, Catharine Sedgwick attended comprehensively to the intricacies of the relationship between individual, institution, and religion that came with this Unitarian theory of improvement. In these efforts, Sedgwick was widely successful. These ministers, and many more readers, found in Sedgwick what Channing called a “power to communicate” religious principles to others.\textsuperscript{13} Ten years later, Channing celebrated that “Thousands will be better and happier” (\textit{Le\&L} 270) for Sedgwick’s most recent fiction. Nor was Channing alone in this admiration. Ware solicited Sedgwick in 1834 to write a “succession of \textit{Illustrations of Christianity}” that he hoped would popularize the “practical character and influences of Christianity” (\textit{Le\&L} 239) much as Harriet Martineau’s \textit{Illustrations of Political Economy} had popularized the principles of political economy. Responding to Howe’s solicitation, Sedgwick wrote \textit{Home} (1835), her first sustained didactic fiction. Although this series did not have the longevity that Ware hoped it would, the invitation did encourage Sedgwick to write more in this style. The last of these didactic works, \textit{Means and Ends} (1839), articulates most explicitly Sedgwick’s own theory of improvement. In \textit{Means and Ends}, we can see a similar Unitarian departure from a Puritan inheritance, but with an even more self-conscious attention to institutions. Instead of predicing the individual self upon an affiliation with a church as the early Puritans had,

\textsuperscript{12} Howe parses this irony as the Unitarians’ desire for “Puritanism without Calvinism,” \textit{Unitarian Conscience}, 138.

\textsuperscript{13} William Ellery Channing (Boston) to Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 11 Jan. 1827, Reel 2, Microfilm edition of the William Ellery Channing papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
Sedgwick imagines individuals who improve themselves by drawing upon diverse—even conflicting—institutions. The potential of improvement to manage multiple, conflicting institutions, in turn, allowed Sedgwick to describe the importance of improvement as institutions increasingly rivaled each other for influence in the aftermath of disestablishment.

As the negotiation between and among institutions, improvement happens, for Sedgwick as it does for Ware and Channing, in the formation of an individual’s character. In the forethought to Means and Ends, Sedgwick contrasts the situation of her “American girls” with that of the girls in the East, who have never “enjoyed an independent and individual existence” (M&E 14). Unlike her readers, these Eastern girls cannot improve since Islamic “institutions … deprived them of all means of preparing for” (M&E 14) their immortality. Through a series of lessons and exemplars, Sedgwick encourages her readers to understand their education as a life-long process of forming their character based on the religious principles they learn from institutions. As a teacher explains to a student in Sedgwick’s opening chapter, individuals are born with “certain faculties” and their education is any process that “tends to develope [sic] and improve” those God-given capabilities (M&E 9). In detailing how improvement works, Sedgwick addresses how her readers can make the most of institutions such as home, school, and fashion—that ever-changing set of rules about dress, conversation, and manners. In improving based on the authority of these institutions, Sedgwick focuses on two main problems: which institutions provide the best principles and examples from which an individual can learn and how individuals can use those institutions for improvement.

The opposite of improvement, for Sedgwick, is imitation—specifically the thoughtless imitation of fashionable manners, dress, or opinions. More than Channing or Ware, Sedgwick emphasizes the danger of imitation; imitation offers to give the appearance of an improved character without teaching the principles of benevolence, honesty, and disinterestedness that religious

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14 On the derivation of the self from institutions among Puritans, see Michael W. Kaufmann, Institutional, 15-37.
improvement requires. In *Means and Ends*, Sedgwick attacks imitation specifically as a method for forming character that copies too programmatic ally the rules of institutions without reflecting on their merits. In her long chapter on “Manners,” for instance, Sedgwick disabuses her readers of the notion that manners can be “be imitated, or copied, as you would copy the fashion of a hat” (*M&E* 142). To illustrate this point, Sedgwick recalls a Chinese treatise on manners that “contains three thousand articles” of which only a fraction “are of universal application” (*M&E* 143). To imitate manners is to copy down this list of rules without understanding the principles of good manners or how they interact with the institutions of any single nation or people. Because, for Sedgwick, “manners are but the manifestation of character” (*M&E* 145), good manners must transcend the imitation of external characteristics: they must be “the sign of inward qualities” (*M&E* 143). Even though Sedgwick sees fashion as the biggest potential rival to religion in the absence of a stabilizing religious establishment, Sedgwick does not simply dismiss external manifestations of character in favor of only internal qualities. As she says in the next chapter, dress, like manners, acts as “a sort of index to your character” (*M&E* 176). Religious character requires an attention to both internal and external qualities that is rooted in religious principles.

As against the dangers of imitation, Sedgwick offers the process of improvement. Early in *Means and Ends*, a feminine embodiment of religion explains to an audience of young girls how they must use the characteristics with which they have been “endowed by Nature” (*M&E* 22). Only after individuals “have well applied and improved” these characteristics do individuals begin to possess them as “virtues” (*M&E* 22). Drawing on John Locke’s theory of property in the *Second Treatise on Government*, Sedgwick suggests that God parcels out plots of land, each of which contains the material of divine qualities, but does not, for instance, provide a blueprint for what to build on that land. By improving those qualities into virtues, these young girls can make themselves into individual characters. Indeed, they are visible as individuals only insofar as they improve this shared property.
In this account of improvement, Sedgwick retains the communal nature of shared moral values without emphasizing an individual moral exemplar.\(^\text{15}\) To be sure, Sedgwick still holds the imitation of Christ as a central tenet of her faith. Once—but only once—Sedgwick makes this explicit in Means and Ends. In explaining the particular faults of a character in one of her parables, Sedgwick asks her readers to imagine how different it would have been had the character “imitated Him who, without sin, was touched with a feeling of our infirmities” (M&E 212). But, far more often, Means and Ends warnings of the dangers of the “slavish imitation” (M&E 189) of fashion. By downplaying even the imitation of Christ to which both Ware and Channing consistently return, Sedgwick draws attention to those aspects of improvement that are most distinct from the errors of imitation and fashion. The imitation of Christ still structures improvement, but Sedgwick seems to feel that emphasizing that good form of imitation would dilute the core distinction between religion and fashion.

Means and Ends usefully summarizes how Sedgwick’s thinking evolves as she adjusts her theory of improvement to the intellectual conditions of disestablishment. Without a religious establishment, multiple institutions—religious, secular, and those in between—compete for influence in organizing society. Sedgwick eschews writing a “separate dissertation on religion and morality” precisely because she insists that her readers must not see religion as “existing separately” (M&E 25) from worldly institutions but as intertwined with those institutions and of every individual’s actions. Because Sedgwick shares with Channing and Unitarianism the belief that religion does not exist parceled off in its own institutions, Sedgwick confronts the intricacies of improvement based upon imperfect worldly institutions. Sedgwick even encourages her readers to view Sedgwick herself as “but one witness” (M&E 249) among many. Her readers must not “take for

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\(^{15}\) Homestead offers a more literal account of the meaning of improving property for Sedgwick in terms of the legal problems of copyright, American Women Authors, 63-104, and on Locke in particular, 84.
granted, believing, with ignorant credulity” (M&E 249) any single author. Whereas imitation would rely on a single authority of a single institution, improvement of their God-given plot of moral faculties requires her readers to weigh the many sources and exemplars they find among different institutions. In this respect, we can see how Sedgwick finds the benefits of disestablishment not in terms of purifying specifically religious institutions but in terms of creating conditions better suited to genuine improvement.

Sedgwick was not, however, the kind of author that started her career with a set theory to promulgate. Her career follows a general trajectory that, from her first novel in 1822 to Means and Ends in 1839 to her last novel in 1857, moves toward a more robust definition of improvement. Along this trajectory, Sedgwick tinkered with what religion meant and how her fiction could best articulate her vision of religion. In doing so, Sedgwick adjusted the precise balance between improvement and imitation as she went from novel to novel while also developing a sense of her own vocation as an author. In discussing so much of Sedgwick’s writing in a limited space, I will necessarily be brief with any single example. But, I want to suggest that, by looking at how Sedgwick returns consistently to familiar plots of inherited property and inherited traits in one’s character, we can see how and why she chooses increasingly to emphasize improvement as the process that best brings together individuals, institutions, and religion.

Inheritance and Imitation in Family and Nation

Written before the most heated debates between the orthodox and Unitarians about disestablishment, Sedgwick’s first novel assumes relatively stable institutions. For this reason, A

16 Improvement as it tries to take advantage of imitation while skirting its dangers recalls “spirits of emulation” that William Hunting Howell describes in the educational philosophy of the early republic that tried to individuate its pupils while still asking them to imitate model exemplars, Against Self-Reliance, esp. 119.
*New-England Tale* (1822) deals very little with improvement. The novel instead tracks a protagonist who imitates a divine example but shows little concern with the intricacies of institutional conflict. Jane, the novel’s heroine, succeeds because of her remarkable self-command in contrast to her tempestuous, ostensibly Calvinist relatives. This feature of Jane’s character results from the “law of imitation” through which Jane “had insensibly fallen into her mother’s ways” (*NET* 23). Jane first imitates the best of her mother, learning “more by the example than the precepts” (*NET* 23). Jane is then tested. She loses her parents, watches their property being sold away, and then survives her pharisaical aunt and a false lover. Through it all, Jane maintains those imitated traits. In her marriage, Jane finds a suitably religious and disinterested man, who, like Jane, “made it a rule to immitate [sic] the Parent of the universe” (*NET* 120). Forming a moral character, as this plot describes it, relies centrally on an imitation that graduates from a familial to a divine model. Jane’s character figures this two-step movement from imitating her mother’s example to directly imitating God’s example alongside her husband. As imitative beings, Jane and her husband are moral characters only insofar as they translucently imitate Christ’s example of disinterestedness, the quality that Sedgwick praises throughout the novel.

Sedgwick solidifies the definition of imitation in the novel’s inheritance plot, which instantiates the moral of Jane’s religious imitation through her familial property. Jane’s father’s bankruptcy kills her father and then her mother. A crestfallen Jane sees her father’s many debtors take her house and belongings. But, when Jane survives this trial and marries her Quaker benefactor, she moves back into her old house where her husband has managed to “leave the furniture in a little room … precisely as she left it” (*NET* 43). The arc of Jane’s inheritance returns her to her original environment and, therefore, connects the beginning and the ending of the formation of her character. Imitation and inheritance, in this early novel, are parallel processes that bind together individual character with the family. In the straightforward world of this first novel, we imitate our
familial models as we imitate God above them in order to inherit the religious character and principles we are made to inhabit. Family, here, is simply the institution through which religion passes from God to the individual. As her subsequent novels suggest, even Sedgwick soon realized that this idea of imitative character was too naïve.

As disestablishment realigned New England’s institutions, Sedgwick depicted increasingly complicated relationships between individuals, family, and religion. Sedgwick begins this process in her next novel, *Redwood* (1824), by representing a society where the institutions of religion and nation form two axes upon which she can position her characters. In this more elaborate system, Sedgwick nuances the relationship between imitation and improvement and, in so doing, makes her inheritance plots more complex. Ellen Bruce, *Redwood*’s heroine, is noteworthy because she improves upon the example of the conflicting institutions of family and nation. Left without her parents at a young age, Ellen splits time between two adopted families that instantiate conflicting sets of institutions. On one side, the Allens trace their family to a Puritan and revolutionary heritage and, on the other, the Harrisons trace their family to an Episcopalian and Tory heritage. In effect, this arrangement of shifting back and forth between two contrasting families creates a “system of checks and balances” (R 131) for Ellen’s character. Being exposed to different families who value different institutions at a young age, Ellen can improve herself by imitating the moral qualities of each family without absorbing the weaknesses of either one. Although Mr. Harrison’s love for the “established church” means he thinks that “puritanism was the mother of rebellion” and Mr. Allen, for his part, thinks the Episcopalian liturgy carries “no more religion than the Pope” (R 133), Ellen herself emerges with “the spirit of blessed religion, without bigotry” (R 133). Through these conflicting influences, Ellen grows into a character that is the “singular and felicitous union of diversity of qualities” (R 131). Ellen, in other words, benefits from the conflict between British and American manners, Episcopalian and Puritan rituals, by—if not improving her character in the way Sedgwick
articulates in *Means and Ends*—at least choosing what to imitate from the exemplars of diverse institutions.

In this early example of how individual character derives from institutions, Sedgwick encloses Ellen’s form of improvement within the imitative structure of the family. As in *A New-England Tale*, Sedgwick’s inheritance plot conveys this structure. Where in her first novel Sedgwick uses the husband to bring the heroine her rightful inheritance, in *Redwood* Sedgwick presents two parallel inheritances for the hero and the heroine. Ellen inherits a box of items that will reveal her parentage; faithfully, Ellen holds fast to her mother’s mandate that it remain closed until Ellen comes of age. Through this emblem and the duty it demands from her, Ellen can feel her mother’s “influence in every event of [her] life” (R 181). Similarly, Charles Westall—the novel’s hero and Ellen’s eventual husband—retains an intimacy with the father he lost when he was four because his mother gave to him “his father’s private papers” (R 164). In this set of inherited documents, Westall’s father exists as “a kind of external conscience to” him; indeed, the narrator boasts that “Few living parents exert such an influence over the character of a child” (R 165). Divorced from their bodies, these parents distill their inheritance to only the essential principles they wish their children to imitate. Through her sealed box, Ellen imitates her mother’s rejection of material wealth and the filial obedience that connects child, mother, and God. Through his father’s papers, Westall imitates the “virtuous efforts and sacrifices” (R 164), into which his father hoped Westall would grow.

Through this representation of inheritance in *Redwood*, Sedgwick tries to preserve the stability of traditional institutions while accounting for how the debates about disestablishment were rearranging New England’s institutions. In *Redwood*, this stability comes from a more thoughtful kind of imitation than appears in *A New-England Tale*. Given Westall’s relationship to these papers and his life as a lawyer, Westall exemplifies the active and rational role that Unitarianism encourages each
individual to have when imitating the example of God as a spiritual father. To this rational interpretation of a divine record, Ellen adds an imitation based on interpreting what is left unsaid. To respect this sealed box, Ellen must both imitate an obedience that arises from faith in God’s benevolence and also carry that self-command with her into other areas of her life. In both these cases, Sedgwick shows how imitation requires thought—be it interpretation or the application of a single lesson in separate contexts. At the same time, Sedgwick preserves the family as a relatively stable institution to help direct this imitation through these characters’ inheritances. By reducing actual parents into emblems, Sedgwick distinguishes for her protagonists the aspects of each parent that are fit for imitation and the features which both parents hoped not to pass on to their child. In turn, the romance of the novel brings Ellen into close contact for the first half of the novel with the man who she later learns is actually her father. In marrying Westall and meeting the requirements to open her mother’s sealed box, Ellen simultaneously learns the true history of her parents and has already proven her worth to her father without either of them knowing it beforehand. In this sense, the improvement that the novel praises in Ellen has the benefit of an idealized mother whose emblem crystallizes the moral qualities most fit for imitation and also the reward of a reunion with her father by the end. Ellen’s improvement, therefore, has the added benefit of bolstering the institutions that the previous generation had damaged.

Only a year after Redwood, Sedgwick published her first piece of fiction that depicts a serious conflict between institutions without a clear, guiding structure surrounding it. In “The Catholic Iroquois”—first published in the *Atlantic Souvenir* in 1825 and reprinted in *Tales and Sketches* in 1835—Sedgwick imagines a scenario in which an individual’s family does not actually know or even support what is best for her religious improvement. This clash of institutions—in this case family, nation, and church—requires that imitation and improvement work against each other. In the story’s embedded narrative, the narrator paraphrases a French Catholic missionary’s account of converting
two Iroquois women to Catholicism. These two Iroquois girls arrive at the mission after being
captured by a chief of the Utawa—Sedgwick’s spelling of Odawa or Ottawa—that gives them to the
missionary to insult his Iroquois rival. Although we never learn their Iroquois names, the missionary
baptizes them Françoise and Rosalie. Rosalie quickly becomes a “natural devotee” (TS 54) among
the Catholics, undertaking a series of “voluntary mortifications” (TS 54). Rosalie faithfully “pay[s]
homage to a single object” (TS 54), totaling abandoning her Iroquois roots in favor of Catholicism.
In contrast, Françoise gets the spirit of Catholicism but not the form: she merges French Catholic
and Iroquois culture, for instance, by singing “wild native songs” (TS 54) as Catholic devotions.
Françoise draws from these two contrasting religious institutions to form a more heterodox
sensibility. In the process, Françoise improves her own character by taking what Sedgwick implies
are the best qualities of both the Iroquois and the French Catholics.

Sedgwick demonstrates Françoise’s religious improvement when her parents return to
recapture her and her sister. With Rosalie a nun and Françoise married to a French soldier, their
parents try to forcibly return them to their home by attacking and massacring the settlement. When
Françoise refuses to renounce her Catholicism even upon being taken back to their home, her father
condemns her to the “funeral pyre” (TS 65). Impressed by Françoise’s resolve, the father
momentarily rejoices that “the pure blood of the Iroquois runs in her veins” (TS 65). By interpreting
the threat of fire as burning away the French Catholic influence, her father connects himself to
Françoise more through nation (as an Iroquois) than he does through kinship or religion—her
father does not refer either to his blood as father or to an explicitly religious inspiration. Undaunted
Françoise credits not nation or family but “the example of my Saviour” (TS 66) for her resolve.
Françoise’s enraged father removes the crucifix from Françoise’s hands and carves on her chest “the
form of a cross” (TS 66), which Françoise herself rejoices will last for eternity. By highlighting two
possible sources for this “victorious constancy” (TS 66), Sedgwick shows how Françoise’s courage
can make her look simultaneously like a conventional martyr and also like a stereotypically stoic Native American. As such, the funeral pyre decouples Françoise’s remarkable improvement of nation and church. In this conflict, Sedgwick acknowledges that national politics are unavoidable; but she also subordinates national politics to an ecumenical, but still liberal, Protestantism. The imitation of Christ underlies the formation of Françoise’s character; but, in this story of “The Catholic Iroquois” who as an “IROQUOIS MARTYR perished” (*TS* 66), Sedgwick prioritizes a narrative of how improvement must adapt nation and family to religious principles.¹⁷

Sedgwick is aware in this story that it is strange to be making a point about Protestant piety and its relation to institutions through the story of a Roman Catholic martyr. From the very beginning, the story’s frame-tale details the effort that must go into reading and interpreting a narrative of Roman Catholic martyrdom. In this frame, the American narrator only encounters the document that contains the narrative because, in travelling from Niagara to Montreal, he is forced to stay with a local French Canadian family after a mix of Scottish and Irish emigrants and British tourists overrun all the local inns. The narrator listens as the landlord explains why, despite being illiterate, he owns such a mysterious document. His grandfather received it around the year 1700 from a friend, who himself copied it from an original which he had found in a First Nation’s shrine near Lake Huron. The document, we learn, is the narrative originally written by the French Catholic missionary who had adopted Françoise and Rosalie. In the 1835 publication of the story in *Tales and Sketches*, Sedgwick makes the connection between herself and these characters explicit by adding a

¹⁷ This double captivity narrative, if you will, differs from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century captivity narratives. In a colonial context that combined church and state, captivity narratives functioned in various authors as political and religious propaganda, advocating for theocrats, for patriarchal authority, or for the relocation of power in the home. Key here is that, rather than a binary that opposes two theo-political entities against one another, we have a triangle between two such theo-political groups (the Iroquois and the French Catholics) and a third, in which religion and the state are not identical. On the captivity narrative, see Armstrong, “Why Daughters;” Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 41-86; Kathryn Derounian; Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 87-111; Teresa Toulouse. In turn, the kind of improvement that Sedgwick describes differs from the forms of exchange that Nan Goodman describes in “Money Answers.”
footnote on the final page that sources her material to Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix’s *History and General Description of New France* (1744).¹⁸ Through this chain of mediation, Sedgwick encourages her readers to evaluate this narrative and these sources for themselves. In the story, Sedgwick takes advantage of the breakdown of barriers between institutions, be they Catholic or Iroquois, national or familial, in order to define religion as a method of improving the individual upon a divine example. In the story of the story’s sources, Sedgwick calls attention to how improvement can draw upon the useful aspects of Catholic sources without necessarily absorbing their faults as well.

“The Catholic Iroquois” is more radical and less widely read than a similar account in *Hope Leslie* (1827). In her novel, Sedgwick represents more of an exchange between Puritans and Pequots when a Pequot daughter grows up with a Puritan family in the Connecticut River Valley. Instead of martyring herself for Roman Catholicism, this character sacrifices an arm to save her adopted brother from her father’s vengeance. Like Françoise’s father, this character’s father is “thrilled by the courage of the heroic girl” (*HL* 63) in resisting her father’s massacre of the village. Despite rejecting her father’s violence, she cannot settle into the Puritan community at the novel’s end because, as she tells her Puritan siblings, “the law of vengeance is written on our hearts” (*HL* 330). The titular heroine, in contrast, can take her family’s “variant religious sentiments” and, like Ellen in *Redwood*, improve upon each model to become “superior to some of the prejudices of the age” (*HL* 123). Her improvement shows for us that her religion “was pure and disinterested,” lacking any evidence of the flaws of the “sectarian faith” around her (*HL* 123). In the difference between these two

¹⁸ I give the English name although Sedgwick would have read the original in French. Keeping Françoise’s name from Charlevoix, Sedgwick makes only relatively minor changes. She gives Françoise a sister, whose life she models on Kateri Tekakwitha in Charlevoix; she generalizes to an Iroquois nation instead of specifying the Onondaga tribe; she has Françoise’s father (rather than her brother) condemn her to death; and she omits some of the more gruesome details of Françoise’s torture, such as the plucking of Françoise’s finger nails. Most notably, though, Sedgwick makes the less famous Catholic martyr the focus of her story rather than more widely recognized Tekakwitha. On Tekakwitha, see Christopher Vecsey. For a full account of Sedgwick’s alterations, see Joan Varnum Ferretti.
characters, Sedgwick seems to admit at least one limit to improvement. The heroine can combine establishmentarianism with dissent; but, given the violence that separates Pequot and Puritan, her adopted sister cannot sustainably improve herself by drawing from such different institutions. Sedgwick’s understanding of religion, that is, is not so capacious that it can incorporate such violent racial, national, and familial conflicts without breaking down.19

Already in *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick has moved considerably closer to the theory of improvement she articulates in *Means and Ends*. This trend toward a theory of improvement and away from a rhetoric of imitation only accelerates in the 1830s as disestablishment finally succeeds in Massachusetts. Sedgwick’s motivation at this point in her career seems to come from the dangers she sees in the influence of fashion as a set of principles gaining in popularity as the longest-standing, New England religious institution falls apart. In the aftermath of disestablishment, Sedgwick fears that the institutionalization of fashion—especially French fashion—as a set of rules and principles threatens to replace the rules and principles of religion. For Sedgwick, the artificial hierarchies of fashion—not just in dress but also in all forms of social interaction—lure people into an unhealthy form of imitation. Insofar as religion promotes institutions that foster improvement, fashion threatens to corrupt institutions by orienting them around the belief that individuals can judge others based upon their appearance. Even worse, in Sedgwick’s analysis, the circulation of colored plates of French designs, the popularity of foreign etiquette, and the general faddishness of fashion all inculcate the belief that individuals can form their character by imitating those

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19 *Hope Leslie* is by far the most discussed of Sedgwick’s novels. On the dynamics of gift and exchange that run throughout the novel, see Shirley Samuels, “Women, Blood, and Contract.” Much of this criticism investigates how Sedgwick draws the lines that demarcate different communities—be they of family, friendship, nation, and race. On friendship, see Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined*, 159-179; Ivy Schweitzer, 165-205. On family, see (although more about *A New-England Tale*) Elizabeth Barnes, *States*, esp. 81-85; Erica Burleigh, “Sisters in Arms;” Judith Fetterley; Karen Weierman. On race, see Jeffrey Insko, esp. 197-200; Dana Nelson, “Sympathy.” In particular, Ezra Tawil uses scenes from *Hope Leslie* to illustrate the basic meaning of “racial sentiment,” which he argues defines the meaning of race in the antebellum US, esp. 1-2, 114-128.
fashionable appearances rather than by cultivating religious principles through improvement. With this danger in mind, Sedgwick adjusts the structure of her novels to distinguish religion from fashion as clearly as possible while also explicitly imagining the institutions that religion can rely upon in the wake of the religious establishment.

Sedgwick makes her most decisive break from her early novels’ hybrid of imitation and improvement in *Clarence* (1830). Set in and around New York City, *Clarence* follows Gertrude Clarence’s family’s inheritance suit and, in more detail, Gertrude's navigation of fashionable life. Having grown up in the country with her father, Gertrude comes to New York City where she stays with a friend of the family, who contrasts sharply with Gertrude as a woman rich in fashion but poor in religion. Among other temptations, this hostess invites Gertrude to a masquerade ball. Gertrude reluctantly attends but only to help, without her hostess’ knowledge, the hostess’ daughter escape the marriage her parents have arranged with an (ostensibly) Spanish rake to cover their debts. With Gertrude’s help, the hero convinces the tailor who is making the rake’s costume to make two copies, one for the rake and one for the hero. Imitating exactly the rake’s appearance, the hero arrives early and lets his costume talk for him; after all, as Gertrude’s socialite hostess remarks when she sees this costume, “this is certainly [the rake]. Observe—no one else would have so well arranged a Spanish costume” (*C* 2:229). This woman, Sedgwick’s pinnacle of the fashionable world, believes in the truth of costumes; through this belief, Sedgwick lets fashion’s logic of imitation undermine itself.

20 Karen Halttunen traces the conflict between sentimental culture and the culture of fashion, in which, ironically, the sentimental “suspicion of the power of fashion, ultimately encouraged a middle-class acceptance of fashion,” 90. Lizzy Brekke locates the roots of this distrust of fashion in the early national period where writers critiqued “fashion in the same way they thought of ‘arbitrary power,’” 120. Taking a different view on fashion, Sandra Tomc argues instead that the use of foreign fashion in the US actually “developed fakery as a principle of national potency and global ascendance,” 100. On the specific manipulation of French magazines in US venues such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Peterson’s Magazine*, see Karin Bohleke.  
In linking imitation with the dangers of fashion, Sedgwick leaves behind the more positive forms of imitation that appear in *Redwood* and *A New-England Tale*. Sedgwick makes this break explicit by rejecting the exact metaphor which, in *Redwood*, describes a child’s imitation of a parent’s religious example. Earlier in the novel, when the hostess first invites Gertrude to the masquerade, she asks, in considering the invitation, if Gertrude worries what her father will say. Gertrude responds that her father “has no wish to be an external conscience” (*C* 2:119). Unlike the hero of *Redwood*, who acts with the help of the “external conscience” he finds in his father’s papers, Gertrude has learned “certain principles” from her father but she exercises “perfect liberty in their application” (*C* 2:119). In this rhetorical reversal, Sedgwick channels our attention away from imitation within the family and toward the improvement that comes from the active interpretation of religious principles. In doing so, she draws a firmer rhetorical boundary between, on the one hand, fashion and imitation and, on the other, religion and improvement.

This is not to say that Sedgwick abandons the act of imitation altogether. Although she no longer speaks of the “law of imitation” as it appears in *A New-England Tale*, Sedgwick still represents the many “indirect influences” that shape Gertrude’s earlier character. These imitations by another name, in fact, teach Gertrude more forcefully than either “direct instruction” or the “careful inculcation of wise precepts” (*C* 1:147). But, by downplaying imitation in the formation of her heroine’s character, Sedgwick defines the relationship that religion cultivates between the individual and the institutions around her in terms of improvement. In doing so, Sedgwick differentiates between imitation in a strictly religious context and the many less salutary forms of imitation that exist in the aftermath of disestablishment.

In pushing the rhetoric of imitation aside in favor of improvement, Sedgwick alters the shape of her inheritance plot for *Clarence*. Whereas Sedgwick’s first two novels circuitously restore the heroine’s lost inheritance, *Clarence* begins where these novels end. In the first chapters, the
heroine’s father discovers his own father on his deathbed in disguise and obtains the promise of his lost inheritance. But, rather than following an eventually happy plot of regained inheritance over two full volumes, Sedgwick instead focuses only part of one volume on the negative consequences of inheritance. Overly engrossed by an English cousin’s suit for the inheritance, Gertrude’s father and mother ignore their son, who steps on a nail and dies from untreated tetanus. Thereafter, the wife soon dies and Gertrude and her father move to the country. In the country, Clarence hopes that Gertrude will benefit from the “education of circumstances” that are not corrupted, as they would be in the city, by “a society where wealth was made the basis of aristocracy and fashion” (C 1:147).22

By abandoning the return of a family’s property as a physical symbol of the imitation of religious principles within a family, Sedgwick establishes the basis of character in the improvement of what each individual finds in the institutions that surround them. These institutions include but are not limited to the family; in turn, Sedgwick pushes her readers to think not just about their own improvement but also about what institutions are available to them when they choose to live, for instance, in New York City and not in the country, where fashion commands less influence.

In confronting the dangers of fashion in her later novels, Sedgwick begins to spend less time on the intergenerational dynamics of the family and more on marriage as a crucial institution for religious improvement. The “purity of the institution of marriage” (LW 360), as Sedgwick explains to her readers at the end of The Linwoods, rests at the foundation of society. The success of her novel, Sedgwick explains, depends upon her ability to lead readers away from the errors that arise from “the growing imitation of the artificial and vicious society of Europe” (LW 360). Because marriage

22 For Sedgwick, country life effects this environment because, the country town, unlike a stratified city, blends seamlessly the town’s “six distinct ranks … like the colors of the rainbow,” C Vol 2: 197. Sedgwick expands on this “essential advantage in education,” Power 77, in her own unpublished autobiography dated 5 May 1853: “Besides all the teaching and inspiration of Nature, and the development of the faculties (in our country life) from the necessity of using them for daily exigencies, one is brought into close social relations with all conditions of people,” Power 77. On Sedgwick’s experience in New York and its influence on her fiction, see Charlene Avallone, “Catharine Sedgwick.”
can only overcome these “licentious doctrines” when individuals enter it thoughtfully, Sedgwick encourages her readers to avoid the lure of ignorant heirs and instead “imitate our heroine in trusting to the honourable resources of virtue and talent” (LW 360). Of course, Sedgwick herself never married and rarely second-guessed that choice; but in these later novels, she looks upon marriage as an institution that helps people continue to improve themselves, but only if they properly understand what marriage should mean. Insofar as family and nation gave Sedgwick institutions through which she could animate how improvement can sustain religion over time, marriage gives Sedgwick an institution that illustrates a conflict between the principles of religion and fashion at the foundation of society.

*The Linwoods* begins and then subverts a plot of marital seduction in order to represent marriage as a means of religious improvement rather than a fashionable achievement. Rather than having a single heroine unite diverse institutions, Sedgwick tells a story of two families with children who are friends: the Linwoods—who retain close ties to England, live in New York, and almost disown their son for trying to fight against the Loyalists—and the Lees—who descend from colonial Puritans, live in New England, and fight for the Revolution. The interesting part of the novel is not that the children of these two families improve themselves by combining aspects of each family, but how those children come to do so.

The crucial trajectory of the plot shows the heroine—Isabella Linwood—leaving behind her initial unthinking Loyalism and fatalistic understanding of love. For much of the novel, “the word of doom,” which would unite the heroine with the rake, “hovered on Isabella’s lips” (LW 192). As a young woman, Isabella struggles to think her way out of her connection to the villain. To move past the rake and be prepared to marry a worthy man, Isabella must escape the “thraldom” of her childhood opinions and affections—clouded as they were by the fashions of New York City—to

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23 On Sedgwick’s thoughts about her own unmarried life, see *Power*, 28-29, 38-39.
become instead “mistress of myself” (L 302). She learns that, even though she fell in love with the rakish villain as a young girl, she is not ruined as she might be in the world that fashion leads us to expect. In fact, by recognizing the villain’s flaws, Isabella can even improve her understanding of what love means. Forsaking her fashionable companions, Isabella dedicates herself to her sick friend, using the same qualities that flourished in fashionable company instead with “a moral aim … religious sense of duty” (L 317). Through Isabella, Sedgwick rejects the plots of both the fallen woman and the woman whose ultimate success is in marriage. Instead Sedgwick’s heroine improves herself and, therefore, her marriage comes not as the sign of success but as an institution that fosters improvement. Marriage redefined in this way recalls Henry Ware Jr.’s description of the Lord’s Supper which, in operating as its own religious institution, offers a “means and incitement of greater improvement” (Ware, *Works* 4:368).

Sedgwick returns to this argument about marriage in her final novel, *Married or Single?* (1857), published twenty-two years after *The Linwoods*. With the stated goal of trying to “drive away” the scorn attached to “the name of ‘old maid’” (*MS* 1: vii-viii), the novel provides a litany of case studies of the failed and successful marriages that surround two sisters as they grow up in New York with their fashionable step-mother. Although the marriage of one of these sisters stands as an example of a pure marriage, the novel includes many more unfortunate marriages—people who married impulsively after a rejection, who married out of fear of being single, who married for money, who married for praise. Defending the “old maid,” therefore, is as much about advocating for marriages founded upon religious principles as it is about advocating for women’s ability to improve themselves on their own. As the heroine’s sister explains to her husband, we must honor the “institutions of Providence” that form the foundation of society and not abandon them to “a market for money-changers … polluted by compromise-marriages” (*MS* 2:81). The purity of this institution, according to Sedgwick and her characters, depends upon the belief that a single woman can “prepare
her soul for its eternal destiny without marriage” (MS 2:82). Convincing her audience to accept this meaning of marriage drives the plot of the novel. The heroine, Grace Herbert, makes this pivotal transition when she abandons the marriage that would have guaranteed a “life of elegant ease and most lady-like indulgence” and fulfilled her reputation as “the most envied young woman in all our ‘Vanity Fair’” (MS 2:172). Leaving behind fashion’s praises, Grace can only model the choice to marry for Sedgwick’s readers once she has accepted the “blessed benevolence patent to a single woman” (MS 2:196); once this option appears to be as viable and as improving as marriage itself, Grace can actually choose to be either married or single.24 That choice depends on how best Grace thinks she can fulfill her religious duty.

Insofar as Sedgwick shows how marriage must depend upon religion, she compares that purified version of marriage with the damage that fashion has done to it. Where Grace illustrates marriage redoubled by religion, Grace’s step-sister and step-mother show marriage corrupted by fashion. Throughout the novel, the step-mother and her daughter maneuver through fashionable circles to secure the most profitable marriage with little attention to either love or religion. When Grace’s step-mother speaks to her daughter about Grace’s sister’s marriage, Sedgwick makes explicit the conflict between religion and fashion in the institution of marriage. The step-mother laments that Grace’s brother-in-law creates needless difficulty for his family by resigning his Episcopalian rectorship over disagreements with “the strict creed of the Church” (MS 1:248). For the step-mother, “All life is compromise” (MS 1:249), be it of marital desires or religious principles. As the step-mother continues, Sedgwick barely disguises the irony in this character’s belief that the advantage of the codified creed and prayers of “our Church” is that “the clergyman is quite relieved from responsibility” (MS 1:249). In Sedgwick’s account, only by abandoning religion in favor of fashion can the step-mother be able to help her daughter pursue a marriage with the “first prize in

24 On the importance of Grace’s marriage being a choice, see Maglina Lubovich, “Married or Single?” 37.
the matrimonial lottery of fashionable life” (MS 1:54) regardless of his morality. Through both negative and positive examples, therefore, *Married or Single?* tries to convince Sedgwick’s readers to see marriage less as a matter of property and reputation and more as a means of religious improvement.

Of central concern to Sedgwick’s plots from *A New-England Tale* through *Married or Single?* is how religious principles travel from one generation to the next or persist through one’s life without losing a basis in the religious principles of improvement. In confronting this problem, Sedgwick explores the conflict and overlap between institutions such as family and nation and between the principles of religion and fashion that she imagines drives those institutions. But, even as Sedgwick imagines how individuals must build and interact with institutions to secure society’s religious foundation, she also works through her own position in the literary marketplace, an institution that rarely features in her novels. Parallel to the balance between imitation and improvement and to the conflict between religion and fashion, that is, runs the question of how literature can communicate a vision of a religiously sound society without succumbing to the demands of popular taste.

**The Institution of Literature**

Catharine Sedgwick belonged to a generation just before the canon of American literature. For Sedgwick and her peers—including James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant (a bit younger), and Washington Irving (a bit older)—writing imaginative literature was, in New England especially, only slowly becoming an acceptable occupation. To whatever degree we ascribe this change to Arminian influences among many denominations, to a growing population more able to
support a literary market, or to Unitarianism itself, Sedgwick lived and wrote through this change. During the thirty-six years she published fiction, Sedgwick experimented with different representations of authorship and vacillated about what it meant to be an author. Still, even as she had religious aims throughout her career, Sedgwick recognized a difference between her work as a novelist and the work of ministers and tract writers. She admits in the preface to *Married or Single?* that the novel might not seem “the legitimate vehicle of strictly religious teaching” (MS 1:vi); but, at the same time, as a member of “that guild” of novelists she implies that she can permeate the secular world with “the spirit of the altar and the temple” (MS 1:vi) without polluting religion with all that exists in that secular realm. To get to this definition of her vocation, Sedgwick tried to align the demands of readers and reviewers against her own religious, commercial, and artistic aims.

Sedgwick dramatizes her fears about literature as an institution most memorably in an early story for a literary annual. “Cacoethes Scribendi”—published in the *Atlantic Souvenir* (1829) and again in *Tales and Sketches*—satirizes literary faddishness as a form of thoughtless imitation. The story imagines a quiet New England village where four sisters, inspired by the newest literary annuals, decide to become authors: one literary, one botanical, one pedagogical, and one religious. The literary author, Mrs. Courland, adds interest to the stories of her isolated village by imitating famous writers: “A tall wrinkled bony old woman, who reminded her of Meg Merrilies, sat for a witch; the school master for an Ichabod Crane” (TS 174). Most troubling for Alice Courland, however, is her aunt’s religious column, “Solemn Hours,” which, Alice feels, prints “Every aspiration of piety” (TS’

25 For the canonical account of the aestheticization of American religious thought, see Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*. On the early US literary marketplace, see Buell, *New England*, 56-83; William Charvat, 5-28; Lara Cohen, esp. 6; Leon Jackson, 1-52; Meredith McGill, 45-108; William Rowland, 17-38. In “The Literary Significance of Unitarianism,” Buell notes that Unitarianism’s aesthetic legacy is in part a function of its own late-nineteenth-century chroniclers.

26 Of course, Ichabod Crane is Washington Irving’s satirical hero. Meg Merrilies is a character from Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannering* (1815) (and in turn John Keats’ “Old Meg” [1818]), whom Scott models on an eighteenth-century gypsy, Jean Gordon. Even though Merrilies was a widely referenced character, Sedgwick perhaps slips into her story a joke about her Debby from *Redwood*, for whom the *Port-Folio* (Jul-Dec 1824) finds a prototype in this same Meg Merrilies.
that Alice had ever expressed. Representing Alice’s dismay about seeming to say her otherwise private “prayers in the market place” (TS 175), Sedgwick imagines a praiseworthy individual caricatured into a saint. In her aunt’s column, Alice becomes an imitable example that confuses her own imperfect character for the divine. Turned into an imitable, religious exemplar, Alice goes from being an “artless, frank, and … social creature” to a lifeless “statue” (TS 176). As Sedgwick suggests here, an individual—with one exception in Christ—cannot both live in the world and also be a religious example for all to imitate. A form of writing that creates such characters, according to Sedgwick, not only injures its subject but also cultivates in its readers a flawed understanding of how to triangulate between themselves, literature, and religion.

Even as Sedgwick defends Alice against imitation, she mocks what is familiar in this heroine. Alice is a hyperbolic version of selflessness, not dissimilar from Sedgwick’s heroine in A New-England Tale: “no girl of seventeen was ever more disinterested, unassuming, unostentatious, and unspoiled” (TS 170). By describing her exclusively by what she is not, Sedgwick satirizes a heroine who has not improved herself in any individuating way. Alice’s most individual action, in fact, is an “ebullition of temper” (TS 180): she burns her school composition after her mother publishes it without her knowledge.27 Astonished at the vehemence of the heroine’s reaction, her mother consents to Alice’s marriage and “relinquished … the hope of ever seeing her as AUTHOR” (TS 181). In this ironic conclusion, Sedgwick self-consciously produces a false binary. As Sedgwick herself demonstrates in writing the story, the choice is not just between being an imitative author, who finds Irving and Scott in every village, and a happily married heroine, who is admirable but featureless. Especially given that Sedgwick published this story only a year before Clarence, we can see here an

27 By being most visible when she violently rejects her visibility, Alice defends the “Sentimental politics” that Lauren Berlant argues “become public on behalf of privacy” and, therefore, “works on behalf of its own eradication,” Female Complaint, 22. But Alice’s politics here are not the same as Sedgwick’s. For an analysis of this story in terms of sentimentalism, class, and gender, see María Carla Sánchez.
extension of the logic of religious improvement to the process of authorship. Only by being an
author of her own character, Sedgwick suggests, would Alice have been able to develop a uniqueness
that could guard her against those who would try to make her a flawless religious authority. In turn,
only by improving the examples she finds in Scott and Irving could Alice’s mother have written
stories that both educate and entertain her readers.

This story, I am suggesting, contains in miniature the forces that Sedgwick had been
negotiating for the first decade of her career. Amid a complex discourse that pitted original against
imitative literature, Sedgwick openly invokes her transatlantic literary models in the hopes of
establishing US literature on a solid foundation.28 In Redwood, Clarence, and The Linwoods not only do
characters mention Maria Edgeworth favorably but Sedgwick also carefully builds upon the plots
and characters Edgeworth had imagined in The Absentee (1812), Belinda (1801), and Castle Rackrent
(1800).29 As a moral novelist, Edgeworth provides Sedgwick with a reference point that signals
Sedgwick’s religious priorities as well as a stock of material upon which Sedgwick can improve. Nor
is Edgeworth alone in this respect. Sedgwick heavily involves Milton and Walter Scott (“Marmion”
in Hope Leslie; Comus and Waverley in The Linwoods) not to mention the host of US and foreign writers
that appear in her many epigraphs, inset quotations, and dedications.30 To be sure, the improvement

28 On how the shifting discourse of imitation and originality in the 1810s and 1820s affected two of
Sedgwick’s contemporaries, see David J. Carlson on John Neal; William J. Free on Bryant. The
popularity of British Romanticism in the US and Britain simultaneously privileged “originality” and
also made imitation take on new guises to stay relevant. See David Duff, 95-118; Peter Murphy, 136-
181. On the history of originality and imitation in the eighteenth century, see Jonathan Lamb;
Elizabeth L. Mann; Tilar J. Mazzeo; Patricia Phillips; Richard Terry.
29 Jenifer Lynn Bobo Elmore’s dissertation is to date the most thorough examination of Sedgwick’s
myriad uses of Edgeworth. On Redwood as translating The Absentee for the purpose of moral
education and “literary nation formation,” see Juliet Shields, “Pedagogy in the Post Colony” esp.
493. See also, Elmore, 80. On Clarence and Belinda, see Elmore, 24-25; Melissa Homestead’s
introduction to Clarence, esp. 13-23. On The Linwoods and Castle Rackrent, see Robert Daly, “Reading
Sedgwick Now.”
30 On Sedgwick’s use of Scott in Hope Leslie with special focus on the triangulation of Pocahontas,
Rebecca, and Magawisca, see Alide Cagidemetrio; Gary Dyer. For Sedgwick’s use of “Marmion,” see
Claire A. Simmons. For Sedgwick’s use of Comus, see Jeffrey Steele. On her use of quotations as
that Sedgwick makes upon these writers is not necessarily aesthetic; nor does it always work in precisely the way she and other Unitarians describe religious improvement. Even so, Sedgwick is taking from other institutions including—but not limited to—the national literatures of France and Britain to make her own fiction better suited for its religious purposes. This kind of improvement suggests how Sedgwick imagines that her characters, readers, and she herself must all answer to the same religious duty.

To understand what improvement means for Sedgwick as an author, we can look at how Sedgwick manages her sources within Redwood in relation to reviews of her work. Critics responded favorably to A New-England Tale and, in their praise, pushed Sedgwick to embrace her position as an American writer. The first British review of A New England Tale, in the Lady’s Monthly Museum (Jan 1823), smiled upon the parts of the novel that “describe the manners of her native land” but frowned upon the “not very successful” parts that “imitated some of our most celebrated novelists” (42). A “regular reader of periodical reviews” (Machor 205), Sedgwick seems subtly to acknowledge these criticisms of her own aesthetic imitation when Redwood condemns various forms of thoughtless imitation within the heroine’s biological family. In her first detailed account of the “polished” (R 31) appearance of the traveler who turns out to be the heroine’s father, Sedgwick illuminates him with an unattributed quotation of Walter Scott’s “The Lord of the Isles” (1815): “His high forehead, from which the hair had receded, the hair itself,” and here Sedgwick indents a couplet from Scott, “Jet black save where some touch of gray / Had ta’en the youthful hue away” (R 30-31). The context of the quotation, which describes Scott’s own traveling hero in disguise, is crucial here. In Scott’s poem, the hero is being described by a nun (who does not recognize him) to his sister (who does recognize him). Sedgwick’s character, who at this point seems to be the titular hero, parallels...

“cosmopolitan,” see Philip Gould, “Catharine Sedgwick’s Cosmopolitan Nation.” At the end of Married or Single?, one character laments to the heroine that the heroine will not after all “make a partie carrée with that glorious trio of Scott’s heroines, Rebecca, Minna, and Flora Mac Ivor,” MS 2:269.
Scott’s character in a number of ways, none of them flattering. In referencing Scott, Sedgwick seems to acknowledge the poverty of any imitation that is as easy as a quotation. Sedgwick wants her readers to see that for them, no less than for Sedgwick or Sedgwick’s heroine, imitating a popular example is not enough. All parties need to improve upon what they are given.

Insofar as the heroine’s biological family forestalls criticism for thoughtless imitation, the character of Deborah Lenox meets the desire of Sedgwick’s readers and reviewers for national particularities. Standing at around six-feet one-inch, with big eyebrows and teeth “like hardy veterans who have by dint of superior strength survived their contemporaries,” Debby appears “altogether singular (R 31). Debby first enters near the beginning as a strange country nurse and then travels with the heroine on the novel’s central moral adventure. But unlike the heroine, her disregard for polite opinion detracts from the faith others have in her abilities. On this trip, one of the heroine’s friends voices an uncommon perception—but one that Sedgwick endorses—that Debby’s rural, “natural character” (R 297-298) contrasts favorably with the fashionable ladies and gentlemen who are “all formed in the same mould” (R 297). The heroine’s friend does not praise Debby for her superior morality—Debby never really rivals the heroine or the hero as a religious touchstone—but for how little she imitates the whims of fashion. As a result, in the context of Sedgwick’s reception, Debby combines with the scenes of life in the Shaker village in the novel to give readers a view of uniquely US scenes and customs. Simultaneously, in the context of the novel’s religious message, Debby warns of the difficulties that come with (even unwittingly) favoring originality over an improvement that subordinates national customs to religious principles.

In the dynamic between Debby Lenox and Ellen Bruce, Sedgwick writes herself into a

31 The quotation comes from Stanza Twenty-Two of Canto Four. Whereas Henry Redwood wanders around the country somewhat aimlessly and voluntarily abandoned religion at a young age, Robert the Bruce is travelling the country to earn support for his monarchy and was excommunicated for a murder he knew was righteous. Both also have important interactions with a person in disguise whom they already know but do not recognize. Of course, by alluding to a character named the Bruce, Sedgwick drops a hint that Ellen Bruce’s real father is Henry Redwood.
problem. Even though Ellen is the moral pinnacle, Debby overshadows the heroine as a character free from aesthetic imitation. Ellen compels Sedgwick’s readers toward a mix of religious imitation and improvement, but her reviewers prefer Debby because she seemed to embody the nation in an original character.  They appreciated the original representation of, as Grenville Mellen puts it in the New York Mirror (26 Jun 1824), “sound, but uncultured sense, and Yankee peculiarities” (380). For these readers, what Debby sacrificed in traditional morality, she more than off-set with the regional traits that she could not imitate from any example in literature, or, perhaps, in the world. Only the reviewer for the Port-Folio (Jul-Dec 1824) thought Debby was, at least in part, yet another imitation. This reviewer lauded Redwood as “the first American novel, strictly speaking” (69) and, on those grounds, forgave Sedgwick’s characterization because every novelist must “be allowed his Meg Merrilies” (67). These reviews predicate Sedgwick’s aesthetic success on her ability to represent the nation and not on how she imagines that religion can adjust to and improve upon that institution. In this sense, Debby is important for Sedgwick because, as Harriet Martineau explained twelve years later in the London and Westminster Review (Oct 1837), Debby was “the first manifestation of our author’s best power” (50). These reviews illuminate how Sedgwick’s success as part of an emerging institution of specifically national literature threatened to eclipse the religious function she imagined her fiction to serve.

Here the two stories I have been telling about Sedgwick intersect. In the first, Sedgwick

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32 This preference fits with the trajectory that Nina Baym describes in which readers and reviewers in the mid-century demanded characters that were “original,” Novels 86, and “individuals,” Novels 88, rather than “overtly consistent,” Novels 90, for religious or moral purposes.

33 Debby stuck in reviewers’ minds as well. W. Hillard in his review of Clarence in the North American Review (Jan 1831) laments that in that novel “there is certainly nothing in it which displays so much genius as the character of Aunt Debby,” 73.

34 For other examples of reviews praising Sedgwick’s national representations, see the William Cullen Bryant’s review of Redwood, North American Review (Apr 1825); the review of Hope Leslie in The Port-Folio, 291.2 (Jul 1827): 28-42, esp 29; two reviews of Clarence, one in Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette. 7.3 (Jul 1830): 320-325, esp 320-321, and W. Hillard’s in the North American Review. 32.70 (Jan 1831): 73-95, esp 95.
adjusts her representation of improvement in an effort to fend off the dangers that religion faces from fashion. In the other, Sedgwick negotiates the demand for what is fashionable about her literature with her own motivations in becoming a novelist. This intersection is historically contingent. For Sedgwick and her peers, there is no intrinsic connection between the aesthetic demands of the novel and the representation of religion after disestablishment. But Sedgwick’s thinking about the relationship between religion and institutions happened to blend with her thinking about her own position in the emerging institution of US literature. In this contingently overlapping way, we might say that the Unitarian Sedgwick inherits literature as it exists in Britain—with their Edgeworth, their Scott, their More, and their Hemans—and then tries to improve it.

Sedgwick’s theory of improvement defines a version of US literature that tries to combine religious principles, a shared literary history in Britain, and a sense of the cultural and political circumstances that differ in the US and Britain. As Sedgwick wrote to her brother Charles on 4 Feb 1836, she wanted to produce works full of “good notions, suited to the American market” (L&L 252). In this effort, Sedgwick recognizes a transatlantic religious community, but insists that religion adapts to national idiosyncrasies. She defers to some British examples of gentility, but also demands American independence of thought. Her theory of improvement, as it blends religion and aesthetics, bypasses a binary between originality and imitation that hovered above US writers and critics throughout the nineteenth century. At the same time, this theory of improvement meant that how Sedgwick defined literature could vary. If the demands of literary fashion seemed to pull her away from the core religious motivation of her fiction, she could abandon that “literary ambition” (L&L 271). After all, she knew she would never be able to outsell Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s novels

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35 On a transatlantic religious community of writers, see John Carlos Rowe, “Nineteenth-Century United States Literary Culture and Transnationality;” on the culture of deference to Britain in the US, see Elisa Tamarkin, esp. 87-177.
when they “can be sold here for fifty cents” (L&L 252). In all of these considerations, Sedgwick calibrates the precise way that she wants to use the literary market in the US to religious ends. For Sedgwick, the tools that made that calibration possible derived from the way that Unitarianism and disestablishment had encouraged her to imagine the institutions that could suffuse society with religion.

36 The first quotation is from a 24 Aug 1837 letter to William Ellery Channing. The second is from a 4 Feb 1836 letter to her brother Charles.
37 Melissa Homestead is correct when she says that Sedgwick always considered herself a novelist even in the late 1830s when she was writing didactic narratives. What is in flux is what a novel will be in the US.
Rebuilding Society in Stowe, Cummins, and Gaskell

As the religious establishment faded into the history of Massachusetts, the concerns for writers across a Protestant spectrum shifted from religion’s relationship to the state to its conflict with other, competing institutions. For Catharine Sedgwick, fashion had become in the 1830s a serious rival to religion. For Harrier Beecher Stowe and authors a generation after Sedgwick, the institutions of political economy increasingly seemed to threaten the place of religion’s institutions at the foundation of society. Claiming to offer a science of wealth that could account for how the exchanges of property among self-interested individuals structured society, political economists imagined a society made up of rational, independent individuals with little room for a God who was involved in daily affairs. Stowe saw the influence of political economy and its institutions in dire terms. Not only did the principles of political economy seem to justify an institution such as slavery but slavery and political economy also corrupted institutions such as the family and the church (especially in the South). Without these institutions, Stowe argued, religion and society could not survive. To confront this problem, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* not only describes the dangers of political economy to society’s institutions but also imagines how Stowe and her readers might rebuild society upon institutions purified by religious principles.

Only by seeing Stowe’s concern with the institutions of religion and political economy can we understand both how Stowe imagines the structure of society and also how Stowe models for other nineteenth-century authors the representation of a purified society. By arguing that Stowe focuses on the purpose and intricacies of institutions, I am moving away from a tradition of scholarship that represents Stowe as primarily interested in the power that individuals can possess through sympathy. To feel right entails sympathy; sympathy calls the individual to action;
sympathetic action creates a society patterned on the bonds of family.\(^1\) The specifics in accounts of the politics of sympathy differ, but these accounts agree that how and with whom the individual sympathizes defines a broad ideology governing Stowe and other sentimental writers. But, in understanding Stowe’s writing—and sentimentalism in the nineteenth century—predominately in terms of sympathy and the individual, we elide the vital role that Stowe and her peers imagined that institutions should play in producing society. In particular, building on how the debates about disestablishment articulated the conflicts among institutions, Stowe does not envision the movement from individual to institution to society as a simple homology in which the family defines the only (and indeed the best) way to organize individuals.\(^2\) Instead, Stowe evaluates and compares the merits of different institutions—especially those she associates with religion and political economy—in the production of society.

While Stowe focuses on the intricacies of slavery, her methods for imagining a better society through literature appealed to both Maria Cummins and Elizabeth Gaskell. In Stowe, they found a contemporary as interested as they were in religion and political economy as organizing entities apart from the state. In Stowe, they found a contemporary who enlivened new ways of envisioning society

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\(^1\) As Lauren Berlant and Lori Merish have argued, this extension of individual personhood operates through an equation in which the (white, middle-class, female) individual stands in for the family, which in turn models the structure of the nation, which ultimately models the structure of society as a whole, Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 1-23, 33-68; Merish, 133-165. This account of sympathy derives from a long line of criticism, notably Elizabeth Barnes, *States*, 1-18, 74-99; Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 87-127; Jane Tompkins, 122-146. For an extension of this thinking about sympathy in Stowe to her later novel, *The Minister’s Wooing*, see Marianne Noble, “The Courage to Speak and Hear the Truth.” On the other hand, this action might also be more “active.” Looking at *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Cindy Weinstein argues that sympathy, as Stowe defines it, is both more expansive than we might have thought—it includes irony—and also necessarily leads to abolitionist efforts to rid the nation of slavery. Although Weinstein notes that Stowe does call for both individual action and also the institutional action of the “whole American church,” she still primarily concerns herself with Stowe’s thought on the individual, Weinstein 92. For a similar account, see Gregg Crane, 56-86. Despite these differences, all these accounts of sympathy in Stowe’s novel isolate the individual as the fundamental unit of Stowe’s interest.

\(^2\) Although she is much more attentive than many others to the religious dynamics of Stowe’s idea of sympathy, Molly Farrell also sees the family as society in miniature, 246.
through character and melodrama. In Stowe, they found a contemporary who used these methods to expose the insufficiencies of a theory of political economy divorced from Protestant Christianity. Within these shared interests, each of these authors described a distinct version of society based on divergent religious principles. In these divergences, I will argue, the relationship between religion and political economy most emphatically refracts the earlier debates about religion and civil government. At issue is the degree to which Christianity can be integrated with the rest of society and how that integration interacts with the institutions of political economy.

In their novels, Stowe, Cummins, and Gaskell reanimate not only disestablishment’s conflict between evangelicals and Unitarians but also the debates it caused among Unitarians themselves. Following these debates, Stowe envisions the institutions that will fulfill the function of religion in replacing the institutions of political economy that have become too secular. In contrast, Cummins and Gaskell are more suspicious of self-contained institutions that demarcate religious and secular domains because such a separation relies on an evangelical understanding of election. Both these Unitarian authors, therefore, found ways of representing institutions that tried to circumvent this division of society. In parceling out how these institutions might work for religion and political economy, Cummins and Gaskell entered into broader debates among Unitarians about revelation, miracles, and prayer that arose in part out of Unitarianism’s conflict with evangelical orthodoxy about church and state. These conflicts, among Unitarians and between Unitarians and evangelicals, arose out of the debates about the purpose of a state church.

**The Evangelicals, the Unitarians, and the Legacy of Disestablishment**

In both the US and England, the rise of evangelicalism split apart political coalitions that had held together increasingly diverse religious interests. In early-nineteenth century Massachusetts, the
animosity between Unitarians and evangelicals altered the meaning of the church establishment because the establishment of Congregationalism in each town depended on a Federalist coalition of Congregationalists who had together opposed Democratic, populist denominations such as Baptists and Methodists. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, this coalition split as evangelicalism grew among orthodox Congregationalists and Unitarianism gave a name to an increasingly liberal form of Congregationalism. This split led to the seemingly counterintuitive defense of a religious establishment by the most liberal major Protestant denomination in the state. England saw similar disputes between evangelicals and Unitarians at a further remove from the established church. As in the US, evangelicalism pushed Unitarianism toward a greater acceptance of the religious establishment. The more radical demands of evangelical denominations within Dissent—especially, the Independents (i.e. Congregationalists) and Baptists—in the 1830s fractured the political coalition of Dissenters by alienating Unitarians and, to a lesser extent, Quakers. But, unlike in the US where disestablishment became increasingly popular, Dissenting denominations, from Methodists to Unitarians, tended to shy away from calls for the complete disestablishment of the Church of England. In both countries, these disagreements about the proper relationship between religion and the state were about more than taxes and doctrine. In these arguments, evangelicals began to articulate an alternative way of thinking about religious institutions apart from the state while, with varying degrees of success in the US and in England, Unitarians attempted to retain the aspects of the established church that would unify society.

It was precisely to combat the influence of Unitarians on religious institutions that Lyman Beecher not only accepted the call at a Boston church in 1826 but also helped establish *The Spirit of the Pilgrims*, a periodical devoted to challenging the Unitarians’ own successful magazine, the *Christian Examiner*. Faced with the rise of populist denominations throughout New England, Lyman Beecher strenuously defended what he considered the fundamental rights of orthodox Congregational
churches first in Connecticut and then in Massachusetts. In the 1810s and 1820s, Congregational churches, which had long had orthodox ministers, were suddenly being given Unitarian ministers by the more liberal, but still Congregational, parish majority. These liberal ministers could be installed because, within the existing establishment, the orthodox members of the parish’s established church could be outvoted by the majority of voters in the parish as a whole. From the orthodox perspective, such actions by the parish majority threatened to destroy the very basis of the church by subordinating it to the control of an unregenerate, civil majority.

Beecher’s move to Massachusetts marked a serious change in his thinking. After fighting vigorously to defend Connecticut’s religious establishment in the previous decade, in the 1820s Beecher embraced the evangelical plan for the so-called voluntary church; as he recalls in his posthumously published Autobiography, he was himself surprised to find that disestablishment was the “best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut” (1:344). In advocating for disestablishment in Massachusetts after rejecting it in Connecticut, Beecher is probably the most canonical example of a shift in the attitude of many orthodox Congregationalists.3 For these men and women, disestablishment had two distinct advantages: first, it energized voluntary religious efforts; and second, in diminishing the rivalry between the orthodox Congregationalists and the Baptists, Methodists, and more minor evangelical sects, it “laid the basis of co-operation and union of spirit” (1:453).

Not long after his arrival in Boston, Beecher served for the town of Groton on an ecclesiastical council whose report articulated a religious argument for opposing an established church. As in other towns in the state, the conflict in Groton arose over whether the Unitarian majority of the parish could claim the established church’s property and funds by installing a Unitarian minister or if only members of the orthodox church in good-standing could decide

3 Neem, 402.
matters of leadership and property. What followed was a report that framed a dispute that was, at least in part, motivated by the ownership of property as primarily an issue of religious liberty. Drawing extensively on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, the report argues that the current orthodox churches were upholding the religious institutions of the Puritan forbearers. The report praised the Puritans for understanding that only the “independence and purity of the church of God” could guarantee “civil and religious liberty to the world” (37). Drawing on the Puritans’ example, much of the report argues that Massachusetts had always recognized some distinction between church and parish powers (and thus between the town’s religious and civil aspects). Crucially, the former were limited only to those “credibly pious, united by covenant, and possessing the right of pastoral election” (12). Building on this evidence, the report argues that controlling their membership and electing their minister were the two most important requirements for combining “evangelical doctrine, vital godliness, and pure discipline, with liberty of conscience, equal civil rights, and permanent civil support” (45). Without a clear distinction between the “church” and the “world,” the report suggests, not only is a true religious community impossible but the state also risks devolving into the “despotism of Popery” (34). Framing their position in terms of the natural rights of property and the dangers of arbitrary state power, Beecher and these orthodox Congregationalists attacked the current form of the state establishment with rhetoric that could appeal broadly to evangelical and democratic readers. In doing so, Beecher and his co-authors argued that only with such a distinction could religion and the state prosper in a way that ensured liberty.4

In response, the Unitarian’s Christian Examiner rejected precisely the distinction between religion and the world upon which the report built its version of church and state. Writing for the Christian Examiner (March 1827), John Lowell finds apostolic justification only for a distinction

4 On the details of these conflicts, see Cushing; Field, 141-236; Howe, 219-221; Levy, 25-53; Neem; Rives; Sassi, 145-184.
between “clergy and laity” (147) not for the report’s distinction between “clergy, church members, and ordinary worshippers” (147-148). Invoking the same rhetoric of religious freedom, Lowell’s response claims that a church that restricts its members effects a “permanent despotism in the church” (147). The orthodox objection to the Unitarian’s dishonest appropriation of their property here flips to a Unitarian attack on a minority demanding a tax from an unrepresented majority. James Walker argued a similar point from the opposite perspective in 1831. The orthodox were disingenuous in claiming to represent liberty in opposition to civil despotism since their “spiritual menaces and terrors” (100) posed more danger to liberty and the free investigation of truth than any civil power could. To be sure, this rhetorical battle over religious and civil liberty was shrewd politics. The language of liberty and despotism appealed to readers across political and religious identifications. But, the Unitarians’ attack on the “Exclusive party,” as they sometimes called the evangelical coalition, bespeaks how important they thought it was to preserve accessible institutions that mixed religious and civil powers.5

Both the evangelicals and the Unitarians assumed that religion was necessary for a strong civil government, especially in a republic governed, as the saying goes, by the people. The arguments over the state’s established churches enlivened the coordinated issue of whether society should be made up of a mix of religious and secular institutions or if all institutions should, to some degree, be religious. Rather than leaving religion as a concern of the individual, disestablishment instead opened up for debate what religion’s functions were and what institutions should fulfill those functions. To this end, even after the *Christian Examiner* had abandoned the losing cause of the religious establishment in 1833, Andrew Preston Peabody’s “Defence of the Third Article” compared the

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5 As Nathan Rives argues, the Unitarians relied very much on a practical (as opposed to theological) analysis of the establishment as a useful tool for ensuring moral improvement. For Rives, in this respect, the Unitarian defense of the establishment was primarily about education. On disestablishment and the purpose of Christianity in society for both the orthodox and the Unitarians in terms of the “common good,” see Johann Neem.
religious establishment to other public goods, such as “public schools” and “highways” (352).\(^6\) Precisely because Peabody does not recognize a fundamental divide in society between saved and damned, his review envisions society as built of institutions that do not in themselves distinguish the religious and the secular. According to this logic, public religion ensures public morality, and the state supports public religion more equitably than do private entities.

This defense of established religion as a public good lost out to the logic of religious institutions formed through voluntary associations. After disestablishment in Massachusetts, evangelicals celebrated the panoply of institutions that arose to fulfill the various functions of the established churches. The most encompassing was what they called the Voluntary Church—an amorphous institution that held together abstract and concrete evangelical institutions, from the family to the associations for reform to religious publishing concerns, under the name of evangelical Protestantism. As John Lardas Modern has argued, the success of the Voluntary Church encouraged stronger categorical distinctions between religious and worldly institutions throughout the century.\(^7\) In formulations such the Voluntary Church, the debates over disestablishment in New England involved more than just the end of tax-supported religion; they brought forth arguments about religion’s institutional role in producing society, arguments which not only continued after Massachusetts’ disestablishment but also echoed in England’s quite different national church.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, English Unitarians were largely moderates not only on the established church but politically and religiously as well. Politically, the majority of Unitarians were Whigs: they supported a liberal government against the Tory aristocracy, but they were hesitant to endorse the radical politics of the Chartists because many were middle-class and wealthy manufacturers in the North. Religiously, the English Unitarians objected to both the defenders of a

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\(^6\) Compare this defense with James Walker’s admission of defeat, *Christian Examiner* 13.3 (Jan 1833): 337-350.

\(^7\) See especially, Modern, 54.
confessional state within the established church and also the reformed evangelicals in Dissent.
Especially in the context of the growing evangelical faction among Dissenters, English Unitarians tended to defend the established Church not as a strictly religious institution but as a political and social institution. In their defense of the Church, they came closest to the Broad Church Anglicans, who supported an established church less to save a confessional state than to promote social harmony and the diffusion of culture. The Unitarians stepped away from attacking the established church in particular because they despised the sectarian divisions that seemed to come with disestablishmentarianism. In this sense, the established church offered social stability as against the chaos that came from the evangelical divide between saved and damned and the labor movement’s divide between rich and poor. Devoted to transatlantic abolition, to social reform, and, perhaps most of all, to education reform, Unitarians worked with the structure of the established church in order to promote an ordered society with a religious foundation.8

The growth of evangelicalism within Dissent in particular pushed Unitarians away from earlier diverse opposition to the Church of England within Unitarianism. Joseph Priestley, one of the founders of English Unitarians, strongly opposed the church establishment because he argued that it weakened Christianity while other notable Unitarians thought the Church itself harmed the public good. But, although strongly allied with Dissent in the early-nineteenth century, English Unitarians faced difficulties with evangelicals surprisingly reminiscent of the conflicts over disestablishment in New England. For instance, after the extension of the Toleration Act in 1813 granted legal ownership of chapels to Unitarians, Unitarians began to claim the property and trusts of previously orthodox chapels, much as they had in New England. And, as in New England, an increasingly evangelical, orthodox contingent challenged the Unitarian management of this money

8 On Unitarian reform comparatively in Boston and Manchester, see Wach. On reform and Unitarianism, see Watts, 593-670; Webb, “Quakers and Unitarians.” On Broad Church support for the established church, see Peter Allen; Stewart Brown, 1-92; Marty, esp 66.
and property. Unlike in New England where Unitarians controlled many of the judgeships, however, rulings came against the Unitarians in 1836 and 1842 in the case of Lady Hewley’s Trust. It took a new law in 1844 for the Unitarians to legally regain ownership of these chapels and then only the chapels that they had previously held for at least twenty-five years. Because of these conflicts over property and the increasingly evangelical tenor of political dissent, the Unitarians officially left the Dissenting Deputies and the General Body of Ministers even though they had almost completely represented Dissent in Parliament up to that point. This rift within English Dissent between evangelical and non-evangelical Nonconformity only further pushed Unitarians away from disestablishmentarianism.9

Where in Massachusetts a small minority of the most liberal Protestants perpetuated the religious establishment well beyond its popular support, in England before the 1860s only a relatively small, evangelical minority within Dissent pushed strongly for disestablishment. Even though disestablishmentarians founded the Anti-State Church Association in 1844 and opposition to church-rates grew in the 1850s, disestablishment was not a serious threat to the Church of England between the height of early disestablishment rhetoric in 1833 and its return in the form of opposition to church-rates in the early 1860s.10 Those Dissenters who did advocate full disestablishment, such as the Independent Edward Miall with his paper the Nonconformist, explicitly looked to the US as proof of the strength of voluntary religion in the wake of disestablishment.11 In

9 On the shift in the Unitarian position because of these conflict over trusts and property, see Larsen, 145-156; Machin, 56-57, 163-165; Watts, 547; Webb “Quakers and Unitarians,” 85.
10 Stewart Brown, 168-246; Chadwick, 479; David de Giustino; Machin, esp. 260; Richard Spall, esp. 123; Watts, esp. 548.
both England and Massachusetts, attitudes toward a religious establishment were always implicated with beliefs about the landed aristocracy, labor reform, social stability, and national politics. For instance, Anti-Corn-Leaguers in the 1830s and 1840s attacked the church as an aristocratic monopoly limiting the freedom in property, in trade, and in ideas. The rhetoric and issues surrounding disestablishment in England as in the US, then, involved not merely the financial support of the church but also how religion as an institution would interact with the institutions of the state and of political economy.

Harriet Beecher Stowe on Church and State

Harriet Beecher Stowe came of age seeing her father working to protect New England’s religious institutions. Although Stowe did not live consistently in Boston with her father because she had moved to Hartford to attend and then teach at her sister Catharine’s school, Stowe remembered with fervor her father’s efforts in the 1820s. In a contribution to her father’s Autobiography, Stowe echoes his arguments in favor of the orthodox church’s rights to church property by lamenting that Unitarian judges had nullified “the peculiar features of church organization, so carefully ordained by the Pilgrim fathers” (2:109). By invoking the Puritans, Stowe defines disestablishment as a sustained defense against the dangers of fashionable errors. According to Stowe, the Unitarians, by denying the doctrine of regeneration and protesting against the orthodoxy, engaged more “in demolition than in construction” (2:109). Such destruction of religious institutions and doctrines, Stowe maintains, suffered in comparison to what she calls alternatively “positive belief” and “traditional faith” (2:111) because it offered little active religious guidance. Stowe’s implicit narrative here is instructive: she does not call disestablishment a crucial reform because her father’s evangelical party

12 See especially, Richard Spall. Also, Machin, 100, 108.
was not, in Stowe’s account, primarily innovating religion; rather, they were preserving institutions that could accomplish traditional, religious ends. Indeed, her nostalgic tone here belies the seriousness with which she herself understood Unitarianism as a threat to religious institutions. When her husband initially agreed to break his agreement to teach at Bowdoin in favor of a professorship at the Andover Seminary in 1851, Stowe impressed upon him the need to keep his engagement at Bowdoin to combat Unitarianism at an institution that, unlike Andover, might actually fall under Unitarian control. Unitarianism was dangerous, according to Stowe, not just for misleading individuals in their beliefs but also for corrupting the institutions responsible for moral, religious, and intellectual education.

As did her father after the orthodoxy’s success in Massachusetts, Stowe approached the problems of church and state most explicitly when she confronted the expansion of Catholicism in the West. In a two-part essay for the New York Evangelist (29 Jan, 5 Feb 1846) titled “What Will the American People Do?,” Stowe describes education in the Western states as a specifically religious problem. Citing letters and reports that describe the scarcity of common schools and Protestant academies relative to the number of Catholic institutions, Stowe explains the dangers of letting Catholic institutions grow without competition. Because Catholic schools rely on the “implicit intellectual submission to human authority” (17), a Protestant student cannot learn to “think for himself” (17). Even more urgently, Stowe reminds her readers that the Jesuits approach education not as an end but as a “means of extending Catholicism” (17); indeed, recalling the example of the Counter-Reformation in Europe, Stowe explains that once the Jesuits accomplish their educational goals they can easily call in the “powers of civil government” to accomplish “a course of universal coercion and persecution” (26). Of course, the vehemence of her father’s attack on Catholicism as a “union of church and state” that inevitably “corrupt[s] the church and enslav[es] the people”

13 On Stowe’s anger at her husband over this choice, see Hedrick 207-209.
(Beecher, *Plea 78*) does not lie far beneath Stowe’s own rhetoric here. But the specifics of Stowe’s anti-Catholicism illustrate how education in the West becomes a religious problem for Stowe precisely because of the chain of consequences that leads from a surplus of Catholic educational institutions to the unification of church and state in the US to tyranny and despotism. True to form, Stowe addresses this religious problem through a mix of individual act and the institutional logic of the voluntary church. In her call to action, Stowe does not address state representatives or even tell her readers to contact those representatives. She tells her evangelical readers that they must send money to voluntary institutions or, even better, move West themselves to solidify these Protestant educational institutions themselves.\(^\text{14}\)

Travelling in Britain and Europe eight years later, Stowe continued to celebrate the advantages of the voluntary church. Describing France in *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (1854), Stowe speculates about the benefits of the more rigorous Sabbath observed in New England, England, Scotland, and Switzerland. She suggests that the more severe Sabbath might account for the success of “a popular form of government” (*Sunny* 2:411) in these nations and the failure of popular government in France and in countries tied to a more Lutheran brand of Protestantism. Stowe specifically credits the more intensive Sabbath for inculcating a firm “self-control to make up for the lack of an extraneous pressure from government” (*Sunny* 2:411). Free from the coercion of government, the Puritan Sabbath requires a “voluntary dissevering” (*Sunny* 2:411) from the world in thought and action. In Stowe’s hypothesis, pure Christianity enlivened by voluntary activity awakens

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\(^\text{14}\) Stowe’s attitudes toward Catholicism changed over the next thirty years. In *The Minister’s Wooing* and *Agnes of Sorrento*, Stowe took a much more ecumenical attitude toward individual Catholic piety and the communal aspects of the liturgy, see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 103, 246-255; Neil Meyer, esp. 481. But it oversimplifies Stowe’s institutional interest in religion to characterize the St. Clares as Catholic, Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, 103 (presumably based on St. Clare’s mother’s taste for Catholic music, *UTC*, 334) or to distinguish Stowe’s early and late attitudes toward Catholicism in terms of separate, gendered spheres, Meyer, 487. For more on education as an issue for anti-Catholic protest, see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 60-83.
the love of liberty that enables democratic institutions, which, in turn, protect the rights and freedoms of that voluntary religion.

Even in England, where she is surprised by how mild the established church is, Stowe still undermines the logic of an established church. Stowe had anticipated seeing dissenters suffering almost as much prejudice and segregation as free African Americans in the US; she instead discovered the “utmost social cordiality” (Sunny 1:27) without any “superciliousness” (Sunny 2:52) on the part of the Church. She wrote home admiringly, therefore, of the “true piety” (Sunny 2:133) among all of the denominations in England, optimistic that religion there was advancing toward “one, pure, beautiful, invisible church of Christ” (Sunny 2:133). Stowe shows some subtlety here. Without criticizing the Church of England explicitly, she praises religion in England, to be blunt, for not letting the visible church obstruct true religion. By implying that the Church of England does not act as despotically as she feared an established church would, Stowe can praise established religion in England and still maintain the supremacy of the voluntary principle.

Stowe valued Christianity’s distinction from the state so strongly that she often measures the strength of religion based on characters’ willingness to adhere to religious principles in the face of state punishment. At two occasions in Sunny Memories, Stowe praises preachers in Britain who have left an established church on principle. In the first, she praises the artistry and subject of George Harvey’s Quitting the Manse (1847). Harvey’s painting depicted a crowd around a minister leaving his church after the Scottish Disruption of 1843. According to Stowe, all Americans should remember with sympathy how the many Scottish ministers left church, salary, and comfort “rather than violate a principle” (Sunny 1:186)—the principle of a church’s independence from state intrusion.15 Similarly, after hearing Baptist Noel preach in London, Stowe praises the “purity of principle” (Sunny 1:315) that led him to sacrifice his aristocratic position in church and society to lead a Baptist chapel, a

15 On the lead up to the Disruption and the Disruption itself in Scotland and England, see Stewart Brown, 324-402; Machin, 112-147.
sacrifice greater than “Americans can ever dream of” (Sunny 1:315). In ways both subtle and ecumenical, Stowe consistently praises those principles which support forms of religion that are independent from, and indeed resistant to, state intervention.

In Uncle Tom's Cabin Stowe represents among the Quakers a similar adherence to religious principle. Describing “The Quaker Settlement,” Stowe credits these abolitionist Quakers for their discipline in refusing to obey any laws that supported slavery. Through the Quaker’s discipline, Stowe can contrast starkly between, on the one hand, a voluntary religious community that pursues a religious society and, on the other, a state that produces a flawed society predicated on slavery and political economy. Stowe is making an extreme case with the Quakers. Not only were the Quakers largely unevangelical but they also embodied a particularly extreme approach to church, state, and religious institutions. Indeed, precisely because of how drastically the Quakers emphasized individuals’ responsibility to obey their own divinely inspired consciences, Protestants of other denominations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had associated Quakerism with antinomianism and the destruction of an ordered society. Stowe mitigates this connotation of Quakerism by insisting throughout the chapter that her Quaker community values the family as an institution and that they teach their children that they “musn’t speak evil of thy rulers” (UTC 224); but her choice of the Quakers to make this point about the state and the institutions that are spoiling society attests to how thoroughly Stowe attacks the institutions in the US corrupted by slavery in order to build them back up from the actions of faithful individuals. Whatever other faults Quakers may have from an evangelical perspective, we can admire, Stowe suggests, the Quakers’ insistence on the distinction between religious principle and a flawed state.  

16 On the Quakers and fears of antinomianism, see Jordan, 104-121 esp. 105, 117. Because of these practices, and the long-standing hostility between Quakers and the Church of England, Quakers (along with Unitarians, Universalists, and Roman Catholics) were barred from the Evangelical Alliance in 1846, see Sandeen, 225; Cox. On the Quakers as harmonious but impossible on a large scale, see James Emmett Ryan, “Imaginary Friends.” For a representative comparison of feminist
At the same time, Stowe reminds us that Quakers cannot themselves maintain their idealistic separation between religion and the state in this world. When the Quaker matriarch initially suggests that the fugitive Eliza could stay indefinitely, Eliza insists that she is too anxious to stay, dreaming that she “saw that man coming into the yard” (UTC 216) to capture them. While the matriarch stresses that no fugitive slave has ever “been stolen from our village” (UTC 216), Stowe’s point remains. The state that surrounds and governs this small settlement exerts its own psychic and physical force on Eliza, and presumably anyone else in her situation. Religious principles are important; but the state cannot be safely ignored either.

Stowe’s juxtaposition of religious principles and state coercion only illustrates part of how disestablishment affected her thought and fiction. After all, by mid-century for Stowe and her evangelical peers, the appeal in the US of a society created by the voluntary church downplayed whatever rivalry there might have been between Protestantism and the state after disestablishment. In this respect, disestablishment meant that Stowe needed to reckon most, not with the state, but with political economy, which loudly claimed to produce an ordered society apart from the state. Where Protestantism emphasized a range of principles from self-culture to moral reform by voluntary institutions, political economy focused on wealth. In particular, it drew on the concepts of self-interest, labor, and property to describe a benevolent society that bypassed problems of innate depravity and divine intercession. That is, the economy and its relationship to religion, I argue, displaced whatever residual concern Stowe (and later Cummins and Gaskell) may have had about the explicit relationship between religion and the state. To appreciate the details of both how Stowe engages with religion and political economy and also how Cummins and Gaskell model their own critique on the Quakers, see Elizabeth Ammons, esp. 166; and for the critique of that feminist model that still interprets Stowe primarily in terms of liberalism, see Gillian Brown, Domestic Individualism, esp. 38.
engagement on Stowe’s, we first need to better understand the broader interaction of religion and political economy in this period.

**Religion and Political Economy in the Nineteenth Century**

By the early nineteenth century, political economy was beginning to coalesce into a basis for institutions independent of both religion and the state. Political economy claimed to be a science of wealth that, as Francis Wayland explained in his popular US textbook, could illustrate the laws governing “the relations of man … to the objects of his desire” (*Economy* 3). This study of these relations between individuals codified the theory of an emerging, self-contained society that was based on exchanges among individuals and among nations. Through political economy, writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries theorized a version of an ordered society, a version of society that Charles Taylor has labeled the “Economy as Objectified Reality.” In this view, society is founded upon an economy of mutually beneficial exchanges that operate by their own laws and logic. Crucially, this society exists distinct from the “management, by those in authority, of the resources we collectively need” (Taylor, *Secular Age* 181). Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand” is but one (and the most well-known) articulation of how individuals create the economic institutions like the market that efficiently order society. In his illustration of an economic society, Smith, along with the Scottish Common Sense school, greatly influenced what duties the leaders in the Early Republic thought the state could expect from its citizens.17

Even by the nineteenth century, political economy was a diverse field. Any working definition of such an emerging discourse necessarily simplifies internal debates. But writers on

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17 On the importance of political economy (and what is now called “classical political economy” in particular) in the early US, see Sklansky, 5, 13-32. On the conflict between the state and the theory of the free market in political economy in Britain, see Ayse Çelikkol, 3-20.
political economy in the first half of the nineteenth century, even when they disagreed about free trade or God’s involvement in the economy, tended to agree about two central aspects of political economy: the independent individual and a society dictated by self-interest. These two tenets of early political economy elucidate not only how political economy imagined an ordered society but also how its relationship to religion changed in this period. The liberal idea of an independent individual is the most familiar of the two. As John Locke argued, the autonomous individual owned his labor; through labor he could appropriate property; and the protection of that property formed the basis of political order. Indeed, this equation worked both ways. The political order relied on rational individuals, who only achieved full rationality and independence by successfully appropriating property through labor. While later economists studiously removed the religious roots of these concepts, Locke himself built his theory of the autonomous, rational individual upon the premise that God had ordered the society to benefit humankind. Locke’s vocabulary of the independent individual appears early and often in Wayland. In fact, he defines wealth as desirable objects that are also “capable of being appropriated” (Economy 4). Without referring to Locke explicitly, he reminds us that “Moral Philosophy” has taught us just this connection between the individual’s labor and his “right to the exclusive possession” of that property (Economy 7). Furthermore, Locke’s often implicit belief in God’s primary ordering of the universe appealed to Protestants ranging from the Baptist Francis Wayland to liberal Unitarians.\footnote{Macpherson, 234; Redman, 68-69; Sklansky, 15. For the most detailed account of Locke’s notion of consent in the colonies and the early republic, see Gillian Brown, The Consent of the Governed. Howe explains that Unitarians rejected Locke’s idea of the social compact in favor of an organic, familial analogy to political and social life, The Unitarian Conscience, 121-131. Sidney Ahlstrom details Locke’s place in Unitarianism’s emphasis on rationality, Religious History 385-392.}

From this foundation in the individual, political economy presented a society in which the actions of individuals were predictable, interconnected, and self-sufficient. Much as we look to Locke as the source of the theory of the individual made independent through property, we look to
Adam Smith as the source for such an economic social order based on self-interest. Smith drew on Scottish Common Sense philosophers to develop a theory of self-interest that explained society solely in terms of economic motivation. Through self-interest, Smith and his inheritors described a society distinct from, and often at odds with, the state. By definition, self-interested individuals were predictable but their actions were not predetermined. They were naturally free but bound together as a by-product of their own self-interest. In turn, this society harmoniously built upon self-interested individuals operated best without any external interference—from either states or gods. Like much Scottish philosophy of the eighteenth century, this model of society did not sharply differentiate between science, religion, and philosophy. Certain laws governed the universe and it was humankind’s opportunity to discover its laws, not just in Newton’s physical mechanics but also in human psychology, morality, and society. Nor were these laws always by definition religiously neutral. Closely connected to natural theology, political economy often portrayed society as, if not providentially designed for everyone’s best interests, at least designed to balance diverse interests. The Scottish Common Sense philosophers, who formed the basis of US higher learning before the middle of the nineteenth century, shared a strong belief in just such a divine beneficial order, in which true self-interest could hardly be distinguished from a moral sense invested with concern for others.

Much like religion and the state, the connection between religion and political economy came under pressure between 1790 and 1830. Ironically, the Anglican curate Thomas Malthus, more than any other writer, precipitated this separation. Malthus presented a bleak future which he derived from the effect of scarcity. Malthus and later David Ricardo approached society through independence and self-interest, but their conclusions rejected the serendipity of competing individuals working for their own self-interest. By using political economy to predict a dire future,

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19 Çelikkol, 5-8; Hirschman, esp. 49, 103-104; Sklansky, esp. 79-80.
20 Gregg, 55; Hirschman, 49-52; Redman, 134; Torre.
these writers put political economy at odds with a providentially ordered society. But, even as
Malthus and Ricardo gained influence, many political economists, holding onto the religious roots of
political economy, rejected such pessimism as an impossible contradiction of the central premise of
a benevolent Creator. The leading author on political economy in the US after Wayland, Francis
Bowen merely restates this premise when he describes economic laws as illustrating “the
contrivance, wisdom, and beneficence of the Deity, just as clearly as do the marvellous arrangements
of the material universe” (Principles 27).21 Other political economists tried harder than Bowen to
accommodate the criticisms of Ricardo and Malthus. Some authors, by favoring primarily empirical
and inductive descriptions of society over deductive methods, tried to strip Malthus’ conclusions of
their inevitability; still other authors, by ceding the description of what society is to political
economy but retaining for Christianity the normative understanding of what society ought to be,
embraced a firmer distinction between religion and political economy that undercut the authority of
Malthus’ arguments. No one account of the relationship between religion and political economy was
universally satisfying, which meant that writers struggled to dismiss either the pessimistic or
optimistic view of a society organized apart from the state.22

These two related principles in the political economy—that independent individuals
constituted society and that the economy needed no external intervention to order society—reveal
the overlap and tension between the rhetoric of Christianity and political economy. In the first
principle, society benefitted from mutual dependence but only on the condition of each individual’s

21 Along with James Walker, Bowen is one of the four Unitarians that feature as central figures in
David Walker Howe’s The Unitarian Conscience.
22 Bowen attacks Malthus and Ricardo by name in an earlier review of a work by Francis William
Newman, 239. Stewart Davenport, in the most extensive book on Protestantism and political
economy to date, refers to Wayland and Bowen as “clerical economists” for their efforts to square
the two disciplines with a heavy emphasis on natural theology, 35-84. On Malthus as the source of
this division between religion and political economy, see Anthony Waterman, esp., 107. On the
debate between deductive and inductive political economy, see Maas. For a general account of
religion and the economy with reference to Francis Wayland and Francis Bowen’s political economy
textbooks, see Noll, “Protestant Reasoning,” esp, 275.
independence. Thus, Francis Wayland, on the one hand, warned against poor laws in England and, on the other, praised the harmonious effects of the division of labor. The former, by eradicating the individual’s “healthful feeling of independence” (*Economy* 126), subverted the basis of Locke’s theory of labor, which Wayland elevates to “the fundamental law of government” (*Economy* 125). The latter, by allowing individuals to pursue the labor for which they are best suited, ensured an ordered society since independent “Individuals are made thus dependent upon each other” (*Economy* 172). Such economic transactions not only encouraged the independent labor that Wayland suggests that poor laws discouraged but, in making men “mutually dependent upon each other” (*Economy* 172), solidified society in a harmony of interests.

In parsing the individual’s place in society, Wayland and others still needed to define the precise religious valence of economic independence and a society based on mutual dependence. In the preface to his *Elements of Political Economy* (1837) Wayland states simultaneously that the arguments of the present work are “closely analogous” to the religious and moral arguments of his *Elements of Moral Science* (1835) but also that he thinks it will be clearer not “to intermingle them” (*Economy* vi). As Wayland distinguishes the two, whether an individual is morally obligated to honor a contract is solely a question of religion and morality while political economy only concerns whether honoring the contract “were or were not wise” (*Economy* vi). By separating religion and political economy in this way, Wayland inserts a subtle distinction between the descriptive work of political economy and the normative work of moral science. But Wayland’s effort to distinguish between political economy and religion while also linking them through analogy did not satisfy everyone. On the one hand, as Thomas Augst has shown, clerks living and working at the heart of the economy often conflated the religious and the economic. In their letters and diaries, they measured their religious and moral character in terms of economic success and independence. On the other, labor activists, Romantic writers, and a variety of Protestant leaders insisted on a greater
distinction between economic and religious arguments. Diverse and usually uncoordinated, their critiques ranged from attacks on the competitive spirit of political economy to an independent self that was defined in terms of abstract cultivation not material labor and property. Through these critiques, they not only resisted the efforts by political economy to restrict religion’s influence to another world but also tried to explain the intricate balance between institutions founded upon religion and institutions founded upon political economy.

The second aspect of religious and political economic rhetoric concerned the merits of a society that needed no external intervention and the merits of one that did. This conflict brought together natural religion and laissez-faire economics, on the side against intervention, and revealed religion and protectionist economics, on the side for intervention. The terms were not identical but the concepts were closely linked. Before critiquing the laissez-faire position, Francis Bowen lays out its purest form: shortsighted and selfish individuals unknowingly do better work than even the most disinterested public servant. Bowen parses this principle in language that mixes natural theology and political economy: “Man cannot interfere with His work without marring it” (Principles 23). Bowen himself suggests a more limited version of this “let-alone” principle. The best laws are “seldom mandatory” but merely “prohibitive” (Principles 23). Good laws remove obstacles, such as vice and crime, that hinder “the ordinances of Divine Providence, by which society is held together” (Principles 23). Invoking God to greater and lesser extents, advocates on both sides of the debate between free trade and protective duties argued that their position merely encouraged a natural order that the opposing policies would pervert. Advocates of free trade argued that protections denied

23 Wayland most likely inherits this is/ought distinction from Richard Whatley’s response in 1831 to Malthus, Waterman 123. See also, Oslington for how John Henry Newman later rebutted Whatley’s distinction for ceding too much ground to political economy. On the importance of poverty for the rhetoric of independence, see Dorsey, 20-21; 50-89; Lazarow, 33; Stewart, 97-105. Augst, esp. 19-61. On the connection between voluntarism in the Second Great Awakening and the rise of political economy, see Hatch, “Market Revolution.” On the critique of any homologies between religion and economics, see Hanley, 32-57, 89-123; Lazarow, 169-198; Sklansky, 33-72; Stewart, 87-105, 155-165, 203-211; Zuckerman, 217-219.
men the proper fruits of their labor, and thus destroyed the natural incentive of self-interest; advocates of protection argued that such duties preserved the relationship between crucial institutions—such as family, community, and state—that produced an ordered society. For US protectionists, an influx of foreign goods and foreign knowledge would destroy the nation’s own institutions before they could successfully establish themselves.²⁴

Bowen’s account of the economy—as an institution that is naturally ordered but still in need of protection by an external authority—fits with his account of natural theology. Bowen explains this relationship between natural religion—the providential order of society which we can discern through reason—and revealed religion—God’s interposition into society apart from the this natural system—in his Lowell Lectures, published first in 1849 and again just a year before his textbook of political economy. In these lectures, Bowen defends revealed religion, especially the miracles of the New Testament, from the argument that revealed religion contradicts the “invariability of the laws of nature” (Lowell 462). Rather than thinking of miracles as disruptions of the providential order, Bowen argues that miracles and a self-ordering society mutually reinforce God’s design for humankind. Bowen concludes that revealed religion offers the strongest “helps to obedience” (Lowell 442) for a society where, even though the moral order is clearly written in each person’s heart and reason, sin can be very tempting. Revealed religion, therefore, primarily works for the “improvement of character” (Lowell 448) through voluntary obedience as against obedience rendered only out of “awe, fear, or selfishness” (Lowell 448)—note, of course, that the last of these incentives invokes economic self-interest. In these lectures, Bowen treats the relationship between self-sufficiency and

²⁴ On the debates between Henry C. Carey (protection) and William Cullen Bryant (free trade), see Meardon, “TRIPs.” Sklansky offers an in-depth account of Carey’s theory of class harmony through the protection of market relations on the proper scale, 73-90. Bateman credits the appeal of laissez-faire in the antebellum US to popular republicanism and anti-intellectualism, discounting the influence of political economy per se, esp. 196. On the relationship between the tariff debates and religious revivals in terms of the distinction between public and private religion, see Meardon, “Religious Revivals.”
divine interposition very much as he describes the balance between economic principles. And, in so doing, Bowen both provides an added religious motivation to the pre-eminent economic motivation of self-interest and also broadens the reach of this particular arrangement of self-sufficient order and external authority.  

My analogy here is not perfect. Bowen does not deal explicitly with the consequences of state influence on religion nor does he properly think of the state and God as strictly analogous. But Bowen’s interest in revealed religion as consistent with natural religious order and his interest in the historical fact of miracles are surrounded by similar analogies between economic and religious societies. Moreover, they are also part of a much larger debate about miracles in the antebellum US that tried to manage precisely this conflict between an infallible God’s natural order and the paradox of God’s exceptions to God’s own laws. In emphasizing the importance of Bowen’s account of revealed religion for both the relationship between religion and political economy and also the literary approach to these same problems, I am using the defense of miracles quite differently than most literary historical accounts. After all, the “miracles controversy” as it is known has marked one of the decisive moments in the emergence of Transcendentalism, whose significance for US literary emergence has far out-weighed the work by more conservative Unitarian writers and, until recently, evangelical religious and literary fiction. But, for Bowen and, as I will argue, for Maria Cummins, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Elizabeth Gaskell, revealed religion was more important for its bearing on the relationship between society and its institution than for its opposition to the primacy of intuition as the source of spiritual enlightenment.  

25 On Bowen’s version of political economy in a Unitarian context, see Howe, Unitarian, 226-231.  
26 The miracles controversy set off a debate among Unitarians about the role of revealed religion and individual spiritual intuition. Most famously, this manifested in Emerson’s “Divinity School Address” in 1838 amid the already brewing conversation about miracles between Andrews Norton, William Henry Furness, George Ripley, and to a less extent Henry Ware Jr. See Buell, Literary Transcendentalism, 23-54; Grusin, 55-79; Habich; Hoffmann; Hurth, Between, 31-51; Hutchinson, 22-51; Mullin, 9-30.
Just as the harmony of interests relied on Locke’s theory of labor to describe how individual actions produced an ordered society, revealed religion relied on prayer. For orthodox Christians, this translation was fairly straightforward. As Calvin Stowe explained in his “Remarks on Prayer” for the Presbyterian *American Biblical Repository* (July 1842), “faith in miracles” is simply the belief in God “directed to a specific end” (17). Drawing on the lives of Henry Young Stilling and Augustus Herman Franke, Calvin Stowe provides examples of contemporary individuals for whom the “long series of answers to prayer” cannot rationally “be accounted for on the ground of accidental coincidences” (“Remarks” 9). Horace Bushnell too refers to Stilling and Franke in persuading his readers that “specific answers to prayer” (*Nature* 478) continue in the modern world. Whereas Bushnell is more mystical about the precise path from prayer to miracles, Calvin Stowe addresses the purposes of prayer directly. Not only does prayer reinforce a dutiful and grateful attitude toward God but, like the miracles it calls forth, the act of praying itself invites God and Christ to “flow into our hearts and transform us into his image” (“Remarks 18). In the *Christian Watchman* (8 Jan. 1847), Harriet Beecher Stowe makes a similar point even more acutely. Prayer must be a grand act of the “complete surrender of the whole being;” but prayer can still be about even the smallest troubles, from the temptation of “a waste of time” to that of making “censorious remarks on some neighbor.” Put simply, prayer bridged the gap that the orthodox insisted upon between religion and the world; it connected individuals’ mundane desires and tribulations with the divine will in order to equip them to navigate a sinful world. In this sense, much as labor and appropriation ensured the rationality upon which an economic society relied, prayer ensured the individual’s faith upon which a religious society depended. Moreover, for these divines, prayer and miracles exemplified the

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27 Mullin notes the intertwining of prayer and miracles when the debate about miracles resurfaced in the 1860s, 31-57, esp. 38.
advantages that a religious society had over an economic one by showing how much more a religious society could offer.28

Of course, prayer is a practice that spans, at the very least, Protestant denominations. As does Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Unitarian Henry Ware Jr. argues that prayer works “to connect every thing with religion” (Works 4:342). Ware does not differ from Stowe or her evangelical peers in thinking that religion should refer itself to the “ordinary duties of active life” (Works 4:342). As in the conflicts between Unitarians and evangelicals in Massachusetts over disestablishment, both sides agree that religion offers an indispensable foundation for society. But, what it means to connect religion with the world is precisely the issue. Rather than an act that looks for specific answers, Ware stressed that prayer is the most “indispensable and efficacious means of religious improvement” (Works 4:336). Ware, like most Unitarians, understood the gradual process of improvement to be almost as essential as evangelicals understood the moment of conversion.29 For this reason, where evangelicals often encouraged spontaneous prayer, Ware insists on the need for preparation, even suggesting meditation beforehand to gain the concentration needed for true prayer. In his version of prayer than emphasizes improvement over petition, Ware does not seem to recognize a stark divide between religious dependence and worldly independence. Similarly, Grindall Reynolds, a Unitarian minister ordained in Jamaica Plain and later installed in Concord, argues in his sermon “The

28 Ann Douglas does the most injustice to the evangelical writers of the period when she criticizes their dependence in economic terms (not in her dismissal of the sentimental mode) because dependence carried important religious meanings for these writers, esp. 24-25, 33.
29 To be sure, the Unitarians are hard to pin down because they reject creeds. Ware in this sense was in the more conservative camp of Unitarians, which extended on the liberal end out to Transcendentalism. The most comprehensive treatment of prayer is James Freeman Clarke’s The Christian Doctrine of Prayer that, like Ware, recommends careful preparations for prayer. In turn, he warns against the “Stoical view of God, nature, and man,” 168, as it appears in Emerson, for divorcing God from the world and humankind. In a more Transcendentalist vein, in contrast, Orville Dewey describes prayer as both the “adoring contemplation of God is the sublimest point of human attainment” and a “plunge into the depths of your own nature” “On the Reluctance to Pray.” Christian Examiner 38.1 (Jan 1845), 31. On the centrality of improvement for Unitarians, see Nathan Rives, 255-256.
Rationale of Prayer” that prayer teaches both “our entire dependence upon God” (321) for all of life’s gifts and also “man’s entire independence” (322) in being able to choose or reject those gifts.30 For these Unitarians, prayer is less about involving yourself in God’s active intervention in the world than it is about improving your own character and its basis in religious principles.

These disagreements about the method of purpose of true prayer, like the debates about miracles, reveal how the issues of religion’s place in the world raised by disestablishment in the 1820s continue in new forms through mid-century. As in the 1820s, the conflict between Unitarians and evangelicals continues to be about the institutions through which religion can and should accomplish its work. For Stowe, Cummins, and Gaskell, the institutions that political economy offers have proven themselves inadequate. In imagining how religion must respond to these institutions, however, each of these authors envisions her own way of refashioning society apart from the state out of the institutions of religion and political economy.

Religion, Economy, and the State in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

As politically charged as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is, the state and state politics occupy very little of the novel itself. The state most famously appears in a single chapter, when a senator from Ohio has returned home and explains to his wife that he has voted for the Fugitive Slave Act. His wife is appalled. While the senator worries about “the state of public agitation” if he were to have opposed the Act, the senator’s wife dismisses this anxiety with a simple argument: “Obeying God never brings on public evils” (*UTC* 144). Of course, when Eliza—the fugitive slave who fled Kentucky at

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30 Compare this, for instance, to Lyman Beecher’s “Dependence and Free Agency: A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of the Theological Seminary, Andover, July 16, 1832,” esp. 11. In its review of Henry Ware Jr.’s popular *On the Formation of Christian Character* (1831), the *Spirit of the Pilgrims* (May 1832) complained most loudly that Ware’s description of prayer suggested addressing Christ as merely the “Founder of our religion,” 291, rather than as our savior from sin.
the same time as Tom was sold South—arrives with her son seeking shelter, the senator does not hesitate to drive them to a safe haven. Here, Stowe contrasts the heroic actions of individuals—the senator’s wife’s emotional appeal, the fugitive slave’s hazardous journey, and the senator’s clandestine transportation—with the abstract rhetoric and interests of the state. While the state has failed Eliza and every other enslaved person, this scene suggests that individuals can still mitigate the evils of a state through personal means.

But, society is not simply split, for Stowe, between individuals and the state. Rather, Stowe also suggests how institutions influence society, for good and for evil. The state fails those it should protect in the novel precisely because it has been corrupted by the peculiar institution. Stowe marks the baleful influence of slavery less in terms of the state than in terms of another institution, namely the family. The novel overflows with examples of divided families, orphaned children, and perverted familial relationships. While the novel does focus much of its energy on individual actions, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* uses these actions to offer institutional solutions to an institutional problem. In particular, Stowe imagines how the actions of faithful individuals must create institutions to replace the ones already corrupted or destroyed by slavery, including the economy, the family, and the church (especially in the South).

In showing the many institutions that slavery had perverted, Stowe attacks slavery from as many angles as she could. Throughout *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe encourages us to sympathize with a whole range of individual slaves, from Topsy and Prue to Tom and George, because, as individuals, they deserve humane treatment. But Stowe also attacks slavery from an institutional perspective. Her most famous objection to slavery, as she explained in *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853), was that it was an “outrage upon the family” (*Key* 133). Slavery tore apart families and, in so doing, threatened what Stowe considered to be one of society’s most important institutions. Similarly, in the Southern church, Stowe shows an institution that, in accommodating slavery, has perverted itself “to fit every
crooked phase of selfish, worldly society” (UTC 280). The economy as an institution earns even more of Stowe’s criticism than the obviously corrupted southern churches. Indeed, the drama begins because Arthur Shelby—Tom’s owner in Kentucky—finds himself “obliged” (UTC 80) to sell Tom and Harry when his mortgage comes into a slave trader’s ownership. But, in the context of disestablishment, Stowe is doing more than criticizing the economy and slavery as conjoined institutions that have corrupted society. In contrast to how Wayland and other political economists linked religion and political economy as analogous institutions, Stowe instead condemns the economy and slavery as institutions in order to show how proper religious institutions must be in charge of creating a new society. The novel, therefore, not only dismantles slavery but also illustrates how faithful individuals can build the institutions that a moral society needs upon religious principles.

Stowe describes the relationship between political economy and slavery most explicitly in Tom’s next owner, the genteel Augustine St. Clare. When St. Clare and his cousin debate the relative condition of US slaves and British laborers, Stowe addresses the heart of political economy’s idea of society defined through Locke’s independent individual. Echoing the novel’s earlier scenes of abuse, St. Clare’s cousin stammers that slavery’s degradations of the enslaved, and its willingness to separate families in particular, make US slavery a unique injustice. In contrast, St. Clare insists that the logic of US slavery and of the economy as exemplified in Britain are the same: “that is, appropriating one set of human beings to the use and improvement of another” (UTC 341). As far as St. Clare is concerned, the logic and consequences of appropriation link slavery and political economy more than the abstract right to property distinguishes enslaved and free. To be sure, St. Clare admits that slavery is a more flagrantly offensive institution; and, in her other writing, Stowe differentiates

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31 The same is true of the Shelby’s church in Kentucky, see Dawn Coleman, 167.
32 For accounts of Stowe’s novel as a critique of modern capitalism, see Elizabeth Ammons “Heroines;” Gillian Brown, Domestic Individualism, 13-62; Charles H. Foster; Thomas P. Riggio esp. 64.
sharply between the severity of “oppressions under a free government and slavery” (*Sunny* 68). But Stowe makes sure in this scene to repeat multiple times the keyword “appropriating” (*UTC* 340) to reinforce the connection between slavery and political economy’s versions of society.33

On St. Clare’s plantation, Stowe lampoons political economy’s idea of the independent individual by dramatizing its essential operations among slaves who are anything but economically independent. Despite St. Clare’s criticism of the perverse consequences of both slavery and political economy, St. Clare still subscribes to political economy’s version of a society in which independence, rationality, and property rights are inseparable. For this reason, in St. Clare’s mind, slaves are dishonest because their “dependent, semi-childish state” as slaves prevents them from ever truly understanding “the rights of property” (*UTC* 318). But what St. Clare considers dishonesty Stowe describes satirically in terms of supposedly rational economic actions. For instance, the enslaved valet habitually wears St. Clare’s clothing and accessories, “among other appropriations from his master’s stock” (*UTC* 321). St. Clare’s valet and Mrs. St. Clare’s maid even establish their social status among the other slaves by appropriating their owners’ names, “Mr. St. Clare” and “Miss Benoît” (*UTC* 321). By appropriating physical property and class markers in their master’s clothing, polite names, and etiquette, St. Clare’s slaves recreate an economy of property and status. On the one hand, this scene, of course, exposes how slavery perverts economic relations among the slaves by robbing them of the opportunity to actually own property. On the other hand, this scene satirically reflects back on the society that political economy produces by showing how appropriation does not guarantee either rationality or independence.34

33 Locke defines his autonomous individual through labor and appropriation in his *Second Treatise of Government*, especially in the chapters “Of Slavery” and “Of Property.” On appropriation as central (even more than labor) to Locke’s theory of the autonomous individual, see C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, esp. 234.

34 Although primarily interested in market capitalism rather than political economy per se, Walter Benn Michaels similarly argues that Stowe links Southern slavery and Northern political economy, 171.
Stowe does not object to the lack of independence in slavery for undermining property rights but for threatening the principles at the foundation of religious institutions. In the *Key*, Stowe excoriates slavery both for restricting “liberty of conscience” and also for dictating how the enslaved “shall learn the will of God” (*Key* 121). And, even as Stowe recognizes the unique severity of slavery as the “worst system of despotism which can possibly exist” (*Key* 121), she finds its core threat to religious institutions to differ in degree, but not in kind, from the threat of other institutions. In her article “Independence” in the *National Era* (30 Jan. 1851), for instance, Stowe encouraged housewives and mothers, who may be unduly influenced by the opinions of their neighbors, to “learn to act individually, unanswered by the feelings and opinions of others” (17). Fashionable opinions, like both slavery and the market economy, threaten to corrupt individuals by separating them from their own consciences and religious principles. We have seen this threat to individual conscience from institutions already in Stowe’s writings about Roman Catholic establishments; we see it in Stowe’s writings on slavery; and we can imagine it enunciated more concretely in the power of fashion to corrupt an individual’s conscience and, in turn, how that individual worships.

With the corrupting potential of such institutions in mind, Stowe forcefully describes what role the individual can fulfill in the conflict over slavery. Anyone who has studied *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the last twenty years knows Stowe’s most famous articulation of individual action: her readers must “feel right” (*UTC* 624). Much as the family allows Stowe to describe the problem of slavery in relatable terms, “feeling right” allows Stowe to explain what action any individual can take. But feeling right is not all she asks. In the next paragraph, Stowe specifies the duty of the “Christian men and women of the North” (*UTC* 624): “you can pray” (*UTC* 625). To be sure, Stowe goes on to encourage these Christian individuals to emancipate, educate, and then return slaves to Africa. But praying is still more foundational. Praying for Stowe requires more than feeling right because it
demands a faith in divine providence and God’s interposition in the world that differentiates a society produced through religious institutions from one produced through the economy.

Stowe’s call to prayer is more than a rhetorical flourish. Stowe reiterates the importance of prayer three years later in an “Appeal to the Free Women of the Free States of American on the Present Crisis,” written for her brother’s The Independent (23 Feb 1854). In this article, Stowe similarly lists three duties for every individual woman in the US: first, each woman must inform herself enough to make her own judgment; second, women can petition the government; and, third, each woman “should make this subject a matter of earnest prayer” (57). Stowe encourages economic and political actions against slavery, but she also equates prayer and, say, the boycott of cotton as legitimate individual actions to rectify society. Rather than a mask for quietism, prayer is the only action capable of registering in what Stowe argues is the most powerful and legitimate version of society.

Tom exemplifies this kind of individual action. Especially towards the end of the novel, Tom’s most effective actions as an individual come through prayer. He prays for the two slaves that Simon Legree sends to beat him; and, surely enough, before Tom dies, his prayer that they be saved “was answered” (UTC 585). Similarly, after convincing Cassy not to kill Legree, Tom offers to “pray, with all [his] might, for [her]” (UTC 563) with clear results. Without Tom’s prayers, Cassy had planned and schemed for hours but discarded every idea for escape “as helpless and impracticable” (UTC 563); with Tom’s prayers, Cassy quickly invents a “simple and feasible” (UTC 563) plan for her escape. Tom’s actions in this sense are not independent, in that they rely upon God, but they are wholly individual. Through his prayers, Tom portrays an ideal of individual action by typifying Christ, the Christian model of the singular individual. In the society of the novel, then, Stowe instructs her readers in a religious form of cause and effect, in which an individual’s prayers provide the most tangible, and the only miraculous, results.
While Stowe demands that every individual pray for the end of slavery, she also depicts on the Shelby’s farm Tom’s legacy as institutional rather than simply individual. Part of the plantation’s transformation happens without regard to Tom, as Mrs. Shelby insists on bringing the plantation into a “tangible and recognizable shape” (*UTC* 587). When her son George returns from the site of Tom’s death, he furthers this process of creating an economic institution free of slavery by emancipating his family’s slaves and promising to teach them their rights as free people. Tom’s legacy, however, is not fulfilled until his memory transforms what had been an institution of slavery and political economy into a religious institution. When George Shelby closes his remarks on freeing his family’s slaves by imploring all to join him in “thank[y]ing God for the blessing of freedom” (*UTC* 616), he transitions from the economic figure of employer to the religious figure of preacher. Fittingly, his invitation to prayer is taken up by an “aged, patriarchal negro” (*UTC* 616) in a “hearty Te Deum” (*UTC* 617), a hymn that, in the *Book of Common Prayer* for instance, traditionally forms one of the songs when a building long-used for worship becomes consecrated, as well as one more regularly sung during the Eucharist, on major feasts, and during morning prayers. The actions of individuals such as Tom and then George Shelby are not important just as examples to Stowe’s readers as individuals but as examples of constructing the purified Christian institution of an ecumenical church.

Shelby’s final words about Tom recalibrate the novel’s title from an economic to a religious meaning. In the beginning of the novel, the title seems to point out the irony of property rights under the institutions of slavery and the economy: how can it be “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” if Tom cannot own even himself much less a building. But when Shelby calls attention to “UNCLE TOM’S CABIN” (*UTC* 617) after the hymn, he refers not to a symbol of the moral poverty of an economic society but to a purified church that will remind every individual “to be an honest and faithful Christian” (*UTC* 617). This new definition of Uncle Tom’s Cabin echoes the earlier scene in which
Eva distributes her hair to her parents’ slaves as a reminder that she had “gone to heaven, and that I want to see you all there” (UTC 419). The crucial difference between these two scenes is that, embedded in the institution of slavery, Eva can convert her listeners only as individuals. When St. Clare unexpectedly dies, Marie sells off Eva’s enslaved disciples in every direction. Slavery, in this sense, disrupts Eva’s institutional legacy. Therefore, this insistence on Uncle Tom’s Cabin at the end does not, as critics have argued, reincarnate the ideology of political economy outside of the market by gifting to Tom in death the individual personhood that the ownership of property bestows; instead, it imagines a future in which an ecumenical religious institution wields the power of building a society that Stowe laments her peers have let slip to slavery and political economy.

In Tom’s plot in the novel, Stowe can draw on a biblical narrative for the creation of a religious institution from individual actions; but such a voluntary church is not the only way that Stowe imagines the creation of purified religious institutions. In the George Harris plot, Stowe builds up the family as a different religious institution that describes a more complex interaction between individual and institution. From the beginning of the novel, George Harris insists much more forcefully than Tom on his own independence as an individual. Whereas Tom comforts his wife that, no matter where the slavetrader takes him, he will always be “in the Lord’s hands” (UTC 163), George Harris exhibits no such divine composure. Even when George’s wife pleads with him to “do right” because God will “deliver you,” George confesses that he “can’t trust in God” (UTC 62). Thereafter, modeled upon one of the most preeminent self-made men at the time in Frederick

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35 Eva's most lasting institutional legacy seems to be in Topsy's work as a missionary as an adult. For an account of Eva's death as absolutely central to the individual dynamics of conversion and admittance into institutions such as the family, school, and church, see Farrell, esp. 262.

36 In Domestic Individualism, esp. 44, Gillian Brown does discuss the economy and the home as institutions that Stowe is trying to reform, but her scant treatment of religion means that Brown overemphasizes the place of the economy in Stowe's thought. Stephen Best argues Stowe substitutes capitalist rationality for market speculation, 183. See also, Lori Merish’s account of Stowe’s “sentimental ownership,” 137, 144-163. Melissa Homestead reads this scene more literally in light of Stowe’s fight for intellectual property rights, 105-149.
Douglass, George tries to achieve his freedom independently, only begrudgingly accepting the help of those he meets along the way.\textsuperscript{37} To make George’s conversion all the more meaningful, Stowe wants her readers to consider George Harris in the first instance explicitly in terms of republican independence. Therefore, not only does George, when fighting off the slavetraders outside of the Quaker settlement, make his own “declaration of independence” (\textit{UTC} 298) but Stowe, in turn, asks us to compare him to Hungarian revolutionaries fighting against their own Catholic monarchy.

But George Harris’ individual independence is less important in the second half of the novel than the reunion of his family in their escape to freedom. In the growth of the Harris family beyond just George as an independent individual, Stowe draws on the secular conventions of melodrama to educate George and her readers in the construction of the family as another religious institution. Eliza’s intersecting plot of escape is particularly important in this respect because it demonstrates a path to freedom through God’s interposition in the world. Whereas George runs away because he refuses to wait for God’s help, Eliza’s first and frequent words as she runs away are the prayers, “Lord, help! Lord, save me!” (\textit{UTC} 105). With Eliza’s faith in God in place, Stowe turns to melodrama to represent God’s miraculous rewards for prayer. Take, for instance, one of the novel’s most famous scenes, in which Eliza implausibly crosses a semi-frozen river “stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing” (\textit{UTC} 118) from ice floe to ice floe. To be sure, the image of an enslaved woman so desperate that she would run across an icy river garners sympathy in order to encourage readers to extend their understanding of humanity to the enslaved. But, instead of focusing solely on the sympathetic aspect of this scene, we need to account for its implausibility, which, in fact, does

\textsuperscript{37} On the self-made man (and Douglass specifically), see David Walker Howe, \textit{Making the American Self}, 136-156. Thomas Augst describes a similar feeling among middle-class clerks, 59. Crucially for Stowe, Douglass was not independently the master of his own destiny. In her short biography of Douglass for \textit{Men of Our Times} (1868), later republished as \textit{The Lives and Deeds of Our Self-Made Men} (1872), Stowe suggests that Douglass’ mother’s may have helped secure his freedom because even after her death she could “plead for [her] children before God,” 386. That is, as great as Douglass is for raising himself so far above his life in slavery, Stowe tentatively suggests that not even Douglass himself could have done so without the help of his mother’s supplication to divine authority.
not lend itself naturally to sympathetic identification. Instead, this scene’s implausibility illustrates
the continuing power of God in the world. Through this implausibility, Stowe can focus on the
miracles that God provides to the faithful as against the mundane society created by political
economy. For Stowe, God provides not only the strength necessary in dire situations but also the
means to escape them, means which no human institution, not even based on the principles of
political economy, can match.

As in the stories Calvin Stowe narrates in his “Remarks on Prayer,” Stowe’s melodrama
makes it seem more rational to believe in miracles than to live only according to the logic of political
economy that denies divine interposition. Stowe turns to melodrama because it provided
conventions for seemingly miraculous coincidences familiar to a readership beset by the influence of
economic rationality. But such a use of melodrama is ironic. After all, critics tend to describe
melodrama by the 1850s as a secularized form of literature that compensated for how political
economy displaced religion in many people’s lives. Melodrama established a secular, but moral,
society through a Manichean binary precisely to offset the control that chance seemed to have over
life in a market economy. In this sense, Stowe turns melodrama back upon itself by reinfusing that
form’s familiar Manichaean morality with a self-consciously divine authority. Through this twist on
the underpinnings of melodrama, Stowe subtly illustrates the interplay between the individual and
the divine that produces the religious institutions central to society.

Once George and Eliza reunite, George slowly begins to understand the family as a religious
institution. Among the Quakers where he and Eliza (miraculously) find each other, George sees for
himself the first example of a “home” (UTC 224), the kind of institution built upon the promise of

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38 For two opposing accounts of melodrama that still agree that melodrama tries to re-instill moral
order in a society ordered by the economy, see Peter Brooks, *Melodrama*, 1-23, and Elaine Hadley, 1-
12, 34-76. David Grimstead links melodrama specifically to ideas of natural order, esp. 225-226. On
melodrama in the US theater, see Alan Ackerman, esp. 42; Grimstead, 137-203, esp. 196-197; Bruce
McConachie, esp. 164; Gary A. Richardson, esp. 259-260.
religion so absent from the institutions George has encountered thus far in the factory and the slave plantation. Only after experiencing this example can George begin to accept “a belief in God, and trust in his providence” (UTC 224). This fledgling faith in God ensures more miraculous rewards for George as the extended family that he and Eliza had assumed were lost forever continues to be reunited. Each improbable stage in the Harris family’s final reunion—from Cassy’s escape from Legree’s plantation to Cassy finding herself on a steamship north with George Shelby and a woman who turns out to be George’s sister—feeds back into Stowe’s broader point about the priority of the family over and above the independent individual. Thus, when these two women arrive in Canada, Stowe can finish George’s education in religious institutions with a lightly ironic spin. At the same moment that George tries to educate his son in independence by explaining to him to “depend on yourself” (UTC 605), Eliza’s mother and George’s sister are ushered in by the “good pastor of Amherstberg” (UTC 605). In contrast to George’s lesson to his son in independence, the arrival of lost family members solidifies this family not made just through independent individuals but as a religious institution “with a holy Trust in him, who … had brought them together” (UTC 606). Through the Harris family, Stowe illustrates how the actions of faithful individuals can not only outmaneuver an institution such as slavery but also naturally produce the religious institutions that a more just society will need.39 In doing so, Stowe demonstrates the rebirth of religiously purified institutions that will ensure an ordered society through the actions of individuals with free, independent consciences.

Cummins, Reciprocity, and Providence

39 Stowe is almost certainly drawing on Puritan ideas of familial affiliation since the Puritans were eminent theorists of institutional life. On crucial analogy between the family and other institutions (state, nation, church, etc.), see Farrell, esp. 245-246; Kaufmann, Institutional Individualism, 15-37.
When we turn to Maria Cummins, we lack the rich contextual material that we have for Stowe. Cummins does not seem to have published any essays outside of her fiction and the only letters that survive are a few from readers and one short letter from Cummins to a friend. The little biographical information we do have comes from a memorial sermon by Nathaniel Hall, her Unitarian minister at the First Church in Dorchester. From this sermon, we learn than Cummins taught Sunday school “as circumstances permitted” (“Sermon” 11); that she took a “lively interest in the advanced religious thought of the age” (“Sermon” 16); and that she rejected the fashionable theories of religion that have prioritized the “soul’s intuition” (“Sermon” 16) over the evidences of Christianity. Hall served at in Dorchester from 1835 to 1875, where he preached against slavery and for a higher law than human authority. In ways that seem to resonate with Cummins, Hall encouraged his parishioners to beware relying too much “on external agencies, on institutions and governments, and associations” when what they really needed was love for each other as individuals amid the “deepening power of moral principles” (“Unbelief” 13).

Not surprisingly, given this memorial sermon, religion abounds in Cummins’ novels. The state, however, is almost entirely absent. Although Cummins holds the standard prejudice against fashionable France in a dream-vision in The Lamplighter (1854), neither comparisons between the US and other nations nor actions by the US government play any significant role in the novel. And only in one place in Mabel Vaughan (1857) does Cummins describe her titular character’s “strong faith in its republican institutions” (MV 127). In contrast to the allegiances of the novel’s rake to Classical Rome and Greece, the titular heroine of Mabel Vaughan voices her own conviction that “in the Christianity of the nation lay the true safety” (MV 129) of its people and institutions. In itself, this statement says little about the relationship Cummins imagines there should be between religion and civil government, or even of religion’s place in the world. Writers with strong religious allegiances
ranging from evangelicals to Unitarians all argued that the foundation of national prosperity rested in the strength of the nation’s Christian faith.40

As with Stowe, the lack of explicit discussion of church and state in Cummins’ novels puts into relief the important role of the economy. In confronting the power of the institutions of political economy in *The Lamplighter*, Cummins models much of her approach on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In particular, Cummins looks to Stowe’s characters and her use of melodrama to represent the tension between individual independence and the construction of institutions redoubled by religion. Cummins undermines the logic of individual independence so crucial for political economy; but, at the same time, she shies away from imagining larger religious institutions as they begin to appear at the end of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Instead, Cummins imagines an interlocking system of small religious institutions built upon reciprocity. Through reciprocity, Cummins insists on religious institutions more than did writers in the liberal branch of Unitarianism while still refraining from a distinction between religious and secular institutions that derived from an evangelical distinction between the saved and the damned.

In focusing on the life of clerks in the Northern economy, Cummins critiques political economy’s idea of a society built upon the independent individual in more depth than Stowe’s anti-slavery novel. To be sure, like much US women’s fiction in the nineteenth-century, *The Lamplighter* is a story of a strong-willed girl becoming an independent and self-possessed woman. But Cummins structures the majority of her novel not around her heroine, Gerty, maturing into independence but around how Gerty subordinates her independence to her role in reciprocal relationships. Compare for a moment *The Lamplighter* with another paradigmatic novel of female development, Susan

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40 For discussion of the little Cummins’ biography we have, see Susan S. Williams, 72-96. The literature on this conjunction of religion and national prosperity is large. For a concise account on nationalist rhetoric with a biblical foundation, Mark A. Noll. “The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation;” on religious writing that warned that the nation was straying too far from its religious foundation, see Hanley, 32-57.
Like Warner’s heroine, who effectively loses her parents early in the novel, Gerty is an orphan who struggles with her temper. Gerty knows nothing of religion and seems to have no ties to any people or institutions, least of all the cruel mistress who seems to have adopted her. As does the protagonist in Warner’s novel, Gerty continually tries to learn self-control but struggles with her temper when, for instance, a servant throws away all of her keepsakes. But, unlike *The Wide, Wide World*, which ends just before her heroine simultaneously reaches the age of maturity and gains complete self-control, *The Lamplighter* comes to the same point only a quarter of the way into the novel. By the time Gerty is fourteen, she has already displayed her “first instance of complete self-control.” The novel can then casually dismiss this event as “the last we shall have occasion to dwell upon” (L. 118) and move on to new preoccupations.

Cummins makes this shift in the priorities of her narrative even more explicit when she invokes Stowe’s example of an individual learning the basics of religion. Cummins defines Gerty’s introduction to religion through her first instructions about prayer. Gerty lacks religious education so completely that, when the lamplighter brings home a figurine of the praying Samuel, Gerty is puzzled why the figurine is kneeling. The answer that the figurine is praying leads Gerty to a series of inquiries: she asks what prayer is, who God is, and, eventually, what “Samuel prays to God for” (L 40). As the reviewer in the *New Quarterly Review* (July 1854) remarks, Gerty’s total religious ignorance recalls “the scene where Topsy confessed that she ‘spect she grow’d’” (385); in the interaction between Topsy and Eva, Stowe parodies the Westminster catechism by showing how

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41 Nina Baym calls *The Lamplighter* “The most successful imitation (in Harold Bloom’s sense, misreading) of *The Wide, Wide World*,” *Woman’s Fiction*, 164. Stacey Margolis, Claire Chantell, and Sharon Kim also discuss the parallels between the child protagonists in Cummins and Warner. 42 Samuel figurines were modeled on Joshua Reynolds’ *The Infant Samuel at Prayer* (c. 1776) and became especially popular after the Minton & Co. showed them at the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London.
inadequate it is compared to Eva’s incarnation of divine love. For Stowe, this scene marks Topsy’s conversion, which actually makes Topsy no longer of much interest to the narrative. Topsy swiftly improves her behavior and eventually goes to her missionary work in Africa; but, after her conversion, the drama of her narrative is finished.

When Cummins adapts this scene, with the exception of the predictable Unitarian substitution of prayers to God for Eva’s incarnation of a divine Jesus, Cummins portrays the relationship between God and the individual much as Stowe does. Gerty learns from the lamplighter’s own “child-like faith” that, because God in heaven is so powerful, “people were made better by prayer”; or, in vocabulary that more clearly invokes Topsy’s dialogue with Eva, “it makes folks good to pray to God.” In turn, like Stowe, Cummins substitutes sentimental piety for the stricter definition of prayer called for in the Westminster Catechism. As Gerty ponders her only partially answered questions about theology, she recreates the Samuel’s posture, which prompts Cummins to address her readers: “did not God in heaven … accept that first homage of a little, untaught child?” In Gerty’s early religious education, Cummins isolates through prayer a definition of the individual that is based on the relationship between the individual and God, not, as in political economy, on concepts of labor and appropriation. But, whereas for Topsy the conversion which that prayer precipitates marks the climax of her action in the plot of the novel, for Gerty the lesson of prayer marks only the beginning of a lifetime of

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43 Topsy, for instance, asks if the initial state from which Adam and Eve fell was the “state Kintuck,” UTC 368. Cindy Weinstein also notices this connection but discusses it in terms of property ownership, 51. For a discussion of Ophelia’s instructional methods in the catechism, see Richard Brodhead, “Sparing the Rod” and Gillian Brown, Domestic Individualism, 13-34. In other readings, Topsy’s education answers questions about African American imitation of white habits, Hochman, 120, whether one can recover from the ill effects of slavery, Bernstein, 45, or even how the disciplined child models national identity, Sánchez-Eppler, 206.  
44 Molly Farrell explains the roots of the conventions for representing Topsy’s conversion that Stowe finds in James Janeway’s Token for Children (1671).
improvement. The rest of the novel explores how Gerty and her compatriots build their own religious institution that eschews a foundation in individual independence.

In order to displace the independent individual as the focus of her novel, Cummins orients her novel around an interlocked chain of reciprocal relationships that Gerty forms with those around her. Cummins establishes the core of these relationships in the first quarter of the novel as Gerty learns of religion. First, the titular lamplighter adopts her away from her cruel adopted mother and shows Gerty her first true home; next, the neighboring family and especially the son, Willie, who is first like a brother and in the end becomes her husband, introduce Gerty to the basics of religion; and, third, the blind woman who takes Gerty in when the lamplighter dies guarantees Gerty’s religious education. After Gerty incurs her debts to these characters, Cummins manipulates the plot of *The Lamplighter* so that every character that Gerty depends on eventually depends on Gerty later in the novel. Because the old lamplighter saves Gerty from the abusive care of her initial guardian, Gerty is there to care for the lamplighter when he sickens and dies. As the lamplighter dies, he explains to Gerty and Emily that “we all depend on each other” (*L* 94); as the lamplighter predicts, just as Emily will take care of Gerty’s immediate needs, so too Gerty “must lend a helpin’ hand to her weakness” (*L* 95). Thus, Emily can offer Gerty physical, emotional, and religious support and, in turn, depend on Gerty for both physical guidance abroad and companionship at home. Through Emily and Gerty’s relationship, Cummins defines the paradigm of reciprocity. They become so close, in fact, that for Gerty sharing her visual experience with Emily “was like whispering to her own heart” (*L* 265). In this sense, Gerty is the protagonist of Cummins’ novel not as an individual but as one half of a series of reciprocal pairings of characters.

In Gerty’s relationship with Emily, Cummins illustrates the importance of prioritizing reciprocity over individual independence. At first, Cummins presents Gerty’s economic independence as the next logical step to pursue after she has gained emotional self-control. Not long
after Gerty has achieved emotional independence, she finds herself caught between, on the one hand, her desire for economic independence and, on the other, what Emily’s father—her current financial benefactor—expects of her. After Gerty upsets Emily’s father by objecting to a trip he has planned, Emily tries to pacify her father by reminding him that they have supported Gerty financially “to make her independent of all the world, and not simply dependent upon us” (L 140). Gerty recognizes that accusing Emily’s father of “tyranny” and focusing solely on “the power of regaining [her] independence” (L 143) arise mostly from her pride; but Gerty remains committed to proving that she “can earn [her] own living” (L 175). Emily and her family, therefore, leave Gerty in the city to make her living. But the possible plot of Gerty’s quest for economic independence ends soon thereafter. As the family is about to return from this trip, Gerty learns that the family is planning a new trip but that their maid who has travelled with them thus far will not go with them to Europe. Gerty fears that, without her assistance on this international trip, Emily would be too “dependent upon a stranger” (L 185). While one of Gerty’s friends objects to this new plan since it means “relinquishing all the independence that she has been striving after” (L 184), Gerty herself does not hesitate. She forfeits her independence in favor of returning to take care of Emily. Economic independence quickly comes to matter much less to Cummins than the reciprocity that makes Gerty “feel bound heart and hand” (L 185) to the woman who took her in after the lamplighter’s death.

By incessantly repeating this pattern of Gerty making good on her end of reciprocal relationships, Cummins begins to imagine her own version of a religious institution. When Gerty comes across her original, abusive guardian dying in an acquaintance’s house, Gerty returns the meager obligation she owes even this woman by nursing her as she dies. When Gerty meets the father she thought had died, she leads him away him from his atheism. Finally, when the neighboring boy who introduced her to prayer returns from a decade of business in India, Gerty
returns the favor by being his wife. I include all of these examples at the risk of repetitiveness to emphasize just how insistently Cummins represents reciprocity in Gerty’s lifetime. In sum, they offer increasingly melodramatic proof of society’s benevolence, even for one like Gerty who was from a young age “dependent upon the mercy and charity of a world” (L 141). Cummins’ phrasing is important here. Although Cummins does note that God watches over Gerty, she focuses our attention on a religious society that reveals its benevolence to those who trust in its design. This trust allows Gerty to see the providential design of society and, in turn, share it with others. In this sense trust is both interpersonal and cosmic. In confronting her father’s atheism, Gerty tries most passionately to convince him to “Trust in goodness” (L 305) and her father compromises by trusting in her. For Cummins, believing in the providential ordering of society is the first step toward helping to make that ordered society a reality.

This emphasis on providential design differs from the more active divine presence in Stowe, where providential events follow more closely upon individuals’ prayers. Unlike Cassy who finds her plan of escape through prayer or Eliza who miraculously crosses the ice floes, Gerty improves herself through prayer in ways that strengthen her “religious trust” (L 312). Cummins, therefore, would have us understand the prayers in The Lamplighter quite differently than the prayers in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Whereas Stowe ends her novel with prayers of thanks for a miraculously enlarged family, Cummins ends her novel as Emily rejoices that her “prayers are answered” because she leaves behind a husband to follow her example to “do good on earth” (L 421). Although Cummins never completes this man’s conversion, conversion is actually much less important for Cummins’ version of a religious institution built on reciprocity and improvement. Emily’s implied prayer reminds us of the connection in this implausible ending between prayer and providential order; but,
at the same time, Cummins represents God’s presence in the world not directly in interposition but only indirectly in the good works of her characters who trust in divine order.\textsuperscript{45}

Although Cummins does not represent as close a link between miracles and petitionary prayer, Cummins absorbs Stowe’s use of melodrama as a means of representing God’s rewards to the faithful. In \textit{The Lamplighter} as in \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}, melodrama reunites broken families, most notably Gerty and her father, Philip Amory. Availing herself of more elaborate melodramatic conventions of disguise and international misadventure, Cummins first introduces Amory in the disguise of Mr. Phillips, who encounters Gerty on the steamboat to upstate New York. Conveniently Gerty talks with him only in the few moments when she is not with her blind benefactor, one of the only characters who would reasonably recognize his voice. After Amory helps to save Gerty from the wreckage of a steamboat that exploded while they were onboard, Cummins reveals that Amory is in fact Gerty’s father. Thereafter, Amory explains that he had fled to South America, where he met Gerty’s mother before she died of malaria; he returned to make a fortune in gold mining in California; and later he even traveled in Europe and Northern Africa where he had met Gerty’s childhood neighbor (among Bedouins, no less). Even more melodramatically, Amory initially fled the US after he accidently blinded the woman he was in love with by too hastily applying an acid that he mistook for cologne; of course, this woman is Emily, Amory’s step-sister and Gerty’s blind benefactor. If we are amazed at the melodrama of the plot, Cummins’ characters are themselves no less in awe of the “singular circumstance” (\textit{L. 400}) of Gerty being Amory’s daughter and in turn bringing Amory back into their lives. Emily’s father’s can barely process the scene simply muttering: “Singular coincidence! Very singular! Very” (\textit{L. 400}). Rather than hiding the implausibility of the

\textsuperscript{45} As Lawrence Buell notes, Amory is not technically converted, but rather “stands for the partially enlightened person whose values are not yet properly clarified,” \textit{New England}, 81. For Buell, this almost conversion matches the debate in Unitarianism “between person-centered and transpersonal values,” \textit{New England}, 82. But the emphasis on providential order and a trust in that providence also signals Cummins’ commitment to a more conservative form of Unitarianism that shies away from the perceived excesses of Transcendentalism.
melodrama, Cummins actively draws attention to it to emphasize the order that she argues God has provided for society, so long as we know how to find it. The melodrama is itself not the plot—only an embedded story that draws interest second-hand—because the divine order that brings the individuals together is more important to Cummins than divine interposition.

The reciprocal pairs brought together through Cummins’ melodrama take the place of Stowe’s religious institutions, especially the family. For Stowe, the family is a crucial institution for voluntary Protestantism; and, to be sure, families appear as an important piece of the society that Cummins similarly develops through melodrama. Much as George Harris experiences a home among the Quakers for the first time, Gerty is amazed at the wonders the “home” (L. 21) that the lamplighter offers her. In the relationship between Gerty and her adopted parent, as Cindy Weinstein argues, Cummins carefully manipulates the discourses of legal adoption to redefine the family in terms of contract rather than bloodlines. But Cummins rarely shows us sustained families larger than just a pair of individuals. Nowhere in The Lamplighter do we see the aggregation of individuals within families that we see in Stowe, where the Harris family keeps finding new members and even the Quakers manage to absorb a reformed slave-trader. Even when Emily’s father brings home a new wife and step-daughter, Cummins isolates Emily and Gerty’s relationship from this enlarged family. Cummins prefers reciprocal pairs because they more clearly illustrate how she envisions God’s reward for trust: individuals return the kindness they have previously received. When Gerty’s father concedes to her that he will “try and have faith in you” (L. 305), he enters into just this kind of institutional relationship that promises a society organized on religious principles. These pairs, then, perform the same function that families do in Stowe: producing a religious society by naturally bringing faithful individuals together.

In replacing the institution of the ever-expanding family with reciprocity, Cummins

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interlocks pairs to secure the cohesion that religious institutions are meant to provide. In structuring her vision of society around pairs rather than around individuals, Cummins challenges political economy’s foundation in the labor of an independent individual. Consider, for instance, how Cummins redefines an individual’s labor in Gerty’s future husband and her disguised father, who both work as merchant’s clerks. Gerty’s father illuminates the poverty of the labor of an independent individual on its own terms. As did many clerks in the nineteenth-century US, Amory strives as a young clerk for a political economy’s ideal of independence. After his mother marries Emily’s father, he resents his “utter dependence” (L 371) upon Emily’s father’s kindness both for his lodging and for his job at his counting-house. This ideal, however, proves hollow when, after Amory runs away and does gain an independent fortune, his life of independence has led him to “trust no one” (L 304). Amory succeeds too well in achieving independence and needs Gerty to return him to a society in which religion binds people together.

Unlike Amory and the many real clerks who sought economic independence, Willie—Gerty’s neighbor and eventual husband—first enters the profession not to become economically independent of his family but, instead, so that he can support his mother and grandfather. In this inversion, Cummins adapts the logic of labor and appropriation by turning it away from self-interest and independence. Therefore, on the one hand, Cummins echoes political economy when she insists that “without labor, nothing that is worth having can be won” (L 39); but, on the other hand, Cummins defines the best form of labor as not self-interested but “for [the] support and comfort” of another (L 39). In this sense, Willie labors not out of a self-interested “love of gold” but for “the love he bears his mother” (L 107). In Willie’s other-directed labor, Cummins fundamentally redefines the meaning of labor away from Locke’s paradigm of the independent individual in a state of nature to one in which an individual can never—and should never—labor alone.

47 On the clerk as a representative profession for the middle-class man and the importance of independence for those clerks, see Augst.
In redefining labor in *The Lamplighter*, Cummins seems to have had in mind the scene in which Locke illustrates labor in the state of nature. In a scene that is relatively isolated from the rest of the novel, in fact, Cummins parodies Locke’s illustration of independent labor and the right to property. A visiting doctor who is a friend of Gerty’s jumps over the neighbors’ stone wall to try some fruit from their pear trees. Once over the wall, the doctor trips over the neighbor’s son who is napping in the grass. In a lighthearted exchange, the doctor is affronted by this lazy boy for “tripping up honest folks” (*L* 124)—although, of course, the doctor is there on the not-so-honest errand of stealing fruit. Undeterred, the doctor defines his effort in jumping the wall as proper labor by unabashedly explaining that he “came to help myself to the pears” (*L* 124). Playing along, the young man himself merrily volunteers to assist in such “A remarkably honorable and honest errand” (*L* 124). To be sure, this humorous scene shows two men playacting chivalry for Gerty’s benefit; but, more broadly, it suggests how Cummins challenges the emphasis on independent labor in political economy. Where Locke imagines a state of nature in which an individual alone on untouched land can enjoy his apples through independent labor, Cummins imagines a world in which walls already enclose the fruit tree, and the children of the owner’s of property carelessly sleep under that walled off tree. By reframing the conditions in which labor occurs, Cummins redefines labor in two ways: first, labor does not occur by independent individuals in a natural state and, second, true labor is not self-interested but done in service of another individual. Part of the joke in Cummins’ revision of Locke is that the doctor justifies his “labor” not only as entertaining Gerty but also as slyly laboring for the neighbor by trying her pears. As irreverent as this scene is, Cummins’ point remains: one labors with another in mind, not, as political economy would have it, as an independent individual.48

48 In this scene, especially, although Cummins does adapt Locke’s theory of labor, she does not, as Elizabeth Barnes argues, “[draw] on the principle of possessive individualism to assert woman’s independence through *spiritual* liberation,” *States*, 89. Cummins explicitly rejects the individual
In imagining a religious society built upon the reciprocity of other-directed labor, Cummins objects to what had been probably the most popular convention for representing the hidden rewards of selfless action, namely the convention of the fateful—and often surprise—inheritance. As children Willie and Gerty initially credit Santa Claus for a serendipitous job offer that Willie receives after his previous employer suddenly died. We do not learn until much later in the novel that Willie actually won this position because an old (and quite eccentric) woman was repaying her “knight” (L. 214) for helping her across the icy sidewalk. In this exchange, Willie’s relationship with the old woman fits into the reciprocal pattern that Cummins establishes throughout the novel. But Willie rejects the more melodramatic relationship that this old woman tries to create when she designates Willie her “sole inheritor” (L. 363). With very little comment, Willie simply refuses the inheritance. Cummins implies that, if Willie were to accept such an inheritance, the basis of a religious society would drift away from reciprocity and back toward the logic of political economy in which economic independence defines mature selfhood. Such a definition of maturity is not only moot—Willie has made his money already without much fanfare—but also, in Cummins’ imagination, flawed. In contrast to inheritance, reciprocity allows Cummins to depict the perpetual activity of religion in the world. It constantly demands that individuals continue to labor for others; in turn, that labor continuously proliferates the primary institution upon which Cummins’ version of society depends—the interlocked, reciprocal pair—without ever dividing society into wholly discrete institutions.

This attack on inheritance as a way for melodrama to infuse morality into political economy runs deeper in Cummins’ novel than just this scene. In the process of unraveling the extent of Amory’s place in the melodrama of The Lamplighter, Cummins reveals how her story undermines melodrama’s moral ambition by twisting the plot of a popular, theatrical melodrama from nine years autonomy in economic relationships that would otherwise make this similarity in Cummins’ novel “conducive to capitalist as well as evangelical constructions of liberal individualism,” States, 89.
earlier—Anna Cora Mowatt’s *Fashion; or, Life in New York* (1845). Mowatt’s play too features a virtuous orphan named Gertrude, here working as a governess for a merchant; its hero is a rural, Yankee farmer named Adam Trueman, whose name Cummins echoes in her titular character, the lamplighter Trueman Flint; moreover, when Cummins has Gerty’s father originally flee the country because Emily’s father accuses him of “a dark and horrid crime,—the crime of forgery” (L 373) that was in fact committed by the father’s “most confidential clerk” (L 399), Cummins further echoes the plot of Mowatt’s play. There, the merchant’s own “confidential clerk” (*EAD* 311) is blackmailing the merchant because he knows the merchant is himself “a forger” (*EAD* 363). In its long run at the Park Theatre in New York, *Fashion* combined melodrama with a sentimental critique of the hypocrisy of fashionable life. But, according to Karen Halttunen, Mowatt’s play also treated with more comedy the relationships within society that had caused many sentimental writers extreme anxiety throughout the 1830s and 1840s.⁴⁹ The villain in Mowatt’s play, after all, is too hyperbolic to be really threatening. He masquerades as a French Count, almost seducing the merchant’s daughter into a clandestine marriage and captivating the merchant’s wife with the allure of the newest French customs (and costumes). In this respect, *Fashion* and *The Lamplighter* both value the transparency in Gertrude’s conduct, which renders her unsusceptible to seduction and the false appearances that plague Saratoga and upstate New York in Cummins’ novel.⁵⁰

Cummins, alongside Stowe and Mowatt, attacks fashion’s ability to corrupt individual consciences. But, by adapting Mowatt’s melodramatic plot of inheritance, Cummins distinguishes her own idea of an institution founded upon reciprocity from Mowatt’s idea of the family. Mowatt’s melodramatic revelation is that Gertrude, whose mother had been seduced and abandoned, is actually Trueman’s granddaughter. Committed to the ideals of political economy, Mowatt’s Trueman wanted Gertrude to be “taught true independence” (*EAD* 360) away from the temptations of his

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⁴⁹ For Haltunnen’s account of Mowatt’s play, see *Confidence Men*, 153-160.
⁵⁰ See Haltunen *Confidence*, 155; on transparency and privacy in Cummins, see Barnes, *States* 89.
own money and the influence of suitors who interested only in her money. Trueman, therefore, sets up a codicil: Gertrude will only earn her inheritance if she can prove herself virtuous to Trueman when he arrives in the city to test her, without her knowing about him or her patronage. In Mowatt’s version, Gertrude does nothing for her mysterious grandfather beyond proving her steadfastness to “economy, true independence, and home virtues, instead of foreign follies” (EAD 365).

Mowatt’s own plot—true to the republican principles prevalent in melodramas of the Jacksonian period—replaces an easy inheritance of property based on lineage with an inheritance offered as the reward for republican virtue. But Cummins eschews even this form of inheritance because it rewards individual independence and absolves these characters of their responsibilities toward one another. In adapting Mowatt, therefore, Cummins splits the function of Mowatt’s Adam Trueman between the lamplighter and Gerty’s biological father. Gerty learns from her adopted father and repays him soon thereafter. In turn, rather than testing Gerty like Gertrude’s grandfather does in Mowatt’s play, Amory almost begs his daughter to teach him the religious trust that he lacks. Much as Cummins invokes the possibility of Willie’s inheritance only to dismiss it, so too does she recall the inheritance of natural traits and property in Mowatt’s melodrama only to push her novel away from the logic of independence and political economy.

The reciprocity that dominates Cummins’ novel differentiates the society she imagines from both the society Stowe builds upon exclusive institutions and a republican model aligned with political economy. In Mowatt’s play, the continual rejection of fashion and false appearances works toward Adam Trueman’s closing declaration that the US (as opposed to Europe) has “nobles in abundance—of Nature’s stamp, if not of Fashion’s,” (EAD 366). Trueman, here, recalls a republican ideology that infuses political economy with morality by stressing disinterestedness and the public

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51 See Alan Ackerman, 42.
good over competition and self-interest. Mowatt’s melodrama rejects the values of mid-century political economy in favor of the hierarchy of a still older political economy. In contrast, Cummins returns to a more literal interest, which is neither self-interest nor disinterest, but, to borrow Hannah Arendt’s neologism, “something inter-est, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (182). That is, reciprocity is always interested insofar as a laboring individual always has another in mind. This reciprocal interest spreads across individuals until it binds together a whole, unified society.

Fittingly, Cummins sprinkles the vocabulary of interest through her novel, but in ways that undermine the logic of both self-interest and disinterestedness. Although Gerty’s father is still in disguise, Cummins emphasizes the “strange interest” Gerty takes in him. And even though at times Cummins praises Gerty’s lack of self-interest as itself disinterested, Cummins also fractures that concept in the seemingly bizarre interview between Gerty’s father and Willie. In this scene, Gerty’s father, still in disguise, tries to discover if Willie loves his daughter or wants to marry—as everyone seems to expect—the rich, beautiful, and fashionable daughter of his employer. Willie, of course, insists he wants to marry Gerty, despite Amory’s “disinterested exertions” (L. 343) and “disinterested advice” (L. 348). Cummins’ joke is that Amory’s advice is anything but disinterested. His advice marks precisely his labor on behalf of Gerty’s interests and, therefore, his protection of Gerty’s future. Amory’s labor in this conversation already begins to repay the trust Gerty has animated in her father. Through trust and reciprocity, he is interested without being either self-interested or

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52 On republican ideology in Mowatt, see Haltunnen, Confidence, 155. For the place of disinterest in republican ideology, see William Huntting Howell, “Spirits of Emulation.” Nancy Cott traces these same principles in the “the ideology of passionlessness,” esp. 228.

53 In this sense, I argue that Cummins is not, as Weinstein argues, pursuing “a republican ideal,” 45, in her construction of the family precisely because such ideals were bound up in political economy’s emphasis on the independent individual.
disinterested. Instead, he is interested insofar as he tries to fulfill the duty he owes to Gerty as a father, which she herself has already started to reward by teaching him about the goodness of humanity. In doing so, Cummins adapts miraculous providence and the theory of labor into a society of reciprocally dependent pair, which is neither as individual as political economy nor as broadly institutional as a Stowe’s religious society built upon large churches and families.

Gaskell and Providential Order

In the preface to the 1857 Leipzig edition of Maria Cummins' *Mabel Vaughan*, Elizabeth Gaskell reveals her hope for what novels can accomplish. Imported novels in England, according to Gaskell, provide “glimpses into American home-life … quite beyond and apart from the observations of travellers” (*MV* vii). Gaskell suggests that these accounts of life in the US—and British novels published in the US act likewise—attest to our common humanity “however different may be national manifestations” of “accents, manners, dress, and language” (*MV* viii). This might sound conventional—especially to a modern reader. But Gaskell alerts us here to an aspect of the novel that describes that form’s importance. Namely, the novel allows us to perceive certain truths about how society is put together that might get lost even in “works of a far higher intrinsic value” (*MV* vii). For Gaskell, this truth, which she quotes from Wordsworth, is that we share “All of us one human heart.” Gaskell likes this line. She used it three years earlier in *North and South*, when her capitalist hero realizes the essential connections he shares with his workers in Gaskell’s vision of a unified society.

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54 Albert O. Hirschman traces the evolution of “interest” as a countervailing force to the destructive forces of the “passions.” In his analysis, interest began to take this meaning in England first on a national scale as “the interest of the ruler” and then “the interests of various groups,” 36, before shrinking to “the material aspects of a person’s welfare,” 32.
North and South itself owes its structure to Elizabeth Gaskell’s reading of US literature, most notably Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Frederick Douglass’ Narrative (1845). With these texts as sources, Gaskell rewrites the geopolitical dynamics, the abolitionist rhetoric of freedom from tyranny, and images of domestic reform in the US for British concerns. By drawing on Douglass’ account of slavery in the US, Gaskell attacks the “tyranny” (NS 107) and “arbitrary power” (NS 109) of the British navy, whose rigid hierarchy of authority the heroine’s brother Frederick defied and had to flee into exile. Gaskell encourages us to read the navy in the context of slavery by doubling Frederick Douglass’s names in Frederick Hale (aka Frederick Dickinson as he lives in Spain to escape from the British authorities). Of course, in George Harris, Stowe too included a defiant character modeled on Douglass, complete with her own comparison to the revolution against the despotic (and Roman Catholic) Austrian government. In their depictions of slavery as a state-sponsored institution, Douglass and Stowe model for Gaskell her own approach to the potential tyranny of state institutions in Britain.

Gaskell draws on Stowe more explicitly when she attacks England’s established church. Like Stowe, Gaskell admired ministers who sacrificed material and social stability in the established church for religious principles. In North and South, Gaskell manipulates the plot and characters of Uncle Tom’s Cabin to emphasize how the state restricts individuals’ ability to follow their consciences. Gaskell mocks a thoughtless adherence to the established church by translating the character of Eva’s obnoxious and sickly mother, Mrs. Marie St. Clare, into her own heroine’s flawed—but not as objectionable—mother, Mrs. Maria Hale. Much as Marie St. Clare attends a “fashionable church” always dressed “in full force” (UC 275), Maria Hale too thinks of the Church in terms of how she and her family will be “admitted into society” (NS 46). But, whereas Stowe ridicules in Marie St. Clare the selfishness that destroys the family as an institution central to a religious society, Gaskell

55 On Stowe and Gaskell, see Whitney Womack Smith; on Gaskell and Douglass, see Julia Sun-Joo Lee, 91-111.
more gently satirizes the subordination of conscience to a state church. Gaskell makes ironic Maria Hale’s shock that anyone, including her husband, would think that he “could know better than the Church” (NS 46). Whereas the heroine’s bother illustrates the potential tyranny of state institutions by defying an irrational superior in the navy, the mother illustrates that same tyranny by thoughtlessly accepting the opinions of a state church. In both cases, Gaskell demonstrates how state institutions threaten the individual’s conscience.

But, whereas Stowe imagines a chain of events that leads from the actions of faithful individuals to purified institutions to a redoubled religious society, Gaskell imagines a society less built upon religious institutions than revealed by faithful individuals. Gaskell downplays the role of institutions because she envisions a society already structured by Divine Providence but whose benevolent design corrupt institutions and clouded consciences have obscured. In Mary Barton (1848), Gaskell had already started this work. As Jon Singleton has argued, Gaskell moves away in this early condition-of-England novel from the institutional to the individual as she blends together what later critics identify as distinct religious and secular discourses. Similarly, Catherine Gallagher shows how in Mary Barton Gaskell emphasizes human freedom but still holds onto the conservative Unitarian idea of society governed by a set of providential natural laws.56 In North and South, Gaskell builds on her earlier articulation of a benevolent society ordered by Divine Providence by emphasizing that the best institutions and the purest individuals’ consciences allow this society to operate without interference. This belief in the Divine order of society, I argue, is what links political economy and religion so fruitfully in Gaskell’s mind. Faith and the science of wealth alike are not about building upon religious principles; they are instead about discovering the truth of a society already ordered by Divine Providence.

56 Singleton, esp. 935. Gallagher sets up the roots of this deterministic causality in Harriet Martineau, Industrial Reformation, 36-61, before showing how Gaskell’s novel runs into formal problems by trying to have both providential determinism and moral freedom, which Gallagher associates with the old and new schools of Unitarianism, Industrial Reformation, 62-87, esp. 67, 82.
To establish the basis for the discovery of society’s order, Gaskell grounds her plot in a conflict between an individual’s conscience and the dictates of the established church. Nothing in *North and South* would have happened if Mr. Hale, in order to stay in a comfortable parish in the South of England, had sacrificed his principled objections to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. As Hale explains to his daughter, he doubts not religion but rather “the authority of the church” (*NS* 35). Confronted with his doubts, Hale tries (and fails) to take courage in the soliloquy of John Oldfield, one of the two thousand Presbyterian ministers who were ejected from the Church of England in 1662 for similarly questioning the authority of the established church. In standing by his principles, Hale calls upon the example of the suffering of the “early martyrs … for truth” (*NS* 37) to justify himself to his daughter. From its opening conflict, *North and South* chooses to pursue truth rather than economic comfort and religious complacency.

This invocation of martyrdom matches closely William Gaskell’s own illustration of early Unitarian martyrs. In a sermon given on 8 December 1850, Gaskell explains that these martyrs provide three lessons: they make us thankful to God, they encourage a simple version of Christianity, and they give us “a noble example of adherence to principle and duty” (W. Gaskell 15). Although the state was the institution that attacked many of these early martyrs, William Gaskell does not stress in this sermon the state as a particular danger. Whereas in the writing of evangelical voluntaryists the state appears essentially opposed to true religion, Gaskell portrays the state as only a contingent historical antagonist to the free inquiry of truth. It makes sense in this context that William Gaskell hated the Athanasian Creed—especially the belief that “This is the catholic faith,

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57 On the importance of the truth and free inquiry to Unitarianism, see John Chapple, “Unitarian Dissent,” 165; R. K. Webb, “Gaskells” 163-164.
which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved”—because it prioritized membership in a specific institution over the adherence to individual conscience.58

Hale’s use of this particular version of John Oldfield’s soliloquy, as Angus Easson argues, shades the novel with a subtly Unitarian history without explicitly involving the novel in too much denominational conflict.59 But connecting Hale’s actions to the institutional history of Unitarianism risks oversimplifying how Gaskell characterizes religion differently from, for example, how Stowe rebuilds society upon religious institutions. Unlike Stowe, Gaskell portrays religion not as opposed to the state in particular but as ambivalent about its relationship to institutions in general. On the one hand, because Hale’s justification invokes the creation of Nonconformity in the 1662 Act of Uniformity as an antagonist to the state church, Gaskell aligns Hale with Dissent, the second largest—albeit quite diverse—religious institution in England. On the other hand, Hale’s decision to prioritize religious truth strains his relationship to other institutions in the novel as well. In leaving the Church of England, he feels he needs to leave not just his parish but the whole South of England; his opinions would “do him no good at Oxford” (NS 47) where he attended university and still has at least one friend. Furthermore, he damages his family, shaking the “staid foundation of [his daughter’s] home” (NS 36) and contributing to his wife’s death in their move North. For Gaskell, it is not that the state in particular threatens religion, but that any institution can potentially interfere with “what … conscience bids” (NS 37).

Opposed more to an over-reliance on institutions in general than the effect of any specific institution, Gaskell shows in North and South how proper religion actually exists throughout society in disparate institutions. Although Gaskell was herself a Unitarian Dissenter, she conciliates evangelical Dissent, establishmentarianism, and even Roman Catholicism in this novel. Within the Hale family

59 Easson, “Mr Hale’s Doubts,” 34-37.
itself, Gaskell presents a microcosm of the English religious scene: Mrs. Hale’s High Church aristocratic sympathy; Mr. Hale’s principled Nonconformity; Margaret Hale’s thoughtful faith in the Church of England; and Frederick’s rapprochement with the Roman Catholic Church in his impending marriage to a Spaniard. Gaskell adds to this familial diversity both the evangelical, millennial Methodism of the neighboring worker’s daughter, that same worker’s skepticism, and the mill-owning Thornton’s inherited nonconformity—signaled by their copy of “Matthew Henry’s Bible Commentaries” (NS 77). Amid this diverse array, no single institution wins out over the others. Margaret takes comfort in saying the “Lord’s Prayer” (NS 44) with her father much as later “Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, and Higgins the Infidel” (NS 230) join together in prayer.  

Gaskell’s expansive view of religion’s ability to remain strong despite its institutional housing culminates in the novel’s understated toleration of Roman Catholicism. As initially scandalized as Margaret is by her brother’s conversion to Roman Catholicism, Gaskell offers a pragmatic solution. Margaret simply “gave up talking about this branch of the subject” (NS 253) of her brother’s situation without further objection. Indeed, the despotic power of the Roman Catholic Church becomes a joke at the expense of the Hale’s superstitious servant; in considering Margaret’s proposed visit to Spain, this servant looks ridiculous trying to balance her “terror … lest I should be converted” (NS 394) against her “lurking curiosity about Spain, the Inquisition, and Popish mysteries” (NS 395). The Roman Catholic Church, which, according to many Protestants in the period was a despotic institution that perversely united church and state, here lacks its nefarious power. The Roman Catholic Church looks to be just one more flawed institution. To be sure, some

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60 For this prayer as signaling Hale’s importance to the novel (rather than his impotence in it), see Easson, “Mr Hale’s Doubts,” 40. We get a hint of Gaskell’s ecumenism in her conflicted pleasure in the devotional aspects of Anglican services, see John Chapple, “Unitarian Dissent,” 176; Letters, 860.  
61 Gaskell’s relatively generous treatment of Roman Catholicism is notable in light of the fear caused by the so-called “Papal Aggression in 1850,” the papal bull by which Pope Pius IX re-established Roman Catholic dioceses in England, see John Chapple, “Unitarian Dissent,” 175.
of this generosity is a performance to attract a diverse readership for her novel and its reformist agenda. Gaskell was decidedly less generous when her daughter Marianne was attracted to Roman Catholicism in 1862, which, as Gaskell admits in her letters, caused her “extreme pain” (*Letters* 687). She fully supported her husband’s course of reading with Marianne to try to correct the “evil influence” (*Letters* 682) that made such views appealing to her. But both Gaskell’s reaction to her daughter’s interest in Roman Catholicism and also Roman Catholicism’s relatively minor appearances in her novels lack the vehement rhetoric we find in Lyman Beecher and Stowe’s anti-Catholic propaganda from the 1830s and 1840s. For Gaskell, Roman Catholicism does not seem to be dangerous for being an institution that combines civil government and religion but, like many other institutions, merely for promoting false doctrines that distract from the truth.

In defining religion as the conscientious pursuit of truth, Gaskell reveals how she imagines that Divine Providence has guaranteed an ordered society. Gaskell explains this foundational link between a principled adherence to truth and Providence in Margaret’s primary internal conflict in the latter part of the novel. Frederick—still under indictment for his mutiny—secretly visits England to see their mother once more before she dies. A drunk recognizes Frederick as he boards the train to leave Milton; Frederick pushes him down precipitating the drunk’s death; a clerk sees Margaret there and tells the investigating police-inspector as much. When the police-inspector later questions Margaret, she—not knowing if her brother has successfully escaped the country—says that she was not at the train station in the hope that it will give her brother more time to escape. In short, she lies. Gaskell knows that many readers would forgive Margaret for this indiscretion. Indeed, she models this reaction for us in Margaret’s godfather, who offers the generous excuse that Margaret “forgot [herself] in thought for another” (*NS* 387). But, for reasons that her godfather never fully understands, Margaret insists that this lie was “wrong, disobedient, faithless” (*NS* 387); in fact, although she did not know it at the time, it was even unnecessary since Frederick had already left
England by the time she told the lie. For Margaret, lying to this investigator is criminal not for misleading the state but for “having failed in trust towards Him” (NS 279). By interfering with God’s design in even this seemingly inconsequential moment, Margaret, “Trusting to herself, … had fallen” (NS 401). Margaret’s extreme insistence on holding to the truth against even the slightest equivocation owes much to the Unitarian inheritance of natural theology: God has benevolently designed the universe, and we must find its providential design. Lying is sinful in this system because it destroys our ability to see the order of society.62

With this understanding of Divine Providence, Gaskell represents prayer not as the request for divine intercession but as the reconciling of the individual to God’s order. Margaret recognizes prayer’s function when she admits that, to have “brave and noble a life” as a heroine, she needs “not only to will, but also to pray” (NS 401). Prayer, here, guards against the temptation to interfere, even in the smallest moments, with God’s plans in the service of one’s own interests. For this reason, Margaret’s parents need help praying when they struggle to accept what is happening in their lives. Margaret’s father knows his wife’s death is “God’s will” but needs Margaret to “pray for me … that I may have faith to pray” (NS 263). Similarly, on her deathbed, Margaret’s mother “cannot pray” as long as her desire to see her son—someone God seems to be withholding from her—“stands between me and God” (NS 202). Her “last wish—prayer, if you will” is to see her exiled son. In both instances, Gaskell shows us two forms of prayer: for God to make things different and for one’s understanding of God’s will to improve. Gaskell prioritizes the latter. Prayer is not the grounding for miraculous rewards. Frederick can visit, but Gaskell eschews a safe reunion of the Hale family, even as she dangles the possibility of a reunion in exile. Instead, prayer is both a means

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62 In Gaskell’s emphasis on truth and providential order, she seems to align herself in this novel more with the older school of Unitarianism than the newer school that Jenny Unglow aligns her with, the divines who prioritized individual emotion over divine order, 131. Chapple underscores the animosity between this new school and some of the efforts of the Gaskells, “Unitarian Dissent,” 165, 168; see also, Gallagher, Industrial Reformation, 64.
and an end to accepting and catalyzing God’s benevolent order. Rather than building the family as an institution, these prayers actually help Gaskell’s characters accept the slow dissolution of the Hale family through death and exile. The institutions that put society together in Stowe and Cummins matter much less for Gaskell than a divine order of society that exists independent of any institution.

Alongside the version of Divine Providence Gaskell develops in the heroine of *North and South*, Gaskell elaborates in the novel’s hero a laissez-faire theory of political economy. Mr. Thornton’s advocacy of a laissez-faire position early in the novel lambasts “the interference of a meddler” (*NS* 84) in an economic system that pits capitalists and laborers against one another in an equal contest. For Thornton, this economic system rewards “good conduct” with riches and punishes “improvidence” (*NS* 84) with poverty. In these outcomes, the system of political economy, as Thornton defends it to Margaret and her father, is “entirely logical” (*NS* 151). Much as in Gaskell’s idea of Divine Providence, any interference in this system—even by the “High Court of Parliament” (*NS* 84)—perverts the logical ordering of society that God provides.

Rather than objecting to interference in the economic system, Gaskell challenges this theory of political economy for neglecting its moral and religious obligations. Throughout the novel, Margaret and her father object to Thornton on precisely these grounds. Hale dislikes the language of a “battle between the two classes” (*NS* 84); Margaret later complains that Thornton both speaks “as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing” (*NS* 152) and also neglects his “religious” responsibilities (*NS* 118). Indeed, although Gaskell alludes to the Thornton’s Dissenting faith, she more directly casts the effect of this a-religious form of political economy as analogous to a form of Calvinism. The feverish, evangelical dream of a worker’s daughter—recalling of course Stowe’s Eva—transitions almost directly to Thornton’s exposition of political economy at his dinner party. By juxtaposing the two, Gaskell invites us to connect the evangelical separation between those who are and who are not “pre-elected to sumptuous feasts” (*NS* 149) to the economic separation
between masters and workers. This connection, in turn, suggests the inadequacies of both the evangelical religion and an a-religious political economy. After all, as Margaret tries to convince the dying working girl, salvation is earned by “our faithful following of Christ” (NS 149) not an outmoded theory of election. The problem in both these systems, for Gaskell, is the arbitrary division between people that undermines the society promised by a providential order.

Gaskell’s objection to both evangelical religion and political economy recalls why the Unitarians in the US confronted evangelicals’ demands for purified churches. As did these Unitarians, Gaskell argues that Christianity must be a part of all worldly institutions rather than its own institution apart from the world. For this reason, Gaskell dismantles religious and economic institutions that foster antagonistic groups and, in doing so, divide a unified, providentially ordered society.63 Gaskell depicts this critique of the system of political economy with both workers and capitalists. With the capitalist Thornton, Margaret and Hale object both to Thornton’s view that he must exercise a “wise despotism” (NS 120) over his workers. With the poor factory worker that lives nearby, Margaret argues that the worker’s union performs a “tyranny” of the same kind as the “tyranny of the masters” (NS 229). As Gaskell portrays them, all these institutions—the navy, the worker’s union, the master’s factories—pervert a providential order by imposing arbitrary rulers and arbitrary divisions among people. In place of a worker’s union that unites only a single class in “a common interest,” Gaskell prefers, as Hale puts it to his neighbor, a union that “would be Christianity itself” promoting “the good of all” (NS 229). In Gaskell’s account, only such a union of all humankind on earth will reveal the society that has God designed for humankind’s benefit.

In place of such limited institutions, Gaskell imagines the kinds of “experiments” that might allow the providential order of the world to reveal itself institutionally. As Thornton tells an

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63 Jo Pryke, in this regard, sells Gaskell a bit short in saying that she aligns political economy and industrial capitalism as unavoidable facts of modern life when in fact Gaskell is showing the inadequacy of precisely that homology between an ideal society and the current society of political economy.
inquisitive interlocutor, “such institutions” can only succeed if they promote intimate interactions between “individuals of the different classes” (NS 421). In the single example of such an institution, Gaskell explains the workings of a dining-room that Thornton has built for the workers that cuts their costs for food and, because it allows Thornton to dine occasionally with them, alleviates the tensions that cause strikes. This dining-room reveals the as yet obscured harmony between worker and capitalist such that, not long after building it, Thornton himself no longer knows whether he should call the union leader “my friend—or my enemy” (NS 353). In Gaskell’s representation, even this small change starts to reveal the providential order, which Margaret insists upon earlier with Thornton: “God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent” (NS 122) beyond a simple wage-for-labor relationship.64

In promoting this providential order, Gaskell accepts more readily than either Stowe or Cummins the society that the Christian political economists described: a harmony of interests that God has created among people and nations. At the same time, in showing a providentially ordered society composed of inseparable religious and political economic principles, Gaskell dismisses the equivocal is/ought distinction between political economy and religion that appeared in Richard Whatley and Francis Wayland. Gaskell solidifies this point by paralleling Margaret’s temptation to lie with Thornton’s temptation to speculate with his creditors’ money to regain his fortune after the market turns against him. Much as Margaret’s lie elevated her own immediate interests above her faith in God, Thornton’s speculation would risk many people’s livelihoods “for [his] own paltry aggrandizement” (NS 413). After refusing to engage in this scheme, Thornton consoles his mother that they must accept the “lot in life” that God has provided, “both of good and of evil” (NS 414). For Thornton, to wish for a different fate is to be “rebellious” (NS 414) in the same way that to lie

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64 As Cates Baldridge notes, however, the dialogic struggle in the novel hints that this process may take much longer than the novel itself permits, esp. 130-142. Thornton’s efforts after all are only “experiments.”
was, for Margaret, to be “faithless” (NS 387). True to her principle of a benevolent society, Gaskell plots her novel to show providence’s rewards for the faithful. Thornton re-enters business as a capitalist when Margaret simultaneously agrees, first, to lend him capital and, second, to marry him. Although Margaret initially only plans to finance Thornton’s bankrupted operation, the two quickly come to nuptial terms. These characters bring together North and South, political economy and religion.

Gaskell’s description of this providential order leaves us with one lingering ambiguity. Throughout the novel, she stresses the dangers of interference: the state’s interference with the economy; the interference of institutions such as family and established church with individual conscience; the temptation for individuals to interfere with God’s plan for them. But the novel does not categorically dismiss interference. On the one hand, when Mrs. Thornton confronts Margaret for her indiscretion at the train station, Gaskell focuses her narration through Margaret’s perspective such that we feel the anger at Mrs. Thornton trying “to interfere with her conduct” (NS 308). On the other hand, when Margaret learns of Thornton’s “interference” (NS 278) with the inquest into the drunk’s death that would have led to her having to own her lie in court, Gaskell does not criticize Thornton for this act of sympathy. Thornton’s act of interference actually seems designed to mitigate Margaret’s own sinful interference. Similarly, Gaskell wants us to value how the Hales repeatedly interfere with the affairs of their neighbor the laborer and Thornton the capitalist. At the very moment that Margaret apologizes to her neighbor for refusing to “mind [her] own business” (NS 317) in encouraging him to appeal to Thornton for work after the strike, Thornton rewards Margaret’s interference by arriving at the neighbor’s house to offer him work. For Gaskell, Thornton goes back on his initial refusal to offer this union leader work because a “diviner instinct”

65 The details of the marriage also show Gaskell’s interest in the specifics of marriage as a union, indeed, as redefining that institution along new lines that incorporate both economic and religious realities. See, for instance, Hilary Schor’s argument that Margaret must first be independent before she will marry, 120-150.
overrides his “mere reasonings of justice” (NS 318). In this reversal, Gaskell demonstrates that Thornton has learned the lesson Margaret first set out for him about mutual dependence. Whereas Thornton initially argued that workers would “resent his interference” (NS 121) if he provided religious education or any care for them after their ten hours of labor, he illustrates by the end of the novel that such care for his workers is not interference at all. As Gaskell wants us to realize, this vocabulary of interference actually exacerbates the errors of a society obsessed with political economy at the expense of religion. Providing for religion can never be interference because religion can never be separated from worldly actions and institutions. For Gaskell, there are no properly religious institutions, but only a providential order revealed by individual conscience and truth-seeking.

Although Gaskell, Cummins, and Stowe imagine the relationship between individuals, institutions, and society differently, they all use their fiction to imagine a future society improved by a better understanding of the relationship between the three. They apply the lessons of past debates about religion and the state to the present institutional conflicts between religion and political economy to depict opportunities for a better future. Present institutions may be stumbling in trying to exist apart from the state, they argue, but we can ensure progress in the future by maintaining those institutions’ religious principles. But this forward-looking approach was not the only way to make sense of how religion had changed after disestablishment. Nowhere in Cummins, Gaskell, or Stowe is there a meditation on what society might lose in jettisoning a religious establishment. In looking back upon the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in their historical fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne and George Eliot ask precisely this question. Rather than looking forward, they look back to compare societies with strong religious establishments to ones without them. In so doing, they ask not, as Cummins, Stowe, and Gaskell do, how society can best maintain its religious
foundation, but how society can maintain the crucial civil functions that only a religious establishment can provide.
Losing the Religious Establishment in Hawthorne and Eliot

Both *Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) invoke a church establishment threatened by sectarianism: the Puritan Congregationalism threatened by antinomianism and the Church of England threatened by Methodism. In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel, Hester Prynne, shadowed by the antinomian Anne Hutchinson, confronts the colony’s Puritan establishment with its own fears of familial impurity and rival prophecy. In George Eliot’s novel, Hetty (Hester) Sorrel disrupts Britain’s civil order while the Methodist Dinah Morris undercuts the monopoly of the Church of England at a time when the establishment’s identity between civil and religious order was coming under question. In each novel, the establishment survives these threats, perhaps even becomes stronger for them: Hester Prynne returns to the colony; Dinah Morris marries Adam Bede.¹

As disestablishment and denominationalism were reshuffling religion, civil government, and literature in Britain and the US, Eliot and Hawthorne both looked to religious establishments to compare past and present definitions of religion and its function for society. Both authors represent historical religious establishments in order to imagine what society might lose in moving away from a strong, established church. In this context, both authors understand the establishment as a ubiquitous institution that necessarily conflicted with the institutions—such as family, courts, and voluntary religious societies—that existed on its margins. They both see, for different reasons, the conflicts that emerge from the many institutions that come together in a religious establishment as crucial for society and for the kind of literature they want to write. For both Hawthorne and Eliot, the waning of religious establishments presents primarily civil and artistic problems not religious ones. Only through their shared interest in the conflicts surrounding the religious establishment can

¹ For accounts that emphasize a final consensus in *The Scarlet Letter*, see Bercovitch, *Office*, esp. 71, 73-112; see also Lauren Berlant, *Anatomy*, 161-189. For a useful summary of accounts of consensus in Hawthorne and attacks on such readings, see Donald Pease, 66-68.
we understand the full connection between these two novels and their often overlooked investment in institutions.

Of course, Eliot does not simply rewrite *The Scarlet Letter*, nor do the two novels describe the same advantages and disadvantages in a religious establishment. On a formal level, Eliot absorbs and then leaves behind Hawthorne’s example. Although she invokes Hawthorne’s treatment of antinomianism and original sin in the connection of Hester Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne to Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, Eliot shifts the focus of the second half of *Adam Bede* away from her own Arthur and Hester toward Dinah and Adam. On a thematic level, the doctrinal basis of the establishments in these two novels is inverted. Hawthorne’s establishment, to which Arthur Dimmesdale belongs in the North American colonies, would register as a much more serious form of dissent to Eliot’s English establishment than Dinah Morris’ Methodism. Where Hawthorne imagines the Puritan establishment as less totalitarian and more dependent on symbiotic relationships with other institutions than many of his contemporaries portrayed it, Eliot imagines the parish in the Church of England as a mediating institution upon which all the connected individuals and institutions depend. Hawthorne sees in the loss of a such religious establishment, most acutely, an artistic problem about the integrated representation of society and individual pathos; in contrast, Eliot sees a social problem about the disintegrating structure of society that elucidates her own function as an artist. As a result, in Eliot’s reworking of Hawthorne’s novel, we see not only a British author’s interest in the US outside of the context of slavery but also a view of Hawthorne that shows

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2 The criticism (a relatively small set given the critical importance of the two writers in their national traditions) that deals with the relationship between *Adam Bede* and *The Scarlet Letter* speaks to both the specific context in which Eliot uses Hawthorne and also our own critical tendencies to read literary models flowing primarily from England to the US. For previous accounts of the use of *The Scarlet Letter* in *Adam Bede*, see Lawrence Buell, “Hawthorne and the Problem of America,” esp. 77-79 and *The Dream of the Great American Novel*, 72, 96; Allan Casson; F. R. Leavis, 49-58; Nicolaus Mills, 52-73; Monika Mueller, 51-81; Ellin Jane Ringler, 65-96; Edward Stokes, 87-209; and a reviewer in the *North British Review* (Aug 1860).
an interest in institutions that has been hidden by his place in a national canon that emphasizes individualism.

**Hawthorne’s Pathos amid the Religious Establishment**

Hawthorne was not alone in excavating the Puritan establishment to understand nineteenth-century religion and society. A variety of popular writers and speakers drew on the Puritan example in New England to bolster the nation’s devotion to religion, to re-establish the authority of New England during westward expansion, and, most strangely of all, to create a long narrative of US religious liberty. As both Sacvan Bercovitch and Lawrence Buell have shown, popular orations such as those for the New England Society on Forefather’s Day (the 22 December celebration of the landing in Plymouth) consistently highlighted the Puritan foundations of the nation. But such uses of the Puritans were not limited to ritual celebrations. For example, in the *North American Review* (Jan 1845), Edwin P. Whipple examined Daniel Neal’s *History of the Puritans* (1844, originally 1732-1738), newly edited by two Baptist ministers “with a love of religious liberty” (215). Given the exclusion of Baptists under New England’s Puritan establishment, two Baptist ministers editing a British, Independent preacher’s history of Puritanism that was in turn reviewed favorably in a Whiggish magazine with Unitarian leanings attests to the wide appeal in the US of Puritan history. These writers celebrated Puritanism despite Robert Southey’s attacks on Puritanism in *The Book of the Church* (1824) and George Bancroft’s countervailing account of the origin of US religious liberty in

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4 In 1827, Hawthorne seems to have read an earlier book of Neal’s, *The History of New-England* (1747), see Marion Kesselring, 58. Richard Brodhead describes Whipple as “Hawthorne’s favorite critic,” *School of Hawthorne*, 51.
the Antinomians and Roger Williams—the professed enemies of the Puritan establishment—in his
*History of the United States* (1837).\(^5\)

Without belaboring too much the familiar importance of Puritanism for Hawthorne and his
counterpartories, I want to emphasize a crucial tension between the historical record of the Puritan
establishment and the religious liberty celebrated in the disestablishment of US churches. This
tension manifests itself, among other places, at great length in Robert Baird’s *Religion in America*
(1844). Baird consistently castigates the New England Puritan establishment because its combination
of church and state severely limited the religious liberty of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson;
but Baird simultaneously praises the Puritan establishment for instilling, especially in New England,
a lasting and uniquely strong belief in the “legitimate influence of the clergy in public affairs” (88).
For Baird and many advocates of disestablishment, religion in the US had since combined the
Puritan establishment’s insistence on the salutary influence of religion on civil government with
individual liberty. Religion in the US benefited, in this argument, because its adherents took the
support of religion upon themselves rather than “looking to some government official” (132). Even
as he attacks the limitations on voluntary action and liberty that came with a union between what
should be distinct institutions of church and state, Baird paradoxically locates the origins of religion
in US life in the Puritan establishment. In this respect, the Puritans provide Baird an example of the
coordination of institutions more than an example of the protection of religious liberty.

The Puritans, however, have featured in our understanding of Hawthorne much more in
terms of a conflict between individual and society than in terms of conflicts between institutions. In
some of these readings, Hawthorne is invested in actual religious disputes, whether they are
seventeenth-century conflicts between the Puritans and Antinomians or nineteenth-century ones

\(^5\) McWilliams explains nineteenth-century reactions against the Congregationalist Puritans such as
George Bancroft’s, 74-99. On Hawthorne as distinct from Bancroft as a historian, see George
Dekker, 129-185.
between the orthodox and Unitarians. These religious conflicts allow Hawthorne to depict the psychological dynamics of his characters that transcend the content of either set of disputes. In other readings, Hawthorne uses Puritan history in order to articulate a fundamental dialectic between the liberal individual and the nation, especially with respect to the incendiary (secular) politics around slavery leading up to the Civil War. But, whether they think about Hawthorne in terms of the religious distinctions of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries or in terms of the politics of liberalism in the 1840s and 1850s, these accounts prioritize the fate of the individual. Rarely do critics discuss how Hawthorne depicts the conflicts among institutions, especially among institutions that the Puritan establishment tied together and that disestablishment claimed to disaggregate.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne pays close attention to the coordination of institutions in and around the Puritan establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In both “The Custom House” and the narrative of the scarlet letter itself, Hawthorne emphasizes how the Puritans rooted society’s foundation in a single, all-encompassing institution. As Hawthorne succinctly reminds us earlier in the narrative, “religion and law were almost identical” (*TSL* 47). In “The Custom House,” Hawthorne similarly recalls his own Puritan ancestor who combined the roles of “solder, legislator, judge” and “ruler in the Church” (*TSL* 12). Hawthorne’s contingent familial connection to the Puritan establishment, in turn, sets up early in the novel the connection between the family and the

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7 Douglas Anderson; Jonathan Arac, 247-266; Bercovitch, *Office*, 113-154, esp. 107; Berlant, *Anatomy*, 1-18, 57-95; George Dekker, 148, 158; Gilmore, “Hawthorne and Politics (Again),” 22-39; Gilmore, *The Middle Way*, 112; Amy Schrager Lang, 181; McWilliams, 90-95, 134-160. For a meta-analysis of political readings of Hawthorne, see Pease, 66-68. Stacey Margolis, 19-20, and Brook Thomas, 185, both usefully track how Hawthorne describes conflicts among political institutions.

8 Michael Ryan is one such exception, but his binary of Democrats who support separation and conservative, evangelical Whigs oversimplifies the religious positions of the period.
Puritan establishment that Hawthorne had seen in John Winthrop’s homology between marriage, citizenship, and piety.\(^9\) In these moments, Hawthorne portrays the Puritans as deeply invested in the close connection between all of their institutions, not only church and state but also the establishment and the family. Because of the interconnectedness of these institutions, Hawthorne can depict Hester Prynne’s sexual transgression as blending a familial crime with sectarian threats to the Puritan establishment. Just before Hester emerges from the prison, for instance, Hawthorne imagines not only “an undutiful child” but also “an Antinomian, a Quaker, or other heterodox religionist” (\textit{TSL} 47) suffering a public punishment similar to what Hester is about to face. Hawthorne layers these institutional rebels on top of Hester to illustrate what it means to have closely connected institutions. In turn, this imbrication of institutions means that for the details of Hester’s family are “strangely mixed up with the deliberations of legislators and acts of state” (\textit{TSL} 89). A threat to one institution, Hawthorne suggests, becomes a threat to the whole of Puritan society.

The urgency that Hawthorne ascribes to Hester’s sin against family for the establishment derives not only from the close connection between these institutions but also from the precarious position of the Puritan society surrounded by violent forces that threatened its institutional arrangements. Hawthorne acknowledges this subtle urgency mostly through Roger Chillingworth. When Chillingworth first appears in the novel in the crowd, dressed in a mix of “civilized and savage costume” and beside “An Indian, in his native garb” (\textit{TSL} 56), he invokes the colony’s insecurity to the West. And lest we grant Hawthorne’s Puritans any relief looking eastward, the 1642-1649 timeline of the novel reminds us of the English Civil War on that horizon. Here, again, Chillingworth invokes this foreign threat. His two names—Prynne and Chillingworth—recall two men on rival sides of the English Revolution. Without reading too far into Hawthorne’s selection of

\(^9\) On Hester’s sin in relation to Winthrop’s arguments about marriage, see Berlant, \textit{Anatomy}, 94; Colacurcio, \textit{Doctrine and Difference}, 180, 223-224.
names—whether the legacy of the English Puritan William Prynne belongs more to Hester or Roger—we can say, at least, that Chillingworth embodies the looming enemies that surround the Puritans as well as the potential infiltration within their ranks.\(^{10}\) Nor are these dangers only symbolically present. At the final election sermon, notwithstanding the Native Americans in “savage finery,” the “wildest feature” (TSL 202) in the crowd is a group of Spanish sailors. Implicitly bringing ashore Spain’s Catholicism, all in the group nonchalantly “transgressed … the rules of behaviour that were binding on all others” (TSL 202). Hester’s relatively isolated sin, therefore, threatens the Puritan society as a whole because that society already faced looming dangers in all directions.

Within a Puritan colony beset by foreign dangers, Hawthorne illuminates how the conflict between the overlapping institutions of family and establishment simultaneously threatened and protected that Puritan society. On the scaffold in darkness, Dimmesdale fantasizes about the chance “to reveal his long-hidden secret” (TSL 131). Alone in the darkness Dimmesdale confronts his individual guilt; but he is not on the scaffold alone for long. Whereas the establishment’s minister John Wilson passes by without seeing Dimmesdale, Dimmesdale’s family—Pearl, Hester, and, at one remove, Chillingworth—easily notice him on the scaffold. After Pearl and Hester join Dimmesdale there, Pearl articulates the conflict that Dimmesdale faces between the institutions of family and establishment. Pearl simply asks her father if he will “stand here with mother and me, to-morrow noontide” (TSL 134): Dimmesdale’s choice is between his position in a family and his position in the Puritan establishment not just between suffering individual guilt and social punishment.

Embracing his family offers “vital warmth to his half-torpid system” (TSL 134); but the “dread of public exposure” (TSL 134) to both the people and the Puritan establishment prevents him from...

\(^{10}\) William Chillingworth, the godson of William Laud and Anglican loyalist; William Prynne, enemy of Laud and Puritan revolutionary. On these parallels and Hawthorne’s familiarity with Prynne and Chillingworth in English history, see Mukhtar Ali Isani. On Chillingworth as the novel’s true antinomian, see Korobkin, 209-212.
holding that embrace into daylight. To be sure, Hawthorne also describes Dimmesdale’s guilt for his crime in individual and not familial terms, for instance, in his self-laceration with the “bloody scourge” 
(TSL 126). But, in bringing Dimmesdale on the scaffold with his family, Hawthorne reminds us that Dimmesdale is not simply an individual battling with his society but also an individual caught between his allegiances to conflicting institutions.

Hawthorne articulates the consequences of this conflict between family and establishment in his portrayal of Hester and Pearl. In her punishment, Hester lives together with her daughter “in the same circle of seclusion from human society” (TSL 85). This two-person family quickly comes under attack from the Puritan establishment, which aims to separate Hester from her daughter according to the “rigid order of principles in religion and government” (TSL 89). The straightforward plan, here, is for the Puritan establishment to override the integrity of the family to save either (or both of) the souls of Hester and Pearl. Of course, family and the establishment are too intertwined for this plan to be straightforward. Dimmesdale—a member of both family (covertly) and establishment (overtly)—preserves Hester’s family by convincing the rest of the ministers and magistrates that Pearl is a “solemn miracle … to keep the mother’s soul alive” (TSL 101). This hidden symbiosis of family and Puritan establishment at the very moment that they seem to come into conflict, as the narrative would have us believe, rescues the establishment from itself. Hawthorne imagines for us that, without Pearl, Hester may have attempted, like Anne Hutchinson, “to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment” (TSL 144). The Puritan establishment, in other words, is not the whole of Puritan society; and, without its hidden connections to these other institutions, neither Puritan establishment nor Puritan society would survive.

Rooted to the colony through her sin and her family, Hester provides this Puritan society with services it needs from institutions it has ostensibly banished. Where Dimmesdale’s scourge infiltrates the Puritan establishment with the flaws of “the old, corrupted faith of Rome” (TSL 126),
Hester offers the benefits of Roman Catholic institutions to an ostensibly purified, Protestant society. At various points Hester resembles “the image of Divine Maternity” (TSL 53), a “self-ordained Sister of Mercy” (TSL 141) or “self-enlisted Sister of Charity” (TSL 188), and Mary in a final pietà with Dimmesdale on the scaffold. In these roles, Hester becomes, ironically, the paragon of the divine family and of “helpfulness” (TSL 141) for those in need while shrouded in the symbols of Protestantism’s great enemy. Through Hester, the symbiosis of family and Puritan establishment reaches out into other ostensibly antagonistic institutions in order to address needs that the Puritan establishment cannot acknowledge. These individuals—named and nameless—require charity and the mitigation of ills rather than judgment and punishment.

Notwithstanding this work, Hester, even more than Dimmesdale, has thought about herself as an individual “not merely estranged, but outlawed from society” (TSL 174). In her most alienated moments, she looks at those around her from outside her society’s “human institutions” such as “the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church” (TSL 174). But, apart from this “latitude of speculation” (TSL 174), Hester remains a part of her family and, through that family and her punishment, part of that Puritan society. Fittingly, therefore, the novel ends as Hester chooses between institutions. She leaves behind, if we believe “the gossips of that day,” her place as Pearl’s “sad and lonely mother at [the] fireside” (TSL 227), to return to the colony and be buried under the same tombstone as Pearl’s father in the burial ground of the Puritan establishment.

Hester’s burial instantiates her institutional position—not enough of Dimmesdale’s wife to be buried without some space between them, nor quite enough of a member of the establishment to have her name on the tombstone but still in the colony’s burial ground.

When we compare this narrative of conflicting institutions with what happens in “The Custom House,” we can begin to see how Hawthorne theorizes secularization not as a problem of

declining religious power but as a decline in the opportunities for literary pathos. The government that Hawthorne describes in this prefatory sketch conspicuously lacks the emotional weight of either Puritan establishment or English monarchy. When the narrator first encounters the scarlet letter and the record of its history, Hawthorne invites us to compare three distinct forms of government—the Puritan establishment carried through history in its symbol of punishment, the Anglican monarchy carried in his predecessor’s incomplete records, and the civil government of the US that employs the narrator. In contrast to the listless employees of the Customhouse, the narrator finds in the letter an almost physical “burning heat” (TSL 32) of this symbol of Puritan history. In turn, reading the papers of his predecessor, Surveyor Pue, the narrator finds himself lacking in comparison to one who, with the prestige of “his Majesty’s commission,” benefitted from the “ray of splendor that shone so dazzlingly about the throne” (TSL 33). Without a royal or religious mandate, Surveyor Hawthorne, “as the servant of the people, feels himself less than the least, and below the lowest, of his masters” (TSL 33). Democratization and the weakening of religious establishments has led to a decline of something between Hawthorne and his predecessors; but Hawthorne does not make immediately clear what that something is.

Unlike a twentieth-century secularization narrative, Hawthorne’s narrative of decline is not predominately about the decline of religion in the wake of the Puritan establishment. After all, Hawthorne makes the sinful Dimmesdale the most powerful religious figure in the novel. His peers in the establishment, “otherwise so apostolic,” lack the ability to communicate their religion to the “whole of human brotherhood in the heart’s native language” (TSL 124)—only the “Apostle Eliot”

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12 Pease draws on Pierre Bourdieu to describe the “symbolic empowerment” that Hawthorne feels he lacks in “The Custom-House,” 62. Henry Leslie Harrison notes a similar ambivalence in “The Scarlet Letter” between the cultural authority of the theocrats and that of the marketplace in the scaffold scenes, 67-68. See also, Sandra Tomc, “Sanctity.” On Hawthorne’s debt to Revolutionary rhetoric in “The Custom-House,” see Douglas Anderson; Bercovitch, Office, 32-72; Berlant, Anatomy, 1-18; McWilliams, 134-160; Pease, 58. For his manipulation of links between Puritans and Revolutionaries in his stories, see Colacurcio, Province of Piety, 389-405, 449-482.
always absent preaching to Native Americans marks an exception. Indeed, Hawthorne seems to invite us here to connect these well-meaning but ineffectual ministers to the less-well-meaning, but similarly ineffectual, customhouse agents. They ironically take customs like Matthew but are “not very liable to be summoned thence, like him, for apostolic errands” (TSL 10). Even as Hawthorne underscores the decline in religious sincerity from Puritan ministers to these customhouse agents, he also implies that that decline matters less than both parties’ inability to communicate with those around them.

More vivid than the contrast between these functionaries is the contrast between Dimmesdale and the narrator himself. Unlike Dimmesdale, whose conflicted position between Puritan establishment and sinful family fuels his eloquence, Hawthorne’s narrator suffers as a governmental agent in the customhouse agent.13 For this narrator, accepting “Uncle Sam’s gold” has the effect of an “enchantment like that of the Devil’s wages” (TSL 38). In this position, the narrator loses not only his artistry as an author but his very “capability of self-support” (TSL 38). Hawthorne’s position also lacks the visibility of Dimmesdale’s vocation. Where a story of Dimmesdale’s individual pathos can double as a narrative of the Puritan establishment, the narrator recognizes the ridiculousness of making a similar claim about his own story. To claim, as he ironically does, that Zachary Taylor’s election to the presidency happens in “the third year of my Surveyorship” (TSL 39) self-consciously misperceives his relationship to national history by framing the events of state with his own life. To make this satire more apparent, Hawthorne’s narrator parses this stylistic choice as in “the tone of ‘P.P.’” (TSL 39) of Alexander Pope and John Gay’s “Memoirs

13 Whether Hawthorne identifies with Hester or Dimmesdale as a figure for the artist is a matter of critical debate. Gilmore suggests that Hester and Dimmesdale present two versions of artistry that Hawthorne struggled to reconcile, American Romanticism, 71-95. On the links between Hester and Hawthorne as artists and the A’s power of mediation, see Bercovitch, Office, 87, 107.
of P.P. Clerk of this Parish.” In doing so, Hawthorne relates his own position as Surveyor-turned-autobiographer to Bishop Gilbert Burnet, whom Pope and Gay satirize for pompously positioning himself at the center of the history of England’s establishment. In Pope and Gay’s satire, a parish clerk narrates the whole of English religious and political history through his own life, unaware that, in fact, he lives far out on the margins of that history with little pathos to offer to that narrative. Thus, where Dimmesdale carries shades of the pathos of Christ by entering into a pietà after a sermon recognizing his own colony’s election, the narrator colors his account of gaining a political “crown of martyrdom” (TSL 41) by being dismissed after the election with humorous irony. In this respect, we can read Hawthorne’s ironic and self-deprecating descriptions of himself in “The Custom-House” less suspiciously; they say less about his psychological condition and more about the kind of stories his institutions allow him to tell.

For Hawthorne, the pathos and the artistic potential of his novel require the conflicts among the institutions that made up Puritan society. Whereas the narrator’s democratic election bloodlessly reshuffles the civil government to match the will of the people, Hawthorne narrates the art of the narrative of the scarlet letter emerging from the conflict among institutions. Much as the conflict between family and religious establishment sets up Dimmesdale’s eloquence, the conflict between the demos—what Hawthorne refers to as, without much distinction, the people, the multitude, and the marketplace—and the religious establishment sets up the potential for Hawthorne’s artistry. We see this conflict early in the narrative as we overhear the women waiting for Hester to emerge from the jail. Rather than lamenting the “severity of the Puritanic code of law” (TSL 49), they criticize the

15 For a more psychological account of Hawthorne’s idea of his vocation that matches up at times with my own, see Kenneth Dauber, 154-191; Michael T. Gilmore, American Romanticism, 71-95, esp. 767-80, 89; Jerome Loving, 19-34.
Puritan magistrates for being “God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch” (TSL 49). And, although such a “public” can be “despotic in its temper,” this demos also recognized more readily than “rulers” of the Puritan establishment the “influence of Hester’s good qualities” (TSL 141). Sometimes the demos is harsh and sometimes it is lenient; Hawthorne is not trying to advocate for either demos or religious establishment. But the relative merits of the judgments of demos and establishment matter less to Hawthorne than what the gap between them allows him to do as an author.

The friction between Puritan establishment and the demos provides Hawthorne with the opportunity to exploit rumor, the most vivid conduit for representing the power of Hester’s letter. Through these rumors, Hawthorne imagines the whispers that tell of the letter’s “lurid gleam” (TSL 64) when Hester returns to the prison as well as the “terrific legend” that the letter was “red-hot with infernal fire” (TSL 79). The power of rumor peaks in the final scene when Dimmesdale reveals his own lettering. Hawthorne ends the penultimate chapter with the “murmur” that “The multitude” emits upon Dimmesdale’s final words; the final chapter picks up with the multitude’s more composed, but still lively, rumor about what actually happened. The demos credits the letter appearing upon Dimmesdale’s chest to Dimmesdale’s “hideous torture” (TSL 223), to Chillingworth’s “magic and poisonous drugs” (TSL 223), and even to Dimmesdale’s supernatural “active tooth of remorse” (TSL 223); indeed, a portion of the demos even deny it completely. At these moments, Hawthorne depicts a gap between the rumor of the demos and the official acts of the Puritan establishment. This gap, in turn, gives space for Hawthorne both to imagine the pathos on all sides of Puritan society and also to represent the act of his own imagination.16

16 Theo Davis has lucidly described the effect of Hawthorne’s figurative language as focusing the narrative not on its content but on the relationship between author, narrator, and reader, see esp. 94-99, with reference to the rose Hawthorne extends to the reader. Hawthorne’s emphasis on rumor has a similar effect.
These institutional conflicts allow Hawthorne to imagine the individual psychology, the pathos, and the drama that a society can offer when institutions pull people apart. In articulating a decline in the potential for his artistry between the Puritan establishment and the present civil government, Hawthorne registers an effect of the differentiation of society, a process of which disestablishment is but one example. Such differentiation seems to rob him of the heart of a narrative like that of the scarlet letter. We might think, therefore, of the position Hawthorne describes for himself as an artist in “The Custom House” as working to translate a conflict among historical institutions into a conflict between past and present. To be sure, Hawthorne is being both ironic and obfuscating in this self-description. In the aftermath of his dismissal from his position at the Customhouse, Hawthorne defends himself against critics (perhaps even assuages his ego) by aligning himself with the methods of Washington Irving, one of the most successful and respected US writers, and the inimitable Walter Scott.17 It is conventional enough that, at the end of the novel, the narrator reminds us that his narrative’s “authority” derives from “a manuscript, of old date” (TSL 224). But in the details of the narrator’s “true position as editor” (TSL 8), Hawthorne exceeds the generic requirements of historical romance and ironic sketch. Hawthorne’s narrator claims that this authenticating manuscript “shall be freely exhibited” (TSL 33) to readers who desire to see those sources. A fictionalized version of Hawthorne offers an imaginary document of testimony compiled by an imagined British Surveyor of a fictional history to his real readers. Hawthorne positions his story at an intersection between reader, text, and author that involves all three but cannot actually exist. In doing so, Hawthorne creates something like a society for text, reader, and

17 See Hutner, 17-27; Pease, 55-56. On the irony and moral dimension in Hawthorne that is missing from Scott, see Dekker, 130-132. For Hawthorne and many of his US contemporaries, Scott modeled a methodology for historical romance in a country struggling with post-colonial identity, Buell, New England Literary Culture, 207, 239-260; Colacurcio, Province of Piety, 462; George Dekker, 29-72, 129-185; Susan Manning, 147-194.
author, from which we may be able to escape but often choose to let pull us in conflicting directions.

Methodism, Sectarianism, and the Establishment

In the most schematic terms, the Church of England is to *Adam Bede* what Puritanism is to *The Scarlet Letter*. Much as in “The Custom-House” and “The Scarlet Letter” Hawthorne frames Puritanism within two distinct versions of religion in North America, so too Eliot sets her novel amid a transition between two distinct forms of religion in England. In the 1790s, the Church of England went from a national church that contained a Methodist movement to being a Church that Methodism, now a form of dissent outside of the Church, exposed as merely one denomination among many. For this reason, Eliot looked back to Methodism in the 1790s as a pivot between two different relationships between religion and civil government in England. Central to this transformation was the status of the parish, an institution that allowed a minister of the Church of England to mediate religion and civil government for his parishioners. The parish went from offering a necessary mediator—between aristocrats and laborers, between the local and the national, and between individuals and the divine—to a circumscribed institution competing against other institutions, both civil and religious. Therefore, in approaching Methodism in Eliot’s novel, we need to understand Methodism both in the eighteenth-century, when it tried to balance reinvigorating the English establishment against becoming just another denomination, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Eliot and many others looked back on Methodism’s role in the rise of denominationalism in England.

In the eighteenth century, as a movement within the Church of England, Methodism offered new ways of mediating between individuals and the divine because its leaders thought that the
established church had become too complacent. As Robert Southey claimed in his *Life of Wesley* (1820), John Wesley addressed the “dormant zeal” of the Church of England by guiding people to the “performance of duties which the State had blindly overlooked, and the Church had scandalously neglected” (183). In more rapturous terms, a less conservative writer than Southey credited Wesley’s Methodism for “a marvellous revival of religious sentiment.”18 Wesley himself believed that he acted in accordance with the Church of England and that he “preached her fundamental doctrines” (Southey 177).19 As loyal members of the establishment, eighteenth-century Methodists still attended the services of the Church of England and relied on the parish minister to administer the sacraments. But, as evangelical members of the Church of England, Wesley and his Methodists attacked the skepticism of the Enlightenment in Scotland and France as well as dissent among Deists and rationalists. In particular, Methodism responded to a lax laity suffering under a weak religious establishment by offering what David Hempton has called an “ecclesiastical superstructure” (*Methodism*, 58). This structure provided new, voluntary associations that encouraged introspection and sincere belief. In turn, Methodism’s emphasis on voluntary associations and emotional piety helped shape the international evangelical revival in Britain, the North American colonies, and in continental Europe. Through these associations, the spread of evangelicalism weakened the monopoly of the hierarchal church as an institution that mediated between individuals and the divine.20

18 See Horace Mann’s report in the *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship* (1853), xxx, which I discuss in more depth later on.
19 Southey was largely critical of Methodism as a threat to the established Church, but he was also the first non-Methodist to write a biography of John Wesley. On Southey, Methodism, and the Established Church, see Stuart Andrews, 79-99; Jasper Albert Cragwell, 33-76; Kevin Gilmartin, 207-252; James J. Sack, 208. On George Eliot’s use of Southey in writing *Adam Bede*, see Valentine Cunningham, 149.
20 David Hempton has written extensively on Methodism, and much of my discussion here and in the rest of the chapter derives from his three books on Methodism in Britain and the Atlantic world. For these specific points, see *Methodism: Empire of Spirit*, 32-85, esp 33, 42, 51. For a brief overview of the changes in religious life in the eighteenth century in Britain, see Richard Brown, 92-129.
Whereas, early on, Methodism’s voluntary associations had inspired many individuals who felt underserved within the Church of England, the concept of voluntary association eventually exposed both the Church of England and Methodism itself to schisms within their own ranks. Although throughout the nineteenth century, many Methodists continued to attend Methodist services at night and Anglican services in the morning, a significant faction of Methodists wanted greater separation from the Church of England. In 1795, four years after Wesley’s death, the ruling body of Methodism in Britain allowed its ministers the privilege of performing the sacraments, thereby solidifying Methodism’s place as a denomination distinct from the Church of England. This separation from the Church of England begot further divisions within Methodism itself. Methodist sectarians splintered the denomination over issues ranging from the ratio of power between ministers and the laity, revivalism, and, foremost for our purposes, a spirit of antinomianism that manifested itself in female preaching.

Female preaching encapsulated for many in Britain Methodism’s most extreme antinomian threat to religion. The basis within Methodism for female preaching lay in the belief that God actively called certain individuals into service. For a conservative like Southey, precisely this enthusiasm, which countenanced in daily life the “miraculous manifestations of divine favours” (442), inevitably pushed Methodism toward “the Antinomian errors” (470). By foregrounding unmediated access to divine authority in the individual, female preaching subverted not only the Anglican parish but even the Methodist chapel as institutions that could mediate between individuals and the divine. Even beyond just the parish, female preaching seemed broadly anti-institutional.

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21 On Methodism’s equivocal relationship to the Church of England in the nineteenth century, see Owen Chadwick, 370-386, esp. 370, 376; Frances Knight, 27, 32.
22 On changes in British religion toward voluntary associations, see Hempton, Religion of the People, 145-161; Deborah Valenze, 28-49. On evangelicalism in the Church of England more broadly, see G. F. A. Best, “The Evangelicals.” On the evangelical revival on an international scale, see Michael J. Crawford, who focuses particularly on England and New England. On rival factions of Methodists, see Hempton, Methodism and Politics, 55-115; Valenze, 74-98. In his report on the census of religious worship, Horace Mann spends considerable time on the many different Methodist groups, lxxiv-xcii.
because it emphasized local autonomy, a rebellion against industrialization, and a reorganization of domestic life (and, potentially, sexual behavior). This association between female preaching and antinomianism only increased after the Methodist Connexion voted to end female preaching in 1803, begetting a new group, the Primitive Methodists, who objected to this decision. Female preaching stands out, therefore, as an instance in which Methodism both offered to reorganize England’s mediating institutions and also struggled to contain the proliferating agents it had deputized throughout the country. It was precisely this proliferation of mediating entities that defenders of the Established Church attacked most vehemently.

In the aftermath of Methodism’s emergence as a denomination and its many internal divisions, the defense of the religious establishment often focused on the unique role of the parish as a mediating institution upon which English society depended. As against Methodism’s focus on the Church of England’s religious function, high-profile writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey emphasized its important civil functions. In *The Life of Wesley* and *The Book of the Church*, Southey objected to how Methodists and evangelicals, when they fought for a more rigorous religion within the establishment, overlooked the Church’s civil position as mediating a stratified society. Coleridge elaborates on this mediating function in *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829). In this work, Coleridge quotes at length from his earlier *Biographia Literaria* (1817) to explain the civil role of the Church in England. By dispersing themselves throughout the country, the well-educated clergymen provide “to every parish throughout the kingdom … a germ of civilization” (75). In particular, the clergy mediate between the classes within each parish because they frequently visit both the “the mansion of the rich landholder” and also “the farmhouse and the cottage” (75-76). Even James Martineau, a dissenter with very different views about the purposes and fate of

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23 On female preaching and sectarian Methodism, see Valenze, esp 17-27, 50-98, 109-158.

24 Similarly, both Southey and Coleridge attacked the periodical press precisely because it threatened to replace the Church of England as such a mediating institution; in their minds, the press offered
religion in modern England, essentially agreed with Coleridge twenty-five years later in an article in the *Westminster Review* (Jan 1854); he too argues that an Anglican clergyman’s duties are to “mediate between the gentry and the poor” (93). In this view, the Church, as a religious and civil institution, has a unique kind of access into all areas of English life. Through such access, the clergy, according to establishmentarians, can disperse knowledge through the nation as well as mediate between the potentially disparate interests of their parishioners.25

According to such defenses of the establishment, Methodism, like evangelicalism more broadly, threatened parish and society because it divided society in two principal ways that prevented any institution from fostering a cohesive English society. First, the proliferation of denominations and voluntary religious societies that Methodism encouraged erased the access that the Anglican clergy had throughout their parishes by drawing people away from the parish church. Second, Methodism (and evangelicalism in general) divided the world into the two essentially distinct groups: the converted and the unconverted. Even though Arminianism meant that anyone could become converted, such a bifurcated understanding of English society undermined the civil benefits of the establishment.26 For Coleridge, Southey, and other conservative proponents of the Church of England, evangelicalism threatened the essential mediating function that made the Church of

none of the hierarchical and intellectual assurances of the Church. For Southey and Coleridge’s resistance to the periodical press as a mediating institution subject to public opinion, see Best, *Temporal Pillars*, 176; Gilmartin, 217. On Coleridge and Southey as anti-revolutionaries in response to Jacobinism in Britain, see Kevin Gilmartin, 207-252. On Coleridge’s defense of the Anglican Church as an intellectual establishment, see Peter Allen.


26 On critiques of Puritanism within both Methodism and anti-Methodism, see Stewart Brown, 37-52; Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, 22. On the consequences of schism for the Church of England in Methodism and Dissent, see Crawford, 378; James Sack 207-208. For Methodism as eroding the monopoly the Anglican Church had on such mediation, see Hempton, *Religion of the People*, 157; Hempton, *Methodism*, 51-52. On the paradox of the establishment in this regard for Anglican Evangelicals, see G. F. A. Best, “The Evangelicals,” esp. 78.
England a unique and powerful institution by prioritizing the revitalization of religion so far above
the civil function of the establishment.\footnote{Southey, for instance, insists that Methodists discounted how important legislative change would need to be for a sincere overhaul of the Church, 207.}

As sectarianism became increasingly visible in nineteenth-century Britain, the Church of
England struggled to justify its dual role. Especially after the government published its report on the
data from the 1851 \textit{Census of Religious Worship}, the sectarian consequences of Methodism and the
evangelical revival were impossible to ignore.\footnote{For accounts of the Religious Census, see Richard Brown, 468-473; Chadwick, 363-369; K. D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, 23-53; David M. Thompson.} With such strong Nonconformity, the Church of
England could no longer reasonably guarantee a confessional state. Commenting on the census for
the \textit{Westminster Review} (Apr 1854), the dissenting Harriet Martineau argued that such “heresy and
schism must fatally affect the power and authority of the religion which is the subject of it” (354). In
this sense, the established church had to compete not only with its old enemy in unbelief—now in
the guise of the German Higher Criticism and advances in geology—but a whole set of new
denominations.\footnote{For the influence of German Higher Criticism in Britain specifically, see E. S. Shaffer; Sue Zemka.} While the fact of denominationalism surprised no one, the census made apparent
that the union of church and state had to be about supporting the church of the majority of Britain’s
population while ensuring the nation’s moral foundation.

Paradoxically, the decreasing religious importance of the Church of England actually made it
more of a religious and less of a civil institution. In response to changing demographics, the church
had gradually been forfeiting its civil functions: the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts between
1828 and 1832, Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the creation of a civil registrar for births, deaths, and
marriages in 1836, and the debates about the Church’s involvement in the nation’s schools. In the
1850s, this separation of civil government from the establishment continued with the attacks on
church-rates, the admission of Dissenters into Oxford and Cambridge, the broadening of the
divorce laws, and the admission of Jews into Parliament.\textsuperscript{30} No longer religious agents that mediated much of parishioners’ civic lives, the Anglican clergy began to see their role as primarily spiritual. Indeed, members of both the High Church and Evangelical parties, who agreed on little else, encouraged this strictly religious definition of the clergy. In turn, the increased emphasis on the religious work of the clergy compounded upon itself as men less religiously inclined, who might have seen the Church as a viable social and professional option in the eighteenth century, went elsewhere.\textsuperscript{31}

With the splintering of so many interests along religious lines, the relationship between religion and civil government in Britain began to resemble that same relationship in the US. Every political issue seemed overlaid with a religious constituency. The conflicts between religious parties within the establishment and among denominations consumed much of Britain’s political rhetoric. To this end, one Chartist complained to his readers that such “fights of rival Churches” could be of no “interest to the poor and unenfranchised.”\textsuperscript{32} While not seen as such at the time by British writers, this imbrication of religion and politics coinciding with the gradual legal separation of religion and civil government resembled the same process in the US several decades earlier.\textsuperscript{33} Not without reason, then, when George Eliot began to write about religion in Britain, she decided to look to the US for help.

\textbf{Eliot, the Establishment, and the US}


\textsuperscript{31} For this change in practice, see Frances Knight, 61-105, esp. 69-71. For this change in the theory of church and state in the nineteenth century, see Chadwick, 476-487; Martin Marty, 66-71.

\textsuperscript{32} G. J. Harney quoted in G. I. T. Machin, 249. On the volume of religious conflicts in 1850s politics, see Machin, 229-298; Snell and Ell, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{33} Marty suggests that proponents of disestablishment in the US and of establishment in Britain actually ended up supporting very similar church reforms and conceptions of religious authority even as they fought each other across the Atlantic about the consequences of voluntaryism.
George Eliot arrived at the conflicts of the establishment in the 1850s with plenty of baggage from her youth. As has been well documented, Eliot grew up in an evangelical family within the Church of England. More radical than Eliot’s immediate family, her aunt began as a Methodist preacher in the late-eighteenth century and joined the Primitive Methodists to continue preaching even after the Wesleyan Methodists outlawed female preaching. Instead of following her aunt’s example, Eliot abandoned her evangelicalism in the 1840s. Introduced by friends in Coventry to German philosophy and theology, Eliot translated David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach into English. After this work got her a job as co-editor for a renewed *Westminster Review* under John Chapman, Eliot frequently interacted with articles on religion and government. She notes in her letters, for instance, the hubbub surrounding William Coneybeare’s widely read “Church Parties” in the *Edinburgh Review* (Oct 1853). In turn, as a contributor to the *Westminster* later in the 1850s, Eliot dismantled the dogmatic evangelical preacher, Dr. John Cumming, for prioritizing clannish identity over the power of religion to educate people in sympathy for each other (Oct 1855). In such attacks on evangelical cant, Eliot maintained that religion continued to have an important civil function for society even if its theological foundations had suffered.

At the *Westminster*, George Eliot also began to think more about the US. As editor, she read the work of and interacted with reformist intellectuals who operated on a transatlantic scale. A little more than halfway through her editorship, on 1 February 1853, Eliot wrote to Clementia Taylor, wife of the radical Peter Alfred Taylor, about a recent article in the *Westminster* about slavery.

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34 She mentions it in two letters to her friend Charles Bray, 29 Oct 1853 and 5 Nov 1853.
35 On Eliot’s early life, religious background, and continuing interest in religion, see Avrom Fleishman, 1-43; Elisabeth Jay, 51-105, 207-243; Christine Krueger, 234-306; William McKelvy, 221-253; Russell Perkin, 124-158. On Eliot’s work with German biblical criticism, see Suzy Anger, 95-130; Bernard Paris; Shaffer, 225-291; Basil Willey, 204-250.
36 On the *Westminster* as interested in US affairs during Eliot’s editorship, see Amanda Claybaugh, 119.
Thinking about the US beyond just slavery, Eliot remarks that her views have changed about this “cradle of the future” (Letters 2, 85). Whereas she used to ignore US politics (and in fact continues to loathe some aspects of US character), Eliot declares that she is now “converted to a profound interest in the history, the laws, the social and religious phases of North America” (Letters 2:85). Awakened to a new interest, Eliot understands the US as a test case of growth into the “higher moral tendencies of human nature” (Letters 2:85). Eliot’s interest here extends beyond the intricacies of transatlantic reform to how the institutions and environment of the US affect the development of all aspects of society. Given this interest, therefore, it is not surprising that Eliot would review Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Dred in October 1856, or that Eliot, again in correspondence with Clementia Taylor, would refer to Hawthorne as a “grand favourite” (Letters, 2:52). Indeed, in her journal, Eliot mentions that she and Henry Lewes were reading The Scarlet Letter aloud to each other during their travels in March 1857.37 The Scarlet Letter, in particular, provided Eliot with an example of a novel that explored the history and development of religion and civil institutions in the US through which Eliot could investigate their relationship in Britain.

Of course, Hawthorne is not the only model that Eliot drew on in this first novel. Eliot read Southey’s Life of Wesley so carefully before writing that one critic has suggested that Eliot named Hetty after John Wesley’s sister, Methabel. Other critics have traced the influence of Walter Scott’s The Heart of Midlothian (1818) on Adam Bede, especially in Jeanie Deans’ mission by foot into London, Effie Deans’ alleged infanticide, and the religious and national framework of Scott’s paradigm for the historical romance.38 Indeed, Scott’s method of examining the creation of national identity through a religiously infused history influenced both Eliot and Hawthorne. But Eliot finds in Hawthorne not just a model of romance through and against which she can define her own

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37 Stokes mentions these appearances of Hawthorne in Eliot’s journals and letters, 89, 92-93. Eliot also mentions Stowe and Hawthorne together in a letter to Cara Bray, 11 Sept 1852, and corresponded with Stowe directly later in her life.
38 Hempton, “Popular Religion and Irreligion,” 183; Fleishman, 98; U. C. Knoepflmacher, 123.
realism; rather, Eliot looks to Hawthorne’s depiction of the changes in US religion and civil institutions after two hundred years of New England history at a time when religion in Britain had begun to resemble its seemingly younger counterpart. In particular, Hawthorne models for Eliot how established religion can exist amid (and even benefit from) conflicts among institutions.

In this respect, Hawthorne’s ambiguously conservative temperament matches Eliot’s own attitudes toward reform. While Eliot grew more conservative as she aged, even in the 1850s, she understood the dangers of too eagerly dismantling inherited institutions. In a review published in the *Leader* (29 March 1856) of a new edition of Sophocles, Eliot carefully parses the central dynamic of the tragedy as a conflict between religion and civil government, between Antigone’s “sisterly piety” and Creon’s demands for the “duties of citizenship” (*Essays* 263). Indeed, Eliot praises Sophocles precisely for ensuring that we must understand that both Antigone and Creon are passionately fighting for what they believe is right; we cannot call the former a “blameless martyr” nor can we call the latter a “hypocritical tyrant” (*Essays* 265). Eliot values this Greek tragedy precisely because it demands that we recognize that any reform, be it of unfair taxation or lax religiosity, also threatens the institutions that create a stable society. In this respect, Eliot reads in Sophocles’ tragedy one instance of a timeless conflict not only between individual conscience and the rules of society but also between religious and civil institutions. Even as this essay reinforces Eliot’s well-documented belief that literature teaches by extending sympathy throughout society, it

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39 On the important role of “romance” as an antithetical category through which Eliot defines the purpose of her realist fiction, see Daniel Cotton, 125-140.

40 Eliot’s conservativism becomes more apparent in her novels set closer to the Reform Bill, especially *Felix Holt and Middlemarch*, see Claybaugh, 117, 120, 126; Emily Coit; Evan Horowitz.
also reveals another reason Eliot would be interested in Hawthorne. After all, *The Scarlet Letter* tells one more such story, dressed in Puritan antinomianism rather than Greek reverence for the dead.

**Eliot, Hawthorne, and the Parish**

To grasp the dynamics of the Anglican establishment in *Adam Bede*, we need to understand how Eliot carefully manipulates Hawthorne’s novel. Where Hawthorne finds artistic possibility in the conflicts surrounding a religious establishment, Eliot attends more explicitly to the function of the religious establishment as an institution. That is, Eliot reads Hawthorne not for his complex representation of psychology but rather for the social theory that underlies his narrative: first, in the religious establishment’s response to a sectarian threat and, second, in the religious establishment’s mediating function. Eliot reveals her own interest in Hawthorne’s description of how antinomianism could redouble an establishment by explicitly borrowing the names Hester and Arthur and the relationship between them. In both novels, the characters that might have otherwise threatened the ruling establishment, by the end, voluntarily stabilize that institution. Hester Prynne returns to the North American colony bringing back with her a set of good works lacking in the colony. Similarly Dinah Morris leaves behind her Methodist preaching to marry Adam, that first man of Britain’s future; and Hetty returns to die in the land of her sin, thematically mimicking but literally inverting Hester’s own travel. For Eliot, the specific sectarian threat is less important than how that threat

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41 For Eliot’s complex theory of sympathy in the novel, see Anger, 95-130; Rae Greiner, “Sympathy Time” and *Sympathetic Realism*, 122-156; Deanna Kreisel; Paris; Perkin. On sympathy in Eliot more broadly, see also Audrey Jaffe, 121-157.
42 F. R. Leavis compares *Adam Bede* to a Greek tragedy in Arthur’s struggles, 53, but such a view of Arthur as a tragic figure, as much criticism since Leavis has shown, misrecognizes Arthur’s place in the plot of Eliot’s novel.
43 Ringler offers a compelling parallel between the three scaffold scenes in Hawthorne and the public gatherings in Eliot (Dinah’s preaching, Arthur’s birthday, and the Harvest dinner), 86. Casson also points out some other parallels in detail and structure, 18-19.
solidifies the establishment, which absorbs some potentially threatening elements and permanently excludes others.

Eliot makes explicit the possibility of a sectarian threat to the religious establishment that Hawthorne only ambiguously implies. Hawthorne layers many potential meanings upon Hester’s character—adultery as an affront to the Puritan establishment, Anne Hutchinson’s antinomianism, the infiltration of Roman Catholicism—but does not ever resolve these layers into a cohesive vision of any single challenge Hester might pose. In contrast, Eliot delimits the individual threat that each of her characters embodies. On the one hand, Dinah Morris’ Methodism explicitly confronts the religious establishment with the potential of sectarianism. Eliot reminds us of the sectarian implications of Methodism when, the day after Dinah preaches in Hayslope, the Anglican minister receives (and largely ignores) a pamphlet titled “Antinomianism and Evangelicalism.” Drawing from Southey’s exposition of Methodism’s flirtation with antinomianism, Eliot shows how Dinah’s belief in the “visible manifestations of Jesus” (AB 34) challenges Dinah’s aunt’s trust in learned clergymen.

On the other, Hetty’s sexuality and egoism only implicitly threaten the foundation of Britain’s establishment.44 No religious mastermind, Hetty goes through the rituals of Anglican life but “never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling” (AB 417). In place of Hawthorne’s ambiguous layering onto a single character, Eliot links these two characters by mirroring their movements with one another: Hetty roams the country like a vagabond searching for Arthur while Dinah, like a vagrant in the eyes of more conservative Methodists, goes to Leeds as an itinerant preacher. But, by the end of Adam Bede, Eliot’s characters have abandoned their threatening positions. Hetty retreats from the civil threat her sexuality poses under the punishment of death and

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44 On Victorian discourses of sexuality and religion, and Eliot’s approach to them in Middlemarch, see John Maynard, 1-38, 277.
Dinah retreats from the religious threat her preaching poses. In her resolution of the novel’s conflicts, Eliot seems to read Hawthorne in the same way that Sacvan Bercovitch does—a society becomes stronger by absorbing the ritualized dissent against its central institution.

More subtly than taking the names and actions of Hawthorne’s characters, Eliot also borrows the way Hawthorne adds urgency to these potential dangers by surrounding her characters with other encroaching institutions. Where Hawthorne alludes to the English Revolution and wars with Native American tribes, Eliot calls upon the international conflict in the Irish rebellion and local fears of urbanization. By sending Arthur Donnithorne with his militia to Ireland, Eliot invokes the uneasy coalition of middle-class Protestant and poor Catholic nationalists in Ireland that led to the 1798 uprisings—only a year before the start of Adam Bede. Much as the English Civil War alludes to a broader challenge to the establishment in The Scarlet Letter, the Irish Rebellion, which drew heavily on the example of both the French and American Revolutions, seems to promise yet another attack on the establishment in Adam Bede. Eliot compounds this foreign threat to the establishment in Hayslope by sending Dinah to Methodists in the Northern, urban Leeds at the same time that Arthur is in Ireland. Not itself a military threat, the growth of cities, alongside industrial capitalism, instead challenge the religious establishment by reorganizing the country around factories and capitalists rather than around aristocrats and parishes. As in The Scarlet Letter, these looming conflicts in Adam Bede help to explain why the small matter of a single Methodist preacher or a single adulteress could consume so much of the attention of the religious establishment and the civil government.

45 The overlap in character is the most commented on connections in discussions of the two novels together, see Buell, The Dream of the Great American Novel, 72, 96; Casson, 19; Leavis, 52; Mills 58, 61, 65-67; Ringler, 80-82-83; Stokes, 128-129, 133, 142. Mueller criticizes Eliot for evacuating the ambiguity of Hawthorne’s novel by splitting Hawthorne’s single woman into the more easily digestible contrast between Madonna and Fallen Woman, 53, 64-65, 73.

46 The uprisings in the 1790s in Ireland contributed to British accommodation of Catholicism and eventually to Catholic Emancipation. See Nancy J. Curtin, 1-12; I. R. McBride, 165-206; Kevin Whelan, 99-130.
Within the society bounded by these dangers, Eliot values the parish as an institution for how it promises stability by holding together disparate parts of society. Eliot focuses on Hetty’s actions to reveal the connections among individuals across institutions. Just before Hetty’s trial for the murder of her infant, Irwine (Hayslope’s parish minister) explains to Adam that all their lives are “thoroughly blended” (AB 460). Irwine’s lesson both asserts the often invisible connections that make up society and also suggests the need for people like himself and Adam to mediate along those connective pathways. In this specific case, if Adam were to take vengeance on Arthur, sin would continue to spread “as necessarily as disease” (AB 460). Rather than contributing to this disease, Irwine urges Adam to mitigate the evils caused by a series of connected sins. In this sense, insofar as Hawthorne finds value in the proximity of institutions primarily for the pathos it can provide to his story, Eliot instead prioritizes the stability which that proximity can provide for society.

Eliot continues to illustrate how this mediation works in Adam’s slow process of understanding the structure of society that sin exposes. At first, speaking to his friend the schoolteacher shortly before visiting Hetty in the prison, Adam insists that “thinking good may come out of” (AB 498) such a sin is foolish because it only glosses over the inescapable damage that sin has done. From this perspective, sin is only destructive of the connections among individuals. But, at the end of the novel, Eliot inverts the affect of Adam’s original claim by echoing it in Dinah’s voice. When Dinah repeats back Adam’s wisdom that “There’s a sort of wrong that can never be made up for” (AB 590), Eliot gives Adam’s insight an ironic harmony. In Dinah, after all, Eliot balances the damage of sin with the good that has come out of Hetty and Arthur’s sins. For all the evil it has caused, their sin has also brought Dinah back from the possibility of antinomianism and, in turn, joined Adam with a more suitable wife than the thoughtless Hetty.

In the structure of society that Hetty’s sin exposes, Irwine emerges as a preliminary model for how the establishment combines its civil and religious functions in order to mediate between
individuals. Despite his theological weaknesses, Irwine is the closest approximation Eliot makes to “a living demonstration of the benefits attached to a national church” (AB 197). As Adam explains to the narrator, Irwine was never “interfering and scolding, and trying to play th’ emperor” (AB 199). Instead, throughout the novel Eliot presents Irwine availing himself of the distinct position of the rural parish that the defenders of the establishment so often praised. Irwine mediates in the novel both between the Poysers and Captain Donnithorne, after Mrs. Poyser’s objection to Donnithorne’s plans for the farm, and also between Arthur and Adam, after Hetty’s trial for infanticide. In turn, in filtering this reflection on Irwine through Adam, Eliot encourages us to understand the parish not just as a vital institution increasingly becoming a relic of sixty years ago but also as an institution whose function, by the end of the novel, Adam and Dinah begin to inherit from Irwine.

To illustrate the civic function of the religious establishment, Eliot compares the religious establishment favorably to competing civil or religious institutions. Early in the novel, Eliot introduces Colonel Townley, who, as his title implies, at least ceremonially combines civil government and the military apart from religion.47 In his first appearance, this magistrate mediates between us as readers and the characters in Hayslope. Referred to only as a stranger, the magistrate rides into town on the day of Dinah’s preaching. This stranger’s naïve perspective, in turn, provides our first view of the town as a whole. True to his rank, he marvels at Adam’s physical prowess, wishing the British had men like Adam to “lick the French” (AB 21), and he judges harshly Irwine’s patience with a Methodist preaching “just under his nose” (AB 19). But, given this prejudice against Methodism, he is surprisingly enthralled by Dinah’s mode of preaching. Listening to Dinah, he feels

47 Colonel can refer to both an honorary appointment and a military rank. As honorary appointments in the late-eighteenth century, colonels were to paid to make sure their regiments in the standing army were clothed and fed but did not lead them in any fighting, Usher, 59.
“chained to the spot against his will” (*AB* 32). As a stranger to the town and its inhabitants, this magistrate lacks all perspective on these characters. His observations only become more superficial as we get deeper into the novel. Indeed, Eliot reinforces in this scene the distance between this character and the residents of Hayslope, the central characters of the novel, and us as readers by withholding the introduction of Colonel Townley’s name well past his first view of Hayslope.

We only learn the magistrate’s name in his second, and final appearance, when the magistrate helps Dinah visit Hetty in the prison. In this interaction, Eliot invites us to compare the magistrate with Dinah to discover how the lack of religion weakens the civil magistrate’s ability to mediate for his citizens. This comparison is not difficult: even the magistrate recognizes his own inadequacies in relation to Dinah. Whereas he can only unlock the physical door to the jail, Dinah, as the magistrate remembers from her sermon, has “a key to unlock hearts” (*AB* 485). Compared not only to Dinah but also to Irwine, this detached magistrate, invisible for so much of the novel, suggests in relief the weakness of a purely civil institution. Through the insufficiencies of the magistrate alongside Hetty’s trial, Eliot subordinates not just this magistrate but also the law more broadly to the establishment as a rival institution of Victorian society. The law cannot effectively mediate without Dinah’s help because the law lacks the emotional access that religion can provide. Indeed, in contrast to a civil trial that might have allowed Eliot to engage more substantively with the mediating potential of the courts, the limitations of a criminal trial allow Eliot to depict more starkly the law as something that sentences but neither mediates between parties nor mitigates the consequences of a crime.

For all the faults of a civil institution that lacks any religious qualities, a minister that overemphasizes his religious powers but neglects his civil functions is no better as a mediator. To

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48 Krueger notes how the distance between the stranger and Dinah corresponds to Eliot’s ironic distance from Eliot’s ironic distance from the charismatic mode of preaching, 260; Deanna Kreisel discusses the traveler in terms of class privilege and the picturesque, 551-557.
49 On the changes in the legal system in the Victorian period and its relationship to novelistic representations of the law, see Courtney Berger; Alexander Pettit; Hilary M. Schor; Jan-Melissa Schramm.
make this point, Eliot proleptically compares Irwine to his more evangelical successor. This new clergyman was more “zealous,” more dutiful to the “doctrines of the Reformation,” and more often “visited his flock … in their own homes” (AB 197). Fittingly, Eliot triangulates this defense of Irwine through Adam, Irwine’s successor in function but not vocation. In conversation with the narrator, Adam disparages the new minister because, by chastising his parishioners from the pulpit, he acted like the “lord judge i’ the parish” (AB 198). As Hawthorne does, Eliot distinguishes between useful mediation and impinging on an individual’s inner life. For Eliot, the new minister foregrounds religion too much and, as lord and emperor, tries to enforce those religious doctrines by disingenuously using his civil position. In becoming too evangelical, what had been a helpful form of mediation in Irwine becomes, in his successor, a means of intrusion and moral surveillance. According to Eliot, an overly evangelical establishment, as with a purely civil legal system, only judges and punishes without actually aiding the parties on either side of sin or crime.

Of course, Irwine also has his faults. Not unlike those of Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s novel, Irwine’s most notable flaws derive from the purely inward, rather than social, aspects of his religious functions. Central to the plot of Adam Bede, Irwine fails to discourage Arthur from seducing Hetty. In this failure, Eliot invokes Catholicism to show how, whereas Irwine’s informality allows Arthur to equivocate at their breakfast, the “old rigid forms” of a confessor behind a stone wall more often “committed you to the fulfillment of a resolution” (AB 177). Although less morbid in her portrayal of confession than Hawthorne, Eliot too redirects the establishment away from a minister mediating between the divine and individuals on purely spiritual matters and toward mediating among individuals in social matters. For this reason, Eliot’s religious figures consistently struggle when they attempt to interfere with the internal morality of others. Irwine recognizes this shortcoming as he admits to Arthur that “a man can never do anything at variance with his own nature” (AB 188), which Eliot reinforces by recalling the notion of fate in the book of Aeschylus that rests on their
breakfast table. Like Irwine with Arthur, Dinah too fails to turn Hetty’s mind away from her sin. Even when Dinah brings Bessy Carnage to tears during her sermon, Dinah does not effectively change Bessy’s superficial nature. These religious figures, in Eliot’s depiction, cannot change individuals. Instead, a priest’s mediation can mitigate the social consequences of sins through the mix of religious and civil power available in the establishment’s parish.

In recognition of Irwine’s insufficiencies and the changing realities of the English parish, Eliot transfers the mediating role of the establishment from the rural parish of the eighteenth century to the domestic partnership seen in Dinah and Adam’s marriage. In Adam and Dinah’s marriage, Eliot shifts *Adam Bede* away from the story of Arthur and Hetty’s sin to the story of two characters whose lives are shaped by that sin but who are not the sinners themselves. In moving away from Arthur and his relationship with both Hetty and Irwine to Adam and his domestic relationships, Eliot presents the beginning of nineteenth-century British society both descriptively and proscriptively. Descriptively, Eliot tells the story of gendered labor relations as they had developed in the previous sixty years; proscriptively, Eliot suggests that this new locus of British society needs to retain the functions of an establishment exemplified by the eighteenth-century rural parish.50

In this domestic setting, Eliot’s characters create a new center for a figurative establishment. The recentering of British society in the aftermath of sin and sectarian threat, then, is the ultimate function of what has been to many the unsatisfying marriage between Dinah and Adam. This

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50 Philip Fisher cogently explains the transference of authority from Arthur to Adam in terms of the rise of individualism in the nineteenth century, *Making*, 39-65. Eve Sedgwick describes *Adam Bede* in terms of a Marxist view of the historical connection between labor and gender relations while also criticizing Eliot’s conservatism, 134-160; see also, Margaret Homans, esp. 167-168; and, more sympathetically, Marks, 327; Daniel Siegel. In objecting to the belief that Dinah is the “moral center,” 417, of the novel, Christopher Herbert notes the important contrast in style and thought between Dinah and Irwine; in contrast, I argue, Eliot is staging the recentering of religious authority from Irwine to Dinah and Adam. Illana Blumberg makes a similar case with reference to Arthur and Adam in terms of the Victorian discourse on sin, 125-132.
recentering also explains why Dinah is a less radical figure than Eliot’s aunt, her well-known historical precedent. In choosing to continue preaching, Eliot’s aunt was doubly sectarian: she had separated with the Methodists from the Church of England; then, she had separated with the Primitive Methodists from the Wesleyan Methodist Conference when the latter forbade female preaching.\textsuperscript{51} Even though Seth Bede would have supported Dinah in joining “a body that ‘ud put no bonds on Christian liberty” (\textit{AB} 589), Dinah does not choose that Bede. Instead, Dinah produces a family with Adam and, as Adam explains it, chooses to “set th’ example o’ submitting” (\textit{AB} 589). In contrast to both fictional and historical models, Dinah Morris retreats from sectarianism to one of the central institutions of nineteenth-century British life. For Eliot, Dinah’s decision is neither wholly subversive of nor wholly complicit in the creation of Victorian England. Eliot values this decision precisely for the opportunities it presents Adam and Dinah as mediators for British society. By the end, Dinah and Adam emerge as mediators in a society that is eroding its establishment; and, insofar as Eliot recreates the establishment in Dinah and Adam, she also tries to rescue the mediating power of the parish at the center of British society for herself and these characters.\textsuperscript{52}

In this lineage of mediators in British society that extends from Irwine through Adam and Dinah, Eliot also justifies her own vocation. The same chapter in which Adam compares Irwine to his successor is one of the most critically discussed because, in it, Eliot explicitly defends her own fictional technique. In “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” Eliot defines “the highest vocation of

\textsuperscript{51} Eliot describes the relationship of her aunt to the writing of \textit{Adam Bede} in a journal entry from 30 November 1858, \textit{Letters} 2:502-505. On Eliot’s aunt, Elizabeth Evans (later Elizabeth Tomlinson) and her relationship to Dinah, see Cunningham, 153; Krueger, 243, 262; Clifford J. Marks, 312; Valenze, 50-73. William Mottram provides a less scholarly, but also more detailed familial perspective on \textit{Adam Bede} and Eliot’s aunt, esp. 218-223. In this small point, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick errs when she states that Dinah would have had to give up preaching even if she were not to have married Adam because of the new Methodist rule about female preaching, 143.

\textsuperscript{52} Simon During refers to Eliot’s “positive engagement” in the civil power of “ecclesiastical organization,” 430, as a “secular desecularization of the secular,” 433. I agree with During that Eliot values the civil authority of the Church of England but denigrates its religious authority as a voice for so-called true religion.
the novelist” (*AB* 193) in familiar terms: the defective mirror, her insistence on being honest about
the real flaws of her characters, and the artist’s sympathy by way of Dutch paintings. But we must
also recognize that Eliot describes her vocation at the very moment that she triangulates between
Adam, Irwine, and the new minister in terms of the mediating function of the establishment. In
doing so, Eliot is translating the civil benefits of the religious establishment into the artistic benefits
of a novel that abjures the impulse to “make things seem better than they were” (*AB* 194). That is,
she sees the value of her vocation in detailing the sympathies that connect us as readers to many a
“vulgar citizen” rather than in looking above society at the “few prophets … few sublimely beautiful
women; few heroes” (*AB* 197). Even as Eliot criticizes the author who would intrude upon the inner
life of her characters by idealizing their words and thoughts, Eliot retains a less intrusive form of
mediation that she inherits from the establishment of the eighteenth-century parish. This unintrusive
mediation encourages us to recognize our responsibility for the imperfect society that emerges from
our connections to others.

Where Hawthorne looks back upon a society with close, but conflicting, institutions to see
the individuals suffering at their intersection, Eliot looks back instead to see the institutions that
hold society together despite the exceptional suffering of heroes and villains. In this respect, we may
more properly think of Eliot as closely inverting—rather than rewriting—Hawthorne’s novel.
Although both novels depend upon the tragedies of sin as catalysts, Hawthorne treats sin as at once
anterior to and generative of his whole narrative; Eliot treats sin as peripheral to her narrative. In so
doing, Eliot portrays an institutional transition that explores how society depends upon the overlap
between the religious and civil capabilities of a religious establishment. The separation that comes
with the weakening of the religious establishment’s civil functions—let alone disestablishment
itself—requires the cultivation of a new institution that can mediate in ways that a totally civil
government and a totally religious church cannot. Despite these differences, Hawthorne and Eliot
both look back to religious establishments before differentiating processes such as disestablishment
to elucidate the relationships between individuals and institutions. In these relationships, both
authors find the pathos and structure of society that they argue too much differentiation threatens to
make solely a thing of the past.
Melville Among the Nations (and States, and Denominations)

By the time Herman Melville published *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), disestablishment had been a settled way of life for forty-three years. In these decades, disestablished Protestantism had come to differentiate between three foundational institutions: denomination, state, and nation. Denominations grouped liked-minded Protestants based on doctrine, cultural background, and style of worship; the state claimed sovereignty as a civil government over a particular territory; and the nation expressed a shared identity—real, imagined, or polemical—that often drew on aspects of both the state and Protestant denominations. But, insofar as the debates about disestablishment articulated an understanding of denominations apart from the state, they left undefined the precise coordination of the three-body problem of nation, denomination, and state. In a theory of denominationalism, as it flourished after disestablishment in the 1840s and 1850s, US evangelicals in particular triangulated between these three institutions by articulating the denomination as a form of religious freedom apart from the state and the nation as a form of interdenominational Protestant unity. What interested Melville in his travels to the Ottoman Empire in the late 1850s and in his long poem two decades later was what happens to this institutional relationship when it lacks the support of a stable state.

More than any of Melville’s other works, *Clarel* uses the conflicts between institutions after disestablishment to explore a paradox that Melville sees between religious institutions and individual belief. Put bluntly, Melville suggests that religion cannot survive without institutions but that institutions might be the death of religion. That Melville would define religion as a paradox is less surprising than the diverse interest Melville takes in institutions in *Clarel*. Melville’s widely studied works often focus on paradoxes that arise in single institutions that model the world in microcosm. The *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick*, the USS *Neversink* in *White-Jacket*, and the HMS *Bellipotent* in *Billy Budd*,
Sailor all leave the world’s shore and, as such, allow Melville to portray conflicts among individuals without the interruption of the institutions at the ship’s margins.¹ For this reason, the dominant paradigms for understanding Melville’s treatment of religion are usually distinct from the paradigms through which we understand his approach to the state and institutions in general. In these accounts, religion apart from institutions becomes, for Melville, an abstract, individual struggle between faith and doubt. For instance, in *Moby-Dick* (1851), the question of fate and evil in Ahab’s quest connects to Melville’s personal doubts about religion as well as the weakening authority of the Scriptures under pressure from German Higher Criticism.² *Moby-Dick* warrants this approach insofar as aboard the *Pequod* Ahab confronts theodicy as king, lord, and captain ostensibly apart from the world’s institutions. In *Moby-Dick*, the ship offers an archetypical institution with, to borrow David Alworth’s phrase, “functional similarity” (254) to other institutions. This setting provides Melville the freedom to approach religion as an abstract system of beliefs without addressing explicitly the institutions that protect religion through space and time.

Even when institutions do conflict, scholarship on Melville tends to focus on conflicts in Melville’s narratives between different versions of the same type of institutions. Thus, in “Benito Cereno,” Melville focuses our attention on the conflicts between states that arise from the slave trade. Melville’s interests here orbit around how the slave trade and, in particular, the Fugitive Slave Law undermine the foundation of the state as an institution that exists as part of a global community.³ As such, the brief inclusion of a mirage of Spanish Dominicans aboard the slave ship

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³ On Melville’s attack on the Fugitive Slave Law through a critique of binary logic in “Benito Cereno,” see Fisher, *Still the New World*, 95; Sundquist, 155. On cosmopolitanism and challenges to
adds detail but not vital substance to the novella. A conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the US government would disrupt any analogy based on the functional similarity of individual states.

In *Clarel*, Melville imagines not an analogy between institutions but the intersections and differences among diverse institutions. *Clarel* extrapolates from the rise of denominationalism in the US to the many schisms in the Abrahamic faiths that intersect in and around Jerusalem, where those conflicts become most highly concentrated. In bringing his readers to Palestine, Melville offers his most sophisticated account of how individual belief functions in relation to conflicts not just about religious institutions of the same type—say, Protestant denominations—but also between different constellations of religion, nation, and state—from the idea of a Jewish nation without a state to the Roman Catholic Church’s denomination that can function like a state without a nation. By investigating these different institutional relationships, Melville shows how the protection of institutions provides longevity: through institutions, religion passes from one generation to the next and can withstand the assaults of rival institutions. At the same time, Melville locates the sincerity and beauty of religion in individual belief, which, he suggests, cannot remain for long within the bounded protection of institutions. The pilgrimage that Melville describes, therefore, is a life spent negotiating this contradiction. Even as Melville depicts one such pilgrimage in the Ottoman Empire, the roots of Melville’s thinking lie in US denominationalism.

**US Disestablishment and Denominationalism**

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the logic of the nation-state in Melville more generally, see Buell, “Decolonization,” 233; DeLombard, 60; Dryden, 34; Giles, esp 56, 86; Hager, 309; Kaplan; Christopher Sten, 38-48, and Wyn Kelley, 61-70 in Marovitz and Christodoulou; Taylor, 51; Waugh.
By the 1840s and 1850s, Protestant writers—especially evangelical writers—were identifying denominationalism as a particular feature of religion in the US after disestablishment. In taking on the most visible religious functions of the established church after disestablishment, denominations did not depend solely, or even primarily, upon consensus about doctrine; they also coalesced around principles of organization and cultural identity. The growth of diverse denominations organized around these principles, according to Philip Schaff—a leader of the Reformed, Mercersburg Theology and the preeminent nineteenth-century historian of US religion—was a defining feature of religion in his adopted country.4 In a set of speeches given in 1854 and published in 1855, Schaff described the good and the bad of denominationalism as it existed in the US. On the one hand, Schaff joined many other ministers in attacking the “party spirit” of denominationalism that seemed to advocate division for its own sake rather than the reliance on one’s own conscience.5 On the other hand, Schaff praised how denominationalism bred an “aggressive and missionary” (America 94) Protestantism that has produced proportionally “more awakened souls and more individual effort and self-sacrifice for religious purposes” (America 98) than any other country.6 Denominationalism in the US, Schaff suggests, insists on the “universal freedom of religion and worship” (America 10); this freedom, in Schaff’s description, not only makes the US unique but also outweighs any worry about

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6 My understanding of denomination as an institution that combines doctrine, organization, and identity derives from Nancy Ammerman, 121; Amy Koehlinger, 7; Richard H. Niebuhr, 25; Russell E. Richey, 75-76; William H. Swatos, Jr., “Beyond Denominationalism,” 222-223. Richey’s categorization of antebellum denominationalism as “purposive missionary association,” 77, 80-82, fits well with Schaff’s account. The extent to which denominationalism was actually an exceptional experience in America is of scholarly debate. Sidney Mead argues it is, “Denominationalism,” 291, 294-295. Drawing on the rise of denominationalism in England, Ernest Sandeen argues it was not, 233.
the divisive tendencies for Christianity of denominationalism’s “SECT SYSTEM” (*America* 10). Indeed, Schaff even hypothesizes that this “infirmity of America” may actually be a characteristic “of all Protestantism” (*America* 12), which the American political and religious environment only makes more apparent.

Even as denominationalism divided Protestants into smaller institutions, denominationalism also paradoxically produced successful and wide-ranging interdenominational associations that unified Protestants. In particular, US Protestants united around the idea of a primitive, apostolic church that returned Christianity to its most essential aspects (although, of course, each particular denomination felt that it alone offered the truest and most effective path to that essential Christianity). In *Religion in America* (1844), for instance, Robert Baird subordinates individual denominational differences to a broad distinction between evangelical and non-evangelical denominations. Hoping to dispel the rumors spread by European travelers of the “unseemly strife among our various religious denominations” (267), Baird insists that among evangelical denominations there exists a “remarkable degree of mutual respect and fraternal affection” (268). In fact, Baird pushes his point further by suggesting that US evangelicals actually feel more “mutual respect” for one another than they would if they were “all coerced into one denomination” (269). As evidence of this camaraderie, Baird details at length the many associations that sustain interdenominational efforts, including Home Missions, Sunday Schools, Tract Societies, and Beneficent Institutions. For both Baird and Schaff, denominations had become in the US the basic

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religious institution that individuals experienced even as denominations themselves did not limit (and often encouraged) individuals to participate in religious efforts across denominations.

Denominationalism and the religious freedom that made it possible, according to both Baird and Schaff, derived from the particular relationship between church and state in the US. Religion prospers, according to Baird, only when the state neither interferes with individuals’ “rights of conscience” and “religious worship” nor privileges “any sect or denomination of Christians” (116). With this distinction between religion and the state, Protestantism succeeds because the people realize it is their “duty and privilege” (Baird 132) to support religion, privately, publically, and financially. In celebrating religious liberty after disestablishment, Baird’s work blends together the popular rhetoric of individualism with close attention to the institutions and associations that have taken over the work of the religious establishment. On the one hand, Baird both locates individual “energy, self-reliance, and enterprise” (Baird 132) as the foundation of religion’s success apart from the state; on the other, he devotes almost a third of Religion in America to the denominations and associations that form when individuals “ask help from others only after having done all they think practicable” (132). Largely in agreement with Baird, Schaff argues that disestablishment produced a “mass of individual activity and interest among the laity in ecclesiastical affairs” (America 79) precisely because, without state support, each denomination “is thrown upon its own resources” (America 98). Expanding on the separation of church and state in 1888, Schaff celebrates the unique success of disestablished religion in the US as against religion in a spectrum of European nations, from the marginally less free Anglican establishment to the Catholic Spain’s “fort of Roman intolerance and exclusiveness” (Church and State 116). For both Baird and Schaff, denominationalism, along with its advantages and its limitations, derives from the unique relationship between the state and religious institutions.

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8 Jon Gjerde notes that this kind of “geopolitics of faith” was common by the 1850s in both the US and in Europe, 42.
In Schaff’s religious geopolitics, Roman Catholicism is especially threatening because it
denies the foundational relationship he sees between denomination, state, and nation. As Lyman
Beecher infamously argued in 1835, Roman Catholicism not only claimed to be “the only church of
Christ” (66) but also gave to the Pope “the right of interference with the political concerns of
nations” (67). Beecher’s anti-Catholicism and Schaff’s religious geopolitics both underscore how
denominationalism relied on a particular coordination of nation, denomination, and state that, they
argue, the US exemplified.9 It risks over-simplifying the complex negotiation between institutions to
say, as critics have recently, that US Protestants tended to differentiate between an “implicitly
Protestant state and the Catholic Church” (Fessenden, Culture and Redemption 64) or, more abstractly,
that evangelicals like Baird saw the state as “an energy that operated within human history … that
would allow individuals to act voluntarily, on their own terms, as a people” (Modern 84). It would
be more accurate to say that writers and ministers in particular denominations, given their
relationship to the state, imagined the nation as a countervailing force to denominationalism’s
tendency toward division. The state’s equanimity toward denominations allowed ministers to
imagine a larger unity as a Protestant nation; but, as with all nation-building in nineteenth-century
America, this process was always a contest between ideas of what that nation could offer and, in this
case, what each denomination would be sacrificing.10

Consider, for instance, the New England tradition of the fast day. In the nineteenth century,
fast days generally happened in one of two ways: either as a traditional, annual fast or as a way to
mark a particular disaster. The first occurred most often in New England as a hold over from

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9 On the relationship between Protestant nationalism and anti-Catholicism, see Ahlstrom, Religious
History, 555-568; Fenton, Religious Liberties, 3-15; Franchot, Roads to Rome, 101-110; Gjerde, 13, 35-36;
Griffin, 1-26; Hamburger, 193-251.
10 For accounts of the US as a self-consciously Protestant nation in the nineteenth century (with
Protestantism as a de facto establishment), see Ahlstrom, Religious History, 470; Hamburger, 143;
Miller, Nature’s Nation, 117, 120; Noll, “The Image of the United State,” 46, 51; For an account of
serious dissent to such religious nationalism from ministers and divines, see Hanley, 1-2, 41, 51-53,
93.
Congregationalist establishments, and tended to happen on Good Friday before Easter. The second occurred when state or federal government declared a fast to mark a specific event—such as the cholera outbreak in 1832, William Henry Harrison’s death in office in 1841, or a particular war (the War of 1812, the Invasion of Mexico, and the Civil War all occasioned fast days). In both cases, ministers availed themselves of the invitation to address affairs of state and nation. These sermons used the nation to imagine Protestant unity; but, at the same time, they warned that both the state and the nation also threatened to corrupt religious institutions. Uzziah Cicero Burnap took his fast day sermon in 1830, for instance, to compare the US favorably to “Mahomedan nations” and “all countries where Popery is the prevailing, or the established religion” (6), because in the US religious leaders cannot impose legal penalties. In this formulation, diverse Protestant denominations coalesce into a nation precisely because of their distance from the state. Other ministers and divines made similar points by arguing that the US simultaneously inherits and excels the model of the biblical Israel because it has left behind Israel’s theocratic government. The US as a nation, for these Protestants, relies upon and makes possible denominationalism. As Ebenezer Porter explains in a fast day sermon in 1831, the nation can be Protestant without being despotic precisely because the “community of pious men, of all denominations” (34) is not a church; the nation then becomes the institution that gives shape to that interdenominational, Christian community.

At the same time, these fast day sermons also sought to redefine that nation as an institution in service of denominations rather than an institution to which denominations had to answer. Since

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11 The fast day is best remembered for its relation to Andrew Jackson’s conflict with Henry Clay before the veto of the bill to re-charter the Bank of the United States. Opposed to institutions and (at least politically) antagonistic toward religious leaders, Jackson refused the Dutch Reformed Synod’s request for a national fast day to mark the cholera outbreak, see, Adam Jortner, esp 236-237, 262. Presidents before and after Jackson, however, did invite fast days, see Charles Ellis Dickson, esp. 195, 205; Jortner, 264.

12 Baird makes this comparison in *Religion in America*, 84-99, 126-127. Alvan Bond in 1836, 3-4, and Uzziah Burnap in 1830, 3, make similar points. In contrast, Charles Hawley in an 1859 Thanksgiving Day address lamented that the US, and all nations, had strayed too far from the Hebrew example, 6, 17.
these fast day sermons predominately occurred in New England, they often attacked slavery. These ministers argued that slavery demonstrates how the nation no longer serves God and that, as a result, God will punish the nation as a whole.¹³ As Richard Bowers Thurston explained to his Congregational audience in 1857, religious institutions must have their “entire independence” from the state precisely because the Bible enjoins ministers “to teach ALL NATIONS to observe ALL THINGS whatsoever He has commanded” (4). To subordinate denominations to the desires of a state or to celebrate a nation built upon anything but Protestant principles, for Thurston, invites divine punishment. To be sure, these fast day sermons are in the tradition that Sacvan Bercovitch has codified as the American Jeremiad; but, unlike those in Bercovitch’s paradigm, they do not use the ritual of dissent to solidify national consensus. Rather they are negotiating what the nation must be in relation not just to the state and to denominations but also to all the other institutions that serve religious functions. In these sermons—as in the more widely read work of Baird and Schaff—US Protestants are ritually redefining the nation in order to preserve the unifying institution that undergirds Protestant denominationalism.¹⁴

**Melville, Denominationalism, and the Holy Land**

Denominationalism surrounded Herman Melville from the beginning of his life. As a child, Melville experienced the Reformed Protestantism of his mother’s Dutch family, the legacy of the colonial Anglican Church that New York had quickly disestablished after the Revolution, and his

¹³ For versions of anti-slavery sentiment in a variety of fast day sermons, see Bacon, 24-32; Eddy, 14-24; Hawley, 21-25; Stone, 6, 18-19; Thurston, 12-15; Whittingham, 30.
¹⁴ See Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 132-175, esp. 159, 166, 172. The ministers and divines I describe here try to put together two institutions that Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has recently argued depended on mutually exclusive logic of the “geopolitics of religion and sovereign nationalism,” 198. We can see Francis Wayland admit to this paradox when in his 1826 fast day sermon he images that in the future religion will bring together all nations: “One feeling, the love of liberty, will have cemented together all the nations of the earth,” 31.
father’s ties to liberal, Unitarian churches in Massachusetts. As an adult, Melville himself chose denominations haphazardly, hopping from church to church: Dutch Reformed with his mother; Unitarian with his wife; Episcopalian (sometimes) in Pittsfield when his mother and sisters pressured him; Anglican, on a whim in Britain, because the well-known preacher shared his surname. In experimenting with these different denominations, Melville enjoyed the religious freedom that advocates of disestablishment had claimed to offer. Forms of belief and worship proliferated in more and more denominations and Melville was free to try to match his own belief and interpretation of the Bible with the institutions that surrounded him.

Throughout his career, Melville includes these experiences in the many denominations and denominational figures that appear in his narratives. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville gently mocks the violence of the *Pequod*’s Quaker owners and Ishmael’s incoherent Presbyterianism. In *Pierre*, Melville satirizes a buffoonish Episcopalian minister. And, in *The Confidence-Man*, Melville catalogues the numerous denominations that spend time aboard the microcosm on the US that floats on the Mississippi. Beginning the narrative with a fight between a Methodist and an Episcopalian, Melville sprinkles representatives of the many denominations that sprouted in the US during and after disestablishment. By the end of the novel, we have seen or heard of a person “in quaker dress” (*TCM* 895), a city founded by “fugitive Mormons” (*TCM* 893) in Minnesota, a suspected secret member of the “Jesuit emissaries” (*TCM* 938), and the “Come-Outers” (*TCM* 1073), that radical anti-institutional religious community.

But all this exploration of the possibilities of denominationalism had its cost. In response to Melville’s lampooning of evangelical missionaries in *Typee* and *Mardi*, Methodist periodicals and

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15 On Melville and his wife at the Unitarian Church in New York City, see Parker, *Vol. 1*, 796. On the religious beliefs of Melville’s mother and sister and their pressuring him to attend church, see Parker, *Vol 1*, 131, 330, 795-796, 808. On attending church in England, see *J*, 41.
16 On the mess of characters in *The Confidence-Man*, see Sten. On Protestant and Catholic tensions, see Cook, 64-66.
readers attacked Melville and his publishers.¹⁷ His story “The Two Temples,” which favored an English theater over a famous Episcopalian church in New York City, was held back from publication by Melville’s publishers lest any denominational partisans object to Melville’s satire of their ornate church.¹⁸ Precisely because Melville chose to experiment with many different denominations, he was left defenseless against attacks from all denominations when he criticized their practices. Without the protection of any one denomination, he sought to find his own Protestantism in between these institutional conflicts.

In 1856 and 1857, after finishing what would be his last piece of published prose, Melville traveled from the US to England and then to the Ottoman Empire. On this trip, Melville gained a new perspective on Protestant denominationalism as he had experienced it in the US. In Istanbul, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, he encountered a variety of relationships not only between similar institutions—such as Christian denominations—but also between religions, states, and nations. Unlike the US, where Christian denominationalism (especially if we include Roman Catholicism as one Christian denomination among others) defined the vast majority of religious conflicts, the Ottoman Empire contained not only rival Christian denominations but also Jews, Muslims, and the various rival sects within those religions. In these rivalries in the Ottoman Empire, Melville found a broader application of the realities of denominationalism. Through his journals about his trip, and ultimately in his long poem about Jerusalem and Palestine, Melville explored the consequences of this experience of religion amid institutional conflicts.

¹⁷ See Suzuki for Melville’s critique of the political implications of missionary activity and Breitwieser for Melville and comparative religion. On Melville and his publishers, see Parker, Vol1, 246, 387, 411, 440; also, Parker, Vol2, 177-178, 218. On evangelical reviews of Melville’s early novels, see Modern, 55-61; Parker, Vol1, 402, 416-417, 431, 505, 717; Buell, “Decolonization,” 219-220; Herbert, Marquesan Encounters, 149-191; Machor 146-147.
¹⁸ On Putnam’s decision not to publish the story, see Parker, Vol2, 218-219. On the probability that Melville satirized the Trinity Church and not Grace Church (both Episcopalian), see Beryl Rowland, “Grace Church.”
Melville could travel in the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s precisely because, as the Ottoman Empire gradually weakened in the first half of the nineteenth century, European political and religious leaders saw opportunities in the region’s religious and political rivalries for the expansion of both territory and influence. Since the eighteenth century, the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose members constituted the majority of Christians in the region, had officially represented Christian interests within the Ottoman Empire. And, although the religious leader of the Orthodox Church resided in Istanbul, that church relied on the military power of the Russian monarchy for protection. In turn, much as the Russians protected the Orthodox population, the French claimed the right to protect the much smaller group of Roman Catholics—although neither the French nor the Roman Catholics had had an equivalent place in the Ottoman government. Only in the 1840s did both France, representing Roman Catholics, and Britain, representing evangelical Protestant interests, negotiate a place in the Ottoman government for these religious institutions.\(^{19}\)

Throughout his travels, Melville consistently notices in his journal the jostling between different religions and different nations.\(^{20}\) In Istanbul, which Melville refers to as Constantinople, Melville sees “crowds of all nations” where “coins of all nations circulate” (J 60-61). On the next day, Melville remarks that there are “Three Sundays a week in [sic] Constanple. Friday, Turks; Sat, Jews; Sunday, Romanists, Greeks, & Armenians” (J 61). This later fact seems to have so struck Melville that, whether he knew it or not, he made an almost identical entry six weeks later about Jerusalem: “Three Sundays a week in Jerusalem—Jew, Christian, Turk. And now come the missionaries of the 7th Day Baptists, & add a fourth. (Saturday—the Jews) How it must puzzle the

\(^{19}\) For the history of Palestine and the Ottoman Empire in this period, see A. J. Arberry, ed., esp 1:239-346, 1:570-595, 2:459-544; Yehoshua Ben-Arich, esp, 65-69, 109-118, 157-161; Charles A. Frazee, 304-309; Ilan Pappé, 1-20; James Parkes, 210-276. On the sectarian realities for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, see Bruce Masters, 130-168.

\(^{20}\) For a comprehensive account of Melville’s journaling of his visit to Jerusalem, see Parker, *Herman Melville, Vol 2*, 314-320, esp 316.
converts!” (J 91). In these entries, Melville is tracking the kinds of institutions that preserve these religions amid so much conflict, both peaceful and violent. Indeed, in summarizing his time in Istanbul, Melville ponders “The Negro Mussleman” (J 68). In this maze of religions, Melville contrasts the “other dispersed nations (Jews, Armenians, Gypsies)” who resist conversion to other religions with this “Negro” who seems “indifferent to forms as horse to caparisons” (J 68). Whether Melville means that dark-skinned Muslims seem more open to conversion or that dark-skinned Muslims maintain their religion without following inherited forms as closely as these other displaced religious groups, the intersections of so many religious groups and the problem of preserving religion and nation seem to fascinate Melville.

Melville finds the interactions and transformation of religions (beyond only Protestant denominations), states, and nations in the Middle East not just in the people but also in the environment and architecture. Melville first saw an instance of the architectural layering of religion in Thessaloniki (Salonica), where he explores “mosques [that were] formerly Greek churches” (J 55). In Jerusalem, Melville encounters such architecture in every direction. Looking upon the “Mosque of Omar—Solomon's Temple,” Melville sees a physical marker of Islam built upon “the foundation stones of Solomon, triumphing over that which sustains it” (J 85). In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the experience of this architecture—and all that it entails—overwhelmed Melville. This church, built over the place of the crucifixion and resurrection, contains major Orthodox and Roman Catholic chapels but also “various little chapels, the special property of the minor sects of the Copts, the Syrians & others” (J 88), (see Figure 1). In his journal, Melville is disgusted by a building that strikes him as the “thronged news-room & theological exchange of Jerusalem” (J 88). Instead of a building devoted to the events of Christian history and sincere belief, Melville finds battling institutions that support nothing more than individuals “indifferently exchanging the
sectarian gossip of the day” (J 88). In this church, Melville finds the bickering of denominationalism without any of its promise.

Jerusalem and Palestine, as Melville witnessed them, brought together rival religious groups through shared attachment to place. This region also gave Melville a sense of the circularity of denominational conflicts within Christianity. After all, Melville traveled to the region just nine months after the end of the Crimean War (1853-1856), the most recent theo-political conflict to involve Europeans in the region. Napoleon III provoked the Russian Monarchy into the Crimean War by taking advantage of the perennial feuds between Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians over the control of (and right to renovate) the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Upon passing Cape St. Vincent toward the Mediterranean, Melville noted how from this point sailed a “Great procession of ships bound to Crimea” (J 52). And upon arriving in Jerusalem, Melville mentions that, looking at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, his landlord “pointed out the damaged dome, as beginning of the war with Russia. Still in same state as then” (79). In addition to housing a mess of sectarian Christians, this Church retains the damage that helped to initiate the Crimean War. Melville sees that, while the Crimean War changed the dynamics of European politics, it had little effect on the institutional conflicts in Palestine.21 The war is finished but the conflict over who can fix the damage remains.

In the context of the Crimean War, the conflicts between Christian institutions in Palestine looked strangely similar to conflicts within US Protestantism even as they challenged the notion of unity that justified the persistence of denominationalism. On the one hand, here were the roots of both the biblical nation and an apostolic church, sacred to Protestants, Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox. On the other hand, Palestine, more visibly than any other place, challenged the

21 On the religious roots of the Crimean War and the corresponding politics in Jerusalem, see Orlando Figes, 1-60; Norman Rich, 1-33; Trevor Royle, 15-33; Ann Pottinger Saab, 1-24.
notion of Christian unity. Even the generous Anglo-Catholic version of Christian unity suggested that the apparent schisms between Roman, Eastern, and Anglican Catholics would dissolve if they inhabited the same location.\footnote{On John Henry Newman and William Palmer’s “Branch Theory” of Catholic unity, see Plato Ernest Shaw, 17-27. For Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox perspectives on the concept of schism, see Aidan Nichols, 27-50; Philip Sherrard, 48-72.} As the Crimean War reminded the world, no such unity existed. To be sure, the Crimean War is neither the only nor the most obvious political context within which we can understand Melville’s trip or the long poem that results from it. Melville includes characters who are veterans of both the European Revolutions of 1848 and the US Civil War without any veterans of Crimea.\footnote{Zach Hutchins most recently reads \textit{Clarel} as displacing national concerns onto the geography of the Holy Land, (in Hutchins’ case, postbellum racial ideology). Such interpretations necessarily avoid the religious and national dynamics of Palestine itself. On Melville and the Civil War, see Andrew Delbanco, \textit{Melville}, 266-281; Stanton Garner. On Melville’s characterization of the European revolutionary Alphonse de Lamartine in \textit{Clarel}, see Larry J. Reynolds, 97-100.} But, unlike these other two conflicts, the Crimean War connected to the institutional rivalries in Palestine that extended the problems of US denominationalism. Not only did these conflicts challenge the notion of a unity within denominationalism (and even that of a unified Catholic Menace) but they also gave a more complex constellation of the relationships that can exist between religious institutions, states, and nations beyond that of the separation of (Christian) church and state.

The sum of these conflicts presents Melville with a contrast between individuals and institutions in which even sincerely devout individuals work within misguided institutions while relying upon those institutions for protection. Melville documents this situation most vividly in the community of Protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, notwithstanding Melville’s antipathy toward the missionaries he encountered in Polynesia, Melville finds Samuel Gobat—the Protestant, Swiss-born Bishop of Jerusalem supported by Britain and Prussia—to be “a very sincere man” (f 91-92). Melville even praises Gobat’s writing in his \textit{Journal of Three Years’ Residence in Abyssinia} (1834)—whose 1850 edition included an introduction by Robert Baird—as
“apostolically concise & simple” (J 92). On the other hand, Melville admits that Gobat’s missionary effort “in Jerusalem is a failure—palpably” (J 92). For instance, the effort to aid in the “prophetic return of the Jews to Judea” (J 93) by installing Jews as farmers in the region has failed not only because the Jews they encounter do not want to farm a desert but also because the “Jews dare not live outside walled towns or villages” (J 94) without protection from the “Arabs & Turks” (J 94). With British and Austrian support, the interdenominational Protestant Church as an institution in Palestine protects sincerely devout individuals such as Gobat even as it supports seemingly endless, failed ventures; at the same time, for the Jewish people living in and around Jerusalem, the lack of any connection between religious institutions and states, leaves them constantly at risk. Twenty years later in Clarel, Melville confronts in depth this dynamic of faith and protection that derives from the complex relationships between individuals, religious institutions, nations, and states in and around Palestine.

**Denominationalism and Institutions in Clarel**

In Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, Melville stages a series of interlocking debates about religion in the modern world. The slippage between what it means to be on a pilgrimage to the “Holy Land”—is this a search for religious origins? sincere devotional travel? a period of exile? the course of mortal life?—provides just enough ambiguity about motives to support these overlapping debates. In their travels, Melville’s many pilgrims openly discuss faith and doubt as well as the opposition between religion and science. For instance, a geologist, who comes to the Holy Land to disprove religion, sets up a sustained anxiety among the pilgrims about

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24 These last three definitions paraphrase entries 1, 2, and 3 for pilgrimage in the OED.
the future of religion in an increasingly scientific world. Although the poem includes many parallels in scene and language with what Melville recorded in his journals twenty years earlier, the poem lacks a single figure that espouses Melville’s definitive views on religion.

To investigate the individual and institutional complexities of religion, Melville brings together a wide range of characters who personify both religious opinions on a spectrum from devotion to apostasy and also a diverse array of institutional structures. Among the figures of the most institutional forms of religion, Melville includes various orders of Roman Catholics, monks in a Greek Orthodox monastery, a Scottish Presbyterian, and a priest in the Church of England. And, although the differences between these figures are daunting enough, Melville adds more eccentric figures: a US man with a Puritan heritage who has converted to Judaism, a missionary Millennialist from the US without a mission to support him, and a cosmopolitan US traveler who celebrates a religious principle that spans the globe. Through this array of characters, Melville does draw our attention to the fate of individual belief but only in relation to the variety of relationships that exist between nation, state, and denomination. In particular, Melville parses the tension between individual and institution by representing characters in three traditions—Anglicanism, Judaism, and Catholicism—that embody distinct relationships between religion, state, and nation.

Derwent, the Anglican minister on the pilgrimage, depicts the religious consequences of merging denomination, state, and nation. In particular, Derwent personifies how this combination of institutions has tended to make his Christian denomination too interested in matters of nation and state and not concerned enough about the finer points of religion. In this context, Derwent

25 Reading the poem as a struggle between individual faith and doubt has been the traditional scholarly approach to the poem, see Goldman, 1-2, 8; Kenny, 11; Kevorkian, 140; Lundin, esp. 135-171; and Potter, to a less explicit extent.

26 Bezanson sets the standard in pointing to the parallels between Derwent and contemporary Anglican thought in his notes on Derwent in Clarel, 619-621.
broadly incorporates anything of “Thought’s last adopted style” (2.1.35) that might bolster his religious optimism. This receptivity to national and foreign influences, Melville implies, is ominous:

A priest he was—though but in part;
For as the Templar old combined
The cavalier and monk in one;
In Derwent likewise might you find
The secular and cleric tone (2.1.29-33)

In this analogy, Melville likens Derwent’s established religion to an older model of the crusaders, who also combined religion, military, and nation: instead of a global Catholic military, Derwent presents a single Protestant nation-state. Lurking beneath this analogy between modern Anglican and medieval crusader is the powerful protection of the state’s military that threatens British imperial expansion.

Of the three institutions that Derwent intertwines, his denomination seems to suffer the most. Derwent’s unselfconscious ignorance of his own shallow religiosity is doubly ironic. First, this figure of established religion, “marching in time’s drum-corps van / Abrest with whistling Jonathan” (2.1.41-42), appears blithely unconcerned about the influence that US disestablishment, denominationalism, and the rise of Dissent have had in weakening the Anglican Church’s supremacy in England.27 Second, Derwent’s modern, confident religion, as many critics accept, lacks theological rigor.28 When responding to Clarel’s doctrinal concerns throughout the poem, he avoids religious quandaries. According to Derwent, Christ was not a revolutionary theologian, but a helper of the poor who regrettably chose to “Credit the Jews’ crab-apple creed” (3.21.273). As Melville depicts him, Derwent makes religion so worldly that it ceases to be a denomination at all but rather just

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27 On changes in the theory of church and state in Britain in the nineteenth century, see Owen Chadwick, 476-487; Martin Marty, 66-71. Marty notes that the actual goals of disestablishment in the US and the establishment in England were oddly enough “almost identical,” 75.

28 It is popular, in this regard, to note that Derwent contradicts Melville’s early enthusiasm for thinkers who “dive” when he warns Clarel, “too deep you dive” (3.21.307). On Derwent as a bad theologian, see Kenny, 100; Milder, 212; Norberg, 46-47; Parker, Vol 2, 722-723. For positive views of Derwent, see Potter, 54-57; Rosenthal, 188.
another branch of the state. It can do social good, but it cannot satisfy Clarel’s search for a
redoubled religion. Therefore, here as it does earlier in the poem, Clarel sees Derwent’s religion as
an unsatisfying, “over-easy glove” (2.22.142). Derwent is a caricature, but a caricature through which
Melville posits the threat to religion of blending nation, denomination, and state, with or without
disestablishing the church.

Insofar as in Derwent Melville personifies a combination of nation, state, and denomination,
Melville shows in diasporic Judaism a combination of religious denomination and nation that has
been separated from the state. In fact, in his most extreme Jewish character, Melville ironically
inverts the US religious narrative of a nation that has (voluntarily) removed the state from a biblical
theocracy. Nathan, an Illinois farmer with Puritan roots, went from Christianity to atheism to
Judaism, finally converting in order to marry a Jewish woman. After his marriage, Nathan’s zeal
quickly outstrips his wife’s, and he forces the family to return to Jerusalem to “reinstate the Holy
Land” (1.17.264) for a Jewish nation. Without the protection of a state, however, Nathan dies at the
hands of the local Arabs who refuse to recognize his claim to any land. Contrary to the critical
emphasis on Nathan as a wandering Jew, Nathan fails in his efforts precisely because as a stationary
Jew he has no protection from “The wandering Arabs” (1.17.292, my emphasis). Nathan functions
doubly for Melville. By blending the voluntary separation of religion and the state in US
Protestantism and the forced separation in global Judaism, Melville undercuts the US celebration of
an interdenominational Protestant nation that improves upon biblical Israel. In turn, this ironic
connection between Protestantism and Judaism elucidates a US Protestant naïveté about what it
means to separate religion and state. Whereas evangelical rhetoric about separation from the state
obfuscates the state’s physical existence and its territorial support of religion, Nathan, in leaving

29 On this satire and the topic of the Wandering Jew, see Milder, 201; Obenzinger, 84-137;
those borders to reinstate a lost theocracy, reminds Melville's readers of how important the safety of state borders are for religion amid warring denominations and states.

In the other Jewish characters in the poem, Melville broadens the lesson of Nathan’s death to a more general history of separation in diasporic religions. One such character comes from India, one of the ten “unreturning tribes” (1.2.25), whom, according to biblical myth, the Assyrians exiled after destroying Samaria. Operating the inn where Clarel stays in Jerusalem, this proprietor, in stark contrast to Nathan, comes to Jerusalem as a faithful pilgrim, “less to live, than end at home” (1.2.73). In his portrait of the inn’s proprietor, Melville shows much more sympathy toward Jewish pilgrims than in his journals twenty years earlier—where he refers to “the emigrant Jews” as “like flies that have taken up their abode in a skull” (J 91). Where Nathan embodies hubris, the proprietor embodies pathos. Between Nathan and the inn’s proprietor marches in the much-maligned, scientific materialist, who comes to the Holy Land with a hammer to disprove scripture through geology. This scientist can do all he can to crack the foundation of the Abrahamic religions, but, in the eyes of all of the pilgrims, he remains a member of a Jewish nation. Between these three Jewish characters—zealot, faithful, and apostate—Melville suggests how varied the relationship between religion and nation can be apart from the state, with both positive and negative consequences for individual faith.

Religion’s survival apart from the state, however, depends upon its institutional connection to a nation. In his final Jewish character, who shares a room with Clarel in Bethlehem, Melville reflects on his own poem’s interest in Judaism and whether its longevity is unique:

“A word,” cried Clarel: “bear with me:
Just nothing strange at all you see
Touching the Hebrews and their lot?”
Recumbent here: “Why, yes, they share
That oddity the Gypsies heir:
About them why not make ado?
The Parsees are an odd tribe too;
Dispersed, no country, and yet hold
By immemorial rites, we’re told” (4.26.275-283)

Without knowing that the Lyonese is himself Jewish, Clarel presses him to admit that there is something unique about Jewish history. But the Lyonese refuses, citing the Romani and Zoroastrians as similar religious “tribe[s]” that have continued for centuries in diaspora. The coherence of the nation, Clarel’s interlocutor implies, keeps these religions together, despite individual apostates and external enemies. The difference between Judaism and US Protestant denominationalism, therefore, is not the freedom of religion from the state but the precariousness of having absolutely no state protection. In Melville’s poem, at least, religion can survive with the support of the nation separate from the state, but religious freedom requires state protection. Between these two, US disestablished religion sits in an uneasy, perhaps untenable, position.

Whereas Derwent’s Anglicanism and these various forms of Judaism all connect religion and nation apart from the state, Melville shows among the Roman Catholics a denomination of Christianity that is separate from any single nation but that retains state power. Over the course of the narrative, Melville presents us with three prominent Roman Catholics—the crippled, doubting, Italian staying among the Franciscans in Jerusalem, the Franciscan guide at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and a Dominican Friar the pilgrims meet upon their travels. Of these three, this French Dominican most directly addresses the Roman Catholic Church’s relationship to the state and to Christian denominationalism. In conversing with the travelers, the Dominican defends Roman Catholicism on religious and secular grounds. As an institution that holds itself to be the only true denomination, Roman Catholicism offers an escape from the dangers of “Sects—sects bisected—sects disbanded / Into plain deists” (2.25.103-104) that comes with Protestant

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30 On the Lyonese in more depth, see Pardes, 213-233.
Moreover, Roman Catholicism, as the Dominican argues, actually guarantees liberty better than a state separated from religion:

“… In this gown,
I sat in legislative hall
A champion of true liberty—
God’s liberty for one and all—
Not Satan’s license. Mine’s the state
Of a staunch Catholic Democrat” (2.25.76-81).

The Dominican analogizes between civil and religious government in order to suggest the superiority of the Roman Catholic Church to the state. Only his Church, the Dominican puts forth, can provide spiritual freedom. This “true liberty,” the Dominican argues, should model the foundation of any worldly state. In his portrayal of Roman Catholicism’s vision of a religious state, the Dominican tries to diffuse the threat of a supposedly despotic denomination. In response to the traveler’s incredulity, the Dominican insists that all in his Church “Stand equal” (2.25.87) especially insofar as any monk, no matter his origins, can “Aspire to sit in Peter’s chair” (2.25.90). In these two aspects of Roman Catholicism, the Dominican tries to undermine the supposed success of Protestantism, especially its successes in the US, by offering better versions of unity and liberty than what Protestantism claims to guarantee.

When the travelers further suggest that the Roman Catholic Church is outdated, the Dominican responds with an analogy that simultaneously illustrates the Church’s resilience and the benefits of its separation from any single nation. The Dominican addresses their accusation—that,

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31 On Melville’s surprisingly sympathetic treatment of Roman Catholicism in *Clarel* in the context of his representations of Roman Catholicism in earlier writing, see Kenny, 132-145.
32 Nine years later in his encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, dated November 1, 1885, Pope Leo XIII articulated what would become the Roman Catholic Church’s dominant theory of church-state relations as a separation between the affairs of salvation and the affairs of the world, see Thomas T. Love. Roman Catholicism has had a variety of relationships to discrete states—from the Papal States to the Holy Roman Empire. Although from 1870 to 1929 Roman Catholicism was technically without a state, it still retained the protection of other states, such as France in the Ottoman Empire. For the connection between the Protestant Reformation and the rise of the idea of state sovereignty after Wesphalia, see Daniel Philpott, 223.
saddled with fixed traditions, the Roman Catholic Church cannot adjust to new epochs—by likening Catholicism’s internal and external adaptability to that of the human body:

“… But deep
Below rigidities of form
The invisible nerves and tissues change
Adaptively. As men that range
From clime to clime, from zone to zone
(Say Russian hosts that menace Ind)
Through all vicissitudes still find
The body acclimate itself
While form and function hold their own—
Again they call:—Well, you are wise;
Enough—you can analogize
And take my meaning: I have done” (2.25.132-143)

According to this metaphor, the Roman Catholic Church can exist in the world outside of a single nation because, as does a human body, it retains both its freedom and its own internal integrity. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church can claim to ensure liberty in any place and for any people regardless of national boundaries. US evangelicals wanted to organize the world in a new way through the nation, but their goals and their flaws, at least in the eyes of this Dominican, seem to be only a weakened version of their supposed Catholic antithesis.

Although the Dominican promises in his Church the benefits of a transnational religion, the cost of the security he offers seems to be the same lack of theological rigor that comes in Derwent’s combination of state, nation, and denomination. The Dominican’s epic simile to the human body, after all, is not very well done. The first three lines weaken its effect because they describe church forms anatomically before establishing the terms of the simile. The weak versification in the Dominican’s voice extends beyond the simile as he stumbles in his rhyming. It strands “itself” without a rhyme and earlier stretches the limits of rhyme with “state” and “Democrat” (2.25.80, 81). Compounding these errors, the Dominican never finishes the simile about the Church’s adaptability. Instead he leaves its conclusion as an exercise for his audience. Even as the form of the poem undermines the rigor of the Dominican’s argument, the poem repeatedly reminds us that its content
is, at best, overly optimistic about Catholic unity. Throughout the poem, Catholic Christianity suffers from schisms in ways dissimilar only in degree—not in kind—from Protestant denominationalism. Melville shows us these schisms in the many Eastern “rival liturgies” (1.6.4) in Jerusalem, in Clarel’s memory of the many sects that Melville himself witnessed “within the Sepulcher’s one fane” (3.21.101), and, most memorably, when the Greek Abbot in the remote Orthodox monastery at Mar Saba boasts that his own Greek Church’s rituals are so old that they make “Rome’s Pope” look “but Protestant” (3.23.37). Roman Catholicism offers an attractive version of relatively secure, global Christianity; but Melville will not dismiss what he sees as the theological weakness and subtly hypocritical attacks on denominationalism that come with its combination of religion and the state.

When the travelers rest in the middle of their pilgrimage at the monastery at Mar Saba, Melville illustrates most starkly the consequences of institutions in general—not just state or nation—for religion. Melville prefaces the traveler’s visit to Mar Saba with a canto about monasteries that emphasizes the monastery as an institution “from world apart” (3.9.35). Mar Saba, stranded alone in the desert, almost hyperbolically exemplifies this feature of the monastery. This epitome of the monastery as an institution, where, for “full fifteen hundred years” (3.9.62), monks have lived to “tend the far-transmitted fire” (3.9.69), attests to the power of institutions to protect its church. But, within the monastery, Melville presents us with a religion that lacks vitality. The Greek Abbot is a literally blind leader; he even keeps a box of relics that he admits have not performed any miracles, because, even without a modern correlative, “Such things may be, for they have been” (3.23.118). Although Melville does not wholly endorse the idea that this church is, as one character claims, “orthodoxy petrified” (3.16.95), he does offer a cautionary tale of institutions pushed to their logical conclusion: religion protected for the sake of protection—not for the sake of religion itself—is only barely religion. And, even if an institution such as the monastery were able to protect a living
form of religion, Melville reminds us that we would not be able to consider that institution in isolation from the rest of the world. As the character most skeptical of the Eastern Church explains, the monastery can exist in the Ottoman Empire only because the Russian “Czar is its armed bishop” (3.16.98). This isolated religious institution can neither preserve a vigorous religion nor completely divorce itself from the state. Having escorted us to Mar Saba, Melville returns us to the desert with what he sees as a central paradox. Religion needs institutions for protection; but religion cannot stay vigorous contained within those institutions.

Individual and Institution in the Holy Land

In these personifications of the relationship between denomination, state, and nation, Melville gives a bleak picture of the denominationalism on a global scale. Seeing the many flaws that Melville exposes in the realities of the world’s religions, critics have tried to describe Clarel as abstracting away from these realities to imagine an ideal, global religious principle. For these critics, the US traveler interested in comparative religion models a theory of an intersympathy of faiths in Jerusalem. He voices a global consciousness of doubt, that accepts that “Time, God, are inexhaustible” (1.31.265). But, in Clarel, Melville rejects precisely this kind of abstract, institutionless religious unity. After all, this US traveler’s “hollow, Many-sidedness” (3.16.263) rarely satisfies Clarel or his interlocutors. Moreover, when Clarel himself imagines an “intersympathy of creeds” (1.5.207) early in his time in Jerusalem, he is actually only daydreaming. In the next canto, the “many notes of varying keys” (1.6.2) in simultaneous, opposing Christian liturgies paralyze and

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33 Watson traces the use of doubt and interruption in forming “a transnational community, a community as irreducible to religion and creed as it is to the terms of the nation-state,” 378. Potter finds the key to Melville’s view of religion in Clarel’s early vision of an “intersympathy of creeds” (1.5.207). Goldman similarly finds a “biblically rooted, nonsectarian, nondogmatic faith,” 4. For a celebration of the comparative religion of the US traveler, see Milder, 216.
confuse Clarel. Instead of sublimating the conflicts among religious institutions, Melville depicts the conflicts that arise in a world that must balance religions, nations, and states. In doing so, Melville does not reject institutions in order to define a pure religion apart from institutions but instead illustrates a pragmatic existence of individual religion among conflicting institutions.

In two cantos in particular, “The High Desert” (3.5) and the antepenultimate “Easter” (4.33), Melville addresses the divisive consequences of denominationalism among the travelers. Unlike many of the cantos, which foreground a dialogue between just two characters, “The High Desert” obscures the characters’ individual voices by paraphrasing a conversation among the pilgrims. This form allows Melville to describe the divisive and the unifying effects of denominationalism among pilgrims that are “At variance, yet entangled too” (3.5.33). By conspicuously removing the divisions between pilgrims, Melville calls attention to the purpose of the divisions between characters and the religious institutions they carry with them. Fittingly, the pilgrims discuss Christian schisms, from Cain and Abel to the Gnostics to contemporary sects. In particular, they collectively worry that Christian denominationalism is reintroducing a Gnostic dualism that hides Christian division under a broad acceptance of a merciful Christ:

Yet, with the sects, that old revolt
Now reappears, if in assault
Less frank: none say Jehovah’s evil,
None gainsay that he bears the rod;
Scarce that; but there’s dishonour civil,
And Jesus is the indulgent God (3.5.54-59)

By playing on two meanings of “civil,” Melville registers the pilgrims’ two contradictory fears: first, that divisions between denominations as well as between the religious and the secular threaten Christianity, and, second, that a relatively polite interdenominationalism avoids (but does not solve) the most important religious questions. By rhyming God/rod and evil/civil, Melville captures their pessimism that offers two equally bleak sides of this dualism—an immoral secular government or a God based solely in punishment. The broader irony in this canto, of course, is that the pilgrim’s fear
of the proliferation of denominations and the impossibility of unity actually produces a dialectical unity among these Christians.

This dialectical unity built upon fear, however, is neither permanent nor satisfying in itself. Melville exposes its shortcomings in the four responses to the conversation that end the canto. The first two come from two pilgrims. Walking away from the squabbling pilgrims, Clarel wonders at the composure of the Druze guide, who, Clarel believes, would never flail about “In waste of words” (3.5.181).34 By idealizing the aesthetic qualities he finds in a foreign religion, Clarel simultaneously longs for the beauty of religion that he does not find in the collective worry about denominationalism and also fantasizes about a simple escape from the threat of denominationalism. More antagonistic than Clarel, the Hawthorne figure on the pilgrimage comically parodies the pilgrims’ dialectical unity by pelting his shadow with stones. Rather than producing anything of meaning, each participant in this conversation, as the Hawthorne figure animates, merely attacks his own shadow with “unchristened earth” (3.5.183) that is both dry (as in unbaptized) and also denominationally inert. In both these perspectives, Melville reminds his readers how unsatisfying any answer would be that could unite all Christians, never mind all the world’s religions.

The end of the canto provides the little hope about religion that does emerge around the pilgrims’ conversation. As the canto concludes, Melville shows us two final perspectives on the conversation:

Each wrinkled Arab Bethlehemite,  
Or trooper of the Arab ring,  
With look of Endor’s withered sprite  
Slant peered on them from lateral hight;  
While unperturbed over deserts riven,  
Stretched the clear vault of hollow heaven (3.5.199-204).

First, each one of the six Arab guards has been watching the pilgrims throughout the events of the canto, with a look that the narrator translates through biblical witchery. A biblical figure emerges,

34 On Melville’s representation of Islam, see Marr, 219-261.
here, to suggest how religion itself rises up from the conflicts we cannot solve. Watching even these watchers, the sky itself unifies and marginalizes those conflicts. In contrast to the weak dialectical unity of the pilgrims, Melville creates in the sky a fragile sense of religion that emerges from the mysterious barriers between these characters and their institutions.

For religion to survive, Melville suggests, it needs individuals who will live and work between the institutions that divide both world and religion. Melville provides a model for this kind of religiosity early in the poem in Nehemiah—Clarel’s evangelical, millenialist guide in Jerusalem. Without the support of any “founded mission” (1.8.30), Nehemiah is “Single in person as in plan” (1.8.31) in his goal to aid the Messiah’s return by restoring Zion. Although Nathan dies for hubristically pursuing a similar plan, Nehemiah passes peacefully among all religions and nationalities; all revere him as a “Man sinless” (1.8.74) and the Ottomans see in him a Muslim ascetic, even a “Santon held him” (1.8.71). The irony of Nehemiah’s universally acknowledged sainthood is that his work is fruitless. He is a “tract-dispensing man” (1.8.33) whose tracts have no effect. He gives out tracts twice on the pilgrimage. First, he provides one to “an Arab tall, on camel lean” (2.13.15), who picks up Nehemiah’s tract with his spear but who cannot read it even in Arabic. Second, Nehemiah approaches with a tract the “sheik” (2.23.124, 146) of a group of marauders, who, looking upon the tract, “deems it sorcery” (2.23.182). The Druze guide only gets the sheik to leave them peacefully by conciliating him with some gunpowder. Nehemiah, the “silvered saint” (2.23.174), will never live up to his biblical namesake, in Melville’s account, by returning with an army and rebuilding Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s work in Clarel, unlike in the Bible, is not to consolidate institutions but to live between them, even if he himself is not aware of it.

When Nehemiah dies on the pilgrimage the travelers bury him with a palm and his only possession—his Bible. Although Nehemiah leaves nothing less ephemeral behind than a “fog-bow” (2.39.154) in the wilderness, Melville suggests toward the end of the poem how Clarel might
continue Nehemiah’s unintentional success. In the final cantos, Clarel finds himself alone on Easter, back in Jerusalem but separated from all of his companions, some by death and some by travel. Although Melville detailed earlier in the poem the kind of violence that can occur when so many “friars / Scismatic” (3.16.48-49) gather together for a single tradition, here the celebration is peaceful. Not only does Melville represent a peaceful Easter season, but he also depicts an Easter that, because of the sporadic alignment of the calendars used by Western and Eastern Christians, “all schismatics from afar” (4.33.10) celebrate on the same day. This coincidence in calendars brings together global Christian institutions like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as nationally specific churches such as the Syrian, Armenian, and Coptic (and at least one Protestant denomination in Clarel). The Easter rites are joyous although this “confluence” of “the nations” only lasts for the duration of the “rite supreme” (4.33.68, 67). A single religion unites, ignoring denominational differences, around the mystery of the resurrection before dividing back into its rival institutions. Amid the contraction and separation of institutions, Clarel continues his search for religion. As he “Vanishes in the obscurer town” (3.34.56), Clarel begins to resemble Nehemiah’s interstitial existence more than ever.

In the “Epilogue,” Melville embraces the paradoxical nature of religion as the poem has defined it—a form of belief that only individuals can keep alive but that cannot survive without institutions. Clarel’s success must come paradoxically, as a death that “but routs life into victory” (4.35.35) or, in this canto’s most well-known phrase, as a “crocus budding through the snow” (4.35.29). With both Easter and this winter flower, the seasons offer the natural analog to Melville’s definition of religion. Institutions—like seasons—offer predictability and permanence but enforce a stagnant circularity. Individuals—like the flower that marks a seasonal change—give religion

35 On one such fight during Easter, see Figes, 1-2.
36 This happens about once every four years but the complexity of calculating Easter in either calendar makes their alignment appear random.
37 On the crocus in Melville’s final canto, see Pardes, 230-231.
meaning and beauty but only momentarily. Neither one religious principle nor one tolerant nation can improve religion, in Melville’s description, precisely because religion relies on the mystery amid the often violent divisions between institutions, which will always experience conflict, decline, and resurgence.

**Coda: No Longer After Disestablishment**

*Clarel* is belated. Melville finished the poem twenty years after his travels to the Ottoman Empire. In those twenty years, the US went through both Civil War and Reconstruction. The particular relationship between Protestantism, the state, and the nation was also changing. Since 1863, in the middle of the Civil War, a minority of Protestants had been pursuing an amendment to the US Constitution that would officially recognize the foundation of both state and nation in the will of the Christian God. As James Wallace argued before the Southern Illinois chapter of the Christian Association for National Reformation in 1864, the state and its rulers are “clothed with the authority of God … they are God’s deputies on earth” (5). This reconsideration of the relationship between the state and Protestantism led Wallace and others to look back on the biblical Israel not as a flawed theocracy set for improvement but as the standard from which the US had deformed. For Wallace, Israel’s prosperity depended on its “practical subjection to the authority and law of God” (8); four years earlier Charles Hawley, the Presbyterian minister at the First Church in Auburn, New York, went further. For him, Israel models the only “true civil government” such that “so far as society has receded from” it, society has also “relapsed into despotism and decay” (17). Even the popular divine Horace Bushnell, voiced support in 1864 for the amendment by attacking the basis of the state in the consent of the governed. He applauded the attempt to move from the “noxious theories of government by man” to one that “stands in allegiance to God” (*Popular Government* 15).
The National Reform Association, made up of a variety of denominations but especially Presbyterians, had little success in these efforts to create a Christian amendment. Not only were they unsuccessful, but a competing secularist campaign in the 1870s and 1880s sought an amendment that did precisely the opposite. Led by Francis Ellingwood Abbot, the National Liberal League promoted in 1876—the same year Clarel was published—an amendment that would guarantee the total separation of religion from the state. The National Liberal League combined nativist fears of Catholic influence on the state, proponents of federal protection of individual religious rights, and radicals who sought to abolish not only all Christian clergy but even the kind of denominationalism that divided any religion from another.38 Although this push for separation was more successful than the amendment to acknowledge the Christian God in the Constitution, it too failed after infighting splintered the movement.

I conclude with this back and forth between advocates of a religious state and proponents of radical separation not because these debates were unique. Indeed, during the 1820s and 1830s, the evangelical proponents of disestablishment competed against those who wanted the state to have no role in protecting religious traditions. They debated, for instance, whether the state should protect the Christian Sabbath by forbidding mail-delivery on Sundays. I point to these two amendment campaigns, instead, as a sign that the contingent coordination of denomination, state, and nation that existed after disestablishment was being realigned. Even without the pressure the Civil War put on both individual belief and national unity, the rise of more dramatic denominationalism in England in the 1850s and 1860s challenged the notion of US religious exceptionalism that helped support the particular idea of a Protestant nation apart from the state.

38 On this amendment, see Philip Hamburger, 287-334. James G. Blaine’s proposed amendment in 1875, which would prohibit state funds for any religious school, is a more famous off-shoot of the secularists’ campaign. It too failed, not only to gather the necessary votes but also to secure Blaine the Republican nomination for President, Hamburger, 324-325.
Looking back on this dimming constellation of institutions, Melville’s investigation of the different ways that a religious denomination, a nation, and a state can relate to one another illuminates the secularism—but not the secularization—that defined the aftermath of disestablishment. As one theorist posits, secularism describes “how religion and politics intersect, constitute, and reconstitute each other within modern liberal democracies” (Scherer 8). In Clarel, Melville not only evaluates this kind of Western secularism among a long history of similar relationships but he does so at a point of transition in US secularism out of the lingering influence of the process of disestablishment. Of course, secularism comes in various forms even at the same moment. In going to the Ottoman Empire to investigate religion, Melville also engages in a kind of secularism that is, by another name, “Christian imperialism” (Anidjar 66). This form of secularism, which we see at times in the character Clarel, finds religion and mystery in the Orient and, in so doing, defines the West through rationality and modernity. But Melville’s image of a religious East does not define the West through negation. Instead, he goes to the “Holy Land” to interrogate the interdependent bases of the institutions that have come to define secularism. In this respect, the least widely read of Melville’s many works might have the most to teach us about modern religion among nation-states.
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