STUDIED ENCHANTMENT:
SCHOLARSHIP AND LITERATURE IN BRITAIN, 1862–1931

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by MERYL WINICK

Dissertation Director:
Carolyn Williams

How can we best understand the profusion of scholarly aesthetics in British literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the footnotes of Sir Walter Scott to the endnotes of The Waste Land? My dissertation argues that the scholarly aesthetics of both fiction and certain kinds of scholarship in this period appear as a means of managing enchantment—of deploying it, as well as containing it.

Victorianists are accustomed to thinking of enchantment as that which the realist novel opposes; Modernists often think of it as the product of mass culture, ideology, and other sources of delusion. Both groups likely think of Max Weber’s idea of disenchantment as the defining condition of a secular modernity. In contrast, my dissertation considers a range of Victorian and modernist-era texts with reference to the flourishing critical conversation around “modern enchantments” that are knowing rather than naïve. Building on this work, I argue that a new kind of enchantment emerged in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain through scholarly practices that aimed at creating coherent
accounts of nature, history, and society. Coherence appeared to offer satisfactions akin to those accompanying religious, especially mystical, experience— but to do so while also satisfying the demands of reason. I call the mixed genre of scholarship and fiction that fostered this reading experience “studied enchantment” to reflect its combination of sophistication and credulity.

Across six chapters, my dissertation traces the emergence of studied enchantment, showing how scholarly practices informed novelistic writing while techniques of novel writing came to shape scholarly practices—and how negotiations over the best way to write about enchantment itself affected both novels and scholarship. I pay particular attention to writing by authors who themselves have been largely excluded from triumphal accounts of the history of scholarship: those often deemed to be particularly susceptible to being enchanted in a dangerous way because of their effeminacy, whether this referred to their gender, their imperfect educations, or a sense that their theories were biased rather than disinterested. Thus, the dissertation foregrounds not Walter Scott and T.S. Eliot, but George Eliot, Walter Pater, the medievalist Jessie L. Weston and her contemporary, the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison, and the aesthetic writer Vernon Lee (born Violet Paget). I treat the adventure writer H. Rider Haggard and the anthropologist J.G. Frazer as hyper-masculine counterpoints to the feminine or feminized authors considered in the other chapters.

Through a literary-historical analysis of these author’s novels, essays, short stories, and monographs, I illuminate an overlooked history of humanistic endeavor centered on legitimizing religion for modernity. More specifically, this dissertation posits two linked historical and literary arguments: first, that studied enchantment emerged at a crucial point in literary and disciplinary history in Britain when professional scholarship appeared as an especially accessible and aspirational practice for those trying to reshape their world through
writing; and second, that studied enchantment functions by using scholarly aesthetics to manipulate the reader’s attention, shifting her between stances of critical distance and immersion, playing with both skepticism and credulity to construct a fulfilling experience of belief in the narrative at hand.

*Studied Enchantment* moves the eminent Victorians of disenchantment and the Modernist aesthetic re-enchanters to the background in order to offer a new vantage on the intertwined history of British scholarly and literary practice. In a period when higher learning was increasingly accessible, the literary production of learnedness was, paradoxically, located in popular as well as high culture. While a historically specific practice, studied enchantment can help us understand the continued popular deployment of scholarship in fiction and nonfiction from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf to *The Da Vinci Code*, and its power to create enchanting narratives of alternative histories.
DEDICATION

For my father, Larry Winick, and in memory of my mother, Robin Rubinstein Winick.
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First, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their guidance of this project. Carolyn Williams continues to model how to be a rigorous and collegial scholar, mentor, and teacher, and I am grateful for her generous intellectual engagement with this project and her guidance in all aspects of my work. Kate Flint’s belief in this project has been a constant source of encouragement, and I am grateful for the many ways she has helped me expand it from my early ideas. A conversation with Colin Jager always moved me past any obstacle in my work, and consistently led me to a new and exciting avenue of thought to pursue. I am also grateful for his attention to my writing style over the years. Andrew Goldstone’s expertise and thorough feedback have helped me refine and strengthen my arguments, and his empathy has helped me to navigate the end of graduate school with a greater calm than I had once imagined.

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In 2013-2014, I spent a year researching in archives in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States. Many archivists, faculty, post-doctoral researchers, and graduate students made my time there worthwhile. For sharing their archival research and expertise, I thank especially Helen Brookman, Janet Grayson, Carolyn Oates, and Juliette Wood. For their expert guidance in the Jane Harrison Papers at Newnham, I thank Anne Thompson and Pat Ackerman. For her exertions on behalf of my research and in helping to mount my exhibition on Jane Harrison and Jessie Weston at the Cambridge University Press Museum, I am extremely grateful to Dr. Ros Grooms. For his guidance and enthusiasm, I thank Martin Maw at Oxford University Press. For her generous help with the Vernon Lee Library at the British Institute of Florence, and beyond, I am grateful to Alyson Price. I thank also Pat Burdick at Colby College Special Collections; the staff at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; at the Bodleian Library, Oxford; at Brasenose College, Oxford; at Somerville College, Oxford; at the Cambridge University Library; at Trinity College, Cambridge; at the University of Glasgow Library; at the Surrey History Centre; and at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

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There are two people whose support helped me see this dissertation through, but who did not live to see it finished. I am grateful to Paul Ryan Rudd for believing I had
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SUBSCRIPTION OR ORDER FORM.

DATE..................1911.

Please enter my name as an Annual Subscriber for...........

cop...of The Quest, for which I enclose £ : :

Please send me...........cop...of Vol....No.... of

The Quest, for which I enclose £ :

Signature ........................................................
(Please write distinctly).

Status if any; if a Lady, Mrs., or Miss.....................

Address...........................................

...........................................

To Mr. JOHN M. WATKINS,
21, Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road,
London, W.C.

Price: Annual Subscription 11/- post free; Single Copies 2/6
net, 2/9 post free.

[over.]
The Quest Society.

WINTER MEETINGS, 1913.

KENSINGTON TOWN HALL, W., THURSDAY EVENINGS, 8.30.
(The Town Hall is opposite the High Street Station.)

Rev. W. Moret Weston, D.D., Ph.D.

Jan. 20. ‘Art and Religion.’
W. Rothenstein, Esq.

Feb. 13. ‘Vocational Education.’
Cloudesley Brereton, Esq., M.A.

Feb. 27. ‘The Philosophy of the “As It”: A Radical Criticism of Human Knowledge.’
The President, G. R. S. Mead, Esq., B.A.

Mar. 13. ‘The Mystic as Creative Artist.’
Evelyn Underhill
(Author of ‘Mysticism,’ etc.)

Guests’ tickets may be obtained from Members or from the Honorary Secretary. The attendance of the same guest at the general meetings is limited to three occasions. For the regulations as to subscriptions for sets of ten lecture tickets and for the purchase of single tickets please see the back of this notice.

16, Selwood Place, E. T. Sturdy,
Onslow Gardens, S.W. Hon. Secretary.

Ladies are requested by the Council kindly to remove their Hats at the Lectures.

Figure 2. “The Quest Society Winter Meetings, 1913” (1913). Image courtesy of National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
Figure 3. Two women standing in front of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (?), (n.d.).
Source unknown.
INTRODUCTION

Through a literary-historical analysis of novels, short stories, and scholarly monographs on the subjects of religious practice and belief, this dissertation argues that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British writing used overlapping conventions of scholarly writing and fantastic fiction to produce a new literary practice and genre that I call “studied enchantment.” Works of studied enchantment aimed to reconcile the scientific, aesthetic, and spiritual demands of writing history. To do this, they drew on the legitimizing power of scientific methods alongside the sacralizing power of a sense of the hallowed past to create a new mode of reading, one which led the reader to an experience of “satisfaction” marked by both rational and mystical qualities. The question of legitimacy was central to these works, since they were often written by women or others marginal to the British academy and empire, and in the context of new disciplines or artistic movements whose claims to authority were contested rather than assured.

Building on the work of scholars on “modern enchantment,” I argue in the following chapters that this new kind of enchantment emerged in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain in large part through scholarly practices that aimed at creating coherent accounts of worldly and sometimes otherworldly phenomena. Coherence appeared to offer satisfactions akin, or even identical, to those understood to accompany religious, especially mystical, experience—but to do so while also satisfying the demands of a rational intellect. Thus this scholarly modern enchantment promised to deliver mystical experience in a rational frame, and, as I will argue, did so through its creative use of literary and scholarly conventions.

It seems fitting that this dissertation, concerned as it is with a dialectic between sober-minded scholarship and dizzying flights of imagination, should begin with its own
dalliance in the mysterious. And indeed, it has become necessary that I should bring to light
a strange adventure—not my own, but one which it has become mine to communicate (and
annotate). Earlier this month, I received an email from an archivist at the National Library of
Wales. She wanted to let me know that another researcher there had found an additional file
in the Jessie L. Weston Papers. She thought it might include some of the documents related
to *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) that I had been inquiring after on my visit in 2013 while
researching Chapter Four, on Weston. (The documents had been mentioned in an earlier
biography of Weston, but we had not been able to find them during my visit.) The recovered
file apparently included some working papers, a heavily marked-up issue of *The Quest*, the
journal of the quasi-occult learned society of the same name to which Weston was a
sometime contributor, and, finally, a photograph that might (at last!) feature Weston herself.
The archivist could not scan them for me, but she would be happy to share them with me if
I could get myself to Aberystwyth. I had been planning on returning to the National Library
to confirm some citations anyway, and I flew out later that week, thinking I could answer
some lingering questions before submitting the final first draft of my dissertation.

But when I arrived at the library, both the other researcher and the newly recovered
file had disappeared—and a new document had surfaced. When the archivist had taken out
the folder that had contained the newly discovered file in preparation for my arrival, she
found the papers missing and in their place a black Moleskine notebook. Tucked inside was
a subscription card, with the place for a name and address still blank, a flyer listing meetings
of the Quest Society for Winter 1913, and a photograph featuring two women standing in
front of an institutional-looking building that may be the Bibliothèque Nationale de France
as it appeared in the early twentieth century. (Reproduced here as Figures 1, 2, and 3.) The
archivist claimed that this photo was different from the one that had been among the
missing papers, which had apparently depicted a small group of men and women in a park. She seemed to want to say more, but stopped herself, and instead insisted I review the notebook and then let her know what I thought.

I have since done so, and neither she nor I can satisfactorily explain the mysterious contents of the notebook or photograph, nor how they got into the folder. The missing documents remain missing, with no reasonable leads in sight. The researcher too is unreachable. (She is apparently also a doctoral student in English literature, though I have not met her on the usual nineteenth-century studies/ modernist studies/ women-writer/ occultism-and-modernity conference circuits.) At this point, I turn to you, my readers and mentors, to help me solve this mystery.

The Aberystwyth notebook suggests a surprising further chapter in the history of women writers’ engagement with scholarship, gender, and legitimacy that I aim to tell through my discussion of works by George Eliot, Walter Pater, H. Rider Haggard, J. G. Frazer, Jane Ellen Harrison, Jessie L. Weston, and Vernon Lee (Violet Paget). It may also complicate my understanding of enchantment in modernity more broadly. If genuine, the notebook suggests how scholarly practices might indeed have effected— and may still effect— the kinds of enchantments pursued by Faustian seekers, vindicating some of the more surprising claims of the scholars and readers discussed in Chapters Three and Four. If it is a hoax, it nonetheless points to the continued power of scholarly practices to authorize strange stories, even at a time when the cultural authority of humanistic scholarship is said to be waning. Whatever the provenance of the Aberystwyth notebook, it conveys the efficacy of studied enchantment in creating transporting narratives out of the interactions among scholarly practice, enthusiastic reading, and imaginative writing.

Accordingly, in what follows I transcribe this curious document as a fitting
introduction to the story this dissertation will tell about British writers’ study of enchantment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I have annotated the notebook entries in an effort to situate this document in relation to ongoing debates in the fields of history, anthropology, and English studies concerning the rise of professional scholarship and the discourses of enchantment. The incredulous reader is invited to read the notes to the exclusion of the notebook entry transcriptions. But enough suggestion: I will present to you the facts as I have them. The judgment of their veracity remains up to you. I look forward to a lively discussion at the defense.

Jackson Heights, New York, February 29, 2016
The Notebook

(Transcribed and annotated by Mimi Winick)

Monday, February 1, 2016
Today was my first day at the NLW. It was both overwhelming and useful. The archivist had the first two folders of the Weston files at my seat. The plan was to begin researching Weston’s various networks—her German academic contacts, her Parisian acquaintances, and her fellow Quest Society members in London, to determine the scholarly standards she would have been working within (and against). The first folder dealt with the Quest material, but I was so sleepy that I kept nodding off over it, and making strange associations with what I was reading.

After a long lunch break, I returned to go through the second folder. It was mostly correspondence with other researchers. There’s some controversy between Weston and another non-academic scholar about her reading of a section of a medieval MS that is apparently in the NLW— I requested it to have a look tomorrow. This will also give me a chance to evaluate Weston’s much-criticized methods of dealing with scholarly evidence.

1. Nineteenth and early twentieth scholarship in Britain was characterized by a tension between the pursuits of dry-as-dust information and experiences of enchantment. On the one hand, the best known scholars from Victorian fiction are those “dead from the waist down,” exemplified by George Eliot’s Edward Casaubon. (See A.D. Nuttall, Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination, which takes its title from Browning’s “A Grammarian’s Funeral.”) These figures toil tediously, their work alienating them from society and family, leading them in some ways to anticipate the condition of disenchantment Max Weber would describe in the 1910s in which the increasing “calculability” of the world leads to a feeling of being trapped in an “iron cage” that excluded feelings of awe and mystery (See Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”).
On the other hand, Casaubon, as befits a creation of George Eliot’s (one in which, moreover, she claimed to see herself), illustrates a facet of Victorian scholarly practice that made room for awe: its aspiration toward discovering deeply meaningful connections among worldly phenomena, an encounter with the kind of modern enchantment marked by a sense of unity in coherence. Importantly, even when this sense of unity is part of an elucidation of religion, as in Casaubon’s project, it is primarily grounded in rationality rather than in supernatural experience. Casaubon believed he was writing a grand, synthetic work that would yield a “key to all mythologies” and affirm the great truths of religion. Actual scholars too sought such “rational enchantment” through their work (Michael Saler, *As If: The Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*). Recent studies of the Victorian era’s most famous nonfictional scholar, Charles Darwin, have emphasized his efforts at “re-enchantment” (See George Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World*.) I contend that scholarship itself became an agent of enchantment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain. Writers took paradigms from the new, self-consciously scientific disciplines that had challenged the familiar unifying force of traditional Christianity, and redeployed them to find other sources of unity in what then appeared to be a fragmented reality.

To be sure, the search for enchantment through science or scholarly endeavor more broadly is part of a long European tradition of the alliance between the pursuit of knowledge and wonder, from medieval alchemists to eighteenth-century dilettanti (Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*). Still, this nineteenth-century alliance between science and enchantment was new in the way it used the recently established conventions of professional scholarship to overcome what was regarded as the
recent separation of knowledge and enchantment. Victorian culture created new models of
the scholar, including the scholar-hero whose marvelous adventures were central to his or
her quest for knowledge (e.g., the proto-Indiana Joneses we find in the fiction of H. Rider
Haggard and in the real-life adventures of Richard Burton and “the Sisters of Sinai”) and the
celebrity lecturer (e.g., the spectacular Professor Pepper, known for his ghostly
demonstrations, and Jane Ellen Harrison, beloved for her dramatic style and vivid magic
lantern slides of Ancient Greek art and artifacts). (See Chapter Three for Haggard and
Chapter Five for Harrison. For “the Sisters of Sinai,” see Janet Soskice, Sisters of Sinai: How
Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Lost Gospels; for Professor Pepper, see Jeremy Brooker,
“The Polytechnic Ghost: Pepper’s Ghost, Metempsychosis and the Magic Lantern at the
Royal Polytechnic Institution”).

The nineteenth-century alliance between scholarship and enchantment was new too
in the demographics of its practitioners, which included middle-class women, working-class
men, and writers based at the peripheries of the British Empire, for whom scholarship was
an aspirational practice. By the late nineteenth century, to be a scholar connoted at once
professional and gentlemanly prestige, promising an elite status as well as an identification
with the pursuit of socially, morally, and even spiritually valuable work. The members of the
Quest Society— many of whom were women— exemplify these new demographics. (For
the rise of the scholar as professional and gentleman, see T. W. Heyck, The Transformation of
Intellectual Life in Victorian England; for the history of the scientist, with some application to
the scholar more broadly, as engaged in moral and spiritual work, see Anne DeWitt, Moral
Authority, Men of Science, and the Victorian Novel.)
2. Jessie L. Weston (1850-1928) and her work exemplify this distinctly late Victorian alliance between scholarship and enchantment, and the trajectory of her work from controversial yet influential to thoroughly discredited further exemplifies the fate of this alliance over the course of the twentieth century. Weston was an award-winning scholar in her lifetime. Her theories of medieval romance were disseminated not only through presses such as Cambridge and Houghton Mifflin, but through channels such as Quest Society publications, and more widely, through her articles on Arthurian literature for the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica. Weston (and many of her peers) regarded her best known book, From Ritual to Romance (Cambridge UP, 1920), as the pinnacle of modern literary scholarship. The book was made most famous, however, by T.S. Eliot’s apparent endorsement of it in his notes to The Waste Land (1922). He recommended it as a key to the poem’s symbolism and “for the great interest of the book itself.” Three decades later, he recanted: “It was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail.” Since then, most critics of Eliot have ignored or disparaged Weston, though excerpts from her work continue to feature in teaching editions. While Eliot’s 1956 recantation hurt Weston’s scholarly reputation among some, it was already in decline in the years following her death in 1928. By the 1930s, Weston’s lack of university training, her associations with occultism, and her reliance on the increasingly outmoded work and methods of J.G. Frazer (1854-1941), author of The Golden Bough (1890), led to the thorough dismantling of her reputation. Bolstering this sense of bogus scholarship, Weston’s work has persisted as a touchstone of alternative

The trajectory of *From Ritual to Romance*’s scholarly reputation is not unique. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholarly and trade presses issued dozens of studies like Weston’s: works that claimed to be in the vanguard of their disciplines, or to be inaugurating new ones, and that used the most up-to-date methods, sources, and categories of evidence to offer dramatic theories of the origins and deep histories of art, literature, and religion. They positioned themselves as “scientific,” gathering “data” from observations and accounts of rituals, beliefs, and tales, and using such evidence to trace the “evolution” of literary and artistic forms. Weston and other women scholars of her era, such as Jane Harrison (see Chapter Five) and Margaret Murray (see Mimi Winick, “Modernist Feminist Witchcraft”), achieved their greatest success by reinterpreting and adding new material to old archives in order to write alternative histories of western civilization that often placed women in significant roles. By grounding their arguments in oral and performance evidence, they shook up their largely textual fields, and valorized orders of knowledge traditionally gendered as feminine. By focusing on women in history, reflecting on their positions as women scholars, and, most significantly, by embracing and valorizing the metaphorically feminine in their scholarship, they created alternative, feminist versions of western history and modernity. Though this body of scholarship had been controversial from the first, it became more thoroughly discredited in the 1930s and was almost entirely beyond the pale of legitimate academic scholarship by the 1970s. At the same time, as in the trajectory outlined
above, their feminist versions of modernity have had a remarkable legacy in literature, entertainment, and religion. Their texts went on to influence the themes and structure of middle-brow and High Modernist literature, and to play foundational roles in twentieth-century Neopagan movements (See Chapters Four and Five, and the Coda). The reception of these texts, from their mixed embrace upon their initial publication (when they were found variously “scholarly” and “unscholarly”), to their eventual total discrediting (belonging on a “scrapheap”), attests to the shifting standards for evaluating scholarly writing as modern university disciplines emerged and became established (See [R. R. Marett], “The Anthropology of the Grail”; William A. Nitze, review in Modern Language Notes; and Richard Cavendish, review of Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, by Jeffrey Burton Russell.)
Tuesday, February 2, 2016

I planned to start by comparing the original medieval MS to Weston’s account of it in *From Ritual to Romance*—but an unanticipated archival adventure befell me! As I lifted the bound MS onto the book rest, a small sheaf of papers dislodged from the back. At first I thought I had handled it too roughly and broken the binding, or worse, the vellum—but it turned out to be a separate item. In fact, it was a folder that contained an issue of the *The Quest* and a composition notebook. There were also some loose sheets: an application for membership in The Quest Society (a card, really) and a program for the Society’s 1913 winter lecture series.

The first thing I read upon opening the issue was the journal’s mission statement, which is worth writing out in full.³

*THE QUEST* welcomes contributions that exemplify the investigation and comparative study of religion, philosophy and science as complementary to one another in aiding the search for that reality which alone can give complete satisfaction.⁴ It desires to promote inquiry into the nature of religious and other supranormal experiences and the means of testing their value, to strengthen that love of wisdom which stimulates efforts to formulate a practical philosophy of life, and to emphasise the need of a vital science to crown and complete the discoveries of physical research. It also invites contributions which treat of the purpose of art and the expression of the idea in forms of beauty; and in literature interests itself in the works of inspiration and the creative imagination.⁵ *THE QUEST* will endeavor, as far as possible, to avoid technicalities, so as to meet the requirements of the more general public seriously interested in such matters. Space will be given to suitable correspondence, queries, notes, and discussions.

The mission statement reflects exactly what I’ve been seeing in my research into late Victorian and early 20th century scholarly trends—especially an embrace of complementarity among science, religion, philosophy (the prestigious ways of knowing that are sometimes—increasingly—seen in conflict). There’s a mention of the “supranormal,” which is here linked more explicitly to religion than to science. But again, those are conflated terms in this milieu of “a vital science,” a new epistemology that extends current “physical” approaches to the realm of the spiritual.⁶ There’s even a dash of aestheticism with the call for contributions “which treat of the purpose of art and the expression of the idea in forms of beauty,” though it’s not art for art’s sake—it’s the disciplined, creative imagination that yields not delightful fabrications but substantive truths. Perhaps most telling is the emphasis on knowledge leading to a feeling of “complete satisfaction.” These Questers not only want the truth, but an experience of fulfillment along with it.⁷ And, of course, the journal disdains jargon (“technicalities”) so as to reach a general audience.

That general audience granted, *The Quest* is very interested in credentials, listing every combination of initials possible after its contributors. But then it doesn’t require them:
plenty of its listed authors don’t have them. It seems pretty welcoming actually. Even the subscriber’s card had the option of Mrs. or Miss. And what a roster—AE, W.B. Yeats, Evelyn Underhill, Alfred Noyes! Seeing all this, and reading the high-aiming mission statement, I am sure if I had been a lady of leisure in Georgian London, I would have been a member. I even thought of sending in the subscriber’s card now. Though of course I wouldn’t commit such an act of scholarly vandalism.

The journal issue was heavily annotated in blue pencil, in writing that looks very much like Weston’s, and the notebook is definitely hers (name on the flyleaf). It is organized into dated entries that correspond to the schedule of lectures listed on the flyer. Here is a scholarly network in detail! I am thrilled! And it looks like it was somehow mislaid, so I am the first researcher to get to see it (the archivist agreed with that assessment). Very cool.

3. This mission statement can be found on the inside front cover of The Quest. This one matches exactly that in The Quest 2.3 (1911).

4. The Quest’s mission statement further attests to the alliance between scholarship and enchantment we can see in the sketch of Weston’s career. In it, the emphasis on enchantment is particularly clear. It suggests how scholarly writing, and scholarly practice more broadly, was a varied, contentious, and, for its writers and readers, an often thrilling field, full of possibilities including the experience sought by The Quest of “complete satisfaction.” It was marked not by the Weberian affect of disenchantment—that everything in the modern world is “calculable” and without deeper meaning or even mystery—but by an optimistic inversion of that sense: that with the right scientific principles and practices, all might one day be known in a fulfilling way. Two practices were especially central to this endeavor: what came to be known as the “comparative method” and its accompanying tactic of conjecture. Both were popularized in the late eighteenth century by Scottish stadial or “conjectural” history, which applied the idea of development to society, positing universal stages of human society from barbarism to civilization. Accordingly,
various human societies were not different in kind, but degree—existing at different points on the same trajectory, some more “primitive” and others more “advanced.” This unity of trajectory allowed for the comparison of different societies to illustrate general laws of development, and to explain various practices so that a similar rite of worship practiced by, say, an Australian aboriginal tribe and a German peasant would be assumed to be rooted in the same belief. Through such analogical reasoning, one could fill in the fragmentary historical record in all kinds of trajectories of development, conjecturing “missing links” in evolutionary development, “lost” continents in geography, and the origins of art and religion. (For analogy, see Devin Griffiths, The Age of Analogy: Science and Literature Between the Darwins; for conjecture, see Carlo Ginzburg, Clues, Myths and the Historical Method; for conjectural history, see Mark Salber Phillips, “Conjectural History: a History of Manners and Mind,” and Frank Palmeri, “Conjectural History and the Origins of Sociology”; for the history of comparative religion, see Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, The Science of Religion, 1860-1915, and Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions.)

While such practices came to prominence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Scottish conjectural history, as well as in natural sciences such as biology (e.g., in the work of Georges Cuvier in France), they became especially popular in the wake of Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859). By the late nineteenth century, comparison and conjecture had become prominent parts of a critique of empiricism. This critique was taken up by many
on the margins of the increasingly professionalizing world of British arts and sciences, who found empiricism limiting and sometimes out of reach. In contrast, conjecture was accessible: one did not have to know ancient languages to infer connections among etymologies published by more expert philologists, or to know the finer points of geology to posit ancient migration routes.

Crucially, the comparative method and its central practice of conjecture were tied to the late Victorian scholarly standard of “coherence.” Comparative studies such as The Golden Bough aim, in Frazer’s words, “to bring a variety of scattered facts into some sort of order and system” (I.vii). Such studies assume that a good theory will find a rational explanation for the phenomena in question, and that a rational order indeed exists to be discovered. In this sense, the coherence of a theory becomes a sign of scientific soundness as well as a reminder of inherent meaning and order in the world. It also became a source of pleasure for writers and readers of comparative studies, who found both narrative satisfaction and the sense of a mystical unity of human nature and culture in the theories put forth. I argue that the coherence of these theories accounts for a readerly experience of “modern enchantment” marked by mysticism and rationality. (For the history of coherence as a marker of advanced scientific inquiry in late Victorian Britain, see Christopher Herbert, “The Conundrum of Coherence” and George Levine, Dying to Know; for a sociological take on coherence in the history of scholarship, see Mark A. Schneider, Culture and Enchantment. See Chapters Three and Four for expanded discussions of comparison, conjecture, and coherence.)
At the same time as popular scholarship was using the methods of comparison and conjecture to construct shocking theories (e.g., Darwin’s evolutionary biology) and marvelous histories (e.g., Gerald Massey’s spiritual Egyptology), another popular discourse was experimenting with related strategies and criticisms—fantastic fiction. Indeed, from the late eighteenth century, fantastic fiction played with literary conventions that were increasingly identified with scholarly writing, from the editor’s preface to the footnote, and increasingly featured scholarly characters, from the scientist narrator of George Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil* (1859) to Van Helsing in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). These scholarly conventions are related to early novels’ claims to historicity, in which documents and authoritative endorsements are presented to authenticate the central story. But in the nineteenth century such authentication was grounded specifically in scholarly discourse—e.g., the authority of a scholar or editor, documents found in archives, footnotes that refer to scientific texts from various fields from biology to ethnology, and images of museal artifacts. (For an elaboration of this argument, see Chapter Three. For the history of the claim to historicity, see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*.)

As fantastic fiction increasingly came to use—and even look like—nineteenth-century scholarship, so nineteenth-century scholarship came to look like—and use the conventions of—fantastic fiction. Such “fantastic scholarship” was especially concerned with the topic of religion. It was arguably well suited to it because of the way the aesthetics of the fantastic allowed for the co-existence of multiple epistemologies in one text. Both scientific (e.g., natural) and religious (e.g., supernatural) explanations for phenomena could be presented in the same work. (This choice of options is definitive of the fantastic as a genre, according to Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.*)
By admitting different, even contradictory, possible explanations for a bizarre story, the fantastic reflects a certain modern condition— that the supernatural explanation increasingly seemed impossible to admit, even while the natural one seemed inadequate. It also emphasized the contemporary instability of knowledge: there were so many approaches to choose from, and so much seemed “possible, though not probable.” (H. Rider Haggard, She, 244. For more on what I call “fantastic scholarship,” see Chapter Three.)

6. Significantly, much popular fantastic fiction of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, in contrast to that of the late eighteenth century, listed to the marvelous, supernatural explanation— or to a new option, that of the “supernormal.” The supernormal, a term coined in 1885 by Frederic W. H. Myers in the context of psychical research, referred to the idea that strange phenomena could be explained by as yet unknown natural laws (Jeffrey J. Kripal, Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred). Either way, in both cases, the stories depicted an extraordinary world, enchanted in the traditional (supernatural) or newer, more self-consciously modern (supernormal) way. Fantastic scholarship such as J.G. Frazer’s Golden Bough (1890) suggested, more or less explicitly, a similar idea. (For an elaboration of this argument, see Chapter Three.)

7. The fantastic scholarship published in the wake of The Golden Bough in the first decades of the twentieth century in Britain, especially by women writers such as Weston for audiences such as the Quest Society members, encouraged an experience of fulfillment I call “studied enchantment.” It involves taking a self-consciously modern, rational, scientific approach to the subject of enchantment itself so as to affirm rather than explain away its marvelous
features. I use “studied enchantment” to refer to this feeling of fulfillment and the historically specific practice and genre that generate it. As “studied,” it is purposeful and sophisticated—writers of studied enchantment use scholarly conventions self-consciously, deploying them to construct a convincing theory and, especially, a good story. This purposefulness is important to emphasize because of the long history of characterizing such work as naïve— as the work of amateurs limited by lack of formal education and unruly enthusiasm. In contrast, I contend that studied enchantment is indeed “amateurish,” but purposefully so: its authors cultivated a style that drew on the conventions of amateur scholarship in order to position themselves as both rejecting and transcending amateur writing’s new foil—professional, specialist work, which they criticized as narrow, pedantic, and unambitious. The two terms “studied enchantment” together best describe this genre of writing, a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction, scholarship and fantasy. (For a discussion of such unruly “plebian” scholarship, which I argue helps define the conventions of studied enchantment, see Peter Pels, “Occult Truths: Race, Conjecture and Theosophy in Victorian Anthropology.” For a definitive discussion of amateur historical scholarship in early twentieth-century Britain as a sophisticated practice with its own conventions, see Bonnie G. Smith, The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice. For a discussion of the affect of “fulfillment” in the context of secularization studies, see Charles Taylor, A Secular Age.)

By using overlapping conventions of scholarship and fantastic fiction, studied enchantment encourages the reader to experience that thrilling and optimistic, even utopic, sense of scholarly adventure, of gradually but assuredly working toward knowing the mysteries of the universe. In addition, it works to encourage a reading practice marked not by a Coleridgian suspension of disbelief, but an active, willing belief. While the form and
diction of poetry, according to Coleridge, encouraged an attitude of “poetic faith” or “willing suspension of disbelief” by indicating a peculiarly literary mode that made claims on the imagination rather than this or the other world, fantastic literature (whether fiction or scholarship) encourages a more active, willing belief. By acknowledging a reader’s skepticism when encountering a tale or theory, fantastic literature effectively disarms it (see Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*). These late Victorian fantastic aesthetics work to persuade, animating first uncertainty, and then guiding the reader to an interpretation by invoking scholarly authority (via the scholarly frame of preface, learned asides, footnotes, etc.) and through analytic reasoning combined with vivid, immersive description and accounts of dramatic events. By representing different orders of knowledge and invoking them in a series of hypotheses or bizarre episodes that yet constitute a coherent story or theory, authors of scholarly fantastic literature encourage their readers to embrace mystery alongside rationality.
Wednesday, February 3rd, 2016

Today I tried to do some other work in the morning, with the promise of going through the new *Quest* journal and notebook as a reward later— but I kept getting distracted. I’m so charmed by the community of scholars it suggests.

Thursday, February 4th, 2016

Well, charmed seems prescient in a way— though it was more like bewitched. I did something absolutely crazy today— I don’t know what came over me. I was working in the South Reading room on the folder with all the *Quest* materials, handwriting notes in my notebook. I was nodding off a little again (it’s true what they say about the coffee here), and after jerking awake, I noticed that I had apparently doodled on the subscription card. In fact, I had filled it out with my name and address. I must have turned bright red, but fortunately no one was around. At least it was in pencil, so I figured I could sneak it home, erase it, and return it the next day. And indeed, I got it past security by slipping it into the back pocket of my jeans (it’s amazing archival crimes aren’t more prevalent… or perhaps they are). But then after walking back, I couldn’t find it. Not in the pocket, not in my purse…. Gone. How??? At least I suppose I won’t be found out, since the archivist allowed me to have the folder before she got a chance to catalog it. But I am now a scholarly criminal, a purloiner of original documents. Yikes.

Friday, February 5, 2016

Well, now I’m mortified. It looks like the archivist knows that I made off with the subscription card (maybe it fell out my pocket while I was still in the library?). When I got to my seat this morning, the first document in the folder I’d requested was a typed letter confirming my membership in the Quest Society. Hilarious. At least she can’t be too furious if she’s joking about it. I went to find her and apologize, but she wasn’t at her desk. In fact, I kept missing her today— and even though she doesn’t seem mad, I don’t want to email and put all this in writing. Well, I guess I’ll face the music Monday when the library reopens. At least I’ll be able to distract myself in London this weekend!

Saturday, February 6, 2016(?)

Something is up. Everything seemed normal when I left Aberystwyth, and when I changed at Shrewsbury, and again at Birmingham… but when I woke up around noon as we were pulling into what should have been Euston Station, I heard a conductor announce King’s Cross. I sleepily got out with my one bag, to find myself not only in King’s Cross, but in King’s Cross decked out in full Downton-Abbey-style glory. Lots of big hats, long dresses, and mackintoshes. Thinking they must have been filming something, I stumbled outside to walk to my Airbnb on Gower Street. But the set seemed to extend into the environs around the station. And that’s when I realized I was in costume myself. Even my messenger bag was replaced by the sort of handbag one associates with Miss Prism’s unfortunate manuscript-and-baby mix-up. In the bag, I found this notebook, a set of keys, some change, and the
letter confirming my Quest Society membership along with the lecture program I had found in the archives. But I know I didn’t take them with me! Since I didn’t know what on earth else to do (my phone was most certainly not in the bag), I decided to head to my Airbnb. I found the flat, and the set of keys in my bag opened the front door and the door of the bed-sit apartment on the second floor that I was meant to be renting. Five stars for “Francesca B,” I guess, whenever I can find my way onto the Internet. I’m writing this at the small desk in the bed-sit now. According the little calendar in the room, it’s Thursday, February 27th, 1913. This is either a magnificent joke, an equally magnificent hallucination, or I owe the “Ladies of Versailles” an apology for mocking them when I first heard of them. If it is 1913, I suppose I could pay them a call at Oxford. Oh my God.

8. In 1901, Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, principal and vice-principal respectively of St. Hugh’s College, Oxford, visited Versailles— but claimed on that visit that they were transported into the Versailles of Marie Antoinette. In 1911, they published their account pseudonymously as An Adventure, after the Society for Psychical Research had declined to investigate. While the “Ladies of Versailles” were outliers, they were not off the map— their “adventure” attests to the rather fantastic possibilities in the air amidst the instability of knowledge in the years before the Great War, even, or especially, among women academics. (See Terry Castle, “Contagious Folly: An Adventure and Its Skeptics.”)
Thursday, February 27th, 1913 (?)

8 am.

I can’t explain it, other than to say, well, maybe Vernon Lee’s fantastic stories weren’t so fantastic after all. Except that I was transported back in time, instead of simply summoning Weston to present-day Aberystwyth. But then, Lee’s characters always seem to die after their direct historical encounters, so maybe this is the better way. But how do I get back? Well, I suppose that’s not the question to be asking now. Rather, what do I do now that I’m here? What did I always want to know about 1910s London, but was afraid I could never ask—or, rather, experience directly?? Well, I suppose for starters, according to my flyer, there is a Quest Society lecture at 8:30 tonight at Kensington Town Hall.

11 pm.

I put my new membership to use and went to the Quest Society meeting tonight. I signed in under my own name, right under that of Weston’s sometime sparring partner A.E. Waite. The lecture was by Mead himself, Quest editor and major influence on Weston. It was “The Philosophy of the ‘As If: A Radical Criticism of Human Knowledge,” and it was lively!

Though I was fascinated by the discussion after Mead’s talk, and all the connections I could see to twenty-first-century discussions of modern enchantment, I really wanted to find Weston. Every time I caught someone’s name at the reception that I knew as a correspondent of hers, I looked to see if an older woman was in the vicinity. Occasionally there was— but once it turned out to be Evelyn Underhill and another time a Miss Kay. Finally, I struck up a conversation with a Miss Gilchrist and risked the awkwardness of asking if she knew “Miss Weston.” It turns out she did (they were working on folk song material together a few years back). Apparently Weston is in Paris for the next few months— she just went over after New Year’s. But Miss Gilchrist is planning a trip next week to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France to consult some ballad records and invited me to join her and her sister on the journey. (I had introduced myself as a student of medieval literature— a good cover for my real interest, and apparently a great way to get invited along to the BNF!) Miss G even promised to help me get a letter of introduction from one of their fancy French professor friends. I suppose I could do some good old fashioned textual research while I’m there, too— check out some of those MSS that Weston translated as I had begun to do in Aber. And, most importantly, she promised to introduce me to Weston while we’re there! She said JLW was very generous with younger women scholars, although her manner could be a little brusque. A little genuflection is advised.

Sunday, March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1913

Today’s the day! Off to Paris— the journey by ferry over the Channel is supposed to take the day. We’ll be spending the night at the American Women’s University Club, and are to start work at the BNF right off. Well, the Misses G will— I have to arrange tea with a M. Meyer first to obtain my letter, but they think that should be settled within a couple of days. Apparently, we’re likely enough to run into Weston at the BNF, but if that doesn’t happen I’ve been assured an introduction on Saturday. What will I say? Ask? What do I most want to know about a writer whose works I know so well— whose correspondence I’ve read— whose date of death I know? Oof. Perhaps in the thrill and bewilderment of all this, I haven’t thought this through.

And there’s the bell! I’ll… figure it out!

\textit{End of journal entries.}
The remainder of the notebook—about 60 more leaves—is blank, with the rough edges of some ripped-out pages toward the end. The handwriting is the same across the entries, though the ink changes after the February 5th entry from black and strongly indented into the paper (suggesting a ball-point pen) to blue with more surface spread (suggesting a felt-tip or fountain pen). Now, the whole thing of course could be an immense joke: it could be that there never was another researcher or a new file, and that the whole thing was just a way for the archivist to tease me about my obsessive work in the Weston files two summers ago (and especially for my failed hunt for a photo of Weston). Perhaps, knowing I would be coming back anyway to check some citations, she decided to have some fun around my return visit, and summoned me back earlier. But while we got along fine in 2013, we did not have a jokey rapport. Though of course perhaps this is some very dry British joke—a sort of Sherlockian game afoot—that I simply do not get. In that case, it would be quite normal for her never to break character about it. And certainly it is odd that she has not shared with me the missing researcher’s name, and that in the small world of academia, I did not know this fellow-worker on Weston already. Or the researcher could be a real person who really did make off with some newly recovered files, in a fit of archive-mania. Perhaps she left the journal behind as a sort of apology. After all, she did sound a bit off, or at least overtired (e.g., “making strange associations” while nodding off over documents). Maybe between being run down and a bit over-invested in the work, she snapped and stole the papers, leaving this fantastical account behind—maybe even believing it to be true. Or, somehow, as the researcher posits, this is some Vernon Lee story inverted and come true: somehow, this researcher actually did the thing so many historians have figuratively done, and often really desired to do, and traveled back into the past she was researching. I don’t really believe
this (I promise, Committee, despite earlier concerns, I do have the “astral plane under control”!), but I feel obligated to list all the possibilities, in the best tradition of the fantastic— even if they seem, well, unbelievable. (But then of course, with the recent news about particle collisions and the discovery of adjacent black holes— maybe, as H. Rider Haggard, Sherlock Holmes, and John Tyndall have each written, the apparently impossible is only improbable.) But now the astral plane, and this literary history itself, seems to be slipping from my control after all. Let me step away from speculation, and return to my proper discipline, and finish introducing the new understanding of literary history I have come to through writing my dissertation, and explaining how it has led this kind of “fantasia of the library” to creep from study into life.

*Studied Enchantment* offers a new history of alternative histories. It emphasizes the importance of scholarship to the British imagination in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this period, historical and fantastic fiction made vivid use of the apparatus of scholarship (e.g., editor’s forewords, footnotes, appendices), while scholarship itself employed literary conventions such as the mystery plot and the fictive re-imagining of a historical event. By focusing on histories of religion in British letters— from those recounted in George Eliot’s and Walter Pater’s historical novels to Pater’s, H. Rider Haggard’s, and J.G. Frazer’s works of literary anthropology, from Jane Harrison’s and Jessie Weston’s enchanted scholarship to Vernon Lee’s critique of such modern enchantments alongside her sacralization of art— it shows how scholarly practices, conventions, and aspirations shaped fiction, and how practices and theories of writing fiction in turn formed and informed scholarly endeavor. It further illuminates the peculiar value systems of this enchanted

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1 Which is of course just what it does in the nineteenth-century fiction Foucault puts into this category of “fantasia of the library.” See Michel Foucault, “Fantasia of the Library” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, (Cornell UP, 1980).
scholarship, which embraced a scientific approach not for the sake of greater specialization but for the sake of developing ethical and spiritual practices grounded in anthropological theories. And it restores the category of scholarship to literary history, reminding us, following the insights of cultural studies and of a historicist approach to the broader meaning of “literature” in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain, of the importance of studying fiction and nonfiction together as literary texts rather than as original creation and source material.

The alternative history of *Studied Enchantment* further suggests an alternative periodization: it focuses not on the Victorian and Modernist literary eras as separate periods, but delineates instead a period of intensive writing and reading of imaginative scholarship from the 1860s through the 1960s that coincided with a golden age of higher education, and especially of the centrality of humanistic disciplines and English studies to the academy. It overlapped also with an efflorescence of influential scholarly writing on religion by women, including Annie Besant’s Theosophist *Esoteric Christianity* (1901), Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* (1911), classicist Jane Ellen Harrison’s *Themis* (1912), medievalist Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), and Egyptologist and folklorist Margaret Alice Murray’s *The Witch-cult in Western Europe* (1921). In literary studies, such work, when not overlooked entirely, has been largely relegated to the status of source material for modernists such as T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and, more recently, H.D. and Mary Butts. But here I take such works— specifically, those by Weston and Harrison, in Chapters Four and Five, respectively— as literary texts rather than paratexts, arguing that they offer a representative example of how women’s scholarly writing presented religious experience as a component of modernity and even a driving force of progressive and sometimes feminist cultural change, as well as of literary and scholarly innovation.
To approach such work as texts rather than paratexts, it is helpful to invoke Svetlana Boym’s idea of the “off-modern.” For Boym, “Off” suggests a dimension of time and human action that is unusual or potentially off-putting and embarrassing. It either describes something too spontaneous (off-the cuff, off-handed, off the record) or too edgy (off the wall), verging on the obscene (off color) or not in synch with the pace (off beat). The “off-modern,” according to Boym, is the “modernity of what if” rather than simply modernization as it is. In her manifestos on the “Off-Modern,” Boym speaks of it mainly as a position applicable to the present, but it is additionally useful for looking at the off-modernist: Boym proclaims that, “One doesn’t have to be ‘absolutely modern,’ as Rimbaud once dreamed, but off-modern. A lateral move of the knight in a game of chess. A detour into some unexplored potentialities of the modern project.” This description of “off” characterizes the work of writers such as Harrison and Weston. In their controversial theories, they have been seen as “off-putting” and embarrassing to scholarship; with their focus on sex and their sometimes vivid anthropological descriptions of sexual rites, they have been accused of obscenity; and their engagement with religion in modernity in particular has been seen as “off-pace,” marking them as irrational, naive, even atavistic. But, as I will argue, Harrison and Weston were explicitly engaged in projects of modernization.

Moreover, the “off-modern,” with its spatial association with the “lateral,” characterizes the orientation of Harrison’s and Weston’s critiques of mainstream historical scholarship: they are not reactionary, conservative, or nostalgic; rather, they are invested in reworking the materials of the past in order to offer an experience of the present and future.

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alternative to where others claimed to see history heading. As Sumathi Ramaswamy suggests in her own study of off-modern scholarship, “For the off-modern, the modern is indispensable but inadequate.” Such efforts embrace the modern, but then add something else to it, in a dynamic of constructive critique. This lateral orientation suggests the structure of my own study. *Studied Enchantment* is not a teleological or even linear story; it is not a developmental narrative, although it is story about obsession with development. And though it traces certain lines of influence, it recognizes that some affinities are not genealogical, and some lines quickly lead to dead ends. But it maintains that such dead ends are worthy of investigation, too. They remind us that intellectual history is not necessarily a progressive story, and that apparently sterile approaches to writing and knowing might flourish under different conditions. Furthermore, this is not an argument about more or less advanced ideas. It is not an evaluation of, say, Harrison’s work as more or less sophisticated than Pater’s or Frazer’s; rather, it aims to recognize the various modes of sophistication at work in Pater’s, Frazer’s, and Harrison’s studies, kinds of sophistication other than the ironic distance most familiar from studies of modernist-era literature and thought and from the practice of literary criticism itself. And, emphatically, it is not a project about whether Harrison’s ideas were more or less correct than Pater’s or Frazer’s. It is interested instead in

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5 Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Last Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (U California P, 2004): 16. Ramaswamy’s study of colonial and occult scholarship offers a remarkable account of nineteenth and twentieth century creative scholarly endeavor fused with cultural critique. Her study of primarily geographical scholarship in Sri Lanka and what she calls “Euro-America” shares many analogues with my exploration of Harrison’s, Weston’s, and Murray’s scholarship on the history of religion. Ramaswamy’s description of this geographical material describes their scholarship equally well: “The history that I document is necessarily off-modern, eccentric, and oppositional, as it foregrounds matters that have been marginal in their own time and in their own place, or have been deemed unworthy of the professional scholar’s attention. I chart, therefore, what Foucault called ‘an insurrection of subjugated knowledges’” in order to recognize “the work of imaginations that have been discarded or disavowed by the disenchanted disciplines within which we function as professional scholars” (4). My approach to Harrison’s, Weston’s, and Murray’s similarly “discarded and disavowed” scholarly writing operates from the same principles; in addition, I bring to my area of investigation an analysis of this material in gendered terms. While the scholars of Lemuria Ramaswamy discusses are almost always men, many exist in gendered positions of marginality; in this way, the historiography of Lemuria offers additional parallels to the historiography of religion in this same period.
what constituted the standards of correctness, or other kinds of value, for each writer, and how these standards shaped their literary work.

Paying closer attention to women writers such as Harrison and Weston alters our view of how religion and spirituality were represented in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as much as querying the history of what constitutes the “religious,” the “spiritual,” and the “secular” leads to a renewed focus on women writers in this period. Recent work in anthropology, philosophy, sociology, history, and literary studies has set new frameworks for studying secularization and religion. Historians have challenged the familiar narrative of secularization as the decline of religious faith in modernity on empirical grounds, arguing that religion is yet a major factor in the world.6 Taking a genealogical approach, Talal Asad has investigated the history of how the terms “secular” and “religious” have been applied, arguing that there is nothing essentially religious or secular, but that there is a rich history of the application of these words to define and further what Juergen Habermas called the “project of modernity.”7 Charles Taylor has argued for understanding the era we call modernity as marked not by secularization-as-a-decline-in-faith, but by a “secular frame,” in which religious faith becomes one possible orientation to the world among many—and, crucially, no longer the default one. Most recently, Saba Mahmood’s and Joan Scott’s

6 See especially Jose Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World (U Chicago, 1994); Vincent Pecora, Secularization and Cultural Criticism (U Chicago P, 2006); and Gauri Viswanathan, “Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy,” PMLA 123.2 (2008): 466-476. Above all, this work asserts that the narrative in which secularization is necessary to modernization and the triumph of scientific rationality as the only legitimate means of knowing the world, is a) empirically untrue, and b) a historical phenomenon which we must study in order to better understand such phenomena as the ideological charge of secularism and the development of the modern academic disciplines.

feminist approaches to the history of secularization have challenged the equation of secularization with the liberation of women and sexuality.  

These revisionist approaches to secularization have important implications for literary studies. As Michael Kaufmann has argued, the secularization narrative that links religious decline, modernization, and the triumph of rationality has constituted a major part of the origin story of academic literary study since its origins in the nineteenth-century. Colin Jager has shown how this once standard secularization narrative has long obscured the emergence in Romanticism of literature not as a replacement for religion, but as an additional branch of discourse on the same level as, and engaging on its own terms with, the philosophical and religious. Charles LaPorte further suggests how narratives that link modernization and secularization have limited the canon of Victorian literature by excluding writing by women whose focus on religion has appeared backward. The long shadow of the Victorian narrative of the triumph of secularization has arguably had the same effect on Modernist Studies. Most recently, Lori Branch and others working within this field of

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8 See Linnell Cady and Tracy Fessenden, eds. Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference, (Columbia UP, 2013). The collection is framed by 1) an introduction by Cady and Fessenden that calls attention to Webb Keane’s “moral narrative of modernity” in which modernization is defined by the emancipation from false beliefs, and how this narrative has shaped the sense that liberal feminism and “sexual liberation” are the outcome and signs of secularization; and 2) an essay by the feminist historian Joan Scott calling attention to the history of the exclusion of women from political efforts at secularization. Saba Mahmood, who has an essay in this collection, has been particularly influential in taking revisionist approaches to secularization and secularism to illuminate nonliberal forms of women’s movements in the context of Islamic practices. Mahmood focuses on women in Islamic societies, but her ideas apply also to Christian societies such as early twentieth-century Britain.


postsecular studies have begun to suggest how this conversation might help shape the contours of emerging “postcritical” studies.  

In this dissertation, I build on such work by analyzing the writing of authors heavily engaged with the topics of religion, spirituality, and the secular, as well as faith and doubt, to further illuminate a history of alternative narrations of secularization and to introduce a history of alternative practices of scholarship— an effort crucial to the continuing revisionist study of secularization and of the interrelations among spiritual, scholarly, literary, and feminist practices. By thus identifying a tradition of scholarly writing on religion that sought to create new experiences of knowledge and religion for modernity, my dissertation contributes to revisions of this still influential Victorian narrative of secularization that pits scholarship against religion— and against literature as religion’s putative replacement. Indeed, it finds revisions of this narrative even as the Victorian era was first slipping into history: Jane Harrison, for example, replaces Matthew Arnold’s parallel between the losses of faith in Ancient Greece and Victorian Britain with an analogy between Archaic goddess-worshipping Greece and early twentieth-century Britain. In Harrison’s account, the archaic period throws into relief the prominence of women and religion in her contemporary public sphere. Harrison’s peer and sometime interlocutor, Vernon Lee presents another alternative account: recasting the Victorian loss of faith as a rediscovery of the fundamental sanctity of art, she presents art not so much as a replacement for religion, but as its superior source. In both their revisionist accounts of the relations among art, religion, and the secular, Harrison and Lee reject certain scholarly practices as inadequate to their subjects of study: such approaches are too distant and alienating to capture what they regard as the most important qualities of religion and art. Instead, they present their theories through new practices of

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embodied and emotionally inflected scholarship, a “language of attachment” that better suits their account of the history and qualities of art and religion.13

By opening with a chapter on George Eliot, devoting a chapter each to the relatively obscure writers Jessie Weston and Jane Harrison, and concluding with a chapter on Vernon Lee, the subject of one of the most successful recent literary recovery efforts, this dissertation participates in the tradition of feminist literary and historical recovery of women writers. It addresses recent questions about the assumptions underlying such recovery projects by focusing on feminized roles and practices among writers, and how the ways they were gendered shifted over time.14 In this period, aesthetic, scholarly, and activist discourses both deployed and reconfigured these conventions. In particular, women scholars, as well as men in emerging fields or otherwise also on the margins of mainstream academia, whose work and careers were especially marked as feminine, were key figures in reshaping what constituted this category. “Miss Harrison” and “Miss Weston”— as they were almost universally referred to in their own lifetimes and long after— had a marked gender thrust upon ’em, but also embraced the metaphorically feminine in their scholarly practice. As writers, lecturers, and club members, Harrison, Weston, and Lee performed and theorized

14 Two recent special issues of journals— *Literary Compass’s* “The Future of Women in Modernism” (January 2015) and *Modern Fiction Studies’s* “Women Writers, the New Modernism, and Feminism” (Summer 2013)— question “the place of a gender-specific analysis, and especially of an analysis of literature by women, in the context of predominant trends and forces shaping the field of modernist studies (and the humanities broadly).” See Elizabeth F. Evans, “Two Paths for Writing by Women in Modernist Studies,” *Literature Compass* (2013) 10.1: 30. Among the many rationales offered for making room for such approaches—indeed, making such approaches central— in literary history, I particularly follow Green in regarding a focus on women writers in this period as valuable for looking at the historical construction of the category of woman writer (or, as here, woman scholar) itself; and I follow Fernald in hoping projects such as this one will “refresh our sense of the variety of women’s responses to modernity,” and in so doing illuminate the multiple modernities experienced even within the geographical and temporal confines of the conventional Euro-American nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Barbara Green, “Recovering Feminist Criticism: Modern Women Writers and Feminist Periodical Studies,” *Literature Compass* (2013) 10.1: 53-60, and Ann Fernald, “Women’s Fiction, New Modernist Studies, and Feminism,” *Modern Fiction Studies* (2013) 49.2: 234. For “multiple modernities,” see S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* (2000) 129.1: 1-26. These conversations follow foundational works such as Rita Felski’s *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard UP, 1995) and Judith Butler’s body of work on gender as performative in taking gender as a category of analysis rather than a biological category.
femininity while also altering its conventions, creating new models of femininity in their scholarly identities.

With its attention to disciplinary as well as literary history, *Studied Enchantment* fills in some of the details of Ted Underwood’s alternative history of literary studies, showing how prominent Jessie Weston’s and Jane Harrison’s “comparative religion”—a close relation to Underwood’s “comparative literature”—was in Anglophone letters. Moreover, it makes a crucial contribution to the understudied history of the humanities by pointing to an alternative history of humanistic scholarship in which scholars in marginal positions to the established system of higher education in Britain (women, amateurs, occultists) were primary shapers of some of the most widely disseminated scholarly theories and methods. In particular, it historicizes the so-called comparative method as the most pervasive approach to writing about religion and the emerging category of culture in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, and shows how the comparative method and its associated practice of conjecture drove epistemological and formal innovation in humanistic disciplines as well as in historical and fantastic fiction in a period when fiction, humanistic scholarship, and scientific practice were being redefined in relation to one another. Finally, it contends that the dominant affect among these discourses was not disenchantment or pessimism, but optimism and marvel. This is an important corrective to a longstanding and influential sense that the onset of modernity in the nineteenth century was marked by a bleak sense of reality.

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That feeling was there too, but alongside this emphatic optimism. Which is not to suggest that disenchantment is all bad and enchantment all good: as Vernon Lee showed with remarkable foresight, modern enchantments could be linked to anti-democratic theories of politics, among other dangers immanent in the years before World War I.

In addition to optimism and marvel, the imaginative scholarship and scholarly fiction I examine in the following six chapters variously encouraged skepticism and credulity, and in some cases a hybrid of the two. This is the variety of modern enchantment that I call “studied enchantment,” which combined a feeling of intellectual satisfaction with a feeling of a mystical ecstasy that at the time defined religious experience. Scholars have recently begun to pay attention to the range of enchantments in modernity. “Enchantment” since Max Weber has indicated a pre-modern condition persisting into modernity as delusion. Critics have recently complicated this account by identifying “modern enchantments” marked not by naiveté but by sophistication, and their engagement with markers of modernity such as science and rationality. Compared with earlier writers on enchantment (most famously, Adorno and Horkheimer), these scholars resist understanding enchantment as ultimately delusive; rather, they try to understand it on its own terms, and even look to it for positive ethical implications. Most contemporary scholarship on modern enchantment celebrates playful, self-consciously fictionalizing endeavors in which nothing is taken literally— for example, enjoying belief in a magic trick while knowing it to be an illusion.17 Invoking a broader periodization in which “modern” covers the period from the seventeenth century to the present, philosophers have elaborated a concept of enchanted materialism in which objects have inherent values that provoke positive responses marked by feelings of wonder.

17 This example is Simon During’s; see Modern Enchantments (Harvard UP, 2002). See also Michael Saler, As If (Oxford UP, 2012) and Michael Saler and Joshua Landy, eds., The Re-Enchantment of the World (Stanford UP, 2009).
and plenitude. Each of these analyses of enchantment articulates dynamics that encompass familiar religious as well as secular experiences and practices, e.g., experiences of wonder and spiritual fulfillment and commitment to scientific practices and standards. In his discussions of the intertwined definitions of the religious and the secular, Talal Asad has argued for the need to use practice rather than belief as the primary unit of analysis in the study of religion and secularization. This focus enables other ways of understanding phenomena, such as occultism (which in Alex Owen’s terms “ostensibly operated without the requirement of faith”) and enchantment more broadly, which might otherwise seem to resist analysis in their conflation of religious and secular claims.

The “studied enchantment” I examine is closest to Saler’s and During’s “modern enchantments,” but in contrast to such playful enchantments—which subordinate themselves to scientific standards, as in the magic trick that must be a trick because it cannot be a miracle—“studied enchantment” is a more sustained variety. It uses scientific standards to create a marvelous, sometimes ecstatic sense of patterning in the world—as in Spiritualist writings that invoke as yet unknown scientific laws to explain séance phenomena. As I show in Chapter Three, for instance, Haggard’s adventure novel *She* (1887) moves its scholar-narrator from skepticism to an open-mindedness about what may be “possible, though not probable” and, ultimately, to the acceptance of a reality of “wonderful fact[s].” These facts exist within scientific laws outlined by the novel, but still convey awe and mystery. By

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19 See Asad, chap. 1, “The construction of religion as an anthropological category” in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1993). My approach to these questions has been informed by Jane Harrison’s own focus on “ritual,” a theoretical stance that anticipates Asad.
20 Alex Owen’s work argues for occultism in turn-of-the-20th-century Britain as a self-consciously modern “spiritual alternative to religious orthodoxy” marked by high participation of women (12). Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, (U Chicago P, 2004). Joy Dixon’s work has also made crucial contributions to both projects. See *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*, (Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.) Owen is among an increasing number of scholars interested in enchantment as a component of modernity.
framing its vivid accounts of marvels with footnotes and asides marked by dry scientific
diction, the novel allows the narrator—and perhaps the reader—to believe in the truth of a
strange story within a scholarly, self-consciously modern worldview.

Studied enchantment has its roots in Victorian literature, reaches its height in early
twentieth-century scholarship by women, and is displaced in the 1930s when new schools of
professional historiography and literary criticism shifted disciplinary practice. I have
organized the dissertation into three parts to trace this history, which proceeds largely
chronologically. Part I introduces the mid-to-late Victorian foundations of studied
enchantment, Part II examines the emergence of studied enchantment itself in
anthropological writings of the 1890s-1920s, and Part III considers the reaction against
studied enchantment in Vernon Lee’s writings of the 1910s-1930s, and, in a Coda, the
legacies of studied enchantment in later twentieth-century literature, religion, and
scholarship. To trace this history of scholarly writing on religious practice and belief, I
conducted extensive archival research in the working papers and personal correspondences
of these writers, especially of the lesser known scholars Harrison and Weston. These
materials helped me to better understand these texts’ composition and reception. By
grounding my literary analyses of texts in the historical conditions of their creation and
dissemination, I draw attention to both overlooked texts and overlooked connections among
well-known texts, discussing not just established connections between the work of George
Eliot and Walter Pater, but illuminating the various mutual influences among Pater, Frazer,
Harrison, Weston, and Lee.

Chapter One, “George Eliot’s Novel Scholarship,” analyzes Eliot’s historical novel
*Romola* (1862) as a text deeply engaged with modernizing religion for her readers. I argue that
it not only offers a woman-centered history of religion, but a new epistemological practice to
go along with it that legitimizes religious experience as a means to knowledge. The “novelty” of Eliot’s approach consists in her attempt to get beyond the contemporary preeminence of realism in pushing beyond empirical models of knowledge. Ultimately, this novel scholarship encourages a certain mode of reading that works against immersion in the text, deflecting an enchanted encounter with the past.

Chapter Two, “Walter Pater’s Enchanted Scholarship,” argues that Pater’s famous recommendation to “burn always with a hard gem-like flame” is a call to practice a certain kind of scholarship. Pater demonstrates this scholarly practice in his aesthetic criticism in *The Renaissance* and *Greek Studies*, theorizes it in his writing on style, and delineates it in histories of scholarship in *The Renaissance* and *Plato and Platonism*. In these texts, Pater sketches a scholarly practice that celebrates doubt as a means to encounter the world more fully; bodily knowledge as an overlooked source of scholarly evidence; and new tactics of a disciplined imagination—such as conjecture—as a way to reanimate enchanting experiences of past modes of feeling.

Chapter Three, “Fantastic Scholarship: H. Rider Haggard’s and J.G. Frazer’s Imperial Romances,” argues that two bestselling works of Victorian imperial literature—Haggard’s adventure romance, *She* (1886), and Frazer’s anthropological study of religion, *The Golden Bough* (1890)—share the same fantastic scholarly aesthetics, despite one being a novel and the other a scholarly treatise. Each uses an elaborate scholarly apparatus to structure its narrative of a quest for knowledge that leads to the discovery of the marvelous, even “supernormal” powers of the human imagination. Despite *The Golden Bough*’s ostensibly recounting the ascent of the rational man of science, many of Frazer’s readers instead took away an ecstatic sense of a mystical unity among humankind grounded in universal religious practices.
Some of these readers wrote influential studies themselves that drew on this reading of *The Golden Bough* to endorse ways of knowing that challenged Frazer’s apparently rationalist assumptions. Foremost among these was the Jessie L. Weston. In Chapter Four, “Jessie L. Weston’s Studied Enchantment,” I analyze Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920)—most famous as an endnote to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*—as a literary text rather than a paratext. I show how it transformed conventions of Victorian professional, occult, and amateur scholarship to create a self-consciously avant-garde approach to literary texts that exemplifies the genre of “studied enchantment.” In this from, Weston’s study offers an alternative history of religion that embraced prominent roles for women and religious experience, and refused easy distinctions between the secular and religious.

Weston’s exact contemporary, Jane Ellen Harrison, took a similar transformative approach to Victorian scholarly conventions. Chapter Five, “Jane Ellen Harrison’s Ritual Scholarship,” shows how Harrison developed a self-consciously modern and feminine writing practice through which she created a sacred text of a feminist, post-theological religion. Harrison’s work helps illuminate a history of alternative narratives of secularization in nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Britain. While in her early work, she echoed Victorian views of Hellenism and religious change, narrating the history of religion in ancient Greece as a story of religious decline linked with modernization and the triumph of rationality, in her later work she disentangled these threads, presenting an alternative account of religious origins and development. Ultimately, she claimed persistence of religious impulses and experiences, even—or especially—in scholarly practice itself.

Though she shared many biographical similarities with her contemporary, Jane Harrison, Vernon Lee (b. Violet Paget) was a vehement critic of her peer. In Chapter Six, “Vernon Lee: Amateur by Choice,” I show how Lee criticized the enchanted scholarship of
Harrison and her peers. But her criticism did not itself aim to disenchant; rather, she offered an alternative means of pursuing ecstatic encounters with history, religion, and art through scholarship in her creation of a sophisticated amateur persona. This persona emerges as character or authorial voice in her fantastic and historical fiction, and as a model in her nonfiction writing. The sophisticated amateur knows the conventions of amateurism as well as those of professional scholarship, and mixes them in approaching her subject. Through this persona, Lee explored the subject that most engrossed her across her varied oeuvre: the way a writer manipulates a reader’s attention, and more broadly, how an aesthetic object acts on its audience.

In the coda to this dissertation, I briefly consider the afterlives of studied enchantment in feminist literature and countercultural movements, particularly feminist Neopagan religions. I conclude by exploring the implications of these texts and the literary history that accounts for them for “postcritical” approaches to humanistic and especially literary study. My study shows that our modern interpretive practices do not have their origins only in Felski’s implied history of the materialist hermeneutics of suspicion, but also in the credulous, enthusiastic, and sympathetic practices of enchanted scholarship that were invested in finding room for religion in modernity.

Inevitably, there is much I have left out, both from this particular account of my research and from the literary history it has led me to articulate. In the first case, I have published elsewhere some of my work on Margaret A. Murray, whose work and career trajectory has many striking similarities with Harrison’s and Weston’s, and to a lesser extent, Lee’s, and who could have been the subject of an additional chapter focusing on the fantastic aesthetics of her popular scholarship, and the way she used them to create a specifically feminist history that in its focus on women’s agency was distinct from Harrison’s
or Weston’s. Canonical modernist writers such as W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound would also fit well into this discussion of scholarly aesthetics and spiritual engagements, as would less canonical but still well known writers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Evelyn Underhill—all of whom, notably, were part of the Quest community discussed above. The greatest gap, however, is a result of my exclusive focus on British writers. As Harrison’s, Weston’s, and Lee’s own involvement in continental European and American networks, my exploration of studied enchantment could be extended to, for example, considerations of texts of American pragmatism, French sociology, and German mythography. Moreover, Gauri Viswanthan’s work on the occult science of Madame Blavatsky and Sumathi Ramaswamy’s work on Tamil nationalist writing on the “lost continent” of Lemuria suggest that studied enchantment is a practice, genre, and affect with particular ties to colonial and post-colonial writing in this same period. Indeed, I believe a wider survey, particularly of writing by women and those in “feminine” positions with regard to the emerging professional academy, such as working class men and colonial subjects who were also accused of having inadequate training or mental or bodily stamina for scholarship, would show the pervasiveness of this practice. I hope my dissertation will enable additional work on the history of this and other enchanted approaches to the experience of modernization within, at the margins of, and beyond the British Empire.
Chapter One: George Eliot’s Novel Scholarship

When George Eliot donated 50 pounds stirling to Girton College in 1869, she did so as “the Author of Romola.”¹¹ Romola was by then neither her most recent nor her best known novel, but it was indeed the most fitting to be associated with the first woman’s college at Cambridge. It is a novel obsessed with scholarship, set in “the scholarly city,” Renaissance Florence, featuring a cast of scholars as characters, and centering on the titular heroine’s encounters with scholarly practices. ²² Moreover, it is obsessed with its author’s own scholarship: infamous as the most heavily researched of Eliot’s erudite novels, it features footnotes, scholarly asides, and references to primary and secondary sources. Eliot’s self-identification as “the author of Romola” in this act of charity not only offers evidence of a long-standing interest in women’s education, but suggests how she might have seen Romola too as a contribution to women’s scholarship—as both a signal achievement of a woman scholar and an intervention into the question of what scholarship, as practiced by women, should be. Romola makes a compelling argument not only for the value of the education of women, but also for the value women, with their particular experiences, could bring to reshaping knowledge practices. ²³ In this chapter, I analyze Romola as a scholarly and literary work, arguing that it offered not only a woman-centered history of religion, but a new epistemological practice to go along with it.

²³ While Romola was written before the debates over the curricula of Girton and Newnham (the former adopting the same requirements as the men’s colleges, the latter designing a new curriculum believed to be better suited to the generally lesser training its incoming students would have received), it was received as engaging with the very live “Woman Question” when it was published in 1862-3. See I. M. Blumberg, “Sacrificial Value: Beyond the Cash-Nexus in George Eliot’s Romola,” Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture, eds. Jill Rappaport and Lana Dalley (Ohio State UP, 2013): 61.
I open my study of mixed literary and scholarly practices in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain with a chapter on George Eliot because her prominence as a novelist and Victorian “sage” in her own time and in Victorian studies today throws into relief her fraught, highly gendered relation with scholarly practice. In this dissertation, George Eliot appears not primarily as the canonized novelist, the Author of *Middlemarch*, but rather as one of the many writers negotiating scholarly and novelistic practices in order to communicate ideas they saw as essential to the improvement of their contemporary society. More specifically, Eliot emerges as a key contributor to a tradition of humanistic scholarship that posited new kinds of authority, new methodologies, and new literary forms to address the needs of modern society. Central among these needs was a modern relation to religion, or a new conception of religion altogether. In this effort, these writers articulated new histories of religion (which doubled as histories of knowledge), and drew on them for precedents in their project of modernizing religion. Scholarship appeared to be the most promising— even the necessary— route for such modernization.

Eliot was at once deeply engaged with and yet marginal to the practice of scholarship in nineteenth-century Europe. Before she published as a novelist, she did so as a scholar of religion, launching her career as a published author with a translation of a book of German Biblical criticism. Even as a novelist, Eliot is notable for her attention to scholarship. Her first and last published works of fiction each employ a scholarly persona and offer critical representations of scholarly figures, scholarly writing, and scholarly practice. In her better

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24 Eliot’s first book-length publications were translations of German Biblical criticism: *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by David Strauss (1846) and *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach (1854).

25 In her first published work of fiction, “Prose and Poetry from the Notebook of an Eccentric” (1846), Eliot presents, through the trope of the edited MS, a largely unsympathetic scholarly figure— MacCarthy— who prefers ideal systems to real phenomena, and who thereby cuts himself off from all interpersonal relationships and dies in early middle age. Her last published work, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, is also a series of essays written in the voice of a somewhat cranky bachelor and includes one essay devoted to a negative depiction of
known work, she often takes scholarship as a theme, as in *Middlemarch*, with its depictions of the pedantic mythographer Edward Casaubon and the more charismatic but similarly flawed biologist Tertius Lydgate. As has been definitively shown, she also drew on her extensive reading in the scholarly and scientific writing of her day in fashioning everything from figures of speech to historical details to plots in her novels, as her use of the language of natural science in *Middlemarch*, her deep research into Judaism for *Daniel Deronda* and Renaissance Florence for *Romola*, and her “Darwinian” plots in these and other novels vividly attest.²⁶

Despite this broad and deep engagement with the history and contemporary practice of scholarship, Eliot, by virtue of being a woman, was in a necessarily peripheral position to scholarly practice. Though better educated than most men of her era, and even versed in the gentlemanly subjects of Latin and Ancient Greek, Eliot was not formally educated. More broadly, women in Eliot’s time were generally seen as unsuited to scholarship by nature as well as (lack of) training. Regarded as physically weak, women were deemed unfit for scholarly work because it would be dangerous to their health (especially their reproductive health); regarded as mentally weak and lacking creative capacity, they were seen as unable to undertake intellectual work beyond basic clerical tasks such as reading aloud or transcription that could support the more original work of men. Editing and translating texts in modern

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languages too counted as such support work: it prepared the way for the creative, synthetic work of male scholars. Eliot represents the conventional relation of a Victorian woman to scholarship vividly in *Romola*, projecting the mores of her own society onto her depiction of Renaissance Florence. Romola aids her father, the humanist scholar Bardo, by reading to him and organizing his collection of texts and objects. She is granted even these small tasks under duress, her brother having forsaken the family and his proper place as his father’s assistant to become a monk. Further emphasizing the vexed relation of women to scholarship, Eliot has Bardo articulate the common attitude of Victorian cultural arbiters regarding the incapacity of women for scholarly work when he cites the “wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind” and “the feeble powers of the feminine body” as reasons Romola is not fit to be a scholar (51).

*Romola* draws on the traditionally marginal position of women in connection with scholarship to explore how a woman’s encounters with scholarly methods, forms, and authorities enable new histories and conceptions of religion. In this chapter, I show how *Romola* critiques established mid-Victorian scholarly practices while developing an alternative to them that I call Eliot’s “novel scholarship.” This alternative practice draws on classical humanist and Christian epistemologies depicted in the novel as well as on specifically novelistic practices. Indeed, what constitutes the “novelty” of her approach is Eliot’s attempt to get beyond the contemporary preeminence of empiricist history by combining it with novelistic techniques. Crucially, Eliot delineates this practice through the experiences of the

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27 Eliot’s scholarly practices in *Romola* and her previous publications are consistent with those of other women scholars in the mid-Victorian period. As Joan Bellamy notes, “Women were [...] regarded as uniquely fitted for such detailed meticulous work as translation from modern languages and the editing of plays and documents.” Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence, and Gill Perry, eds. *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge, 1790-1900* (Manchester UP, 2000): 8. For more on Victorian scholarship practiced by women, see Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History* (Harvard UP, 1998); Alison Booth, *How to Make it as a Woman*, (U Chicago P, 2004); and the section “The Victorian Woman Scholar” in Chapter Four below.

titular heroine, suggesting in this and other ways its particular suitability to women practitioners. This “novel scholarship” is marked by play with established and emerging practices of history and novel writing, and, centrally, concern with the new scholarly subject of religion. For writers such as Eliot, religion offered a subject that was significant both for its implications for morality and for how knowledge ought to be categorized in modernity. Religion had come by many to be seen as quintessentially irrational, and thus a foil to a modern, rational scholarly epistemology. As we will see, Romola is remarkable for troubling rather than simply building on this binary. Ultimately, Eliot’s “novel scholarship” can be seen as part of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century tradition of creative scholarly endeavor that I illuminate in this dissertation. In contrast to a Marxist or Freudian critical tradition that approached religion by aiming to explain it away by translating it into other terms, this tradition—shaped largely by women writers— not only took religion as a central object of inquiry, but also approached it by drawing on religious practices and experiences to inform their self-consciously modern scholarly methods.

Romola’s established scholarship

Before George Eliot was “George Eliot,” she launched her writing career as a scholar of religion: her first two book-length publications, in 1846 and 1854, were translations of German Biblical criticism.29 Her first published work of fiction, the short piece, “Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric,” appeared the same year as her first translation, and in it too, she wrote from the perceptive of a scholarly narrator. While publishing her first novels, Eliot stayed interested in scholarly writing, and with Romola she returned to a sustained engagement with scholarly discourse. Her critics recognized this engagement,

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29 She published the first anonymously, and the second as Marian Evans.
lauding Romola for its erudition and ambition, while also criticizing it for pedantry. Eliot signaled her scholarly ambitions for the novel behind the scenes, in her working methods and her commentary on the novel in her correspondence, but also, crucially, in the novel itself, through references to her intensive and extensive research for it, addresses to a scholarly audience, and commentary on scholarly methods. Even the novel’s most often analyzed themes—its engagement with myth and Hellenism in its depiction of the classical humanism of its Renaissance characters, and its copious “scenes of reading”—function not only as storytelling devices, but also as signs of the author’s knowledge of the most prestigious fields of Victorian humanism, Classics and philology. I argue that Eliot highlighted these scholarly bonafides in Romola to legitimize her intervention into debates over modern knowledge, which consisted of a critique of established historiographical practices and the creation of an alternative practice linked to fiction and to women—her “novel scholarship.”

Eliot signaled to Romola’s readers right away that the novel would seriously engage scholarly discourse by opening it with a Proem that dramatizes the accepted ways of

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30 Critics marveled at the depth of Eliot’s historical research: the Athenaeum remarked on the “amount of reading that the author must have achieved to get up the minute details of the time, place, circumstance and costume” (196, 197). But for many, this admiration was mixed with discontent with the novel as fiction: the Athenaeum found it too dry, the events and characters “only well dried, preserved and colored,” and even the largely admiring R. H. Hutton complained that “[s]he does not carry her readers away, as it is called; it is generally easy to stop reading her” (197, 199). Most harshly, and tellingly, the Saturday Review likened Romola to a mere compilation or collection: “To note these [historical details] and to understand them, and to store them up and bring them out at last as children bring out of their baskets the shells and stones they have worked hard to collect, is a great pleasure. But […] a lesser hand might have been employed to collect these simple treasures” (208). This reviewer suggests that Romola resembles the naïve, self-pleasing collections of children, an association that calls to mind Bardo’s collection in the novel, which exists primarily as a source of pleasure to him, although he likes to imagine its widely applicable use for future scholars. Reviews quoted from David Carroll, ed., George Eliot: The Critical Heritage (Routledge, 1971). Perhaps most famously, Henry James held a similarly ambivalent opinion, praising Romola as Eliot’s best novel but also complaining that it was “so overladen with learning, it smells of the lamp, it tastes just perceptively of pedantry.” Henry James cited in Andrew Sanders, The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979).

approaching historiography. First, the narrator traces an angel’s-eye view that, sweeping across the world with the coming dawn, reveals “the broad sameness of the human lot, which never alters in the main headings of its history—hunger and labor, seed-time and harvest, love and death” (1). The Proem ends on this note, too, affirming the universality of humankind’s longing for “the reign of peace and righteousness” which is “not come yet” (8). But between these paeans to what is universal among humanity, the narrator offers us a brief cautionary tale about historical difference, invoking not so much an angel’s eye as a scholar’s.

The narrator conjures a “Shade” from Renaissance Florence, placing him on a hillside overlooking the city in the nineteenth century. The Shade, like the narrator, begins by being impressed with a sense of sameness: “as he looks at the scene before him, the sense of familiarity is so much stronger than the perception of change, that he thinks it might be possible to descend once more amongst the streets, and take up that busy life where he left it” (2). Just when the Shade has been nearly seduced by this view of transhistorical sameness, the narrator interrupts his gaze to warn him against it: “Go not down, good Spirit! For the changes are great” (7). Sunlight, buildings, “the faces of the little children,” “the same chants, […] the same images as of old” in churches, the “living faces,” the “old prayers” may remain the same, but speech itself, politics, trade, and “scholarship, official or monastic” will now “sound as a riddle” to the Renaissance Shade (7).

These distinctions are the familiar eighteenth- and nineteenth-century distinctions between the ahistorical and the historical; between nature, human emotions, and the spiritual elements of religion on the one hand, and language, politics, economics, and learning, on the other. 32 They attest to the narrator’s up-to-date historicist perspective, which is more

32 The Proem is a major site of Romola criticism focusing on interpretation, historiography, and epistemology. Hilary Fraser has read it as a Comtean view of history; David Kurnick sees it as signaling the novel’s self-reflexivity; Kristin Brady sees it as highlighting conflicting approaches to knowledge that value power or
protective of difference between historical periods than of their “sameness.” In this emphasis on historicism, Eliot was following the influential historical fiction of Walter Scott, and more broadly “rehabilitating the historical novel,” which Scott had established as a popular and prestigious genre, but which had become a “denigrated form” by the 1860s (Battles 215). At the same time, in her acknowledgement of “sameness,” Eliot was engaging with the theories of Comte and thus signaling the breadth of her modern historiographical models. While the novel considers both historical difference and sameness in their most up-to-date nineteenth-century manifestations, ultimately the narrator’s warning to the Shade not to rush into an identification with the future suggests a warning to the reader of this historical novel, too, to respect historical difference in the other direction—not to rush into an identification with the past. While sameness persists in some things, the novel begins by emphasizing that the past must be approached with care.

A key part of this care involves adopting the right perspective. The Proem warns that a too lofty view—the angel’s, the Shade’s on the hill—can prevent one from seeing historical differences that are really there. At the same time, sameness must be recognized where

sympathy; while Kelly E. Battles sees, as I do, a depiction of shifting epistemologies preparing the reader for the novel as “a site of narrative conflict among different models of historical knowledge” (Battles 215). Though I depart from Battles as to the nature of that conflict, which she finds first resolved in favor of patriarchal knowledge practices until the novel “spins out of control” (Battles 224). See Fraser, The Victorians and Renaissance Italy (Blackwells, 1992); Kurnick, “Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading: Drifting Through Romola,” Novel (2009) 42.3: 490-496; Brady, “Gender and History in George Eliot’s Romola,” Dalhousie Review 67.2/3 (1987): 257-274; Battles, “George Eliot’s Romola: A Historical Novel ‘Rather Different In Character,’” Philological Quarterly 3 (2009).


34 Romola’s engagement with Comte is well established. See Bullen for a detailed account of how Romola “contains within it an allegorical account of the development of man’s moral consciousness from the earliest times” following Comte’s account of stadial history (Bullen 428). See J.B. Bullen, “George Eliot’s Romola as a Positivist Allegory,” The Review of English Studies (1975).

35 Eliot suggested the limits of this historical view in her first novel, Adam Bede (1859). There the narrator contrasts the view from a “lofty, historical level,” which yields misleading generalizations that “only fit a world
appropriate, and indeed, the novel encourages some distanced perspectives that reveal
commonalities. As Amanda Anderson has shown, the right sort of distanced perspective or
“detachment” was a major concern of Victorian writers such as Eliot, who saw this as a
central “ethical and methodological question[…].” Romola is remarkable for the dynamic,
even paradoxical, way in which it explores this question: in its own form, especially its use of
scholarly conventions, it encourages distanced perspectives, while in its plot and character
portraits, it vehemently warns against them. The novel’s formal distancing techniques are
part of its legitimization discourse, its illustration of its mastery of scholarly methods, while
its immersive, anti-distancing plot elements constitute one of its primary sites of critique of
those scholarly methods it has mastered and of which it has come to see the limitations.

Ruptured reading

Of all Eliot’s novels, only Romola uses that most disruptive of distancing literary
technologies, the footnote. As paratexts, these notes suggest the necessity of a supplement
to the narrative in order to connect the past and present. By framing a gap that needs to be
smoothed over, and then crossing it, they differentiate and connect simultaneously. Some
notes translate colloquial Italian (Tuscan) into English, emphasizing the narrator’s necessary
role not only as mediator between past and present, but also as mediator between a Tuscan
story and an Anglophone audience. Yet these notes read as largely gratuitous: it is not
necessary to the movement of the story to know that “Boto is popular Tuscan for Voto” or
that Befana is “a corruption of Epifania” (598n17, 607n7). In this way, they operate primarily

37 While Penguin’s scholarly edition uses endnotes, the Cornhill magazine and nineteenth-century editions of the
novel used footnotes.
as reminders that the narrator is mediating, not as supports to the narrative. Other notes refer to archival material that bolster the novel’s depiction of historical details, both reminding the reader that she is in the capable hands of a well-informed author— but also that she is in such hands at all, that the scenes before her are built by the author out of such details (601n5, 615n1). The novel reminds its reader that she cannot access the past directly; the narrator must build a bridge using scholarly forms. These notes signal, too, that the novel itself is a work of scholarship, and invites the reader to take a scholarly perspective.  

The narrator maintains this sense of scholarly remove through the deployment of implicit footnotes that act on the reader’s attention in ways similar to the paratextual variety. In a late scene between Tito and Savonarola, the narrator includes a comment that jolts us into the archive and away from the novel’s action at a key moment in the plot:

Savonarola rose and turned to his desk as he spoke. He took from it a letter on which Tito could see, but not read, an address in the Frate’s own minute and exquisite handwriting, still to be seen covering the margins of his Bibles. He took a large sheet of paper, enclosed the letter, and sealed it. (528)

In the midst of this tense moment, when Tito is about to receive from Savonarola a letter that he expects will play a critical role in his own self-preservation and in Savonarola’s demise, the narrator tells us that Savonarola’s “minute and exquisite handwriting” is “still to be seen covering the margins of his Bibles.” We are pulled from the novel’s scene in Renaissance Florence into the ongoing present of “still to be seen” in the contemporary

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38 In particular, the novel’s last footnote emphasizes the narrator’s expertise not only in the archival material, but in secondary sources. That note, which praises and then critiques “The most recent, and in some respects the best biographer of Savonarola,” suggests that this novel offers a more recent and more correct biography itself, and is thus a work of scholarly biography as well as history (618n2).

39 I take this idea from Elaine Freedgood’s characterization of the implicit or “naturalized” footnotes she finds in *Middlemarch*. See Freedgood, “Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect,” *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 393-411: 408.
archive. Moreover, the narration constructs a continuity between past and present through a textual artifact rather than through the “sameness” of human nature. This narrative strategy effects a self-consciously artificial continuity, asking the reader not to identify with characters from the past, but with the scholar-narrator who accesses the past from the present. The novel encourages the reader to experience an encounter with the past mediated by archival research, one that calls attention to the novel’s own construction, moving the focus from the action of the novel to the invocation of a historical artifact and the process of historical research.

These explicit and implicit footnotes interrupt readerly immersion into the scene of the novel, preventing the reader from adopting the naive view desired by the Renaissance Shade of the Proem, who is about to rush down from his promontory overlooking nineteenth-century Florence into the city, expecting no change. As a contemporary reviewer complained, the reader does not get “carr[ied . . .] away.” This strategy contrasts distinctly with the use of footnotes and learned asides in late Victorian romance such as H. Rider Haggard’s She, in which scholarly conventions are used to playfully invoke skepticism only to encourage a deeper immersion into the narrative. Such notes allow the reader to outsource her disbelief to the scholarly apparatus so that she is then free to dive into the tale. Though in Romola these conventions serve to affirm in all seriousness certain historical details, this grounding of the novel in historical fact does not encourage greater immersion in its narrative, but disrupts it.

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41 Katie Trumpener describes such a dynamic in her discussion of the relationship between the Ossian controversy of the eighteenth century and the emergence of Gothic fiction. She argues that post-Ossian historical fictions that raise the issue of authenticity at the outset, i.e. in a frame narrative by a scholarly “editor,” make the audience more willing to suspend disbelief (109). Such novels “internalize [...] Johnson’s critique of Ossian by anticipating, and forestalling, criticism of [their] own procedures. In conceding the necessity and appropriateness of Johnsonian skepticism, novelists free themselves and their readers to indulge in Ossianic fantasies” (109). Bardic Nationalism (Princeton UP, 1997). See Chapter Three and Chapter Four for further discussion of the immersive effects of footnotes.
Additional comments from the narrator further interrupt readerly immersion to steady the reader in the position of a scholarly observer. Such a distancing, steadying effect is particularly evident in a scene of playfulness in the novel. The narrator describes a midsummer festival in the city, focusing on the “ceri,” large, highly decorated cylinders spun in a procession. But instead of encouraging the reader to get swept up in the procession featuring the ornate, spinning ceri, the narrator describes them with distancing mechanisms. The ceri are gilded, carved, and painted, as real sacred tapers often are, with successive circles of figures—warriors on horseback, foot-soldiers with lance and shield, dancing maidens, animals, trees and fruits, and in fine, says the old chronicler, “all things that could delight the eye and the heart;” the hollowness having the further advantage that men could stand inside these hyperbolic tapers and whirl them continually, so as to produce a phantasmagoric effect, which, considering the towers were numerous, must have been calculated to produce dizziness on a truly magnificent scale. (88)

This vivid description of the ceri is interrupted with a scholarly citation—the narrator is no longer describing a present scene but quoting and elaborating on an “old chronicler.” And instead of evoking “dizziness” in the reader, the narrator explains the marvelous effect before describing it; moreover, the effect is something that “must have been calculated.” The move from the present-tense description to scholarly citation and then to the inferred past—“must have been”—denies the reader any sense of immediate connection with the procession and its ostensibly captivating spectacle. Thus, the scene’s most “magnificent” effect is made especially distant. Overall, the passage shows the narrator removing the reader from excesses of “dizziness” through a historicist perspective. The reader is not allowed to forget that she is encountering a mediated past constructed out of historical documents (the
old chronicle) and authorial analysis (as in the inference of what “must have been”). As with the Shade, she is kept from “going down into” the scene of the novel, and reminded that her place is instead on the promontory, looking down from a distance. In these ways, the novel endorses such a lofty, distanced view as necessary to a proper sense of history: there are real differences between the past and present, and they must be acknowledged and strategically bridged in the pursuit of understanding the past.

The novel thus trains the reader to read like a Victorian historian. At certain points, it goes beyond this to treat the reader explicitly as a scholar herself, not only asking the reader to identify with the scholar-narrator, as in the archival reference above, but implicating her in the construction of the novel’s historical setting. A late footnote offering supporting detail for the novel’s description of Romola’s receptivity to Savonarola’s “dogmas and prophecies” yields this effect:

[Savonarola] himself had had occasion enough to note the efficacy of that vehicle [his preaching]. “If,” he says in the *Compendium Revelationum*, “you speak of such as have not heard these things from me, I admit that they who disbelieve are more than they who believe, because it is one thing to hear him who inwardly feels these things, and another to hear him who feels them not; . . . And, therefore, it is well said by St. Jerome, *Habet nescio quid latenis energize vivae vocis actus, et in aures discipuli de auctoris ore transfuse fortis sonata.*” (615n1)

By citing this source and allowing a Latin quotation within it to remain untranslated, the note illustrates the narrator’s knowledge of Latin and her assumption that the audience also knows Latin: she is a scholar addressing a scholarly audience. Moreover, the note reminds the reader of her distance from the historical scene: unlike Romola, she cannot actually hear Savonarola preach, and is thus among those who “have not heard these things from me.”
Once again, she is asked to identify more with the researcher encountering the past through mediation than the characters living in the historical scene of the novel.

Through encouraging the reader to identify with the researcher rather than the characters, the novel suggests its investment in imagining a certain scholarly audience. This audience is both elite—reading untranslated Latin—and engaged with popular print culture—picking up a novel initially serialized in the *Cornhill* magazine. Shanyn Fiske suggests we “see Romola as attempting, like the *Cornhill Magazine*, to blur the boundaries between high intellectual and popular culture” by “molding rigorous scholarship into a popular form” (*HH* 114, 113). Eliot herself claims to have imagined a more exclusively elite audience for the novel, writing to Sara Hennell in July 1862, “Of necessity, the book is addressed to fewer readers than my previous works, and I myself have never expected—I might rather say intended—that the book should be as ‘popular’ in the same sense as the others” (qtd in Fiske *HH* 113). Most critics have seen *Romola* more as Fiske does, as a work effecting a “democratising of knowledge and the expansion of access to it that characterized the nineteenth century.”^42^ The novel, and Eliot’s invocation of it with her donation to Girton, further suggest that the novel not so much dedicated to popularizing knowledge or scholarship broadly, but rather to reconfiguring knowledge practices to suit certain women practitioners—thereby expanding access to knowledge, but only for elite women. After all, Romola but not Tessa creates new ways of knowing and acting in the novel. This limitation is indeed characteristic of the nineteenth century, when access to higher education was expanding for working-class men but only for middle- and upper-class women.

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The novel further encourages scholarly reading among its audience by making its paratext sometimes more vivid than its main text. The footnote above, for instance, not only moves the reader’s attention from the body of the text to the margins of it, but grants more vividness to the margin text: the reader’s focus is drawn to the quotation from the *Compendium Revelationum* to encounter a historical fact, a direct quotation from Savonarola himself. Upon returning to the body text, the reader encounters in the third-person description of Romola’s receptivity to Savonarola a mere echo of the historical fact given in the note, and thereby a reminder that Romola’s receptivity—Romola herself—is a fiction. Moreover, she is a fiction that is less animated than the historical detail the reader has just encountered. In these ways, the novel’s footnotes and asides rupture the reading experience to invoke the perspective of the Victorian historian for readers. Such “ruptured reading” takes the reader out of the plot of the novel by reminding her of the conventions that construct it, working against the sense of a coherent narrative. In the next section, we will see how the novel exhibits skepticism of coherence thematically as well as formally, and how this constitutes a major part of its critique of established scholarly practices.

**Romola’s critique of scholarship**

While the detached forms of reading encouraged by the novel’s scholarly notes and asides work against the coherence of the novel’s plot, Romola’s major scholarly characters, Romola’s father Bardo, her husband Tito, and Tito’s disavowed father Baldassarre, practice forms of detachment that foster narrative coherence in their own lives. These scholarly men are obsessed with coherence: Bardo and Baldassarre aim to create coherent works of scholarship, while Tito and Baldassarre weave hyper-coherent conspiracies. At various points, each inhabits a position echoing that of the Proem’s Shade on the hillside, looking
down and seeing a distorted view of reality that obscures difference. This apparent paradox— that the novel appears to frame itself with an endorsement of a “lofty, historical view” only to depict those characters that hold this view as doomed by it— is resolved by the distinction between the novel’s intermittent use of this view in contrast to the male scholars’ maintenance of it. The novel presents distance and detachment as valuable when they effect discrete interruptions— when they figure as scholarly tactics erupting in the novel— but not as sustained, exclusive perspectives. In its portrayals of the humanist scholars Bardo, Baldassarre, and Tito, *Romola* shows how such a sustained, active detachment is associated with a “sense of mental empire” that, while thrilling, leads to an alienating and self-destructive relationship to other characters, and to the world at large (334). It is the novel’s, and Romola’s, rejection of this flawed detachment that leads to the creation of *Romola’s* “novel scholarship” as a superior knowledge practice.

Romola’s father, the scholar Bardo, is generally recognized as a proto-Casaubon: like his more famous counterpart, Bardo is obsessed with organizing his vast collection of mythographic data (in his case, ancient Greek artifacts and manuscripts) into a product that will preserve his achievement, and his name, for the future.43 He envisions a “great work” of unity and totality “in which I had desired to gather, as into a firm web, all the threads that my research had laboriously disentangled” (51). Bardo’s “firm web” offers a model of organizing historical material into a coherent narrative. As Susan David Bernstein notes, this “great work” contrasts with Bardo’s fear of accomplishing a lesser and distinctly feminine achievement: he worries that without such a work he will only be remembered as “‘a diligent collector and transcriber,’” a function associated with Romola specifically, and women more

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43 Though, as Lesley Gordon notes, Bardo has more “vitality” than Casaubon, reflecting the thrill of new knowledge experience in the Renaissance. See “Greek Scholarship And Renaissance Florence In George Eliot’s *Romola*,” *George Eliot and Europe*, (Scolar Press, 1997): 179-189: 186.
generally (Bernstein 130, quoting Romola 55). The collector and transcriber concerns herself with parts, not coherent wholes. It takes the masculine mind of the true scholar, according to Bardo and conventional Victorian ideas of scholarly practice, to synthesize those parts into a coherent creation.

But, as with Casaubon, this masculine practice is revealed to bring harm to those around the scholar, especially the novel’s heroine. In his singular concern for his great work, and for “accuracy” within it, Bardo is the typical dry-as-dust pedant whose objects are as desiccated as himself, and valuable to him not for their inherent properties but as a means to his self-aggrandizing end (64). Even Romola comes to see herself as such an object in relation to Bardo. When he blames her inadequacy as a scholar on her gender, Romola responds that not only will she “try and be as useful to you as if I had been a boy,” but that in particular she will aim to marry “some great scholar [who] will not mind about a dowry” (51, 54). Romola sees herself as an instrument, of greater value as a vehicle to provide a scholarly son-in-law to Bardo than as a loving daughter. Bardo’s unsympathetic scholarly practice, his concern for his great work over the things, even the daughter, that surround him, sows the seeds of his sad fate: he dies alienated from his son, disappointed in his eventual son-in-law, and with his great work left unfinished. Even his collection will ultimately be dispersed, his attempt at a coherent project, a “firm web,” a total failure.

The novel’s portrayal of Bardo suggests its skepticism of projects that aim at coherent narratives. In this, Romola is engaging in the nineteenth-century discourse of anti-

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44 Romola experiences this relegation through a contagious enervation. Bardo’s collection inspires Romola herself with a lack of vitality, as if she were akin to its items: she “looked with a sad dreariness in her young face at the lifeless objects around her—the parchment backs, the unchanging mutilated marble, the bits of obsolete bronze and clay” (52). These objects suggest not only the stereotype of the enervated scholar, but also the Faustian scholar whose obsession with obtaining knowledge and fame leads him to sacrifice the happiness of others. Instead, they too become mere objects to him, ones he fails to animate with imaginative sympathy.

For a discussion of pedantry that looks beyond the dry-as-dust stereotype to the ways in which pedantry offers a mode of Romantic sociability, see Sean P. Barry, Romantic Pedantry, unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University (2013).
coherentism, which was suspicious of the tendency of literary devices such as plots to grant apparent order to accounts of natural or social history. In nineteenth-century novels as well as in science, philosophy, and history, coherence had long held a moral value: “to be coherent is to be beautiful, good, desirable, ‘true’; to be incoherent (except that ultimately, so we believe, nothing can be) is to be the opposite.”45 But alongside this view emerged a skeptical response that a coherent narrative was too neat: it necessarily obscured the messy truths of reality. By 1862, coherence could be the sign of real design in the world (and the author’s ingenuity at descrying it), or of a deluded perception of it. Victorian writers of science and of fiction who believed the latter worked in what Adelene Buckland has identified as a literary tradition of “anti-coherence,” in which they found “intellectual satisfaction [...] in the breakdown of plot.”46 Such breakdown was seen as guaranteeing “narrative authenticity” by rejecting “a fictionalizing arrangement of parts into suspiciously plausible wholes” (Buckland 27, 62). For a novelist who had to recount a compelling narrative, coherence could thus be an unwelcome standard: while it might improve the work’s aesthetic value, it could be seen as compromising its scientific and moral value. For Eliot, who regarded aesthetic, scientific, and moral values as intertwined, this was a profound dilemma. Romola represents a singular response to this dilemma in Eliot’s oeuvre: the full embrace of anti-coherentism in a novel.47

46 Adelene Buckland, *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* (U Chicago P, 2014): 27. Buckland shows how, while Victorian coherentism emerged out of the Romantic organism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and others, anti-coherentism built on antiquarian practices popularized by Walter Scott. In Scott’s novels, he was, as he asserted in the voice of the title character of *The Antiquary*, “more solicitous to describe manners minutely than to range my case in an artificial and combined narrative” (quoted in Buckland 51). In Romola, Eliot too favors detailed historical description over a “combined narrative,” as is evident in her use of explicit and implicit footnotes. Her narrative is not so much “combined” as “re-combined”: it highlights its own construction and fictionality through its use of scholarly devices. For discussions of “coherentism” and “anti-coherentism” in Modernist literature, see Paul K. St. Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford UP, 2015): 186.
47 Eliot’s late essayistic fiction, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, also embraces anti-coherence formally and thematically.
Unlike *Middlemarch*, which, as George Levine observes, seems to practice a version of the “unitary enterprises of Lydgate or Casaubon” that it ostensibly discredits, *Romola* is more consistent in its embrace of incoherence: the novel itself, notable for its mix of realism and romance and its heroine’s stops and starts (doomed marriage, aborted flight, abandoned conversion), rejects the coherentist endeavors of its flawed male scholars not only in the fates it provides them, but in the ways it tells its stories (*Realistic* 10). Indeed, as Kristin Brady argues, the novel links markers of “feminine life” with breakdowns of plot, placing such events as marriage “in narrative gaps that undermine the illusion of narrative continuity and challenge the telelogical movement of the conventional [e.g., historical] plot” (Brady 264).\(^{48}\)

Through its thematic and formal anti-coherentism, *Romola* launches a strong critique of certain established scholarly practices. This critique is specific in its rejection of masculine scholarly models, not only by associating woman-centered plot points with incoherence, but by pointing out the metaphorically masculine attributes of the male scholars’ practices. With regard to Bardo, for example, his patriarchal attitude to Romola is connected to his reductive view of the objects in his collection as material for his great work, and his dismissal of her capacity for scholarship leads him to welcome a son-in-law who ultimately ruins his ambitions.

The other male scholars of the novel, Baldassarre and his adoptive son, Tito, are also guilty of and punished for coherentist scholarly practices. Like Bardo, Baldassare is interested in weaving coherent narratives out of fragments. Though he had once been a historian of antiquity like Bardo, now he follows in the footsteps of his adopted son Tito in his attempts at conspiracy. The narrative he becomes most concerned with constructing is

\(^{48}\) Similarly, the novel’s generic markers are incoherent. As Lauren M. E. Goodlad observes, the episode in which Romola aids the plague victims in a nearly abandoned village “surprise[s] the reader’s expectation of the (masculine) history genre” as shaped by Scott (201).
no longer an account of antiquity, but Tito’s downfall, his revenge on the son who left him for dead after he was kidnapped. But Baldassarre’s vengeance is hindered by his amnesia, a result of his traumatic misadventures. He has lost much of his memory, even his ability to read Ancient Greek. But in a climactic moment of clarity in the novel, he is able to read a Greek text he is holding. After this illumination, he walks outside in his excitement and looks down on the mountains, river, and valley and “felt himself master of them all” (334). He thus takes up the lofty perspective associated with the Victorian scholar-narrator in the Proem. In this scene,

That sense of mental empire which belongs to us all in moments of exceptional clearness was intensified for him by the long days and nights in which memory had been little more than the consciousness of something gone. That city, which had been a weary labyrinth, was material that he could subdue to his purposes now: his mind glanced through its affairs with flashing conjecture; he was once more a man who knew cities, whose sense of vision was instructed with large experience, and who felt the keen delight of holding all things in the grasp of language. Names! Images!— his mind rushed through its wealth without pausing, like one who enters on a great inheritance. (334-335)

This experience of “mental empire” is one of great pleasure, as well as of possession. As Richard Jenkyns points out, here Romola “conveys a sense of the excitement of scholarship and the sheer thrill of the Greek language”— though Jenkyns misses the novel’s warnings about the danger of such scholarly ecstasy (1980 120). Moreover, it is a coherentist view: Baldassarre is able to “grasp” his knowledge as a whole, filling any gaps with “conjecture[s].” Baldassarre’s conquering relationship to knowledge further resonates with the violent term “subdue,” and its place in the novel’s plot affirms this connotation: Baldassarre’s “mental
empire” is now bent on vengeance. He applies his new clarity and mastery to his revenge-inspired inquiry after Tito, which leads to both their deaths.

Baldassarre’s lofty view not only harms himself and Tito, but also threatens Tessa, the peasant girl Tito has seduced. In the same moment Baldassarre’s knowledge of Greek returns to him, he infers the affair between Tito and Tessa. And just as Bardo saw Romola as a mere instrument in the construction of his “great work,” Baldassarre seizes on Tessa as an instrument in his quest for revenge. Following on his discovery about Tessa, Baldassarre draws on his scholarly practice of observation and inference to continue to track, gather information, and make inferences about Tito. He builds on the return of the powers of his “fine fibres of association,” conjecturing what he cannot find out through direct observation, thereby constructing a narrative about Tito in the service of his plan of revenge.49 Ultimately, Baldassarre comes to live on the bank of the Arno, salvaging just enough food to keep himself alive until chance brings Tito to him. And indeed, the novel has chance do just this, whereupon Baldassarre kills Tito and then dies himself. By this point, Baldassarre’s tracking of Tito had given way to this almost purely wish-driven search, in which he trusted to the efficacy of his desire for revenge to complete the plot and bring it about. And the novel acquiesces in this, but kills him at the same time. In this scene, the novel accepts the coherentist logic that the narrative it recounts must progress in a meaningful, orderly way; at the same time, it closes off any additional narrative of redemption for Baldassarre. His narrow, grasping, and coherentist pursuit of knowledge for the purpose of vengeance leads him to die within that pursuit. Here, the practice of narrative construction unsupported by sympathy makes for a coherent plot, but a failed life. In this portrait of the vengeful scholar, Eliot connects humanist knowledge—mastery of Ancient Greek—with a narrow, selfish

49 In Baldassarre’s hunting of Tito, we see the conjectural method put to use as a hunter’s method and as the method of detection. See Ginzburg on its affinities with these practices.
(ultimately murderous) ambition. It is also an example of the way the wrong kind of feeling drives the work of the novel’s male scholars: as Meechal Hoffman points out, it is not that Bardo, Baldassare, and Tito are too rational, but rather that they feel so strongly (and selfishly) that their apparent reasoning is warped by too much certainty.\(^50\) In the case of Baldassarre, the practice of conjecture in particular— emerging in the 1860s as a newly powerful scholarly tactic— is shown to be dangerously susceptible to such warped feeling.

Romola’s primary villain, Tito, also suffers the consequences of practicing an exaggerated coherentism by creating satisfying “plot[s]” using the scholarly methods he learned from Baldassarre (404). While he first earns his place in Florentine society and among the Bardo family as a humanist scholar, he eventually gives up scholarship, instead applying its methods of observation and inference to political work— specifically, to orchestrating elaborate conspiracies. Like Bardo and Baldassare, he treats other people as mere instruments. He too “suffer[s] the discontinuity and impotence of an intellectual sovereignty dissociated from moral sympathy” which makes the material with which he engages— here, other men and their goals— “subservient” to him (Fiske HH 135, Romola 402). His lofty, unsympathetic view has alienated him from human passions. Tellingly, when Tito reflects on his cleverness at making Florence’s political dynamics “subservient to his own interest,” he is standing at the top of the Duomo, looking down at the church full of people and particularly on his future victim Savonarola (402). Recalling both the novel’s opening view over nineteenth-century Florence and Baldassarre’s view over the city when he finally makes sense of Greek writing, Tito’s lofty position in the Duomo is both literal and

\(^{50}\) Though the men in novel accuse Romola of feeling too much, and thereby compromising her reason, it is in fact the men who feel excessively, their selfish desires warping knowledge by making them too certain (Hoffman 56-57). Jacob Jewusiak too finds Tito’s flaw to be his “hubristic certainty” (864). See Hoffman, “‘Her soul cried out for some explanation’: Knowledge and Acknowledgment in George Eliot’s Romola,” George Eliot - George Henry Lewes Studies (2016) and Jewusiak, “Large-Scale Sympathy And Simultaneity In George Eliot’s Romola,” Studies In English Literature, 1500-1900 4 (2014).
metaphorical. It is a sign of his sense of superiority to other. Tito inhabits a similarly lofty position when he addresses a Florentine crowd in an earlier scene. Looking down on the crowd below him, he thinks, “The gestures and faces of weavers and dyers were certainly amusing when looked at from above in this way” (263). This distanced view of the successful scholar-politician fosters a sense of alienation from and mastery over other people. Tito repeatedly inhabits this position, whether out in the city or at home with Romola, when he metaphorically looks down on her as an inferior sort of being. Unlike Romola, as we will see, Tito never mixes his detached view with something closer and more immersed.

Indeed, Tito’s lofty contempt for others manifests most vividly in his relationship to Romola, taking on not just an imperial but a specifically patriarchal cast. Even when he feels love for her, he keeps her at a distance, seeing her as a mere thing, a piece of “furniture”: “he loved her still; she belonged to that furniture of life which he shrank from parting with” (276). Ultimately, she becomes only a fact to be calculated, as he calculates the actions of political figures in his conspiratorial work: “Romola seemed more than ever an unmanageable fact in his destiny” (496). Even before the full deterioration of their relationship, Tito takes an explicitly patriarchal position in reference to her, exhibiting what Eliot calls his full “masculine predominance” (285): labeling her loyalty to her father as “superstitions,” he casts Romola as a savage in need of “a little philosophy” so that she will give up her “futile devotion—like praising deaf gods forever.” He tells her, “I am obliged to take care of you in opposition to your own will” (281). But Romola resists this display of masculine power and the flawed logic of domination behind it. She “recoil[s…]” from Tito’s argument, which the narrator describes as a “hopelessly shallow readiness which professed to appropriate the widest sympathies and had no pulse for the nearest” (283). Like the flawed “lofty, historical” view in Adam Bede, Tito’s lofty view here “only fit[s] a world of
extremes” and misses the nearer, “familiar” world. His shallow detachment obscures the specific details and points of connection between himself and others a closer look would reveal. Moreover, his appropriative arguments show his lofty view to be rooted in “the narrowness that hedges in all merely clever, unimpassioned men” (282). Tito’s narrowness, his inability to extend sympathy to others, and his easy satisfaction with the conspiracies he has created, is not only a trap for him, but acts as a foil for Romola’s emerging and more comprehensive and sympathetic anti-coherentism.

**Romola’s novel scholarship**

In the preceding sections, we have seen how Eliot establishes her scholarly bonafides and then uses that authority to suggest how familiar scholarly methods are inadequate to accurate knowledge and ethical living. Now, we turn to the alternative method and ethics she offers instead—what I call Romola’s “novel scholarship.” In this practice, Eliot embraces other ways of knowing: through linked forms of bodily and mental passivity, and through an acceptance of incoherence. The novel connects these modes of knowledge to aesthetic and religious experiences; they are further linked, in the context of Eliot’s œuvre, more broadly, with critical approaches to Christianity—e.g., theorizations of interpretation coming out of Biblical criticism. This last section of the chapter focuses on how these mixed literary and religious modes of knowledge constitute Eliot’s “novel scholarship.” I argue this practice is a crucial part of her project to modernize religion by making a place for religious experiences and modes of knowledge in self-consciously modern knowledge practices.

Religion has a fraught place in Romola, and in the context of Eliot’s writing of the early 1860s more broadly. On the one hand, it would hardly be unusual for a historical novel published in 1862 to make a case for the importance of religion to the present as well as to
the period of its setting; indeed, the major genre of the “religious historical novel,” which was devoted to such a project, peaked in the 1850s. In that decade, writers such as Cardinal Wiseman, John Henry Newman, and Charles Kingsley published influential historical novels with explicitly religious aims (Fabiola, Callista, Hypatia, respectively) that Romola echoes in placing its titular heroine at the center of a story of religious change. On the other hand, in 1862 Eliot was writing at the height of a career she had launched with work that questioned the place of Christianity in modernity, and amidst the controversies over the truth of Christianity generated in the wake of Darwin’s Origins of Species (1859) and the controversial Biblical criticism of Essays and Reviews (1860). Romola registers these generic and intellectual pressures by following religious historical novels in using the “language and tropes of the Bible” in its story of religious conversion while at the same time presenting a humanist ethics indebted to skeptical modernizers of religion such as Strauss, Feuererbach, and Comte.

While the authors of religious historical novels saw themselves as restoring traditions of Christianity grounded in the early church, Eliot in Romola draws on the divergent conventions of such novels and Biblical criticism to create a fictional historical precedent for a humanistic version of religion.

But Romola also registers a more surprising ambivalence about religious experience, suggesting that—even in its most apparently pre-modern “mystic” forms—it can be a

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means to accurate and sometimes ethically valuable knowledge. The novel takes this suggestion to an extreme by undermining its own skepticism and allowing for the possibility of the validity of the supernatural. This ambivalence emerges early, when the narrator’s use of “mystic” as a term synonymous with ignorant superstition is belied by Bardo’s identical employment of the term. If the flawed Bardo speaks in this way, perhaps there is a flaw in the narrator’s opinion too. In this last section, I will show how Romola modernizes religious experience in ways indebted to but distinct from Biblical criticism and the tradition of the religious historical novel. Ultimately, I argue, the novel modernizes religion through presenting it as serving knowledge, and introduces a new and improved knowledge practice made more capacious and ethical by its encompassing of religious experience.

**Depictions of religious experience**

The novel depicts the vivid religious experiences of Dino, Romola’s brother who becomes the monk, Fra Luca, and of Romola herself, as means to new knowledge. Dino’s vision seems to lead him to surprisingly accurate knowledge about Romola and Tito, while Romola’s leads her to an apprehension of “some truth” in Christianity itself, and eventually to a more general lesson about knowing through feeling. Dino’s most detailed religious experience in the novel is the vision he has and then communicates to Romola about her future, specifically her doomed marriage. The novel pursues its skepticism of skepticism by affirming this “monkish vision” as prophetic by allowing its predictions to come true, suggesting the reality of religious experiences beyond natural bounds (176). However, the novel does not endorse such a means of knowledge; rather, it acknowledges its power but still finds fault with it. Though it contains truth, Dino’s vision came “from the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom apart from the human sympathies” and blocked a
“revelation that might have come from the simple questions of filial and brotherly affection” which might have led Romola to change her doomed course (160). Such supernatural prophecy may be accurate, but it is ineffectual and unethical thanks to its alienation from human affection.

Romola’s own religious experiences, which occur in connection with the presence of Savonarola, and specifically in the act of submission to him, are grounded in the human realm rather than the “shadowy” visionary realm. In support of this, the novel emphasizes Savonarola’s humanity rather than his divinity: “There was nothing transcendent in Savonarola’s face. It was not beautiful. It was strong-featured, and owed all its refinement to habits of mind and rigid discipline of the body” (356). Savonarola may inspire awe, but it comes from his non-supernatural if extreme “refinement” and “discipline.” Similarly, his doctrine is fundamentally human, according to the narrator: “That had been the advice of Fra Girolamo, whose preaching never insisted on gifts to the invisible powers, but only on help to visible need” (380).

Romola’s first religious experience occurs at Dino’s deathbed, when she is thrown into a new experience of passive reception. This state is prefigured by Savonarola who earlier in the scene encourages Romola to listen to Dino’s vision by praising the receptive state that leads to such visions: “in visions and dreams we are passive, and our souls are as an instrument in the divine hand” (156). After some resistance, Romola is overcome by the sound of Savonarola’s voice: first she “vibrat[es]” to it, and then is “move[d]” by it, kneeling. Importantly, it is the power of the very human Savonarola, not a “divine hand” that leads her to kneel. In this “very act” of kneeling, the narrator tells us, “a tremor came over her; in the renunciation of her proud erectness, her mental attitude seemed changed, and she found herself in a new state of passiveness,” in which she listens to Dino’s vision. Ultimately, this
experience of linked bodily passivity and mental receptivity enables Romola to acknowledge value in Christianity, which before had seemed a matter of ignorance or delusion. Following this scene, she tells Tito that there may be “some truth” in Dino’s and Savonarola’s beliefs: “Dino was not a vulgar fanatic; and that Fra Girolamo [Savonarola]—his very voice seems to have penetrated me with a sense that there is some truth in what moves them: some truth of which I know nothing” (176). She maintains this humble interpretation of Dino’s and Savonarola’s Christian faith in the face of her husband Tito’s reductionist analysis of Dino’s deathbed vision as “an ordinary monkish vision, bred of fasting and fanatical ideas” (176). Romola will not dismiss her late brother’s beliefs as she used to, and as Tito urges her to do again. Instead, she honors the feeling of being moved by her encounter with Christianity as it was embodied by the pitiable Dino and the forceful Savonarola; rather than explaining it away, she ascribes to it “some truth.” Her passive experience of Christianity as mediated by these men has led her to a new (if vague) apprehension.

Romola’s mixed bodily passivity and mental receptivity in response to Savonarola’s influence recurs in two additional scenes: Romola’s experience of Savonarola’s preaching in the Duomo and her conversion to Christianity under his guidance. In the preaching scene, the novel links Romola’s mixed passivity and receptivity not to Christianity specifically, but to encounters with aesthetic phenomena. When Romola first hears Savonarola preach in the Duomo, “she felt herself penetrated with a new sensation—a strange sympathy with something apart from all the definable interests of her life. It was not altogether unlike the thrill which had accompanied certain rare heroic touches in history and poetry; but the resemblance was as that between the memory of music, and the sense of being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies” (247). Such experiences suggest the “sympathies […] deeper than all theory” that Savonarola evokes in his sermon in a previous scene (230). Romola had
been primed for this response to Savonarola’s sermon by her visit to Dino’s deathbed where she undergoes the similar experience of passivity and receptivity—even of “vibration”—in response to Savonarola’s influence.

The same experiences of passivity and receptivity recur in Romola’s later acceptance of Savonarola as her guide to Christianity. In the lead up to this moment, Romola has fled Florence, having determined to leave her treacherous husband and to pursue an independent life as a learned woman (she is on her way to such a one, Cassandra Fedele, for guidance). But she is stopped by Savonarola who endeavors to persuade her to stay with Tito in Florence, to honor her marriage vows and her debt to the city of her birth. Moved by his entreaties, “surrounded and possessed by the glow of his passionate faith,” she acquiesces (362). In the moment following her “prayerful” response to Savonarola, she again finds herself kneeling by him, as she did by Dino’s deathbed, but this time “[a]lmost unconsciously” (362). Savonarola, too, can only communicate bodily at this moment, making a gesture of blessing, but unable to speak: “Savonarola stretched out his hands over her; but feeling would no longer pass through the channel of speech, and he was silent” (362).

Romola is in the realm of a mystical Christianity in which the body is more central than the word; in which one knows through the body, through sensation, through feeling and experience, rather than through mental effort and articulation. In scenes such as this, the novel presents Savonarola’s famously ascetic Christianity as grounded in the body; here, Savonarola’s Christianity is not about a denial of the flesh but an openness to encountering transformative knowledge through bodily experience.

The novel’s emphasis in these scenes on embodied experience, especially in the context of Romola’s marriage woes, recalls not the waning genre of the religious historical novel, but rather the rising one of the sensation novel, which often depict doomed marriages
as *Romola* does. And like sensation novels, *Romola* engages in reflection on the text’s effect on the bodies of its readers. The novel’s account of Romola’s physical response to Savonarola’s preaching in the Duomo explores this question most directly. By likening her experience of the sermon to an encounter with the aesthetic phenomena of “history and poetry,” the novel raises the question of the difference between an encounter through listening and one mediated through writing. Romola in this scene experiences an auditory, in-person encounter with Savonarola; but the reader, necessarily, only encounters the scene through writing— as history, as “the memory of music” rather than “being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies.” Like the annotated passage discussed above, in which Romola’s reaction is described in the main text and then supported in the note by vivid historical detail, the reader is reminded of her more distant relation to the historical scene of the novel. She is steadied, rather than encouraged to vibrate with the heroine. But here the emphasis is not on the legitimacy of the reader’s distanced perspective, but on the value of the kind of immersive state attributed to Romola. The novel suggests the pleasure and pull of such a state, as well as its capacity to produce knowledge through wider “sympathies.”

But, unlike in a sensation novel, this state is not communicated to the reader herself; *Romola* depicts knowing through immersive, bodily feeling but blocks itself from stimulating such an experience in the reader through its continual distancing effects. In this way, the novel does not fully enact its own formula: by continually disrupting the reader’s immersion in the historical tale, it discourages the kind of vibrating experiences it connects with being possessed by religious feeling. Although, through its account of Romola’s *bildung*, it delineates an epistemological practice that includes such religious experiences, it does not foster them itself. Instead of recapitulating experiences akin to a mystical Christianity, it

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recapitulates the effects of Biblical criticism, offering readers an indirect encounter with the past as the only means of finding real value there.

Renaissance synthesis and its failure

Importantly, neither Romola’s embrace of Christianity nor Romola’s limited embrace of the value of bodily sensation translate to a triumph of Christianity over paganism, or even of the synthesis of Christianity with paganism. Indeed, the novel explicitly rejects these options.55 It has Romola’s first attempt at finding her own way in life and her own mode of seeking knowledge lead her to the characteristically Renaissance (and Victorian) synthesis of pagan and Christian approaches to knowledge, but then shows how the synthesis fails. This synthesis is most apparent in Romola’s conversion to Christianity, which involves a powerful Christian mystic experience combined with articulations of “law[s]” that recall a pagan humanist (and Victorian scientific) approach to inquiring into the order of nature (357). In the scene that ends with her conversion, Savonarola seems to recognize that Romola is looking to him for “some valid law to show her,” and takes up her point of view in order to reach her, telling her “I speak to you as a Pagan” (357). In this way, Romola’s conversion is effected through both pagan humanist and Christian experiences of knowledge; both through cognitively accepting the truth of a law, and feeling truth experientially.

After her conversion, this synthesis seems to function for a time, leading to accurate knowledge and ethical action based on it. In her new practice of Christian fellowship mixed with pagan rationality, Romola’s use of conjecture—the scholarly tactic of Bardo, Baldassarre, and Tito that imagines connections between disparate facts—becomes more

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55 This pattern of two “unsympathetic, male alternatives” that do not work for women and the emergence of a third feminine or feminist alternative is a pattern that repeats in the novel in other contexts (Blumberg 65); Blumberg finds it in economic models, while others find it as I do in epistemological models or textual interpretations (See Hoffman 53).
reliable, and almost divinatory. When she sees Baldassarre in the city, she recognizes him as a poor old man who once startled Tito; but she does not yet know he is Tito’s abandoned father. Yet “[s]he felt an [...] imperious need to keep close by the side of this old man whom, the divination of keen feeling told her, her husband had injured” (373). And indeed, events shortly prove the validity of this religion-inflected conjecture driven by “keen feeling.” When Baldassarre says to her, “Ah! you would have been my daughter!” Romola experiences a “revelation” of the truth she suspected— that he had a close claim upon her through Tito— accompanied by a “swift flush” of her face (447). Successful conjecture here is marked by a blush, suggesting the mixed bodily and mental experiences familiar to her from Christian contexts. Moreover, Romola is sympathetic to Baldassarre, and this too drives her certainty: “it was more in sympathy than in fear that she avoided the risk of paining him by any show of doubt” (448). Her experience of Bardo’s grief at Dino’s abandonment further affirms her interpretation: “Romola’s belief in him had submerged all cautioning doubts. The pity with which she dwelt on his words seemed like the revival of an old pang. Had she not daily seen how her father missed Dino and the future he had dreamed of in that son?” (449). She pieces together her experience of her father, of Tito, and of Baldassarre himself, and through her sympathy— her “keen feeling,” perceives the truth of the old scholar’s case. She arranges the facts and conjectures the missing details both through her bodily sensation and her sympathetic imagination, mixing her Christian and pagan humanist approaches. Notably, Romola’s successful conjectures differ from Baldassarre’s and Tito’s in the role her sympathy plays in driving them; Baldassarre’s rely on too narrow a sympathy, while Tito’s ill-fated conjectures lack sympathy entirely.

But ultimately, this synthesis proves to be inadequate to order her new life, to be the “fresh clue” by which she would “thread” her future (365). Though Romola achieves the
reconciliation of classical paganism and Christianity, it fails her. When Savonarola refuses to save her godfather’s life, he falls short of her expectation of Christian fraternal principles; and in thus losing her guide as well as her godfather, Romola despairs. Her earlier certainty gives way to a “sense of a confusion in human things which made all effort a mere dragging at tangled threads” (500). Fellowship now appears only “mere unfairness and exclusiveness,” and a sense of narrowness “eclipsed” for Romola “[t]he vision of any great purpose” (500-01). She feels the need for some “force […] to create for her that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty, but which can have no inward constraining existence save through some form of believing love […]” (500). She desires a form of the sacred—“that supremely hallowed motive”—and a form of faith—“believing love”—but feels neither. She discovers both however in her work among the plague-stricken community she arrives at after fleeing Florence.

But before finding a more accurate and ethical methodology, Romola not only acknowledges the failure of her synthesis, but also rejects its primary components, Florence’s two dominant, patriarchal modes of knowledge. After seeing her grandfather doomed, Romola tells Savonarola that she now “stand[s] outside” Christianity’s kingdom of God; and in her flight from Florence she equally rejects the pagan humanist method of active reasoning in favor of rest and passive acceptance of chance (492, 551). In both these rejections, she chooses randomness and potential disorder in favor of coherent unity. Further, she chooses, in Meechal Hoffman’s terms, “acknowledgement” over “knowledge.” Hoffman reads Romola as recounting a shift from “knowledge-based to acknowledgement-based sympathy” (44). The former is too certain of its capacity to know another, while the latter allows for the alterity of another person. In allowing for this, such acknowledgment is itself an ethical action (46). It is marked by the “humbled merging of feeling and
knowledge,” the mixing of feeling and “studied critical detachment” that becomes characteristic of Romola later in the novel (46, 47).

In an act of rejecting established masculine scholarly practices, Romola flees Florence at last by floating away on a boat without any idea of where she might end up other than, likely, dead. Arriving instead at a shore,

She rose from her reclining posture and sat up in the boat, willing, if she could, to resist the rush of thoughts that urged themselves along with the conjecture how far the boat had carried her. Why need she mind? This was a sheltered nook where there were simple villagers who would not harm her. For a little while, at least, she might rest and resolve on nothing. Presently she would go and get some bread and milk, and then she would nestle in the green quiet, and feel that there was a pause in her life. She turned to watch the crescent-shaped valley, that she might get back the soothing sense of peace and beauty which she had felt in her first waking. (551)

Resisting a “rush of thoughts,” she actively embraces— even “will[s…]” — a “pause.” Romola does not wish to construct knowledge, but only to feel an impression of “the soothing sense of peace and beauty.” Though upon landing she finds not a peaceful scene for her retreat, but a plague-stricken community that needs her aid, she adapts her needs to this situation. She continues to resist any conjecturing; rather, she spends her days only practicing her immediate duty. And instead of practicing interpretation, she herself becomes a subject of interpretation, and eventually, of sacred narratives: first mistaken for the Virgin Mary, she later becomes the subject of “legends […] afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea, […] legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful loving deeds there, rescuing those who were ready to perish” (559).
In addition to becoming the subject of narratives, late in the novel Romola becomes an interpreter of competing narratives and eventually a narrator herself. Most vividly, she demonstrates her new approach to knowledge by reading and considering the various “contradictory” accounts of Savonarola’s words during his trial proliferating in Florence (569). She draws on her personal experience of Savonarola, her deep desire to believe in him at his best, even her knowledge of rhetoric (“she saw many sentences which note the stamp of bungling fabrication”), as well as her sympathy, to reject the interpretations already circulating in Florence (573, 574). For a time, she resists formulating her own interpretation, hoping to hear some final words from him at his trial that will quell her uncertainty about whether he was guilty or innocent; but he does not offer them, and “she only knew that Savonarola’s voice had passed into eternal silence” (579). As Hoffman observes, in episodes such as this, Romola is modeling for the reader how “to hold multiple possibilities in mind without necessarily choosing between them” (51).

Eventually, in the epilogue, Romola settles on her own interpretations and becomes a narrator herself, offering brief accounts of the lives of Bardo, Tito, and Savonarola to Tito’s son, Nino. Thus, Romola becomes both the subject of a woman-centered history within the novel, and a narrator of history. But in both cases the modes of those histories are associated with fiction and entertainment—legends and tales told to a child. In this way, the novel cements the association of fictional modes with women’s historiographical practices, suggesting a reflection back on the novel itself as a genre associated especially with women readers.56

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56 Blumberg finds these associations highlighted at the end of *Romola*, when Romola is reading the printed materials circulating about Savonarola. This episode showcases an “alignment of modern form of textuality [e.g., cheap circulating handbills] with sympathy, circulation, collective benefit & female agency” in the novel (73).
Literary knowledge and incoherence

“Novel scholarship” thus acknowledges the power of feeling and the value of reason for knowledge, but it does not accept either method as an exclusive approach, nor does it accept an easy synthesis of the two as represented by a mix of pagan and Christian practices. *Romola* treats its form of the scholarly novel not as an instrument for endorsing established knowledge practices at all, but rather as a means to a new and more accurate and ethical knowledge practice. Essential to its value as such a practice is the novel’s use of figurative language.

Discrete elements of narrative—in contrast to coherent stories—such as figures of speech mark Romola’s engagements with ethical action throughout the novel. At crucial moments for Romola in the plot, the novel highlights the artificiality of storytelling and the literary conventions that constitute it, and their importance to knowledge production and transmission. In particular, Romola shows an affinity with narrative and especially the literary device of figurative language as means of producing knowledge: she reasons better when using figurative language. Feeling Tito wearing hidden armor, Romola conjectures, wrongly, that he has borrowed it only to wear at that day’s procession; but at the same time, she feels accurately about it, and represents these accurate feelings to herself in similes and metaphors. She conflates Tito’s fear and his armor, and compares the latter to an element of a fairy tale: “This fear—this heavy armour. I can’t help shuddering as I feel it under my arm. I could fancy it a story of enchantment—that some malignant fiend had changed your sensitive human skin into a hard shell. It seems so unlike my bright, light-hearted Tito!” (250). She feels as if his skin has been transformed by a fiend as it “seems so unlike” him. In this “fancy,” Romola is closer to the truth than in her conjecture that he is wearing it just for the day: Tito is indeed no longer her “bright, light-hearted Tito.” By imagining a fragment of a
“story of enchantment” about the armor, she comes closer to the truth than with her more literal questions and conjectures, which try to fit her observation into the rest of her knowledge about Tito. The novel too conflates Tito’s fear and armor: together, they are both thing and figurative expression. According to the narrator, Tito’s fear of being exposed by Baldassarre “pressed on him like a cold weight”—the same sensation that would describe the pressure of his chain mail (252). For Romola, and for the novel more broadly, accurate knowledge is best accessed through figurative language. This echoes the implications of much nineteenth-century Biblical criticism, which found that the true meaning (and ethical import) of Christian scripture was not found not in its literal or historical meaning, but in its metaphorical, figurative sense.⁵⁷

Similarly, the artist Piero represents the truth of Tito’s feeling toward Baldassarre in his painting of the two men, while Romola’s sensitivity to artistic fancy catches the same truth from the image. The painting shows a frightened Tito, apparently responding to the presence of Baldassarre. Romola, thinking of the armor, is struck by the painting—“Romola, who had the fact of the armour in her mind, […] was penetrated by this strange coincidence of things which associated Tito with the idea of fear”—and suspects some meaning in it. Notably, her experience of being “penetrated” recalls her embodied experiences of passivity in connection with Savonarola and Christianity; but here the encounter is not merely likened to an aesthetic one, but is propelled by an art object. Her

⁵⁷ See Hans Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (Yale UP, 1974), for the history of how “realistic” came to mean “at once literal and historical” in nineteenth-century Europe in the context of Biblical criticism (1). Frei sees a “coincidence” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century discussion of the realistic style of the Bible in Germany and the “resurgence of a serious realistic literature and criticism” in nineteenth-century England. But there is one particularly meaningful connection between these two episodes of literary history: George Eliot’s equally deep engagement with German Biblical Criticism and her practice of “serious realistic literature and criticism.” Eliot was deeply engaged with realism in both contexts, and is the missing link in Frei’s argument.
unease about the painting turns out to correspond to the true situation; once again, a figurative representation and the feeling it evokes yield the truth.

Elsewhere the novel more specifically endorses elements of fiction against theoretical formulae as a means to ethical knowledge. The formula the narrator ultimately articulates for living a meaningful life— that “energetic belief, pursuing a grand and remote end” allows “life” to “rise into religion”— is complicated by the novel’s account of Romola’s experiences (501). Formulae cannot represent the complexity of these experiences, which involve unexpectedly developed sympathies, chance encounters, and insights suggested by figurative language and art. And after all, where is Romola’s “energetic belief”? It is not active belief in something, but a willfully passive practice of sympathy and duty in the plague-struck village that leads Romola to a life that appears to “rise into religion.” Indeed, a carefully designed anti-coherent narrative, and not formulations of general principles, better illustrates the relationship of life to ethics in Romola. In this novel, scholarly conventions are mixed with those of fiction to correlate moral value with incoherence.

**Conclusion**

*Romola* is a self-consciously ambitious novel. It juxtaposes the practices of up-to-date historical scholarship and accounts of religious experience to make the case for the novel itself as a form of writing that not only can represent truth but also provide the best guide to a meaningful and moral way of knowing and living. In this respect, the novel sets itself up as a rival to other forms of history writing. But while it uses the latest approaches of nineteenth-century historiography to narrate its story, it ultimately pushes beyond the realm of such established scholarly practices and their standards of coherence. The narrator of *Romola* adopts the position of an expert historian toward her characters and her readers,
asserting her superior perspective and authority, as well as supporting the truth and reality (synonymous in Eliot’s realist practice) of her tale. At the same time, the novel’s plot and characters illustrate how such an approach to history is inadequate as a guide to ethical knowledge— for it may lead to inaccurate conclusions about the world, and immoral actions within it.

George Eliot’s sympathetic, synthetic yet unsystematic approach to knowledge and inquiry constructs the novel, just as Romola’s sympathetic, synthetic yet unsystematic approach to knowledge and inquiry constitutes the way to live morally and meaningfully within the modern world the novel depicts. The apparent contradiction of launching a vehement critique of scholarly methods of inquiry—of the “lofty view”—in a novel that uses the latest scholarly approaches to tell its story attests not only to a mixture of anxiety about and attraction to scholarship on the part of Eliot, familiar as much from her biography as her fiction, but also to a gendered critique of scholarly practice. In short, in the hands of (remarkable) women, scholarly practices are tempered, their reach for abstraction and systemization interrupted and channeled instead into morally valuable incoherence, and their potential for use in telling meaningful stories and leading meaningful lives increased. As represented by this novel, scholarly practices conducted by men lead to delusion and even death. But when scholarly practices are employed by women—central character and author alike—they constitute the latest stage in a process of moral and spiritual development askew, and superior, to familiar stadial narratives of human mental and spiritual development.

Finally, Romola’s novel scholarship is marked by the novel-reader’s experience of movement between descriptions of passive, receptive immersion in the past and in characters’ interiority, and formal stimulation to active, distanced reflection on the alterity of
these other times, places, and people. In this way, *Romola* suggests how novel-reading itself enables a way to participate in novel scholarship. Romola learns much by variously undergoing and acknowledging feelings and experiences that she claims to “not share or understand,” but which she eventually regards as sources of truth (179). The reader, too, widens his or her sympathies and knowledge though acknowledging the feelings or experiences of characters in a novel, and then, interrupted by distancing effects such as footnotes and scholarly commentary, reflecting on them and ultimately incorporating them into a wider view. In the next chapter, we will see how Walter Pater’s own mixing of scholarly practices, fiction, and vivid accounts of aesthetic experience yield a more ecstatic encounter with the religious past in his creation of fictional historical precedents for a modernized religion.
Chapter Two: Walter Pater’s Enchanted Scholarship

For Walter Pater, scholarship is anything but a dry-as-dust endeavor. Though he belongs to an extensive tradition of nineteenth-century British writers who engage creatively with scholarly form and the figure of the scholar, Walter Pater stands out for making scholarship equivalent with a life well lived. A professional scholar himself, and alive to the rapidly shifting and expanding forms of scholarship swirling around him, Pater, like Eliot, makes scholars and scholarship central to his oeuvre. But Pater did more than merely celebrate scholarship and scholarliness. He created a genre of scholarship, “aesthetic criticism” which entailed new approaches to research, to writing, and to life itself. The object of this aesthetic criticism is nothing less than a “success in life” consummate with Pater’s well-known ambition to “burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy” (R 189).

Over the course of his career, Pater developed a theory and practice of scholarly writing as a response to what he saw as the “intellectual needs” of his historical moment (A 7). In The Renaissance and in his classical studies, including Plato and Platonism and Greek Studies, Pater tells histories of scholarship and scholarly interpretation, using historical

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58 Out of the nine studies in The Renaissance, four include sustained considerations of scholars: Abelard, in “Two French Stories”; and Pico della Mirandola, Leonardo da Vinci, and Winckelmann in eponymous chapters. Other figures in The Renaissance are scholarly, if not scholars: Joachim du Bellay, for instance, “has the ambition […] of being […] a great scholar” (R 133). Further essays and books feature still more scholars, or attribute scholarliness to their subjects. In Plato and Platonism and Miscellaneous Studies, Pater groups Plato, Raphael, Virgil, and Milton among “the great scholars of the world” and “the world's typical scholars,” respectively (Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures, [1893], (Macmillan, 1910), 146. Hereafter cited as PP. Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays, [1895], (Macmillan, 1910) 38-39). Charles Lamb is “essentially a scholar,” while Wordsworth writes “with the tact of a scholar,” and Tennyson’s eclecticism is marked by “a fine, fastidious scholarship throughout” (Appreciations, With an Essay on Style, [1889], (Macmillan, 1910): 111, 15, 17. Hereafter cited as A.)

models to delineate his modern practice. In his essay, “Style,” Pater most explicitly theorizes a form of artistic scholarly writing in his genre of “imaginative prose.” It is both something to be evaluated and appreciated by scholarship, and a form of scholarship itself.

“The literary artist is of necessity a scholar,” Pater writes (A 12). He is a “scholar writing for the scholarly” (A 17). However, the literary artist—the aesthetic scholar—is not a “mere scholar” (A 35). A “mere scholar” is narrowly concerned with “correctness”—the precise delineation and transcription of facts within a certain system. The aesthetic scholar works not with “mere” facts, but with his “imaginative sense of fact,” his own “personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from man’s ordinary sense of it” (A 8, 34).

From the first publication of The Renaissance through much of the twentieth century, critics have tried to understand the “use and abuse” of history, philosophy, and fiction in Pater’s work, and to determine what genre it belongs to, or, perhaps, inaugurates. Critical consensus since the 1980s has settled on Pater as a consummate practitioner of creative criticism. In this chapter, I build on this consensus to further illuminate the formal qualities of this kind of creative nonfiction, and to situate it in a wider tradition of ambitious and innovative reworkings of Victorian scholarship that engaged centrally with the emerging scholarly subject of religion. Pater’s aesthetic criticism, like Eliot’s novel scholarship, yields a new method, practice, and form of scholarship that legitimates religious experience as a

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60 Greek Studies: A Series of Essays, [1895], (Macmillan, 1910). Hereafter cited as GS.
61 See, for example, Richard L. Stein’s category of “the Victorian literature of art” in The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts as Literature in Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater (Harvard UP, 1975), and Gabriel Roberts, “Analysis leaves off: The Use and Abuse of Philosophy in Walter Pater’s Renaissance,” The Cambridge Quarterly, 37.4 (2008): 407-402. The most definitive contribution to this question has been Carolyn Williams’s discussion of Pater’s writing as “aesthetic historicism.” See Williams, The Transfigured World: Walter Pater’s Aesthetic Historicism (Cornell UP, 1989). In a later essay, Williams connects this genre to a “hermeneutics of appreciation” which she sees at work in Pater’s writing, and which she adopts as the most appropriate approach to Pater’s own work. I discuss this approach below. See Williams, “Walter Pater’s Impressionism,” in Knowing the Past, ed. Suzy Anger (Cornell UP, 2001): 99.
means to knowledge for their contemporary readers, for whom religion had become a fraught category often opposed to knowledge in its new scientific sense. I refer to this religiously engaged scholarship as “enchanted scholarship” to signal its investment in subjects and approaches that had come to be associated with an enchanted premodernity in the nineteenth century, and to evoke the affects of pleasurable awe, wonder, and fulfillment further connoted by “enchantment” in today’s critical conversations. This chapter extends my discussion of the literary use of scholarly conventions in nineteenth-century British writing by looking at Pater’s deployment of them primarily in nonfiction, and contributes to this dissertation’s overarching project of enlarging our history and repertoire of the languages, practices, and forms of scholarship through recovering its enchanted modes.

**Pater’s history of enchanted scholarship**

Across his work, Pater recounts a history of scholarship whose key figures include Plato, Pico della Mirandola, and Johann Joachim Winckelmann—in his telling, all originators of influential approaches oriented toward ecstatic encounters with ideas or art. Like George Eliot in *Romola*, Pater tells a history of scholarly endeavor that presents an alternative to the narratives emerging out of academic history; and, also like Eliot’s historical fiction, Pater’s history of scholarship recuperates outdated ways of knowing for modern scholarship. Ultimately, Pater recuperates aspects of the scholarly practices of the figures he studies, and reconfigures these practices into a superior approach modernized by the application of the “historic sense”—the sense that past ways of thinking and being are different from those of the present, and that past ideas or artifacts need to be understood

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with reference to their original contexts. Pater believed the historic sense to be the defining condition of modern consciousness.

Foremost among the elements of past scholarly practices that Pater takes up anew are discredited forms of intuitive knowledge. In opposition to the nineteenth-century trend for textual evidence, *The Renaissance* widened the scholarly archive by invoking and modernizing bodily and spiritual forms of evidence. Bodily evidence in Pater consists of tactile experiences: sensations felt by a body when it comes into contact with another body or object. The object might be a material object, or the visualization of an object via language— a kind of ekphrastic materialization. Spiritual evidence in Pater’s aesthetic criticism consists of what Pater in the essay “Style” refers to as “soul-fact” or “sense of fact”: an impression or perception specific to the inner vision of the perceiver (*A* 7, 4). I have separated bodily and spiritual evidence heuristically here, but as in *Romola*, in Pater’s writing, body and spirit are often overlapping categories used to represent or invoke one another. Together, they constitute the “figure” or “personality,” which is the most significant unit of Pater’s analysis. Pater’s figure is sometimes the critic himself and sometimes his aesthetic object; each acts as evidence in aesthetic criticism.

*The Renaissance* opens by asserting the key roles of sensation and desire in its artistic form of scholarly writing: the aesthetic critic first experiences “pleasurable sensations” while observing an object: “This influence [of the object] he feels and wishes to explain, analysing it and reducing it to its elements” (xx). Here, scientific method— specifically, the analysis of the “chemist”— is explicitly driven by sensation and desire (xxi). It’s in this sense that science leads to that “success in life” described in the Conclusion of *The Renaissance*. For Pater, the scientific method does not aim merely at the attainment of knowledge, but at the

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64 Pater uses this term repeatedly, as in *PP* 9-10, *A* 16, and *Ren* 26.
ecstatic experience of “burn[ing] always with this hard gem-like flame” (189). In Pater’s formulation, aesthetic criticism begins in feeling and desire, proceeds through analysis, and ends in ecstasy, engaging body, mind, and spirit.

In the essays that make up the rest of the book, Pater illustrates how aesthetic criticism uses bodily and spiritual experiences to yield this specific kind of “ecstasy”—one defined by a complete and intense encounter with worldly phenomena. He does this by evaluating the flaws and virtues of earlier scholarship, using this evaluative history to formulate his own modern approach. In its penultimate chapter, Pater presents Winckelmann as a pre-modern, pre-scientific scholar, but one who not only came to know the essence of Greek art, but transformed the scope of human knowledge itself by introducing “a new sense, […] a new organ for the human spirit” (R 141). Winckelmann thus exemplifies the flawed, outdated scholar whose work and career yet have value for the late-nineteenth-century reader. While Winckelmann flourished in the eighteenth century, Pater claims that he “really belongs in spirit to an earlier age […] He is the last fruit of the Renaissance, and explains in a striking way its motive and tendencies” (R xxiv-xxv). Winckelmann’s approach to knowledge is marked by a pre-scientific embodied intuition and enthusiasm: he grasps the unity of an idea through “excitement, intuition, inspiration” rather than deducing it from “general principles” (R 152). This intuition stems from physical experience: he “apprehend[s …] not though the understanding, but by instinct or touch” (R 152). His instinctive mode of knowledge, moreover, manifests in his physical characteristics: Pater links his “enthusiasm” to his “bodily temperament,” the signs of which Pater claims are evident in “his olive complexion, his deep-seated, piercing eyes, his rapid movements” (R 152).

Winckelmann’s body is not just the seat and sign of his peculiarly enthusiastic scholarly temperament, but, a point of contact with other bodies, an instrument of erotically—

specifically, homoerotically—based scholarly knowledge. Via “his romantic, fervent friendships with young men” Winckelmann shapes his knowledge of form in Greek art: “These friendships, bringing him in contact with the pride of human form, and staining his thoughts with its bloom, perfected his reconciliation with the spirit of Greek sculpture” (R 152). Winckelmann’s bodily unions with young men fuel his spiritual union with Greek art. His case shows how bodily and spiritual experiences are both necessary for a knowledge of Greek art and, more to the point, for a satisfying encounter with it—what Pater describes, again, as Winckelmann’s “perfected […] reconciliation with the spirit of Greek sculpture” (R 152).

Pater illuminates another embodied enchanted scholarly practice in his discussion of the fifteenth-century Italian humanist, Pico della Mirandola, in The Renaissance. Like Winckelmann, Pico manifests an intuitive, enthusiastic temperament: he was especially susceptible to being “deeply enough impressed” by the “beauty and power” of Greek religion to “seriously and sincerely entertain[…] the claim on men’s faith of the pagan religions” (R 23, 33). This temperament is visible in his body: Pico’s body provides Pater with his central piece of evidence for understanding Pico’s spiritual motivations. According to this analysis, Pico embodies the desire of the scholars and artists of the Renaissance to harmonize the Christian and Greek religions: “This picturesque union of contrasts, belonging properly to the art of the close of the fifteenth century, pervades, in Pico della Mirandola, an actual person, and that is why the figure of Pico is so attractive” (R 37). Pico “even in outward form and appearance, seems an image of that inward harmony and completeness, of which he is so perfect an example” (R 28). The critic’s experience of Pico’s continuing attraction—as a figure, and as an aesthetic object—is both the grounds for

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modern knowledge about Pico, and the root of the pleasurable experience of encountering Pico.

In this account, Pater brings together the modern “historic sense” with an earlier strategy of deriving information about spiritual states from bodily appearance. He looks at Pico in the context of his time, as shaped by historical conditions; and he looks at Pico as a figure whose bodily form provides evidence of a spiritual state. Just as his description of Pico’s appearance highlights the importance of bodily evidence to Pater, Pater’s description of Pico’s radiant prose style attests both to the prominent place Pater ascribes to the spirit in Pico’s scholarly practice, and to spiritual evidence’s significant role in Pater’s own “study” of Pico. For Pater, “there is a glow and vehemence in his words which remind one of the manner in which his own brief existence flamed itself away” (R 36). The fiery imagery of “glow and vehemence” suggests that, in the terms of Pater’s essay “Style,” Pico’s writing is full of “soul,” a quality Pater links with fire imagery, intensity, and religious effects in writing. Of such expression, as Pater writes, “‘The altar-fire,’ people say, ‘has touched those lips!’” (A 26). Pico’s writing is religious in this stylistic sense. Pater’s experience of Pico’s writing as flamboyant suggests further the connection Pico’s imperfect scholarship has with burning with a “hard, gem-like flame” (R 189). Pico burns thus in the writing of his work, and Pater burns again in the reading of it, and in writing his appreciation of it in The Renaissance. Pico’s inspired writing inspires Pater in turn. Through his historic treatment of Pico, Pater creates a means to aesthetic-critical ecstasy.

According to Pater, the glow of Pico’s appearance and his prose style embody the striving, serious spirit of reconciliation characteristic of the Renaissance. In this interconnection of body and spirit, Pico and his writing offer still vital evidence of the pleasure to be found in that harmonizing ambition. Via this spirit of reconciliation, Pico
conceives of a totalizing approach to the world, where everything is connected meaningfully. He illuminates the unity of the Greek and Christian religious systems and of the natural and supernatural worlds more broadly:

Everywhere there is an unbroken system of correspondences. Every object in the terrestrial world is an analogue, a symbol or counterpart, of some higher reality in the starry heavens, and this again of some law of the angelic life in the world beyond the stars. [...] In this way, every natural object, every combination of natural forces, every accident in the lives of men, is filled with higher meanings. (R 35)

This is a Renaissance conception of an enchanted world, and Pater recognizes it as limited by its ignorance of the historic sense. Without the historic sense, Pico’s scholarship “misrepresent[ed] the language, the conceptions, the sentiments, it was proposed to compare and reconcile” (R 26). But Pater finds value in this aspiration of the Renaissance, even while its products are, according to the standards of Victorian scholarship, false: it “was great rather by what it designed than by what it achieved” (R 25). Similarly, he celebrates Pico not for the “positive value” of his ideas, but for their spiritual value, how they are “connected with springs beneath them of deep and passionate emotions” (R 36).

Like Winckelmann, Pico, when revived by Pater, also effects a transformation for the modern reader: it is not Winckelmann’s transformation of the world via a new organ of perception, or Pico’s own intended transformation of the world into a meaningful place full of correspondences between the natural and supernatural, the Christian and the pagan, but a transformation of scholarship of no “positive value” into art of great spiritual value via the medium of aesthetic criticism and its historic sense. His portrait provides embodied evidence of the spirit of the Renaissance, and the body of his work— his writing— communicates a spiritual value of pleasure to its reader even yet.
This spiritual value is a form of the ambiguously bodily and spiritual concept of “vitality”: Pico’s scholarship is one of those products of the human mind which, having once “interested living men and women can[not] wholly lose its vitality” (R 38). Pico’s writing is no dead letter or mere artifact, and Pico himself, via his biography, is no inert figure; rather, both survive for the aesthetic critic: Pico’s “qualities are still active, and himself remains, as one alive in the grave” (R 38). There is something suggestively fantastic in this image of vitality: it recalls similar images of uncanny bodies in fantastic fiction: e.g., the strangely intact corpse dug up by antiquarians at the end of James Hogg’s Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, and the undead body of Bram Stoker’s Dracula. Like these fantastic figures, Pater’s Pico suggests the persistence of the past into modernity. More broadly, Pater’s aesthetic criticism, like fantastic fiction, invokes older orders of knowledge in which the supernatural was credible. Like novels such as Memoirs and Confessions and Dracula, Pater’s aesthetic criticism depicts forms of evidence grounded in a diverse array of epistemologies. In fantastic fiction, this diversity of evidence often has the effect of making scientific and supernatural explanations appear equivalent, thereby granting a kind of reality or legitimacy to the supernatural.\(^{66}\) In aesthetic criticism, this mix of evidence has a similar effect: it at once grants legitimacy to experiences grounded in the spirit and body, and imbues Pater’s new form of scholarship with the traditional values of spiritual and bodily experiences—evoking both religious and sexual pleasures. This linking of the irrational and the scholarly has a temporal dimension as well: Pater modernizes what had come to be seen as irrational, and thus, pre-modern, elements of experience, and grants the explicitly modern practice of historicist scholarship some of the prestige of the hallowed past and of transhistorical, i.e., eternal, values connected with the body and spirit.

\(^{66}\) For elaboration of this point, see Chapter 3.
Ultimately, Pater’s aesthetic criticism not only satisfies man’s “capacity for religious devotion, and for some still unimagined development of the capacities of sense,” as Pater writes of the scholarship of Plato, but also addresses the new intellectual needs of the nineteenth century, which demand something other than the earlier approaches of Pico and Winckelmann could offer (Plato and Platonism 264-265). While their scholarly approaches apparently fulfill their bodily and spiritual wants, they do not satisfy the modern intellect, dominated as it is by the new historic sense. They anticipate the aesthetic critic, but the aesthetic critic also improves upon their precedents. By introducing the historic sense, Pater claims, aesthetic criticism surpasses these earlier epistemologies. But it also surpasses contemporary “mere scholarship” which is exclusively concerned with historical validity (R 26, A 35). It draws on the best of previous forms of scholarship to create a flexible, eclectic practice that takes advantage of Pater’s belated position at the end of the nineteenth century and responds to the special need of that era to recognize the various truth claims of proliferating modern disciplines and epistemologies. Its objects are “all the fairer forms of art and human life”— and “fair[ness]” is essential: aesthetic criticism is only concerned with objects that promise to yield aesthetic pleasure.

Practices of scholarly enchantment: reception and reflection

Aesthetic criticism, in its concern with pleasure, is an enchanted scholarly practice—one that aims to aid its practitioner in attaining a fulfilling and meaningful encounter with the world. The practice of aesthetic criticism is the means, according to Pater, “to attain[ing] not only as intense but as complete a life as possible” (R 149-150). To succeed in this practice, one must be receptive: one must possess “a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects” (Ren xxi). He can develop this
capacity through “education,” which “becomes complete in proportion as our susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety” (Ren xx). By cultivating such receptivity, the aesthetic critic is able to “see in [experience] all that is to be seen in [experience] by the finest senses,” to “be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy”— to be ready to encounter most fully the pleasurable experiences which the world offers (Ren 188).

The aesthetic critic does this by feeling the impressions made on him by the virtues of aesthetic objects and then analyzing them, in a dynamic of reception and reflection. In order to aid this process, he may use theories as “instruments” to better “gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us,” but he must never allow a theory to guide his engagement with the world in such a way that it “requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience” (Ren 189). In these ways, aesthetic criticism invokes scientific methods as models that it claims to go beyond: aesthetic criticism can perceive dynamics where “analysis leaves off”; it uses philosophy to “rouse, to startle [the human spirit] to a life of constant and eager observation” and never to “acquiesce[…] in a facile orthodoxy, of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own” (Ren 188, 189). The purpose of aesthetic criticism is ethical and experiential, to live a certain way, not to create a system of thought. And the means to this is a dynamic practice of receptivity and attention to fair objects of art and life.

In this dynamic of reception and reflection, a pleasurable “impression” that a “fairer form” makes on the critic is noted and then analyzed. The analysis distinguishes the particular quality of the object that caused the impression, and this “quality, wherever it

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67 I use “he,” because, as we will see, Pater held that the scholar of this kind was necessarily male (See A 8).
68 Several critics have noted this dynamic in Pater’s writing. Steven Connor describes it as a “gentle shuttling backwards and forwards of sympathy and detachment” in “Myth as Multiplicity in Walter Pater’s Greek Studies and ‘Denys L’Auxerrois,’ The Review of English Studies. New Series, 34.133 (Feb., 1983): 38. Carolyn Williams refers to “the epistemological process of impression and detachment” (Williams “Impressionism” 84).
exists, it is always pleasant to define” (Ren 15). In aesthetic criticism, there is thus pleasure in analysis itself. The last step of the aesthetic critic is recording that quality “for himself and others” via specific forms of literary expression (R xxi). Thus, the process of aesthetic criticism yields enjoyment by creating a new literary object, a work of imaginative prose, which in turn will trigger a pleasurable response in others.

This process as it manifests in Pater’s writing creates a new aesthetic object out of the very object it observes and analyses, contributing the pleasure of a new “fair form.” Carolyn Williams sees this re-creation occurring through “a hermeneutics of appreciation” in which the value of an aesthetic object from the past increases, or “appreciates,” with time as it is reconstructed in Pater’s writing (“Impressionism” 99). This appreciated value only exists when viewing the object as a historical object; its origins in the past and its creation under different conditions than those of the present are each a part of its aesthetic value in the present. Williams sees this “hermeneutics of appreciation” as the most productive way to approach Pater’s criticism itself. By taking it “as a period piece,” one is able to judge Pater’s writing not as philosophy, but as literature; that is, as subject to standards of aesthetics rather than accuracy (“Impressionism” 98). Indeed, this is to apply Pater’s own method to his work. Thus, Pater’s aesthetic criticism claims the existence of pleasure-giving properties inherent to the world’s “fairer forms”; prescribes a practice of analysis of such objects that itself yields pleasure; and creates a new aesthetic object with its own pleasure-giving properties. And in order to formulate these claims and practices, it takes the concepts and methods of modern, scientific knowledge generally applied to natural and social phenomena and extends them to apply to man-made objects and to actions that aim not at the accumulation of knowledge, but the widening of (pleasurable) experience. It offers a scientific means of understanding and engaging with the world which is oriented to the
experience of pleasure, not the construction of theories. Williams’s name for this practice, the “hermeneutics of appreciation,” evokes the positive affects associated with it: it is a receptive, flexible scholarly practice—a scholarly practice of “attachment” in Rita Felski’s terms. In Pater, this practice, while involving the wide range of affects and stances that Felski associates with attachment (love, pleasure, receptivity), is constituted also by skeptical approaches. In this way, it is not only a practice of attachment, but also studied enchantment.

**Pater’s scientific scholarship**

For his skepticism, Pater draws on models of scientific—that is, self-consciously modern and systematic—knowledge to encourage his practices of scholarly attachment. The late nineteenth century is the period in which history became a “science” in Britain, in both the sense of becoming a distinct university discipline and of being seen as featuring natural laws. In his later work, Pater celebrates the application of general laws in natural science and history, presenting it as essential to aesthetic criticism’s capacity to offer a fulfilling experience of an encounter with the world. How scientific methodology yields a fulfilling perception of the world is most explicit in *Plato and Platonism* in what Williams calls “the anecdote of the shell” (*Transfigured* 266-270). A “layman” picks up a shell on the beach, and sees in it no more than a “toy”; he then learns about shells in general, returns to the beach, and on the sea-shore again finds a fellow to his toy, perhaps a finer specimen of it, he may see what the service of that converse with the general has really been towards the concrete, towards what he sees—in regard to the particular thing he actually sees. By its juxtaposition and co-ordination with what is ever more and more not it, by the contrast of its very imperfection, at this point or that, with its own proper and
perfect type, this concrete and particular thing has, in fact, been enriched by the whole colour and expression of the whole circumjacent world, concentrated upon, or as it were at focus in, it. By a kind of short-hand now, and as if in a single moment of vision, all that, which only a long experience, moving patiently from part to part, could exhaust, its manifold alliance with the entire world of nature, is legible upon it, as it lies there in one’s hand. (PP 158)

Knowing about shells in general has “enriched” the layman’s experience of this particular shell. He is now able to see it, not as an isolated object, but one in “manifold alliance with the entire world of nature.” The shell has increased in significance and in the enjoyment it gives to the layman—who is now a “scholar”:

What broad-cast light he enjoys!—that scholar, confronted with the sea-shell, for instance, or with some enigma of heredity in himself or another, with some condition of a particular soul, in circumstances which may never precisely so occur again; in the contemplation of that single phenomenon, or object, or situation. He not only sees, but understands (thereby only seeing the more) and will, therefore, also remember. The significance of the particular object he will retain, by use of his intellectual apparatus of notion and general law, as, to use Plato’s own figure, fluid matter may be retained in vessels, not indeed of unbaked clay, but of alabaster or bronze. So much by way of apology for general ideas—abstruse, or intangible, or dry and seedy and wooden, as we may sometimes think them. (PP 159)

Natural laws become not something to escape, as they are for the modern man at the end of “Winckelmann,” but something to use to better apprehend the concrete phenomenon.69

69 In “Winckelmann,” the “modern” spirit needs a “sense of freedom,” but not freedom from another, greater will (this is the pre-modern idea), but from our knowledge of natural law (the modern idea) (Ren 184). It needs freedom from the “bewildering toils” of “that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us.
They are one of the “instruments of criticism” that allows the full experience of the aesthetic object. In Pater’s oeuvre, the historic sense performs the same function as naturalist classification in enabling such a full experience.

**Pater’s doubtful scholarship**

Doubt too emerges as essential to the aesthetic critic’s full and fulfilling experience with fair forms. Paradoxically, Pater claims doubt— that affect so often associated with disenchantment in the nineteenth century— as central to his practice of scholarly enchantment. Doubt, and the related stances of provisionality and uncertainty, allow one to entertain possibilities rather than shut them down; they create room for the experience of what may appear to be mutually exclusive thoughts or feelings. In *The Renaissance*, aesthetic criticism is a specific response to what Pater regards as a definitive condition of his age: the sense that we cannot know anything absolutely or directly. Acknowledging late Victorian fears of the impossibility of apprehending absolute truth, and, in a related vein, of knowing reality as it really is, Pater suggests what one can know: multiple, relative truths, and one’s own impression or sense of reality.\(^{70}\) Doubt must remain about any question of absolute or even shared truth. Pater revisits the problems of modern thought in his essay, “Style,” where he links their solution even more explicitly to doubt, and to scholarship. In his characterization of the modern age as distinguished by two key traits— its “chaotic variety

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\(^{70}\) I follow Williams’s reading of the first two paragraphs of the Conclusion to *The Renaissance* as Pater’s “ventriloquism” of contemporary discourses on materialism and solipsism, to which he responds in his own voice in the remainder of the Conclusion (*Transfigured* 13). Pater’s aesthetic criticism also responds to this second problem of modern thought, solipsism: while other modern thinkers imagine that one can never communicate one’s sense of reality or know another’s, Pater’s ethics of scholarship includes sharing one’s senses of truth and reality, thereby further enriching one’s experience of the world.
and complexity of its interests, making the intellectual issue, the really master currents of the present time incalculable” and its “curiosity about everything whatever as it really is, involving a certain humility of attitude”— Pater suggests its “intellectual needs” (A 11, 7). They are 1) to find a way to apprehend contrasting, even contradictory, truth claims that preclude one “master current” or “intellectual issue”; and 2) to exercise, and satisfy, a modest but pervasive curiosity, an epistemology of humility (A 11). I understand the first need to imply anxiety about a lack of shared consensus regarding meaningful knowledge of the world— there is no one “master current” that allows for a shared interpretation of the phenomena of life, but only a “chaotic variety.” The second need already points to a way out of this dilemma, to a desire for an encounter with the world leading to knowledge marked by a humble curiosity, an extreme receptivity, and an acceptance— even an embrace— of provisionality. Thus, Pater rejects not only the obstacles identified by thinkers such as Herbert Spencer, but upends more broadly the cliché of the Victorian will-to-knowledge that Eliot captured in the approaches of Bardo and Baldassarre: instead of a strategy of gaining mastery over the world via obtaining complete, systematic knowledge of it, Pater endorses an openness to experience and possibility that offers a more complete, unsystematic, experiential knowledge of the world— one ultimately leading to an ecstatic encounter with it.

In Plato and Platonism, and most vividly in his unfinished novel, Gaston de Latour, doubt is even more explicitly part of the solution to these problems of modern life. As the narrator of Gaston de Latour affirms, “Yes! Doubt, everywhere! doubt in the far background, as the proper intellectual equivalent to the infinite possibilities of things” (GL 166). The humble curiosity and receptivity endorsed implicitly in The Renaissance and explicitly in

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“Style” as necessary to aesthetic criticism are extended in these texts by an embrace of doubt as an essential ingredient of valid knowledge. The scholar senses truth only where at least some uncertainty remains: for him, “a survival of query will be still the salt of truth, even in the most absolutely ascertained knowledge” (PP 196). Or, as Pater’s Montaigne finds in Gaston de Latour, the complexity of man and nature “make all true knowledge of either wholly relative and provisional.”

Certainty suggests a false perception. Uncertainty allows for the most complete encounter with the world in all its complexity.

The philosophy of Giordano Bruno, yet another of Pater’s historical precedents for aesthetic criticism, offers a guide to such a complete encounter. Anticipating Tzvetan Todorov by connecting the consequences of embracing doubt with a concept of the “fantastic,” Pater describes Bruno’s philosophy as thoroughly fantastic in its style of wild syncretism: “Fantastic!”— from first to last, that was the descriptive epithet” (GL 199). Here, it refers to Bruno’s, and the Renaissance’s, tendency “[t]o excite, to surprise, to move men’s minds […] and […] to bring them to birth” via an eclectic, highly “graphic” mix of illustrations from “all religions for rhetoric illustration,” and through such rhetoric to suggest even more than is said (GL 199). Pater’s location of fantastic philosophy in the Renaissance is a mark of its modernity: for Pater, the Renaissance is the beginning of his own, belated age.

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Pater's form of enchanted scholarship

Doubt defines not only the early modern, fantastic philosophy of Bruno, but also what Pater regards as modern inquiry’s characteristic written form: the essay. The essay for Pater is the crucial link between doubt and scholarship. Through its formal capacity to represent doubt, the essay emerges in Pater’s writings as the supreme literary form of aesthetic criticism, from its precedents in the classical and Renaissance periods through his own writings.74 The essay, in Pater’s account, was invented by Montaigne—“the representative essayist because the representative doubter”—and was anticipated by the proto-essay dialogues of Plato (PP 175). The essay has at once a “seemingly modest aim” and “really large and adventurous possibilities” (PP 175). While embodying the humble curiosity of the aesthetic critic, the essay also claims the greatest scope for what truth may be. For Montaigne, Pater writes, “truth itself is but a possibility”; his judgment was ever suspended, forming no definite conclusions, “to the very last asking: Que sais-je? Who knows?” (PP 175-176). To have no definite conclusions, to have no absolute truths, is to allow all possibilities as potentially true.

The aesthetic critic, by coming to know his sense of fact, and communicating it through the essay to others, adds to the possible truths one may encounter in modernity. By remaining ever doubtful, ever humbly curious, ever aware of the provisionality of his knowledge, he makes room for encountering others’ senses of fact as well. The essay “does but put one into a duly receptive attitude toward such possible truth, discovery, or revelation [...] it does not provide a proposition, nor a system or propositions, but forms a temper”

74 While “imaginary prose,” the “special art of the modern world” and an analogue for aesthetic criticism, may manifest in novels (Pater was “thinking of books like Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables, [when he wrote] that prose literature was the characteristic art of the nineteenth century”) or in nonfiction prose (“in history especially, and in all those complex subjects which do but lie on the borders of science”), by Plato and Platonism, it is most apparent in the essay “Style” (A 9, 37, 11).
(PP 188). For Pater, the essay becomes a fantastic form, enabling the receptivity that fosters an encounter with the world as a surprising, dynamic place.

**Pater’s scholarly myth-making**

Pater’s commitment to doubt makes possible an encounter with the enchanted world of Ancient Greece, a recuperation of its forms of ritual and myth through a practice of conjecture. Within his essays and essayistic historical fiction, Pater participates in the pervasive nineteenth-century practice of invoking past religious experiences for modern readers. In addition to recuperating spiritual and bodily experiences of knowledge, Pater’s writing also makes religious experience real and accessible to his audience. It does this by making religious experience into an object—a “fair[...] form”—that can be encountered in aesthetic criticism.

Religious phenomena as objects of aesthetic criticism appear most explicitly in Pater’s discussion of myth. In Pater’s stages of “mythical development,” his stadial theory of the creation of art, the myth-maker of the second, artistic phase takes a “conscious, poetical, or literary” approach to the “instinctive” myth of the first phase to further “realise” it. Pater illustrates this process with the case of Euripides’s artistic treatment of the mythical

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75 This was particularly prevalent in fantastic fiction and also historical fiction of the period.
76 Matthew Kaiser has also argued that Pater literalizes a sort of religious experience through embodying it for his readers, as will be discussed further below.
77 Pater’s three phases of mythical development are the instinctive, the artistic, and the ethical. The first is a primitive, oral, “half-conscious, instinctive, or mystical, phase.” In the second phase, the “conscious, poetical or literary, phase,” artists “become the depositaries of the vague instinctive product of the popular imagination, and handle it with a purely literary interest, fixing its outlines, and simplifying or developing its situations” (GS 91). The second phase shades into the third, “ethical” phase: “in proportion as the literary or aesthetic activity completes the picture or the poem, the ethical interest makes itself felt” (GS 92). In this third phase, the elements of the myth in its form of a “poetical narrative are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions” (GS 91). These phases are universal, and “constitute a natural order in [“mythical development”], based on the necessary conditions of human apprehension” (GS 93). They are historical stages in the development of mankind, that, as in stadial history, may manifest in different times and places over the globe, but always in the same order. Thus, the creations of the artistic and ethical phases of mythical development are “real” in their correspondence to universal ideals of “moral or spiritual conditions” that manifest in history.
figure Dionysus. Pater argues that Euripides offers a “real object” in his literary depiction of the god. Art shapes tradition to create something “real”:

in the Bacchanals of Euripides we have an example of the figurative or imaginative power of poetry, selecting and combining, at will, from that mixed and floating mass, weaving the many-coloured threads together, blending the various phases of legend—all the light and shade of the subject—into a shape, substantial and firmly set, through which a mere fluctuating tradition might retain a permanent place in men’s imaginations. Here, in what Euripides really says, in what we actually see on the stage, as we read his play, we are dealing with a single real object. (GS 53-54)

In this creation of something “real,” Euripides transforms immaterial oral tradition into something “substantial and firmly set,” suggesting the materialization of a gem-like object. This poetic practice is akin to aesthetic criticism, which also finds solidity in mere flux via its “burn[ing] with a hard, gem-like flame.” The figurative “subject” is transformed into a “real,” literal aesthetic and historical object that Euripides’s audience—in his day or Pater’s—can encounter.

Pater’s skeptical ecstasy ultimately aims for nothing less than to recreate Greek experience. Ultimately, I want to suggest that by personifying abstractions such as “spiritual forces” Pater uses historicism itself to cultivate openness to a literal encounter with what is customarily deemed merely figurative. Matthew Kaiser has noted that Pater also treats the “poetic enchantment” of the Ancient Greeks in a similar way by literalizing metaphors through embodying them; by cultivating in himself and his readers “[a]n ability—an exuberantly sensuous one—to mistake one’s own metaphors for fact” (Kaiser 58). Pater claims that such forces were regarded as real phenomena by the Ancient Greeks; in contrast, modern men understand “spiritual forces” as a metaphor for the real, “mechanical” forces in
the universe (Ren 158). For a modern man to regard such “spiritual forces” as historically real, and not merely metaphorical, then, is to practice the historical method, and, thereby, to enter an approximation of the world of the Ancient Greeks. In Greek Studies, Pater explicitly instructs his audience in how to use certain reading practices to this end. This is a crucial aspect of Pater’s innovative scholarship: he discusses the Greek mentality not to pin it down for modern readers, but to re-animate it within them. He trains his readers to embrace the real existence and the continuing vitality of this “product of the human mind.” The modern aesthetic critic, following Pater’s lead, recreates the Greek experience while supplementing it by purposefully—not naively—taking figurative language literally.

The openness to reading figures literally that I am describing is exemplified in a passage from “A Study of Dionysus” in Greek Studies where Pater directs the reader in how to re-animate Greek sentiment by refashioning Dionysius from personification into person. He first invokes the “power” of women’s names to generate in the mind of the audience “a hundred associations, trains of sound, forms, impressions” in order to illustrate the power of language: in this “respect, such names are but revealing instances of the whole significance, power, and use of language in general” (GS 36). He then attributes the same power to “mythical conceptions” expressed in Greek drama and sculpture: they communicate the “soul” of a natural phenomenon (“rain,” “river”) or concept (“swiftness,” “purity”) (GS 37). Having established this power of language, whether it is the textual language of drama or the iconographic language of sculpture, Pater instructs his reader in how to experience the Greek conception of Dionysus:

To illustrate this, think what the effect would be, if you could associate, by some trick of memory, a certain group of natural objects, in all their varied perspective, their changes of colour and tone in varying light and shade, with the being and image
of an actual person. You travelled through a country of clear rivers and wide meadows, or of high windy places, or of lowly grass and willows, or of the Lady of the Lake; and all the complex impressions of these objects wound themselves, as a second animated body, new and more subtle, around the person of some one left there, so that they no longer come to recollection apart from each other. **Now try to conceive the image of an actual person**, in whom, somehow, all those impressions of the vine and its fruit, as the highest type of the life of the green sap, had become incorporate;—all the scents and colours of its flower and fruit, and something of its curling foliage; the chances of its growth; the enthusiasm, the easy flow of more choice expression, as its juices mount within one; for the image is eloquent, too, in word, gesture, and glancing of the eyes, which seem to be informed by some soul of the vine within it: as Wordsworth says,

Beauty born of murmuring sound

Shall pass into her face—

**so conceive an image into which the beauty, “born” of the vine, has passed; and you have the idea of Dionysus, as he appears, entirely fashioned at last by central Greek poetry and art, and is consecrated in the [Greek] and the [Greek] the great festivals of the Winepress and the Flowers.” (GS 37-38, bold emphasis mine)**

The reader must consciously try to think and imagine his way to this experience. Pater instructs him to “associate, by some trick of memory,” to “try to conceive of” a certain image, to “so conceive an image.” All this leads to the reader “having” the idea of Dionysus” as he appears in “Greek poetry and art.” The Greeks created this image through drama and
sculpture; the modern scholar can recreate this image through active efforts of the intellect and imagination, pushing imaginative effort to its extremes, finding essential meaning in the forms of language, and literalizing metaphors until they become materially felt, “real” experiences.

Pater details a complementary process to this in “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone” in the idea of “feel[ing] our way backwards” to an image of the Ancient Greeks. The critic, pursuing a feeling of curiosity “justified by the direct aesthetic beauty” of fragments of Greek art, “feel[s] [his] way backwards” to a construction, an “engaging picture of the poet-people,” the Ancient Greeks. This picture is not knowledge itself; rather, the imaginative creation that fills the absence of knowledge: we know the fragments, but we do not know the whole from which they come, except as a conjecture. It is an imaginative construction, and acknowledged as such.78

Moreover, this construction is a product of both aesthetic feeling and modern scholarly practice: while the aesthetic scholar feels his way backward to this picture, it is also already there, waiting for him, having been created by “the ingenuity of modern theory” which “has filled the void in our knowledge” (GS 112). This is the proper process of aesthetic criticism: the scholar, drawn by “curiosity” in response to “the direct aesthetic beauty of these fragments” of poetry and sculpture, of religion, views these fragments “in the light of” modern theories of “comparative mythology” and “animism.” He is careful to use these theories only as tools to better view the objects in question, and not to use them as standards of judgment: “Only in the application of these theories, the student of Greek religion must never forget that, after all, it is with poetry, not with systematic belief or standards of judgment: “Only in the application of these theories, the student of Greek religion must never forget that, after all, it is with poetry, not with systematic belief or

78 At the same time, it can be a right or a wrong construction: Pater warns us “we must take heed, before all things, in no sense to misconstrue the poets”— that is, the Greeks the scholar is trying to access through the fragments of their art and religion. Here and elsewhere in Pater, neither the imaginative nor the relative provides license for abandoning standards of evaluation.
dogma, that he has to do” (GS 112). He uses these theories to better illuminate the poetry for a fuller encounter with it, not to judge a religious system by modern theories.

The reward for encountering the poetry of Ancient Greek religion is the “elevation and purifying of our sentiments” (GS 151). Such an encounter offers “a pledge to us of the place in our culture, at once legitimate and possible, of the associations, the conceptions, the imagery, of Greek religious poetry in general, of the poetry of all religions” (GS 151). In order to receive this pledge, one must have “admitted [the elements of Greek religion] as recognised and habitual inhabitants” (GS 151). The “modern mind” must make room for religion through scholarly study: for moderns, it is necessary to practice scholarship to experience religion (GS 151).

More specifically, it is necessary to practice conjectural scholarship. In the nineteenth century, the proper scholarly approach to “prehistoric” subjects like the religion of Dionysus was conjecture and comparison, and Pater takes them up in this context. The practice of conjecture resonates with many aspects of Pater’s aesthetic criticism. It emphasizes process and especially provisionality and explicitly denies that its results are certain. It professes to take a humble approach to the seeking of knowledge, assuming it will never reach absolute knowledge; rather, it attempts to approximate the truth it seeks, regarding that as the most any search after knowledge can do. By assuming a developmental logic, it creates unity diachronically via the historic sense. By using the imagination, it infers information about phenomena that cannot be observed directly. It purports to incorporate the best of empiricism, rejecting old-fashioned a priori reasoning, but also to move beyond empiricism into a more flexible epistemology in which imaginative insight complements direct observation.

Pater was in the vanguard of British scholars applying the innovative and controversial practices of comparison and conjecture to that most prestigious and staid of subjects, classics. In *Greek Studies*, he endorses this imaginative yet scientific approach to prehistoric “origins” over an “over-positive” empiricism (*GS* 112). He acknowledges the criticisms of the approach: that in his conjectural treatment of the myth of Demeter, “much may seem to have been made of little, with too much completion, by a general framework or setting, of that after all are but doubtful or fragmentary indications” (*GS* 111-112). He admits to “follow[ing] faint traces” as a “student of origins.” However, he then criticizes the criticism: “Yet there is a certain cynicism too, in that over-positive temper, which is so jealous of our catching any resemblance in the earlier world to the thoughts that really occupy our own minds” (*GS* 112). Here, Pater highlights the transhistorical in his historicism: in the story of the evolution of the human mind, there is continuity, or “sameness,” as the narrator of *Romola* puts it, as well as change. The human mind never changes so drastically that it is no longer connected to its previous iterations. While the historical method has made the past into another world, conjecture allows transport from this world to that. The “earlier world” of the Ancient Greeks is not entirely lost to us: we can access a reconstruction of it via a combination of scholarly ingenuity, imagination, and responsiveness to resemblances between the mentalities of the Ancient Greeks and ourselves. Moreover, in the way it operates by rearranging “fragments,” conjecture as practice and as literary form is identifiable with the artistic mythmaking process of “selecting and combining, at will” Pater attributes to Euripides. He thus presents the mind of the nineteenth-century British scholar as a space in which all the “products of the human mind” across time can be reconstructed and crystalized into “real” aesthetic and historical objects that become sources of pleasure, satisfaction, and a particular form of modern enchantment.
Heather Love sees Pater’s “feeling backward” as part of a “tradition of queer experience and representation” linked to feelings of “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness” as well as to practices of “affective historiography” that focus on pleasure in history writing and that may feature “an embodied, loving historical practice” (Love 2007 4, 4, 37, 39). The negative affects in Love’s litany are indeed part of such practices of love and pleasure which constitute the repertoire of “minority or marginal modernists” such as Pater who were often seen as backward, e.g., anti-modern (Love 2007 6). This tradition further encompasses the “labors of loss” that Sumathi Ramaswamy describes among nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers similarly construed as at the margins of modernity, because of their origins in colonized nations or their spiritual commitments. The strategies of conjecture Pater outlines in Greek Studies are characteristic of this tradition because they are particularly accessible to writers with limited access to modern forms of authority, such as those without specialist expertise, professional affiliation, or a certain European Christian rationalist masculinity. Conjecture only requires the most basic access to already gathered collections of data and a willingness to imagine links among them.

The myth-maker’s collective creativity

Rather than modern forms of authority grounded in the rational individual, conjecture is particularly compatible with a form of authority grounded in tradition. As Billie Inman has shown, through “selecting and combining, at will” Pater himself creates artistic myths: his “attitude toward his sources has been the type that he attributes to the myth-maker in the

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80 As Love notes, Pater suffered from an “internal exile”: “his position of educational and national privilege could be maintained only by fending off the constant threat of exposure” regarding his sexuality. Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History, (Harvard UP, 2007): 57.
81 See chapter Four for discussion of this in relation to women writers’ experiments with authority.
third ethical phase of the myth” in *Greek Studies.* The ethical mythmaker is one of “those more elevated spirits, who, in the decline of the Greek religion, pick and choose and modify, with perfect freedom of mind, whatever in it may seem adapted to minister to their culture” (*GS* 137, quoted in Inman xlii). Pater creates his own myth via aesthetic criticism: instead of acknowledging his creative authority and originality, he presents his version of the myth as one dependent on the authority of other writers. Scholarship provides him with the form for this explicitly derivative creativity: it enables him to focus on the sources of his work rather than on the new creation involved in his treatment of them. While he offers a new, original product in the version of the myth that emerges from his study of its collected versions, he presents it as less an original production than as a conclusion derived from ancient sources; a derivative, not an original, product. This fictive representation of scholarly authority is not mere modesty, or a genuine attempt to fool readers into believing the accuracy of all he says (after all, in some cases he is writing for those students of classics who would also be familiar with his ventriloquized sources). Rather, this authorial strategy grounds Pater’s ideas in tradition, rather than original invention. Pater represents other, proto-aesthetic critics as mythmakers in this tradition elsewhere: for example, the scholars of the Renaissance created “a new sort of mythology, with a tone and qualities of its own” (*R* 36). Pater is the latest (and thus, most advanced) of myth-makers in this long tradition which first peaked in Ancient Greece—of those who via their art of selection and modification create something “real.” A crucial effect of this sort of modern mythmaking is to elicit reflective receptivity on the part of the reader: the reader, recognizing the signs of the authority of both scholarship and

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83 Inman notes this tendency in Pater’s writing, but suggests it is motivated by a desire to avoid controversy: to “come boldly forward as in the ‘Conclusion,’ with a pronouncement— that way danger lay” (xlvi). In contrast, I see this tendency as a strategic part of the mythmaking Inman also identifies. See Chapter Four for a discussion of Jessie Weston’s related strategy of folk authorship.
tradition at the same time as they are presented as somewhat artificial, is led to be receptive, but consciously so.

The playful, myth-making capability of aesthetic criticism is vividly illustrated in “A Study of Dionysus.” Pater writes:

So far, I have endeavored to present, with something of the concrete character of a picture, Dionysus, the old Greek god, as we may discern him through a multitude of stray hints in art and poetry and religious custom, through modern speculation on the tendencies of early thought, through traits and touches in our own actual states of mind, which may seem sympathetic with those tendencies. In such a picture there must necessarily be a certain artificiality; things near and far, matter of varying degrees of certainty, fact and surmise, being reflected and concentrated, for its production, as if on the surface of a mirror. (GS 53)

Pater draws on a variety of materials, all of which are put into play by the leveling of the aesthetic-critical temperament which “remembers always that beauty exists in many forms” and to whom “all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal” (R xxi). This temperament is what perceives these materials “reflected and concentrated […] as if on the surface of a mirror.” Thus, art, poetry, religious custom, modern theories of early thought (i.e., modern “ingenuity”), and aspects of “our” (modern) states of mind which seem in sympathy with early thought (i.e. modern “feeling”), are equally available to the aesthetic critic as materials out of which to create his scholarly and artistic myths.

The interplay between conscious artistic creation and bodily and spiritual experiences, in which artistic creation shapes such experiences into concrete, literal, historical, or “real” aesthetic objects, is the source of one of Pater’s most significant innovations in scholarship: his location of truth in “style.” Pater locates truth not in the
subject matter of literature, but in the relation between subject matter and the manner in which it is expressed. Truth consists of the exactness of “the accommodation of speech to that vision within,” “the absolute accordance of expression to idea,” the exactness of the fit between form and content (A 10, 34). The highest degree of this fit “is when [the term] becomes, in a manner, what it signifies”; when there is an essential, not an arbitrary, association between what is expressed and the language expressing it (A 22). This location of truth in how something is expressed rather than in what that something is places all subject matter on a level playing field. One type of subject matter—say, history, theology, or natural science—is not essentially more true than another; rather, the way in which it is presented makes it more or less true. This leveling of fields of knowledge (and emerging disciplines) through scholarly, literary art allows a different kind of evaluation of truth, so that a work of theology is not necessarily more valid than a work of biology, or vice versa; rather, the validity of each work depends upon how directly its form aligns with its content; how precisely it expresses the informed impression—the “imaginative sense of fact”—of the aesthetic critic. This new way of evaluating truth reconstitutes the various fields of knowledge as man-made aesthetic objects, and values them as such, allowing for a wide array of potentially equally valid, but also potentially conflicting truth claims.

In “Style,” Pater draws attention to an important source for the delineation of this literary matter: the expanding vocabulary of the English language (12). “English, for a quarter of a century past, has been assimilating the phraseology of pictorial art; for half a century, the phraseology of the great German metaphysical movement of eighty years ago; in part also the language of mystical theology […]. For many years to come its enterprise may well lie in the naturalization of the vocabulary of science […]” (12). Pater’s own writing does not so much naturalize the vocabulary of modern science as use its terms to highlight the
novelty and value of aesthetic criticism. In particular, Pater draws on the terms of the scientific historical method to present strong, strange ideas of “real illusions” and other literalizations of figurative language. As Ian Duncan writes of George Eliot’s similar literary practices, Pater’s writings “thus assume a more dissonant, competitive, even combative relationship to the great scientific projects of the age than recent accounts of the matter tend to allow” (Duncan 17). Just as Romola presents itself as a (superior) rival to contemporary scientific history, Pater’s aesthetic criticism presents itself as the most modern, most valuable guide to the history and practice of engaging with the world, especially its most significant truths.

Conclusion

As we have seen in the preceding discussion, Pater develops his aesthetic criticism with reference to a history of scholarship as well as to current scholarly practices; but his aesthetic criticism turns this scholarly heritage to surprising uses. It takes scholarly inquiry as not only a means to knowledge, but as a source of ecstatic pleasure. It takes the idea of developmental history and uses it to present aesthetic criticism itself as the superior heir to previous scholarly approaches, but then 1) asserts that it is also distinct from the dominant “mere scholarship” that otherwise marks advanced inquiry in the present, and 2) uses the history it recounts to recuperate apparently premodern approaches to inquiry for modern scholarship. And it takes the proliferation of knowledge since the early modern era as an occasion to embrace not the promise of certain knowledge, but, rather, doubt. With its embrace of doubt, modern myth-making, and conjecture, Pater’s aesthetic criticism begins to set the conditions of possibility for what I call the practice of “fantastic scholarship,” which will come to fruition in J. G. Frazer’s Golden Bough in 1890. Equally significant for
understanding the emergence of fantastic scholarship in late Victorian Britain is fantastic fiction, particularly the scholarly variety epitomized by H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887).
Chapter Three: Fantastic Scholarship: H. Rider Haggard’s and James George Frazer’s Imperial Romances

This chapter discusses two books published in late nineteenth-century Britain. Both feature scholar-heroes, preoccupations with religion, a central mystery, and an elaborate scholarly apparatus. The first book is H. Rider Haggard’s adventure novel, She (1887), and the second is James George Frazer’s anthropological study, The Golden Bough (1890). Haggard’s novel is best known as a boy’s adventure story featuring a supernatural quest, while Frazer’s study is famous as a monument of skeptical scholarship on religion. In this chapter, I will show how both books share the same fantastic aesthetics and use them to the same end: to foster a reading practice in which the reader moves swiftly from reflection on to immersion in the text’s narratives, coming to believe in an extraordinary reality in which all people—whether “primitive” or “advanced”—tread on what Frazer calls “enchanted ground.” This is to read Haggard’s novel with the grain and Frazer’s rather against; but my approach to both books is informed by their reception by enthusiastic readers who saw in each evidence for the persistence of religion into modernity.

Though the two are not generally discussed together, Frazer’s intellectual biography bears some resemblance to that of Walter Pater, placing their study of enchantment within the same context of Victorian scholarship. Both men were trained in classics, the most prestigious discipline in Victorian England, and held positions in that subject at one of the top English universities. Like Pater, Frazer also published on a range of topics for diverse audiences, and wrote in modes from the explicitly scientific to the belletristic, even

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They addressed not only their academic peers, but went to a great deal of trouble to reach a general audience.

Notwithstanding obvious differences in education and class, I argue that Haggard too was pursuing the same literary project that I described in the previous chapter as a “fantastic scholarship.” After an unpromising early education, Haggard was sent to work in the British colonial administration in South Africa at age nineteen. In the late 1870s, he began publishing accounts of his time in South Africa in British periodicals, and in the 1880s returned to England to study law. He started publishing novels in 1884, with the bestseller *King Solomon’s Mines*, and did not stop until his death in 1925. While Haggard himself was never a scholar, he became close friends with the anthropological writer and man of letters, Andrew Lang, and through Lang became engaged in the same scholarly conversations about religion, colonized peoples, and anthropology that also involved Pater and Frazer. Haggard’s novels thus came to participate in the same trends in late Victorian scholarship, and particularly, anthropology that animate Pater and Frazer’s nonfiction writing. In this chapter, I draw on Chapter Two’s discussion of Pater to analyze scholarly aesthetics in the work of Haggard and Frazer. In my account, Pater’s essays and Haggard’s novels are

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85 See Walter Pater, *Imaginary Portraits: With the Child in the House and Gaston de Latour*, ed. Bill Beckley, (Allworth Press, 1997). In 1915, Frazer published an edition of Joseph Addison’s essays. In a manner familiar from fantastic fiction, the preface purports to include a recently discovered unfinished essay by Addison (actually, of course, written by Frazer himself). Frazer published in periodicals several such essays in the style of Addison in 1915 and 1916. These were published as a collection in 1920. See *Essays of Joseph Addison* (Macmillan, 1915) and *Sir Roger de Coverley and Other Literary Pieces* (Macmillan, 1920). More were collected and published in *The Gorgon’s Head and Other Literary Pieces* (Macmillan, 1927).


88 For the network of anthropological writers that included Lang and Haggard, see the special issue of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, “The Andrew Lang Effect: Network, Discipline, Method,” guest-edited by Nathan Hensley and Molly Clark Hillard, 64 (October 2013).
precursors to an emerging genre of “fantastic scholarship” which Frazer’s encyclopedic study more fully exemplifies.

**Knowledge in flux**

Fantastic scholarship emerged in a setting— late Victorian Britain— in which scientific practice was surpassing the old gentlemanly approaches to classics to become the most prestigious means to knowledge, and seemed to promise a future in which humankind could finally discover the explanations to great mysteries. On the one hand, there was an exhilarating but bleak sense that such explanations would reveal a meaningless world; on the other, there was an exhilarating and optimistic sense that new scientific and professional approaches to knowledge would affirm a meaningful world and, particularly, truths about religion. At the same time, the prominence of scientific knowledge threw into relief other ways of knowing, and led some, like Pater, to question whether such ways were legitimately obsolete, or whether they too might have something to offer. This flux, and the anxiety and excitement it entailed, especially regarding the potential value for knowledge of the imagination and of fiction, is evident in the late Victorian receptions of Pater’s Renaissance, Frazer’s Golden Bough, and Haggard’s She. The Renaissance and The Golden Bough were reviewed in similar terms in academic and general interest journals. Each was deemed remarkable for its literary style. Often, reviews celebrated this literariness; sometimes, they found that it interfered with the work’s potential to be sound scholarship, as when the Edinburgh Review criticized The Golden Bough for too much reliance on “poetical and allegorical interpretation” (quoted in Vickery 76). Some reviewers disputed Pater’s and Frazer’s claims that their work applied scientific approaches, such as Mrs. Mark Pattison, who found that The Renaissance lacked “the true scientific method” and was not “to be relied on for accurate statement of
simple matters of fact.”

Over all, while most reviewers found pleasure in the imaginative elements of The Renaissance and The Golden Bough, many who invoked academic standards found the books insufficiently scientific.

While most reviewers deemed imaginative practices antithetical to scientific value, others, especially those invested in new or emerging disciplines such as folklore or anthropology, celebrated the imagination as a legitimate scientific instrument, and narrative coherence as a sign of scientific soundness. Some reviews judged Pater’s or Frazer’s book not only be sound, but even exemplary of the genres of scholarship emerging in the period. Folk-Lore, the journal of the Folk-Lore Society, endorsed The Golden Bough as “a veritable triumph for folk-lore, and especially for that science which has been consistently advocated by the Folk-Lore Society.” In this review, the book’s aesthetic value complemented its scientific value; in particular, the author was praised for his “literary skill” (391). The range of responses to The Renaissance and The Golden Bough suggest the various standards available by which one could evaluate such scholarly works, and the contested place of the aesthetic and imaginative within them. Meanwhile, discussions of She in the Spiritualist journal, Light, devalued authorial imagination entirely, seeing it as a mere cover for real experience: readers of She writing in Light felt the novel, whose titular character is an immortal woman who can kill her enemies from a distance with invisible forces, to be so “realistic” that they found it “difficult to conceive that the work is purely one of imagination.” Rather, such fantastic fiction “implies on the part of the writer more knowledge than is safe to shew” (881). In this

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90 A key marker of advanced scientific inquiry in late Victorian Britain had become what sociologist Mark A. Schneider calls “the criterion of coherence.” See Mark A. Schneider, Culture and Enchantment, (U Chicago P, 1993), and Herbert, “The Conundrum of Coherence,” New Literary History 35, No. 2 (2004), pp.185-206. For discussions of anti-coherence in earlier Victorian scholarship, see Chapter One.
91 See Colvin and Morely in Seiler, Critical.
reading, the novel is no novel at all, but a cipher transmitting dangerous facts. *She* itself, as we will see in more detail below, offers its own evaluation of the imagination: in the novel, the imagination ultimately appears as an instrument of knowledge in a way that replaces its aesthetic value with scientific value. In a sense, then, the commentators in *Light* read the novel according to its own values. In what follows, I will examine the use of scholarship in Haggard’s and Frazer’s texts to show how their formal and thematic engagements with scholarly conventions and the concept of an instrumental imagination elucidates the emerging genre of fantastic scholarship.

**Case 1: *She* and the Supernormal Fantastic**

Haggard’s *She* offers a particularly vivid example of scholarly aesthetics in fantastic fiction. It opens with not one but three pseudo-scholarly frames: Haggard’s dedication to the man of letters and writer on comparative religion, Andrew Lang as a friend and an author; the more traditional introduction by a sober “editor” of a mysterious manuscript; and the voice of the narrator of the manuscript himself, the scholar Holly. In addition, the novel’s front matter includes a facsimile of “the sherd of Amenartas,” one of several artifacts that came to the editor along with the manuscript. The sherd was an actual object that Haggard asked his sister-in-law to create for the book, further embedding it in the world outside the novel. All this front matter attests in the new scholarly language of archeology to the authenticity of the manuscript and therefore of the novel’s central story. *She* uses this scholarly apparatus to invoke the reader’s critical faculty in order to build to a rationalized

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94 The sherd was constructed sometime between the publication of the serial and of the book. (Today, the sherd is in the Norwich Castle Museum.)
certainty about an extraordinary reality. The novel follows two Cantabrigians, the misogynistic, highly rationalist scholar Horace Holly and his ward, the classically beautiful Leo Vincey, on a quest to Kôr, an ancient, ruined city in Africa. It is ostensibly a quest to avenge Leo’s ancestor who swore revenge on an immortal Queen who killed her husband, but becomes for our nineteenth-century heroes a quest for knowledge.

*She* is typical of late Victorian fantastic fiction in how its claims to historicity are part of an elaborate pseudo-scholarly apparatus featuring prefaces, footnotes, and even facsimile reproductions of material objects. While eighteenth-century novels in English often made claims to historicity featuring prefaces and references to found manuscripts, nineteenth-century novels increasingly made these claims specifically in the context of modern forms of disciplinary scholarship. Late Victorian scholarly claims to historicity often include references to contemporary disciplines, from philology to archeology, and feature language that evokes the practices of objective scientific study, such as distance, detachment, skepticism, and reflection. Their overall form is a frame/tale structure in which a scholarly figure (editor, narrator) claims to bring together a narrative constructed from multiple

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95 Historian Michael Saler calls attention to the role of the pseudo-scholarly apparatus in fantastic fiction, especially in *She* and other “New Romances” of the late nineteenth century, in fostering a double-minded experience of reading in which one plays at believing a story while hyper-aware of its status as fiction. See *As If* (Oxford UP, 2012) and the related article, “Clap if you believe in Sherlock Holmes’: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-1940,” *The Historical Journal*, 46.3 (2003), 599-622.

96 For the history of such “claim[s] to historicity,” see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2002), especially pages 56-59 and 105. Where early nineteenth-century novels such as James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) featured scholars as important characters and scholarly apparatus such as footnotes, they rest as much authority on clergy in their role as clergy as in their role as scholars. For example, while Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) features scholarly apparatus and a scholar as a main character, its first frame invokes the context of a sermon and the authority of a minister, not a scholar. *She*’s first ancestor is probably Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4), which similarly embeds itself thickly in scholarly contexts, presenting itself as a translation of a German scholar’s fragmented manuscripts into English, with attendant scholarly apparatus. Moreover, in it Carlyle introduces the idea of “Natural Supernaturalism,” which is a forerunner of the supernormal in *She*. Natural Supernaturalism holds that humans cannot be certain of the laws of nature, but that such laws may indeed explain all aspects of the world, if they could be known. But even phenomena we do understand rationally according to natural laws, such as madness, may still evoke wonder in man (194-197).
accounts featuring different epistemologies and forms of evidence. The scholarly apparatus constitutes the frame and the combined accounts the tale.

*She*’s scholarly frame draws on the conventions of both fiction and contemporary scholarship to encourage the reader to weave between feelings of skepticism and conviction regarding the strange tale. The editor and Holly each explicitly address the reader, introducing the tale as the typical “extraordinary history” that might be explained in several (reductive) ways, while offering it up to the reader’s own judgment, and ultimately asserting the tale’s almost incredible credibility— that, as the editor writes, “the story seems to bear the stamp of truth upon its face” (5). In this way, *She* participates in a long tradition of British novels claiming their stories are “strange but true,” implying that they are “strange, and therefore true.”

In addition, throughout the novel, Holly offers asides and even footnotes (accompanying the editor’s own footnotes) for the “learned reader” that ape the convention of the Victorian scholar-traveler making ethnographic observations, in the manner, most famously, of Richard Burton. Moreover, these observations sustain the effect of the initial frames, keeping the reader weaving, alongside Holly, between immersion in the adventure and scholarly detachment (45).

The scholarly frame of *She* and its regular appeal to the reader conjure a specific kind of doubt, a hesitation between crediting scholarly authority and skepticism about claims that, despite their provenance, still seem too strange to be true. The fantastic— exemplified by books such as Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*— has traditionally been defined by its focus on doubt. The genre’s most influential theorizer, Tzvetan Todorov writes that the

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97 McKeon, *Origins* 351.
fantastic “confronts us with a dilemma: to believe or not to believe?” “The fantastic,” Todorov writes, “occupies the duration of this uncertainty” (25). In its focus on the dynamic of hesitating between believing in alternatives, the fantastic implies the role of the reader within text. Recent work has focused on the position of the reader in the fantastic, showing how when the dynamic state of hesitation is invoked, the reader is both receptive—nearly believing in the impossible, supernatural alternative— and critically distanced, or reflective—aware that he or she has not yet decided whether to fully believe.99 Scholarly form shapes this simultaneously receptive and reflective state. The receptive/reflective dynamic constitutes the quintessentially fantastic state of doubt, as the reader oscillates between belief and skepticism.

While She begins with these familiar fantastic conventions, it soon moves into a new version of the fantastic, in which dynamic doubt gradually gives way to a rationalized certainty. At the beginning of the novel, Holly hints at the transformation he will undergo:

The whole story, on reflection seemed to me utterly incredible, for I was not then old enough to be aware how many things happen in this world that the common sense of the average man would set down as so improbable as to be absolutely impossible. This is a fact that I have only recently mastered. Was it likely that a man would have a son five years of age whom he had never seen since he was a tiny infant? No. Was it likely that he could foretell his own death so accurately? No. Was it likely that he could trace his pedigree for more than three centuries before Christ, or that he would suddenly confide the absolute guardianship of his child, and leave

half his fortune, to a college friend? Most certainly not. Clearly Vincey was either drunk or mad. (15)

Holly recalls his initial reaction to all these unlikely scenarios: his friend, Vincey, the father of his eventual ward Leo Vincey, was “either drunk or mad.” He chooses the natural explanation, and rejects the implicit supernatural one (that Vincey could predict his own death, and that all these strange things were true). By the end of the novel, Holly has “mastered” the “fact” that a third possible explanation exists: the supernormal, in which facts are possible even when they are not probable.

While in Todorov’s conception of fantastic fiction, doubt traditionally hovers between the natural and supernatural explanations of strange phenomena, over the course of the nineteenth century, the third option of the supernormal became increasingly available within the genre. Frederic W. H. Myers coined the term in *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1885, defining it as characteristic of “phenomena which are beyond what usually happens—beyond, that is, in the sense of suggesting unknown psychic laws.” It was coined expressly in opposition to the supernatural, which referred to unusual phenomena that were seen to exist outside of natural law. In contrast, the laws of the supernormal are analogous to and indeed extensions of natural law. The supernormal exists on a continuum with the normal: in the realm of the supernormal, unusual phenomena do not need to be explained away by rational explanations; rather, they are, in theory, explicable by rational explanation themselves. The unusual is thus rationalized without losing its status as strange. The supernormal is at once natural and unusual; normal in kind, and strange in degree. With the supernormal, doubt could ultimately give way to a new kind of certainty, a certainty grounded in reason but capable of encompassing the bizarre or the extraordinary.

100 Quoted in Kripal, 66. Kripal offers an excellent history of this term in the context of his application of a more capacious definition of the fantastic to religious and psychical experiences.
A key quality of the supernormal is that it can only be apprehended with help from the imagination—specifically, the disciplined imagination found in the Victorian practices of comparison and conjecture. By imagining the existence and extensions of natural laws through inductive reasoning, one could trace out the supernormal. In fantastic fiction (as well as in scholarship itself, as will be explored below), the supernormal was tied to the practice of conjecture. Both were understood as part of the discourse of advanced scientific knowledge. As Carlo Ginzburg illustrates, the practice of conjecture took center stage in the late nineteenth century both in a growing number of disciplines engaged with developmental theories of history, including history itself, archeology, and geology. It was marked as especially modern, and controversial, by its central role in Darwin’s theory of evolution. In these contexts, and from its first emergence in the conjectural history of the Scottish Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century, the conjectural method was seen as an advance upon empiricism. In this inductive method, the researcher begins with observation, but then uses reasoning informed by probability and imagined “conjectures” to move beyond it: the researcher gathers facts and then connects them in a narrative—a theory—that links them in a meaningful way. This conjectural “chain” consists of a combination of noncontiguous observed facts (e.g. artifacts, fossils, textual fragments) and conjectured facts that are supposed to supply the missing links between them. To test the theory, one asks whether it best accounts for all the facts. This is not the method of Baconian science,


\[\text{102}\] As conjectural scholar par excellence J. G. Frazer writes in The Golden Bough, “After all what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best” (I.212). The Golden Bough (Macmillan, 1890), 2 vols. Hereafter cited as GB. This dictum of course can be understood in the context of Frazer the relativist, undermining any
falsifiable via tests of replicability, or even of probabilistic empirical history, but rather an essentially literary method. The best conjectural theory tells the most plausible and coherent, but also the most interesting, story. Readers and scholars value conjectural scholarship not only for the historical validity of its theories, but for its literary value— for its picture of the world as organized in a rational system that is meaningful rather than reductive.103

Perhaps the clearest account of the tactic of conjecture and, especially, of the sense of its great potential for extending human knowledge beyond the limits of empiricism is given in another late Victorian work of fiction, by Sherlock Holmes:

“The ideal reasoner,” he remarked, “would, when he had once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the aid of their senses.


103 Conjecture is also literary in two other important ways: 1) As a hermeneutic method, it turns what it investigates into texts. It textualizes even most material evidence by making anything it observes a sign. Srdjan Smajić explores this “languification of all meaningful content” in the context of detective fiction and semiotics rather than conjecturalism more broadly in Ghost-seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science, (Cambridge UP, 2010): 122. And 2) The hypothesis, its building block, was increasingly recognized as a form of fiction in this period. This idea was most influentially formulated in William Whewell’s Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences (1840), and culminated in the work of Hans Vaihinger, Die Philosophie des Als Ob (1911), published in English as The Philosophy of As If: A System of the Theoretical, Practical, and Religious Fictions of Mankind in 1924 in a translation by C. K. Ogden (Harcourt Brace, 1935). On Vaihinger, see Saler As If and Barry Stampfl, “Mapping Conjecture in Henry James and Joseph Conrad: A Stylistic Approach,” The Henry James Review, 14.1, (Winter 1993): 99-114.
Holmes presents his method of detection as capable of constructing conjectural chains “before and after” a single fact. This is on the one hand extreme statement, a sort of caricature of a method expressed by a famously arrogant character; on the other hand, this account describes not only the fictional Holmes’s method, but the ideal method of Doyle himself when confronted with the mysteries of Spiritualism. Such practices, in Doyle as well as in Haggard, feature as objects of representations as well as structures of narration.

In a crucial early scene, She illustrates how conjecture creates a convincing story with the most limited direct evidence. Upon arriving in Africa, Holly and Leo see a land formation that looks like one described as a head in the strange documents that instigated their quest. Leo concludes, “Well, then […] the whole thing is true.” Holly is skeptical of such an inference: “I don’t see at all that that follows […] Very likely it is not the same head that the writing talks of; or if it is, it proves nothing.” Leo chastises him, “You are an unbelieving Jew, Uncle Horace […] Those who live will see” (60). Leo employs conjecture, inferring the truth of a hypothesis from the existence of two coincident facts—a landmass that looks like a head in their field of vision, and a landmass described as a head in a document. He believes the coincidence must be meaningful, while Holly insists on the probability that it is not. By calling Holly an “unbelieving Jew,” Leo links conjecture with religious faith, suggesting how it could be seen as both a throwback to an order of knowledge increasingly linked with pre-modernity (e.g., religious belief), as well as a form of the modern, scientific imagination it is associated with in Doyle and others. Leo turns out to be right, and the novel affirms the value of conjecture for knowledge. Significantly, the fact in question is that the land mass looks like “the head of an Ethiopian” (60). This image emphasizes conjecture’s common application in anthropological studies of African tribes and Victorian race-science. In this scene, then, the Englishmen interpret an image that is at
once an African landmass and an African body, or rather, body part. This moment thus introduces the entanglement among practices of racism, imperialism, and the pursuit of knowledge in the novel: to find out the truth in this novel, the English protagonists take conquest of African land and bodies.

But before their ultimate conquest, Holly and Leo are nearly made conquests of themselves: each is seduced by the titular She, the empress of the African Kingdom of Kôr, Ayesha. At the same time, they are instructed by Ayesha in the principles of the supernormal. In this way, She deploys the convention of the colonizers learning from the knowledge practices of the colonized; but in She, this convention is complicated by Ayesha’s position as colonizer and quasi-European herself. She presents Ayesha as a particularly Victorian version of an Ancient Egyptian—a white woman whose fallen civilization is accorded status as a precedent of modern European civilization. Her knowledge thus belongs to an ancient wisdom tradition valorized as part of a Hellenistic, ultimately European inheritance, even if parts of it have been lost or sidelined over time. In this way, Holly and Leo’s status as her conquests is mitigated somewhat by their belonging to the same group. Moreover, the information they learn from Ayesha is doubly legitimized: first, by being presented as belonging to a European wisdom tradition, and second through the form of the novel, which legitimizes them through its late Victorian scholarly frame. In this way, the novel and its protagonists make room for enchanting ideas and practices in modern knowledge, and affirm them as belonging to a specifically European knowledge tradition in the first place.

Ayesha makes this process especially smooth by using language that, despite its archaisms, uses terms and turns familiar from Victorian scientific discourse. She explains her

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104 See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, (Routledge, 1995).
extreme longevity as a matter of extending normal natural processes. While she never uses the new term “supernormal,” the concept is plainly described: “There is naught that is wonderful about the matter, couldst thou but understand. Life is wonderful, ay, but that it should be a little lengthened is not wonderful” (151). Notably, this explanation does not sacrifice an inherent “wonder” belonging to life; it only refuses a skeptical wonder regarding the extent of natural law. Ayesha further extends natural law by analogy, the characteristic mode of conjectural scholarship: just as man has a vital or “animating spirit,” so too does nature; and it is this spirit that fuels her longevity. And if it were not yet sufficiently clear that Ayesha deals with natural, not supernatural forces, she insists explicitly that she does not work magic. When Holly labels her clairvoyance “magic,” she responds, “Nay, nay; oh Holly,” she answered, “it is no magic, that is a fiction of ignorance. There is no such thing as magic, though there is such a thing as a knowledge of the secrets of Nature” (151). Later, seeing Holly look frightened after he watches her mark the hair of her rival without directly touching it, she reminds him: “I tell thee I deal not in magic— there is no such thing. ’Tis only a force that thou dost not understand” (207). This is a supernormal force, one of the “phenomena which [is] beyond what usually happens” but yet conforms to discoverable natural laws.

While Ayesha is the spokeswoman for the supernormal, the novel itself endorses her perspective, presenting the strange episodes of its tale as explicable in Ayesha’s terms. Most centrally, the novel affirms the supernormal in its portrayal of strange, vital forces. Foremost among these is the force which grants Ayesha her extreme longevity. This force is the “animating spirit” of nature which stems from the Pillar of Fire underneath the caves of Kôr, the visible source of the “vital forces of the world” (29). The other major vital force in the novel is the imagination. In She, the imagination affects the physical world just as the life-
force of the Pillar of Fire does. Ayesha deploys this force in what she calls her “empire [...] of the imagination,” keeping her subjects in line through their terror of her (175). Our skeptical, scholarly narrator Holly further illustrates its reality in the world of the novel: he has a vision in which his “imagination, taking up the thread of thought,” weaves an image “so real and vivid” that he seems to see it (186). He excuses the “intrusion of a dream into a history of fact” by suggesting that this dream was perhaps a form of fact itself: “who shall say,” he asks the reader, “what proportion of fact, past, present, or to come, may lie in the imagination? What is imagination? Perhaps it is the shadow of the intangible truth, perhaps it is the soul’s thought” (186). Holly here puts forth an idea that was becoming increasingly popular in academic and spiritual scholarship—that the imagination might be a faculty that allows for access to truths belonging more to the realm of fact than faith, and which are apprehensible by it alone. Holly instrumentalizes the imagination as a means to factual knowledge.

In this, Holly was in agreement with many Victorian writers, from the scientists T.H. Huxley and John Tyndall to the occultist H.P. Blavatsky. Many nineteenth-century scholars saw the imagination as necessary to the discovery of new ideas. In connection with this, they believed that conjecture, as an interpretive method that unites imagination with observation and reason, could reveal more of the truth than empiricism could alone. This sense of conjecture as a superior method of research valorized the subjective realm of the imagination. The imagination became the closest one could get to reality in its immaterial or

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105 Here, Holly echoes Pater’s celebration of the “imaginative sense of fact” or “soul fact” as valuable sources of perception and expression. (A 4,7)

106 For ways in which the imagination takes on this role in the context of new religions at the end of the nineteenth century, see Gauri Viswanathan’s work on occultism, especially “Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy,” in *PMLA*, 123.2, (March, 2008), 466-476, and Alex Owen’s study of turn-of-the-century occultism, *The Place of Enchantment* (U Chicago P, 2004).

otherwise less observable forms, and took on the value and validity of reality itself. In its use of conjecture, late-century supernormal fantastic such as *She* takes on this value system, and affirms the validity of the imagination as a source of knowledge.

Holly’s conquests in Africa yield a new experience of reality: a sense of awe and mystery alongside rationality—a modern, studied enchantment that accepts “wonderful facts.” Along with Holly, the reader too is brought to experience the novel’s strange story as supernormally real. The novel’s use of the late Victorian scholarly convention of conjecture ultimately allows Holly to believe in the truth of a strange story without sacrificing his self-consciously modern worldview. Instead, he must expand that view to embrace a sense of awe and mystery alongside rationality: at the end of the novel, he awaits his future, “wondering in what shape and form the great drama will be finally developed” (275). His own life has become a grand narrative to him, one subject to “a fate that never swerves and a purpose that cannot be altered”—a reference to the sworn vengeance that set him and Leo on their adventure, as well as an updating of the idea of Providence that evokes the supernormal laws they have discovered in consequence (275). Both his life and the world he lives in appear inherently meaningful, the latter in the framework of a modern enchantment that embraces an experience of wonder enabled by the knowledge of supernormal laws of nature.

Scholarly conventions have a similar efficacy for the reader: the alternation between scholarly frame and marvelous adventure story, and especially the practice of conjecture which drives the novel’s plot create an experience of reading that sweeps one’s credulity along, until, like Holly, the reader too is brought to believe in the novel’s strange story as supernormally real—at least within the world of the novel. *She* is fiction and is presented as such: its scholarly effects are literary conventions, not actual claims. Even its attempts to
embed itself within the world— the model “sherd of Amenartas,” the dedication to Lang invoking “his learning and his works”— are ultimately extensions of the literary convention of the claim to historicity, even if some readers in *Light* took them very seriously. But, as we will see in the following section, the conventions *She* was drawing upon are also found in scholarship that was making similar claims for the natural, rather than the imagined, world. Such fantastic scholarship used scholarly conventions such as conjecture and the instrumental imagination to transform its audience’s knowledge and experience of the world, persuading them of a new way of understanding it as knowable yet strange, and strangely meaningful.

**Case 2: *The Golden Bough* and Fantastic Scholarship**

The most remarkable, and remarkably popular, example of what I am calling fantastic scholarship, is James G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. *The Golden Bough* is now a footnote to literary and intellectual history: it is best remembered as one of the discredited scholarly works referenced in T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* and as an egregious example of Victorian arm-chair anthropology. While it is largely regarded as an embarrassing relic today, *The Golden Bough* was seen as epoch-making upon the publication of its first edition in 1890, and only grew in popularity with its subsequent editions. While Pater’s work had a small but fervent popular audience, *The Golden Bough* soon reached a readership closer to Haggard’s, becoming a mass-culture hit. As Mary Beard notes, the book achieved “extraordinary and immediate popularity” (Beard *Frazer* 168). It sustained this popularity through the early twentieth century “not among academics and specialists (who were often, in any case, skeptical of the claims of *The Golden Bough*), but among the middle-brow reading public who
bought it in staggering numbers” (Beard Frazier 163).\(^{108}\) First published in two volumes as “A Study in Comparative Religion,” it gathered accounts of religious rituals from a range of times, places, and sources—nineteenth-century missionary’s travelogues from Australia, Asia, Africa, and the Americas; Ancient Greek texts; folkloristic accounts of European peasants—organizing them via the comparative method to construct a theory of universal human mental development from magic to religion to science.\(^{109}\)

In a pattern that we will see repeated with the texts discussed in the next two chapters, The Golden Bough’s eventual fall in academic respectability was as precipitous as its rise in popularity. Frazer’s reputation first shifted from exciting innovator to respectable if increasingly outmoded founding figure of anthropology in the late 1910s. In the next decade, his former protégé, Bronislaw Malinowski, moved away from his influence to inaugurate a new phase in academic anthropology in Britain, based on first-hand fieldwork.\(^{110}\) By the 1930s, Frazer’s shift to discredited forefather was underway, though he would not be wholly dismissed until after his death in 1941.\(^{111}\) While anthropology has since then “viewed [Frazer] as an empiricist who failed,” in the same period, retrospective appreciations of Frazer as a literary writer began to appear (Fraser “Face” 4).\(^{112}\) In the second half of the twentieth


\(^{110}\) Franz Boas did similar work for anthropology in the USA.


century, Frazer became a significant figure for literary studies, primarily as the writer of a text that was seen to have exerted a major influence on modernist and, eventually, post-modernist writers. In 1987, Robert Ackerman published the first scholarly biography of Frazer, *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge UP), and in 1990 Robert Fraser published a comprehensive study of *The Golden Bough* and an edited collection of essays on its relationship to twentieth-century literature. Since then the only significant published work on Frazer and his work (as opposed to Frazer’s literary influence) has been Mary Beard’s essay and afterword on *The Golden Bough* in a collection of essays on the comparative method, and Christopher Herbert’s examination of *The Golden Bough* in the contexts of “Victorian Relativity” and the “unknowable.”

In this chapter, I return to the long-standing critical conversation about how best to understand *The Golden Bough* in relation to its contested status as either literature or scholarship. While the first responses to the book tried to determine to what discipline it belonged, later literary critical discussion of the text has focused on the conundrum of its literary form. As Stanley Edgar Hyman observed in 1962, “Precisely what sort of literary

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113 In “On the Teaching of Modern Literature” in *Beyond Culture* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), Lionel Trilling declared, “Perhaps no book has had so decisive an effect upon modern literature as Frazer’s” (28). John Vickery’s *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* (Princeton UP, 1973) explored this effect, focusing on T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence. In 1990, Robert Fraser’s edited volume, *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence* (Macmillan, 1990), collects essays that continue Vickery’s work and expand the examination of *The Golden Bough*’s effects from High Modernist to more popular modernist-era and post-modernist literature. A. S. Byatt’s contribution, for instance, considers the work of Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Anthony Powell, Saul Bellow, and Norman Mailer. See A. S. Byatt, “The Omnipotence of Thought: Frazer, Freud, and Post-Modernist Fiction,” 270-308. As is apparent, the focus on *The Golden Bough* in literary studies has largely been on its relations to twentieth-century fiction and poetry. This vein of work on Frazer appears to have been largely exhausted with Fraser’s 1990 collection of essays.


form the book has gets as many different replies as the earlier question about what sort of social science it is” (Hyman Tangled 245). Since Hyman, it has been characterized as a detective story, a quest romance, an “epic,” and more generally, a kind of “imaginative” scholarship.\(^\text{116}\) Robert Crawford reads the later editions of The Golden Bough more specifically as an “anthropological epic.”\(^\text{117}\) Like Crawford, I believe The Golden Bough is best understood not as belonging to “the genre of fiction, but […] in a meaningful relation to fiction” (“Scottish” 29).\(^\text{118}\) While critics of Frazer have likened The Golden Bough to detective fiction, they have not taken seriously its formal relation to fantastic fiction.\(^\text{119}\) Yet it shares many of its conventions, including a sober, scholarly preface to an extraordinary tale (the “frame/tale” structure), appeals to the reader’s judgment, and, crucially, an emphasis on doubt and provisionality. Moreover, its depiction of a direct connection between pre-

\(^{116}\) Fraser likens The Golden Bough to “a pot-boiler or detective story” in which the author, “[l]ike Conan Doyle, […] kept back the solution until the end” (GB xxi). Vickery suggests Frazer’s armchair anthropology is like Nero Wolfe’s armchair detection: “In short, the hero is Frazer himself, who, like Nero Wolfe, solves the mysterious puzzles and crimes of mankind from an armchair” (132). Hyman, too, see The Golden Bough as “something more like a detective story” (Tangled 262). Vickery also finds The Golden Bough “less a compendium of facts than a gigantic romance of quest couched in the form of objective research” (Vickery 128). Crawford observes that “study and scholarship were for Frazer imaginative activities” (Crawford “Scottish” 25). Discussing Pater, in another article, Crawford refers to works of Victorian anthropology generally as “imaginative scholarship.” “Pater’s Renaissance, Andrew Lang, and Anthropological Romanticism,” ElH 53.4 (Winter, 1986): 849-879: 875.

\(^{117}\) Crawford cites Frazer’s own term of the “anthropological epic,” finding this especially applicable to the later, larger editions of the study (Crawford “Scottish” 31). Frazer also apparently referred to the work as “an epic of humanity” (Downie quoted in Vickery 107). Crawford also refers to The Golden Bough as “anthropological assemblage” (Crawford “Scottish” 33). And, again, though Crawford does not link Frazer and Pater explicitly, they both seem to be writing “as an imaginative anthropologist,” as he writes of Pater (Crawford “AR” 849).

\(^{118}\) For Crawford, The Golden Bough is part of the tradition of Scottish Romanticism, from Scott’s Waverley novels to Stevenson’s new romances. I too see Frazer in a Scottish literary tradition, but one defined less by romanticism than by the tradition of conjectural history from the Scottish Enlightenment through its role in fantastic fiction such as Stevenson’s.

\(^{119}\) Fraser likens The Golden Bough to “a pot-boiler or detective story” in which the author, “[l]ike Conan Doyle, […] kept back the solution until the end” (GB xxi). Vickery suggests Frazer’s armchair anthropology is like Nero Wolfe’s armchair detection: “In short, the hero is Frazer himself, who, like Nero Wolfe, solves the mysterious puzzles and crimes of mankind from an armchair” (132). Hyman, too, see The Golden Bough as “something more like a detective story” (Tangled 262). Vickery also finds The Golden Bough “less a compendium of facts than a gigantic romance of quest couched in the form of objective research” (Vickery 128). Crawford observes that “study and scholarship were for Frazer imaginative activities” (Crawford “Scottish” 25). Discussing Pater, in another article, Crawford refers to works of Victorian anthropology generally as “imaginative scholarship” (Crawford “AR” 875).
modem enchanted mentalities and the self-consciously rational and modern worldviews of contemporary educated Britons connects it thematically with fantastic fiction, which explored this theme in stories of vampires, sorcerers, reincarnation, and other encounters between figures of a superstitious past and of a skeptical modernity.

Like She, I argue, The Golden Bough encourages readers to rationally accept a bizarre story through its use of both scholarly conventions of conjecture and the instrumental imagination as well as the “frame/tale” structure that was coming to define fantastic fiction. At the book’s opening, the scholarly author soberly introduces a mystery—what is the meaning of the priest-killing ritual in the Arician Grove at Nemi? – “a strange and recurring tragedy” in which a “strange figure,” a “priest and murderer” faces off with another man; if this man kills the priest, he becomes the new priest. Frazer promises that the material that follows, bizarre as it may be itself, will illuminate the mystery. At the end of the book, he returns to the mystery introduced at the beginning and offers a solution, while appealing to the judgment of the reader: “Whether the general explanation which I have offered of that custom is adequate, and whether the rite that the priest of Aricia had to die a violent death is, as I have tried to show, a particular instance of the general custom, are questions which I must now leave to the judgment of the reader” (II.222). In addition, throughout the text, the scholarly frame continues to make itself felt via footnotes and commentary that connects the lengthy quotations from classical literature, anthropological fieldwork, folk-lore, and travelogues.

These quotations largely constitute The Golden Bough’s marvelous tale. In their extent, they evoke the fantastic form of the found manuscript, or even the mix of diary entries, newspaper accounts, letters, and telegrams, that make up the text of Dracula (1897). The Golden Bough’s quotations represent a similarly eclectic range of sources, and go on for pages
at a time. In one case, Frazer’s assurance that “These general statements will now be illustrated by examples” is followed by nineteen pages of accounts of customs and rituals. Moreover, as in a fantastic novel, the book’s authorial voice presents this material as bizarre. It recounts customs in striking anecdotes, narrating them in a vivid style. Some open by evoking exotic locales—“At Shark Point near Cape Padron in Lower Guinea, lives the priestly king Kukulu, alone in a wood” (I.112), or romantic nostalgia—“Midsummer Eve, a day redolent of a thousand decaying fancies of yore” (II. 286). One begins in classic fairy-tale mode: “Once on a time” (II.244). Frazer includes many folktales as evidence for his theory, and occasionally retells an entire tale beyond what is necessary to the point being made, using the frame/tale structure to simultaneously give in to narrative pleasure and legitimize such entertainment as scientific evidence (II.299-300).

The Golden Bough presents these quotations, folktales, and anecdotes in a list-like form that gestures backward to early modern miscellanies. They resemble the curiosities of the early modern virtuoso, who also aimed to evoke marvels via his collections of facts.\textsuperscript{120} Crucially, unlike a miscellany, The Golden Bough marshals those lists into a developmental narrative of universal human development from magic through religion to science.\textsuperscript{121} By balancing miscellany against narrative, The Golden Bough rationalizes the strange facts it presents without simply reducing them to its explanatory conclusions. Their strangeness remains, made coherent and meaningful in terms of the book’s theory that all these strange customs are versions of a universal religious ritual of the dying god that is part of a universal stage of humankind’s mental development. As a frame for these remarkable anecdotes, this

\textsuperscript{120} See Mark A. Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment*, (U Chicago P, 1993): 88.
\textsuperscript{121} The contrast between The Golden Bough with its central thesis or “plot,” and the miscellanies of the pre-Enlightenment era help us see what is different about the enchantment fostered by fantastic rather than earlier, virtuoso scholarship: While in a miscellany, strange facts are presented without connective commentary, in fantastic scholarship such commentary and the order of chapters shapes the material into a more linear narrative.
theory places them into an equally marvelous story. This frame narrative ultimately suggests a single solution to the mystery it sets up—a “key to all mythologies”—but on the way, it invokes many alternate hypotheses which encourage the reader to treat its claims as provisional.

In further support of this attitude, the book reflects explicitly on its method, a habit which produces the effect of reminding the reader continually of the book’s scholarly frame and the contestability of its theory. Frazer constructs his theory largely via conjecture, through a combination of indirect evidence and probability. On page three of the book, Frazer offers a brief overview of the principles of his method, and its limitations, in terms of the mystery of the priest of Nemi:

Such an inference, in default of direct evidence as to how the priesthood did actually arise, can never amount to demonstration. But it will be more or less probable according to the degree of completeness with which it fulfills the conditions indicated above. The object of this book is by meeting these conditions, to offer a fairly probable explanation of the priesthood of Nemi. (I.3)  

Toward the end of the first volume, Frazer offers another illustration of how the method works, emphasizing its reach:

The explanation here given of the killing divine persons assumes, or at least is readily combined with, the idea that the soul of the slain divinity is transmitted to his successor. Of this transmission I have no direct proof; and so far a link in the chain of evidence is wanting. But if I cannot prove by actual examples this succession to the soul of the slain god, it can at least be made probable that such a succession was supposed to take place. (I.237-238)

122 Hyman notes that this statement appears in each edition of The Golden Bough (Tangled 234).
He conjectures a “transmission” of a soul from the dead deity to his murderer, noting that this conjecture supplies the place of a missing “link in the chain of evidence.” In this illustration of the method, we see how it allows for greater knowledge than a strict empiricism would: instead of stopping the inquiry with the dearth of “actual examples,” conjecture allows the researcher to create examples, and to “make probable” a certain historical sequence, constructing a narrative out of a conjectural chain.

The chain is woven via analogical reasoning. In this practice, all coincidences are meaningful. Behind every superficial parallel is deep connection, even a fundamental unity. Frazer outlines this approach in a discussion of ceremonies celebrating the “death and resurrection of vegetation” (I.279):

From the similarity of these customs [of “Egypt and Western Asia”] to each other and to the spring and midsummer customs of modern Europe we should naturally expect that they all admit of a common explanation. Hence, if the explanation here adopted of the latter is correct, the ceremony of the death and resurrection of Adonis must also have been a representation of the decay and revival of vegetation. The inference thus based on the similarity of the customs is confirmed by the following features in the legend and ritual of Adonis. (I.281)

Analogical reasoning works thus: we know the explanation of Rite A; Rite A is superficially similar to Rite B; therefore, the explanation of Rite A also applies to Rite B. Frazer “naturally expect[s] that they […] admit of a common explanation” because his theory of the stages of mankind’s mental development assumes that the same ideas are held by all humans at parallel stages of human nature. This kind of reasoning pervades The Golden Bough. Frazer asserts that, “On the analogy of these instances, we may conjecture that…” (I.328); that “This explanation of the name Demeter is supported by a host of analogies” from folklore
examples (I.331); that “The interpretation here given to the custom of beating the human scapegoat with certain plants is supported by many analogies” (II.215); and so on.\textsuperscript{123} Importantly, in Frazer’s conjectural anthropology, the deeper unity is secular: it is found in common humanity, not divinity.\textsuperscript{124} Frazer’s analogical reasoning presumes and affirms a secular world in which what may appear trifling or bizarre is guaranteed a profound and rationally comprehensible meaning by a fundamental unity among humankind.

Within this approach, such basic unity is certain from the beginning; however, the chain constructed with reference to it is not. Frazer acknowledges the many points in his study where uncertainty persists, even, like Pater, explicitly embracing it. But in \textit{The Golden Bough}, in contrast to Pater’s aesthetic criticism, uncertainty does not exist in a dialectical relation with certainty, but gradually moves toward it as the conjectural chain “make[s...] probable” the story it has begun to tell. \textit{The Golden Bough} is riddled with “probably”s and “perhaps”s, and features hesitating formulations such as, “Tree-worship may perhaps be regarded (though this is a conjecture) as occupying an intermediate place in the history of religion” (I.253). But even more frequent than such hesitations and qualifications are transitions that smooth the links in the conjectural chain, while admitting their conjectural nature. Constructions like the following are common: “From this review of […], it is easy to understand why […]” (I.74); “Therefore it is hardly rash to infer […]” (I.99). There is swift movement from less to more certain claims, from “a fair presumption” to something

\textsuperscript{123} As Hyman observes, \textit{The Golden Bough} is a “vast argument from analogy” (\textit{Tangled} 237). Such reasoning is familiar from the stories of Sherlock Holmes, where trifling incidents and bizarre mysteries are explained with reference to Holmes’s eclectic knowledge or experiences from similar cases. As Srđan Smajić observes, analogical reasoning is central to detective fiction as well as spiritualism and other occult discourses; it allows the reasoner to make inferences about the unseen—whether the hidden clue, the spirit world, or interiority—based on what is known or visible (Smajić 188). Frazer’s language comes very close to that of detective fiction at times, as when he writes of “clues we seek” (I. I.6).

\textsuperscript{124} Frazer asserts this common humanity early in the study: “recent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life” (I.3).
“almost unmistakable” (II.274, 275). And chains of conjecture are ultimately confirmed through the invocation of additional evidence: “May we not then conjecture that […]? An examination of […] confirms this conjecture.” (I.150). Late in each of the two volumes, the language of certainty increases. At these points, the chains of evidence have been made so probable that Frazer can assert them as definitive rather than conjectural. At the end of volume I, “In the personages who are thus slain in mimicry, it is impossible not to recognize the representatives of the tree-spirit,” especially “if these personages represent, as they certainly do, the spirit of vegetation in spring” (I.247). At the end of volume II, “The inference is almost inevitable that the Golden Bough was nothing but the mistletoe seen through the haze of poetry or of popular superstition” (II.363). Even when provisionality is explicitly present, certainty may override it, at least temporarily: “[W]e are bound, provisionally at least, to accept the conclusion” (I.393).

As we observed regarding _She_, conjecture is an imaginative, even a literary practice: its standard of evaluation for the best hypothesis is whether that hypothesis offers the best, more interesting and coherent story. Frazer makes this clear when he approves a hypothesis because it “explains them [the rites in question] separately and collectively in an easy and natural way” (I.320). _The Golden Bough_ offers its readers a literary, probabilistic, teleological narrative. The primary narrative of this sort is what Frazer calls the book’s “plot,” the explanation of the rite of the priest-king at Nemi. At the end of volume II, Frazer summarizes this narrative:

>The result, then, of our inquiry is to make it probable that, down to the time of the Roman Empire and the beginning of our era, the primitive worship of the Aryans was maintained nearly in its original form in the sacred grove at Nemi, as in the oak

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125 Frazer wrote to Macmillan, “I find it very difficult to summarize the gist of the book without disclosing what I may call the plot” (Fraser GB xxi).
wood of Gaul, of Prussia, and of Scandinavia; and that the King of the Wood lived and died as an incarnation of the supreme Aryan god, whose life was in the mistletoe or Golden Bough. (II.370)

The presentation of a “result” of “our inquiry” evokes the end of a detective story. This result is the illumination of a historical continuity, a chain, that runs from the ancient (conjectured) era of the “primitive […] Aryans” all the way to “the beginning of our own era.” This point in time is vague: where does “our own era” begin? But the effect is clear: the story links prehistory with the present time of the reader, much like the historical, genealogical chain at heart of the plot of *She.*

Perhaps the most marvelous part of *The Golden Bough*’s extraordinary tale is a mystical unity of human nature apparent in the similarities among its wide-ranging anecdotes. Like Pater, Frazer grounded his theory in the development of “the human mind”; both men believed the human mind progressed through the same stages of development across time and space, though at varying rates. Today, scholars reject this as an overgeneralization—there is not one universal, progressive route of human mental development. Their fundamental error is a defining error of Victorian science, common even to its fictional scholars, such as Casaubon with his “Key to All Mythologies” and even Lydgate with his “original tissue” that is the common basis for all biological phenomena. This error moreover is crucial to Victorian enchantment: it is a source of unity among all mankind, and a grounds for claiming the real, historical existence of mental experiences, including those understood as religious.

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126 *The Golden Bough* is perhaps best known for two additional linear narratives, in which Christian ritual is understood as the “continuation, under a different name, of the Adonis worship,” and the mental development of mankind is posited as a series of stages constant across different cultures (1:295-296). The best remembered version of this last narrative—the progression of mankind from magic through religion to science—is not actually formulated until the second edition. In the first edition, the focus is on the continuity between magic and science.

127 It is moreover a pernicious overgeneralization which was used to justify British colonialism.
What the Victorians found compelling in Frazer’s narrative, however, was not merely a question of the universal scope that subsequent generations would come to regard as a sign of facile overgeneralization. *The Golden Bough*’s enchantment lies not only in its content, but in its narrative form. Its capacity to encompass all the evidence cited in the study in one linear narrative provides a rational, meaningful order for the apparent chaos of the world. In Frazer’s words, his study aims “to bring a variety of scattered facts into some sort of order and system” (I.vii). Recently, Jesse Molesworth has argued that plot, narrative, and teleology are themselves engines of enchantment. He observes that narrative’s aim “to describe events interestingly and to describe events coherently or teleologically” are incompatible with “a rational understanding of causation” (Molesworth 6). *The Golden Bough*, in contrast, assumes these aims to be aligned: the more coherently it describes events, the more certain it is that it has discovered the correct and rational explanation of those events.

Moreover, this approach, like any extreme use of the Victorian comparative method, assumes there is no such thing as coincidence. Behind every superficial parallel is deep connection, a fundamental unity. Arguably, *The Golden Bough* made this argument primarily in its over all effect: even before it grew to a dozen volumes in the third edition of 1906-1915, the two-volume 1890 edition presented an overwhelming series of vivid accounts of religious beliefs and practices, some yet extant. Moreover, its emphasis on the commonalities in

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128 Molesworth focuses on how the novel contributes “to a re-enchantment of the world” by resisting a Copernican perspective and placing the individual at the center of her own world; obviously, this is not how fantastic scholarship, which, in the tradition of conjecturalism, engages in social rather than individual history, works. But his larger points about the enchanting effects of narrative and teleology apply equally to novels and to scholarship. For instance, the following could apply directly to *The Golden Bough*: “Narrative may therefore operate through the medium of verisimilitude, offering the pseudo-probabilistic illusion of a rational chain of causes, but its ultimate allegiance is to the magic of teleology” (Molesworth 46). Where Molesworth’s study and mine most differ is in the relationship between rationality and enchantment in the texts we look at. Molesworth argues that eighteenth-century novels such as *Roxana* and *Amelia* position narrative against rationality, and in cahoots with enchantment; in contrast, I see nineteenth-century novels and scholarship as pursuing enchantment along with rationality (10). See Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic*, (Cambridge UP, 2010).
religious beliefs and practices across wide expanses of space and time—though intended to reduce religion to a merely human phenomenon—rendered the book, as one recent editor wrote, “rather mystical and capable […] of provoking strong mystical feelings among readers who are often swept along by a suggestion of things half remembered and brought to life.”

The reader comes to inhabit the same “enchanted ground” as the men and women described in the study’s marvelous anecdotes. Crucially, this form of rational enchantment is a result of imperial conquest here no less than it was for Holly in *She*: in both books, British scholar-narrators and their readers encounter the beliefs and rituals of so-called primitive societies, and by translating them into the language of the European instrumental imagination via conjecture, create a new experience of an extraordinary reality, a new world of “modern enchantment.”

Conjecture is not only a means to constructing these narratives; it also features centrally in *The Golden Bough*’s story of humanity’s mental development, collapsing the distance between modern scholarly technique and the “savage” societies it examines. In *The Golden Bough* conjecture represents a thematic as well as a formal source of unity. Frazer emphasizes the role of conjecture in the logic of what he calls “primitive” or “savage” man. He claims that one of our many similarities with our “savage” forefathers is that “their errors were not willful extravagances or the ravings of insanity but simply hypotheses” (I.211-212). He defends them in their similarity to modern scholars like himself:

> Crude and false as that philosophy may seem to us, it would be unjust to deny it the merit of logical consistency. […] The flaw—and it is a fatal one—of the system lies not in its reasoning, but in its premises […] But to stigmatize these premises as ridiculous because we can easily detect their falseness would be ungrateful as well as

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unphilosophical. We stand upon the foundation reared by the generations that have
gone before, and we can but dimly realize the painful and prolonged efforts which it
has cost humanity to struggle up to the point, no very exalted one after all, which we
have reached. Our gratitude is due to the nameless and forgotten toilers, whose
patient thought and active exertions have largely made us what we are. (I.210-211)

Frazer here delineates one long, intellectual effort from then to now, a chain of reasoning
begun by earliest man and continued to the present day. Frazer emphatically resists what
Pater calls “that over-positive temper” which denies “resemblances” between the mentalities
of modern and pre-modern man. But where Pater is skeptical of any theory that promises an
all-encompassing, unified account of worldly phenomena, Frazer presents just such a unity.
By its logic of uniform stages and uneven development, The Golden Bough thus constructs an
expansive conjectural network, linking the earliest humans with contemporary “savages” in
regions far beyond England, with English and other European peasants of the present day,
and even with modern-day British scholars like Frazer himself—who are only adding the
latest links to the conjectural chain first begun by their earliest ancestors. Conjecture thus
uncovers a source of unity among all humankind: conjecture itself. It links and unites the
ancient and the modern, the most primitive with the most advanced.

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130 He introduces the idea of this chain early in the study, writing that “Alchemy leads up to chemistry” and
magic “directly prepares the way for science” (I.32).
131 This idea was explored earlier in conjectural history by Adam Ferguson: Ferguson to an even greater degree
than Frazer (who goes on to disavow this idea in the third edition of The Golden Bough), sees early man as
essentially the same as later man, only with different surroundings. He also sees primitive man as an early
scientific reasoner. Ferguson wrote in 1767, “What the savage projects, or observes, in the forest, are the steps
which led nations, more advanced, from the architecture of the cottage to that of the palace, and conducted the
human mind from the perceptions of sense, to the general conclusions of science.” (Ferguson 14, quoted in
Phillips 180). See Ferguson, “An Essay on the History of Civil Society,” (1867), and Mark Salber Phillips,
“Conjectural History: A History of Manners and Mind,” Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain,
At times, it is hard to distinguish where the logic of *The Golden Bough* and the “savage” logic it reconstructs separate, if they do. Such conflation is apparent in Frazer’s reconstruction of “primitive” logic in his discussion of why the golden bough is “golden”:

Now if the mistletoe [as divining rod] discovers gold, it must be in its character of the golden bough and if it is gathered at the solstices, must not the golden bough, like the golden fern-seed, be an emanation of the sun’s fire? The question cannot be answered with a single affirmative. We have seen that the primitive Aryans probably kindles the midsummer bonfires as such—charms, that is, with the intention of supplying the sun with fresh fire. But as this fire was always elicited by the friction of oak wood, it must have appeared to the primitive Aryan that the sun was periodically recruited from the fire which resided in the sacred oak […] No wonder, then, that the mistletoe shone with a golden splendor, and was called the Golden Bough. (II.367-368)

It is unclear whether the last clause continues Frazer’s free indirect discourse in relation to the “primitive Aryan”’s conception of the mistletoe, or whether it is his own conclusion.

Similarly, in an early description of mythmaking, Frazer appears to conflate mythmaking with his own methodology. Like Pater, Frazer defines mythmaking in terms that apply equally to his own scholarly practice. According to Frazer, “The history of religion is a long attempt to reconcile old customs with new reason; to find a sound theory for an absurd practice” (II.62). Myths, many of which “are invented to explain ritual,” function just like the arguments of *The Golden Bough* (II.245-246). Thus Frazer’s scholarship yields similar results to Pater’s use of spiritual and bodily evidence in aesthetic criticism. By

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132 “Ritual may be the parent of myth, but can never be its child” (II.246). See also II.290, where Frazer defines “ritualistic myth” as “a myth based on actual observation of religious ceremonies and purporting to explain them,” in contrast to “[m]yth pure and simple” which is “mere description of physical phenomena in imagery borrowed from human life.”
repeating the practices of earlier mental states that credited magic and myth, Frazer imbues his modern scholarly practice with the mysterious values of these epistemologies, and suggesting their own affinities with modern rational, scientific approaches to knowledge. In this way, the modern scholar can access the mentality of the pre-modern magical thinker, and experience a knowing but nonetheless real form of enchantment.

Frazer further shares with Pater and the new disciplines of anthropology, archeology, and folklore more broadly, an investment in expanding the archive of scholarly evidence. By emphasizing what we can learn from non-textual forms of evidence, Frazer positions himself squarely in the avant-garde of scholarship, pushing against the trend in the academic human sciences over the course of the nineteenth century to define legitimate evidence as textual evidence. Instead, he includes other kinds of evidence, such as performance (ritual, custom), oral traditions (folklore, myth), and artifactual (archeological) findings and archives. He legitimizes these sources as the grounds for a redefined modern scientific knowledge. In the Preface to *The Golden Bough*, Frazer declares that he values “living tradition” as a source of knowledge about “early religion” above “the testimony of ancient books” (I.viii). Later, he elaborates, “The best evidence for the original character of the Egyptian gods is to be found in their ritual and myths, so far as these are known (which unfortunately is little enough), and in the figured representations of them on the monuments” (I.316). The category of “text” is conspicuously absent, while “ritual and myths” and “figured representations” are specified as the “best evidence.”

Of course, the rituals and myths Frazer celebrates as evidence are often taken from recorded accounts in texts. But it is significant that Frazer separates these out as forms of

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134 Frazer also makes limited use of negative evidence, or what he calls the “negative argument”— taking a lack of evidence as a form of evidence itself (I.99).
evidence, for marking a distinction between texts and artifacts involves Frazer in an archaeological treatment of texts themselves. He goes digging in them for the superior evidence of myth and ritual, which have pre-textual origins and thus can be distinguished from the texts in which they have been preserved. This approach allows Frazer to take “observations” of ancient writers as reliable accounts of ritual or myth, while disregarding their “explanations” of the ritual or myth as inaccurate: “We cannot reject the evidence of such intelligent and trustworthy witnesses on plain matters of fact which fell under their own cognisance. Their explanations of the worship it is indeed possible to neglect, for the meaning of religious cults is often open to question, but resemblances of ritual are matters of observation” (I.319-320). Thus, Frazer endorses a separation of observations, or empirical facts, from accompanying interpretation. This in turn legitimizes a way of reading texts as artifacts, or the carriers of facts. In contrast to Pater, whose aesthetic criticism turns historical objects into aesthetic objects, as well as taking aesthetic objects as evidence of historical mental and spiritual experiences, Frazer’s approach treats aesthetic objects only as historical artifacts, and does not take into account how their creation as literature might affect the “facts” they appear to contain. Yet Frazer’s own literary presentation of what he calls “facts” in *The Golden Bough* has been criticized for reshaping its facts to better fit its narrative.

**Enchanting scholarship**

While Frazer’s version of archeological scholarship has largely been discredited in the social sciences, his model of textual interpretation has contributed to practices that literary

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135 Frazer claimed that this approach was valid for his study as well. In the preface to the first volume of *Balder the Beautiful* (the last section of the third edition of *The Golden Bough*, published 1913), he declared that the real contribution of his study was the facts it marshaled, not the theories it marshaled them into. Such theories he held “very lightly” (xi).
studies has taken for granted or else attributed to more familiar influences. Thus I argue that Frazer’s scholarship falls within the more expansive category Rita Felski calls “interpretation-as-excavation” in *The Limits of Critique* (58). For Felski this archeological approach to textual interpretation is a variety of what she calls “suspicious” reading, in which the critic approaches “apparent” meaning in a guarded way, prepared to unearth “hidden meanings” behind the guileful surfaces (56). While Felski cites Marx and Freud as the major inaugurators of this approach for literary studies, Kathy Psomiades points out that the network of anthropological writers around Andrew Lang—including Haggard and Frazer—are also “part of the prehistory” of the “project of critical reading.” For Psomiades, these writers’ anthropological theory of romance—that it was a mythopoeic mode “surviving” from an earlier period of humanity’s development—fostered a “trope of literalization” that invited such an archeological analysis (para. 33). In this network, Lang and the other anthropological writers are the ancestors of modern literary critics, and Haggard the mythopoeic romancer produced the material on which Lang specifically honed his approach. In this dynamic, Haggard too was playing with the conventions of this scholarly approach, creating just the sort of material able to be subjected to this kind of analysis, as well as representing its aesthetics in his scholarly apparatus. In Haggard’s novel (or in Frazer’s study), accounts of immortality or apparently supernatural or supernormal powers could be traced back to a “literal origin,” in an actual event or a conjectured explanation for an event. Such “literalization […] is the occasion for the employment of the analyst’s interpretive process” (para. 33). For both Felski and Psomiades the precondition for this interpretive process is a resolutely suspicious critical perspective.

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Such suspicious criticism, as Felski argues, is generally seen as engaged in a project of disenchantment, revealing truths behind illusory surfaces. But I argue here that Haggard’s and Frazer’s archeological scholarly modes are emphatically enchanting. They work their enchantment by presenting their revealed truths not only as discoveries, but as discoveries that constitute truths more wonderful than the surfaces they were hidden behind. Such wonders are not convincing to those who are more interested in the aesthetics of those surfaces, such as J.R.R. Tolkien who complained of the “quarrying researchers” who treat poetry only as historical documents and not art. But they are convincing, or at least, pleasurably plausible, to readers who want coherent narratives of history or religion from their reading, whether they are reading novels or scholarship, Haggard or Frazer.

How do readers— not only those enchanted Victorians but the many who continue to who find something “mystical” in The Golden Bough— approach and engage with the text? In my own experimental, postcritical approach, I pick up on the strategy initiated in my introduction, and get close to my object of study, rejecting an exclusively critical distance from it and its apparently naive readers in favor of grounding my analysis in a careful attention to the text that is sympathetic to its documented if also sometimes embarrassing effects. The Golden Bough’s mode as scholarship, and not novel, is of course relevant here. Indeed, it is essential to its particular enchantment. Its use of scholarly conventions function much like those elements do in She to encourage a dynamic reflective/receptive reading experience that increasingly gives way to a rationalized conviction in the reality of the strange tale. By acknowledging his hypotheses to be provisional, Frazer invites a provisional belief in his theories and with it a fantastic experience of doubt in his readers. But, in contrast to She, and more in keeping with Pater, this invitation is given in the context not of fiction but of

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scholarship. And like Pater, Frazer in *The Golden Bough* uses scholarly theories of mankind’s universal mental development and its historical manifestations to present its strange accounts of religious belief and practices as real, according to the nineteenth-century conflation of “real” with “happened in history.” But while Pater’s aesthetic criticism revives objects from the past, reconstructing them anew as aesthetic objects in the present, Frazer’s conjectural scholarship discovers ancient, authentic meanings behind even something so apparently fanciful as a folk-tale. Finally, when *The Golden Bough* creates narratives structured by conjectural chains, they do not offer a plot for a novel, but re-order the world the study claims to describe. Frazer’s study transforms the world outside the text, taking the reader beyond the bounds of “as if” into new understandings of history and modernity as at once secular, rational, and deeply meaningful. A 1937 newspaper article captures a sense of this felt transformation: it claims Frazer “has changed the world” not politically as Mussolini or Lenin has, but, like Darwin, “by altering the chemical composition of the cultural air that all men breathe” (quoted in Beard Frazer 170-171). This hyperbolic description offers a metaphorical account of the experience of modern enchantment: *The Golden Bough* has transformed the world through science (“by altering the chemical composition of the cultural air”) on a marvelous scale (“that all men breathe”).

*The Golden Bough* further strengthens its enchantment through its thematic and formal preoccupation with the material effects of language. It presents “primitive” magic as granting real-world effects to imaginative representations, even while it appears to engage in this same sort of magic itself via its own textual representations. As nonfiction, and especially through its claims of certainty, *The Golden Bough* practices the same magic it theorizes. Frazer understands magic as structurally akin to science; only magic’s premises are flawed, where modern science’s are legitimate. According to Frazer, both science and magic assume a
“notion of natural law or the view of nature as a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency” (I.10). The flawed premise of magic is the belief that a representation of an event causes the actual occurrence of that event in the world:

One of the principles of sympathetic magic is that any effect may be produced by imitating it. If it is wished to kill a person an image of him is made and then destroyed; and it is believed that through a certain physical sympathy between the person and his image, the man feels the injuries done to the image as if they were done to his own body, and that when it is destroyed he must simultaneously perish.

(I.10)

*The Golden Bough* often appears to be acting on such a principle. Its increasing assertions of the high probability and even certainty of its explanations transform the world as we knew it into the one represented in its pages. This is Frazer’s scholarly, literary magic. Frazer observes of sympathetic magic that it is a “mode in which primitive man seeks to bend

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138 Critics have often found magic in Frazer’s own forms, methods, and ideas: Scholar of religion Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that the comparative method traffics in the same sort of magic that Victorian anthropologists such as Frazer used it to theorize. Like Frazer’s sympathetic magic, comparison makes the subjective objective: it takes a subjective impression of similarity and presents it, Smith writes, “as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like.” And, he continues, “this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic” (22). Gillian Beer notes that “[h]is own writing everywhere manifests, though it never draws attention to, the prevalence of magical epistemologies in the culture of his intellectual England, and specifically in the culture of his kind of literary anthropology” (42). Christopher Herbert sees Frazer as “exposing himself to the charge that the magical symbolic equivalences which he claims to reveal are not native to a system of primitive thought at all but are simply heuristic devices in the mode of ‘as if,’ manufactures of scholarly speculation” (Herbert “Unknowable” 46). Thus, Frazer has been seen to expose the magical nature of Victorian scientific thought, and of “scholarly speculation” more generally. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notes on *The Golden Bough* (from his reading of the one-volume edition of 1922) reveal that the study similarly provoked him to think about “metaphysics as a form of magic” (Wittgenstein vi). See Smith, “In Comparison a Magic Dwells,” *Imagining Religion from Babylon to Jonestown*, (U Chicago P, 1982): 19-35; Beer, “Speaking for the Others: Relativism and Authority in Victorian Anthropological Literature,” in Robert Fraser, ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination* (Macmillan, 1990); Herbert, “The Golden Bough and the Unknowable” in *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger, (Cornell UP, 2001); and Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*, ed. Rush Rees, (Brynmill Press, 1979). In this chapter, I have tried to take this idea seriously in order to try to better understand the magical qualities of *The Golden Bough* as embodying in literary form a form of modern enchantment prominent in the literature and literary culture of the late Victorian period.
nature to his wishes” (I.12). We can understand fantastic scholarship as the mode in which scholarly man (and, in the next two chapters, scholarly woman) also achieves wish-fulfillment—his or her preferred version of historical reality—in the modern world.

Sympathetic magic constitutes one half of the “primitive” experience of an enchanted world; “spiritual forces” pervading the world make up the other (I.10). In *The Golden Bough*, as in *She*, these spiritual forces appear to have a supernormal status. In the study’s oft-discussed treatment of taboo, Frazer describes taboos as regulations protecting a “spiritual force” or “supernatural energy” believed by “primitive” man to exist in specific members of the society in question (II.242). In this context, Frazer asserts the reality of such forces: “The danger [from a taboo person], however, is not less real because it is imaginary; imagination acts upon man as really as does gravitation and may kill him as certainly as a dose of prussic acid” (I.171). Here, as in *She*, such forces, aligned with and here even identified with the imagination, are treated as supernormal forces, akin to invisible but real natural laws such as gravity or chemical reactions.

Again as in *She*, the imagination not only plays a central role within the plot of *The Golden Bough*, but is the force behind that plot’s construction via its instrumental mode in conjecture. Furthermore, as in Pater’s aesthetic criticism, imagination, as a spiritual force, powers the literalization of the figurative within the text. Conjecture itself is figurative: it represents a probable representation of the invisible and unknowable. It becomes literalized in works such as *The Golden Bough* when conjectures are asserted as certain findings, and when conjectures pile upon conjectures, implying the solidity of those reconstructions that act as foundations.

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139 As Fraser notes, “Frazer’s storyline” is “strongly dependent on a rather abstract notion of energy as an immanent force like electricity that somehow informs the universe and binds it together; it is thus dependent on seeing the whole human organism in terms of the science of, say, Faraday” (*GB* xxii).
In addition, Frazer, like Pater, draws on folk belief and custom as a source of literal, essential meaning for figurative language. Returning to Frazer’s attempt to answer, “Why was the mistletoe called the Golden Bough?” we find him locating meaning in myth rather than in authorial invention: “The name was not simply a poet’s fancy” (II.365). Nor can it be traced to the actual color of the bough, a fact which might inspire such fancy; rather, a “clue to the real meaning of the name” is found in “the mythical fern-seed” (II.365). Frazer follows this clue, giving an overview of associations between fern-seed, gold, and fire in European mythology, and then of similar associations with mistletoe, asserting that primitive men regarded the mistletoe as the source of the sun’s fire, concluding, as we saw above, “No wonder, then, that the mistletoe shone with a golden splendour, and was called the Golden Bough” (II.368). Ultimately, through the myth of Baldor, Frazer explains the name by a “belief” that is “probably […] a fragment of the primitive Aryan creed” (II.368). The name of the “golden bough” has no mere literary significance, or even the superficial significance of a description of the physical appearance of the plant; instead, it has a deep significance as the survival, and the sign, of an ancient, “primitive” belief. In this sense, the name of the golden bough is not arbitrary or invented language, but a real thing, an artifact of something “once […] believed” (II.295).140

This transformation of a late element of literature (Virgil’s “golden bough”) into an artifact of a historically real belief is a form of literalization. Frazer takes the literary detail and traces it back through accounts of religious ritual and myth to conjecturally posit an ancient belief system ultimately behind Virgil’s poem. Something aesthetic becomes something historical; something figurative becomes literal; something fanciful becomes real. Through this transformation, an old belief is re-animated. Something “once […] believed”

140 “The [Baldor] myth shows that a vital connection must once have been believed to subsist between the mistletoe and the human representative of the oak who was burned in the fire” (II.295).
again becomes something real in the world. Frazer does not offer, as Pater does, explicit instructions in how to reanimate such beliefs; rather, he more subtly guides the reader to the experience through the gradual accumulation of links in the conjectural chain. When the chain is complete, probability has become certainty, and strange phenomena are revealed to be the signs of beliefs that themselves become real things, in the newly valorized sense of the historically real.

These books also grant beliefs reality through the valorization of the imagination: in both *She* and *The Golden Bough* it has an almost physical reality as a supernormal force. In these books’ presentation of the imagination as something real, with real-world, even physical effects (in both books, it specifically can kill), they validate their own effects on their readers. By affirming the reality of what exists in the imagination, the books validate their own narratives. They create the conditions for their own credibility. They make it possible to believe in their strange, wonderful stories in a way that satisfies a certain late-Victorian, self-consciously modern rationality. These strange stories are supernormal, not supernatural: they offer mysteriousness without insoluble mystery, certainty without reductive explanation, meaningfulness alongside rationality.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have aimed to show how H. Rider Haggard’s and J. G. Frazer’s late Victorian writings on history, myth, and religion constitute, along with the work of Walter Pater, a genealogy of “fantastic scholarship” that illuminates the central role of scholarly form in creating modern enchantment. By invoking the conventions and themes of late Victorian scholarship, fantastic fiction such as Haggard’s imagines an extraordinary, deeply meaningful world commensurate with the standards of late-nineteenth-century scientific and
rational enquiry; by operating within such scholarship itself, Frazer’s fantastic scholarship affirms the reality of such an enchanted world.

Enchantment is, historically, a fraught term—and not only because it is difficult to define. In the late Victorian era it had an ambivalent valence: on the one hand, it had positive associations with experiences of aesthetic pleasure; on the other hand, it had negative associations with delusions and compulsions. Pater emphasizes its positive connotations, writing admiringly of “the enchanted region of the Renaissance,” which is marked by free play rather than dogmatic strictures (R 20). Frazer is more ambivalent. In some places, he commends the “atmosphere of romance” evoked by the presence of “enchantment,” as in the anthropological writing of a correspondent: “If the writer did not tread enchanted ground, at least he moved among people who firmly believed in the power of enchantment and constantly resorted to it for the satisfaction of their wants and the confusion of their foes” (Frazer quoted in Crawford “Scottish” 30-31). Here, Frazer appears to take comfort in the existence of enchanted thought somewhere in the world, even if enchantment itself has no physical reality. “[A]t least” through anthropology one can encounter enchantment as a real belief—even one that yields “satisfaction”—if not as an ontological condition. Like Pater, he celebrates “real illusions.” But Frazer elsewhere disavows such enchantments, rejecting the admiration or embrace of such “primitive” beliefs. And across his works, he explicitly celebrates modern, rational science as the pinnacle of mankind’s achievement. His later work, moreover, separate the “savage logic” and modern science which the first edition of The Golden Bough had linked, distancing himself and his theories further from any truck with enchantment. However, these disavowals did not prevent his readers from ignoring these claims and reading The Golden Bough to encounter its “enchanted ground” and equally enchanting theory.
I have explored how the frame/tale structure of both *She* and *The Golden Bough* effects enchantment by legitimizing marvelous narratives through presenting them in the forms and terms of up-to-date scholarship, from prefaces and footnotes to conjecture and coherence. I further shown how Frazer’s hyper-suspicious, coherentist scholarship—everything has a hidden meaning, and all these meanings are connecting in an all-encompassing explanation—turns a disenchanting practice into a means of enchantment. And in this, my own scholar-detective-magician approach is apparent: here I show you Frazer, not as he would be seen (an arch-rationalist whose Scottish-Enlightenment-infused anthropology discredited Christianity) but as he has since appeared to enthusiastic readers who read this skeptical anthropology not so much as discrediting Christianity but as revealing a universal religion preceding and exceeding Christianity.

Frazer has survived into the twenty-first century as a legitimate object of academic inquiry in literary studies largely by virtue of his place in Modernist and Victorian intellectual history. Later works of fantastic scholarship that share the same enchanting practices and effects have been more fully excluded from academic literary study. Literary history, when it registers them, often takes such works as embarrassments, best recalled as cautionary disciplinary tales, or as evidence of the persistence of delusive enchantments even into that bastion of modernity, academia. In the next two chapters, I will consider the fantastic scholarship that follows in the wake of Pater’s and Frazer’s foundational work, and which suffered a more severe fate. As an author of fantastic literature might write, it is no mere coincidence that the next two chapters focus on the writings of two of the most prominent women among professional scholars in late Victorian and early twentieth-century Britain. While Pater may have argued that the scholar was necessarily male, the enchanted scholar at the turn of the twentieth century was often biologically, and always metaphorically, female.
Chapter Four: Jessie L. Weston’s Studied Enchantment

Jessie L. Weston is best known to literary studies through the association of *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) with T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot endorsed the study in his notes to the poem, both as a key to the poem’s symbolism, and “for the great interest of the book itself.”¹⁴¹ Eliot was clearly interested in her startling theory that the grail romances were coded records of an ancient fertility ritual. Three decades later, Eliot recanted: “It was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail.”¹⁴² Since then, most critics of Eliot have largely ignored Weston, though excerpts from her work continue to feature in teaching editions.¹⁴³ When critics do mention her, they generally dismiss the work entirely, extending Eliot’s dismissal of *From Ritual to Romance* as a key to *The Waste Land.*¹⁴⁴

The “exposition of bogus scholarship” that Eliot attributes to his own notes has come to be seen as describing Weston’s book—in part because Weston’s book had indeed already

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¹⁴² T.S. Eliot, “The Frontiers of Criticism,” *The Sewanee Review*, 64. 4 (1956): 534. Eliot claimed he only added the notes in the first place to bulk up the poem for its book publication—an explanation generally repeated by scholars of the poem such as Lawrence Rainey, despite work that suggests he had planned them before beginning negotiations with Liverwright, and had written them before the poem appeared in *The Dial*. As Kaiser writes, “Eliot’s contention that the notes were added only because his poem ‘was inconveniently short’ has been disproved.” Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, “Disciplining *The Waste Land*, or How to Lead Critics into Temptation,” *20th Century Literature* 44.1 (Spring, 1998): 83.
¹⁴³ See, for example, the 1992 Norton edition of *The Waste Land*.
¹⁴⁴ For a recent example, see Rainey, *Revisiting The Waste Land* (Yale UP, 2005). Writing of the idea of *From Ritual to Romance*’s relevance to the poem, Rainey maintains, “surely this is just one more dead end, perhaps the deadest of them all […] *The Waste Land* has a much to do with Grail legends and vegetation rituals as Ulysses has with the rickety schema that Joyce concocted as he neared the end of his masterpiece. […] Th[e core of *The Waste Land*] is not to be found in the turgid speculations of Jessie Weston, or the pseudo-arcana of vegetation rituals” (48-49).
become “bogus” to scholars in her home field of medieval studies by that time.\footnote{Eliot 1956 p. 534. R.S. Loomis’s shifting opinion on Weston illustrates how she went in a generation from the leader of an academic field to a liability. In 1927, Loomis, the leading Arthurian scholar in the US, and a friend of Weston’s, endorsed her theory of the Grail romances, writing in his own study: “Miss Weston’s interpretation of the Maimed King and the task of the hero I accept, though stressing rather the solar than the vegetation aspects of the characters” (186). In 1963, he inserted a “retraction of certain chapters” in remaining copies of the book, and in another study “retracted in particular my adherence to Dr. Jessie Weston’s ingenious hypothesis concerning the Grail and Lance, for lack of valid and clearly pertinent evidence” (ix). See R.S. Loomis, \textit{Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance}, (Columbia UP, 1927), and \textit{The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol}, (Columbia UP, 1963).} By the 1930s, Weston’s lack of university training, her associations with occultism, and her reliance on the work and methods of J. G. Frazer, which were increasingly out of favor, led to the thorough discrediting of her work and reputation in academia. After her death in 1928, medievalists either ignored her or invoked her as a cautionary tale of scholarship gone awry, and since the 1950s, professional literary criticism has largely ignored Weston, or when invoking her work in relation to Eliot, appears to protect the poet from association with the bogus scholar.\footnote{Even Leon Surette, who observes drily in reference to earlier criticism, “\textit{The Waste Land} is a text of such importance and sanctity that it must be protected from any suggestions that it is less than it has been seen to be,” affirms the distance between Eliot and Weston by referring to her theory as “goofy.” “\textit{The Waste Land} and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment,” \textit{20th Century Literature}, 34.2 (1998): 241. In one case, institutional modernism has even erased Weston’s marked gender in proximity to the poem: W.W. Norton’s website features a table of contents for its critical edition of \textit{The Waste Land} that lists “James” rather than “Jessie” L. Weston. See http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail-contents.aspx?ID=10806. Similarly, the masculine misspelling “Jesse” for “Jessie” appears regularly, as in a recent listing for the forthcoming Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism.} (The one exception was the myth-ritual school of literary criticism that flourished on certain American university campuses from the 1930s through the 1960s, which drew on the theories of Weston, Frazer, and others to look for mythic patterns in modern literature.\footnote{The myth-ritual scholar Stanley Edgar Hyman (Bennington College) wrote the first biographical essay on Weston in 1966, “Jessie Weston and the Forest of Broceliande,” \textit{The Centennial Review} (9): 509-521. Hyman locates Weston in the tradition of criticism of which he is himself a later practitioner. Princeton UP’s 1993 edition of \textit{From Ritual to Romance} features a foreword by scholar of myth Robert A. Segal that draws heavily on this essay. The 1990s appear to have witnessed the end of myth-ritual scholarship as a mainstream academic practice.}) Weston did not fare much better in the other fields with which her work engaged: anthropology threw her out with the Frazerian bathwater, and over the course of the twentieth century folklore as a discipline has suffered a loss of academic status.
similar to Weston’s own. At the same time, her work has persisted as a source and
touchstone of alternative histories in popular fiction and nonfiction and in neopagan
religious practices. In this chapter, I investigate what was variously so “bogus” and so
compelling about Weston’s book. Three crucial elements help explain its strong but
troubling appeal: 1) its account of an alternative sacred woman-centered history of western
civilization, 2) its conflation of standards of scientific and spiritual truth, and 3) its use of the
so-called comparative method to encourage mystical experience in a scientific framework.

In Weston’s own account, From Ritual to Romance was the culmination of her life’s
work on medieval romance. She began her career in the 1890s as a conventional Victorian
woman scholar, translating and editing texts and publishing poetry and fiction; but by the
end of the century, she was developing a more avant-garde, self-consciously “scientific”
approach. By the 1910s, she had become the leading British authority on medieval
Arthurian romance (she wrote all twelve entries on the Arthurian legend for the 1911
Encyclopedia Britannica). By 1920, she was aspiring to address “those scholars who labour in
a wider field”—that is, “comparative religion.”

But even as the most prominent scholar of Arthurian literature in Britain, Weston’s
relation to the academy was fraught, and might best be described as “para-academic.” She
was not university-trained and never held an academic post. In addition, her scholarship
drew on the work not only of academic scholars, but of amateur occult scholarship, such as

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148 From Ritual to Romance’s ideas shape the conspiracy plot of Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code, while Weston’s
caricature as a spinster obsessed with fertility cults appears in and David Lodge’s campus novel Small World,
which features a parody of Weston in the character of Sybil Maiden (Weston is mentioned specifically as her
mentor). It is further preserved in Goddess spirituality (see Ronald Hutton’s The Triumph of the Moon: A History
of Modern Pagan Witchcraft [Oxford UP, 1999], 125); and makes a cameo appearance alongside The Golden Bough on
Kurtz’s nightstand in Coppola’s Apocalypse Now (1979).

149 For the Victorian woman scholar, see Bonnie Smith, The Gender of History (Harvard UP, 1998).

150 On her early work, see Helen Brookman, “From Romance to Ritual: Jessie L. Weston’s Gawain,” Studies in
provides the most extensive study of Weston since Grayson (see note 24).

that featured in *The Quest*, a journal edited by the ex-Theosophist G. R. S. Mead. Weston, while not herself a Theosophist nor occult insider, was steeped in Theosophical ideas and embraced a recognizably Theosophical commitment to investigating the spiritual truth of historical religious practices.\textsuperscript{152} Her debt to Theosophy is most evident in *From Ritual to Romance*’s central theory that the grail ritual had an occult meaning: it consisted of an exoteric, or popular, rite, familiar as the fertility rite chronicled in J. G. Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, and an esoteric initiation rite that introduced an elite to the mystery of the source of life. This source was a spiritual energy on the “*astral plane*” corresponding to sexual energy in the fertility ritual on the “actual” or human plane (182).

What may seem most shocking to us in this theory was merely controversial, and sometimes not even that, to Weston’s contemporary audience. *From Ritual to Romance* was published by the Cambridge University Press; it was awarded the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize for the best study of English literature written by a woman in English; and it earned Weston an honorary doctorate from the University of Wales. It was widely reviewed in academic and general interest journals as well as even newspapers. Some critics indeed questioned its emphasis on the “astral plane,” and criticized Weston for engaging with such Theosophical ideas; but others didn’t remark on it at all. In reviews, she was more likely to receive criticism for her outdated use of the philological term “Aryan” than the occult term “astral.”\textsuperscript{153} Recalling the receptions of *The Renaissance* and *The Golden Bough*, it was simultaneously lauded by one eminent scholar as “scholarly, scientific work through and through,” and

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\textsuperscript{153} See, for instance, R. R. Marrett, Review in the *Athenaeum*, “The Anthropology of the Grail,” 5 March 1920: “As Miss Weston shows, not only our “Aryan forefathers,” whoever they may precisely have been (to tell the truth, we imagined them as so described to be a little out of date), [...] were addicted to like “revivalist” practices.
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reprimanded by another as “unscholarly.”"154 And, as with Walter Pater’s and J. G. Frazer’s work, this reception suggests the varied standards by which scholarship before World War II could be judged. *From Ritual to Romance* was variously evaluated by reviewers according to the standards of traditional textual scholarship, scientific anthropological scholarship, and even Welsh nationalism.155

Today Weston is regaining a place in literary studies as a comparatively respectable and useful peripheral figure. Thanks to Janet Grayson’s pioneering 1989 scholarly biography, medieval studies has rediscovered her as a foundational figure of the field.156 In 2012, Helen Brookman published a study of Weston as a textual scholar with a “coherent medievalizing

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154 See “The Anthropology of the Grail,” Review in *Athenaeum*, 5-3-1920 and William A. Nitze, Review in *Modern Language Notes*, June 1920, 35:6: 358. The *Athenaeum* review is almost certainly by the anthropologist R. R. Marret, a major arbiter of the field. Nitze was a friendly colleague of Weston’s in Arthurian Studies, and his critical account of her work comes from an in-depth nine-page review of the book. This is a representative range of the response the book garnered in the academic press. Notably, the eminent French folklorist Arnold van Gennep also praised Weston for her method: “C’est un des plus élégantes demonstrations ritualistes que je connaisse” (“It’s one of the most elegant demonstrations of ritualism that I know”). Review in *Mercure de France*, Jan 3, 1924: 435. Another review in the French academic press rejects Weston’s theory, but treats it as scholarship and Weston as important scholar. See G. Huet, Review in *Moyen Age*, July-April 1920: 201-203. The same kinds of treatment and range of positive and negative reviews appear in the newspapers, with positive and neutral reviews outnumbering negative reviews.

155 A review in *The Manchester Guardian* focuses on its value as textual scholarship, endorsing it as valuable resource for those who want to know more about the background story of Wagner’s *Parsifal*. See S.J., Review in *Manchester Guardian*, Feb 17, 1920. Marret, van Gennep, and others judged it as anthropological work. The Welsh newspaper *The Western Mail* was effusive in its praise, and ended its review with a call to (scholarly) arms:

> It is hardly too much to say that the settlement of the authorship of the Grail legend will provide the touchstone for Welsh scholarship in the immediate future. The efforts of Mr. Owen and Mr. Gruffydd were not followed up: the war is probably responsible for that. But the war is now over, and young Wales, full of enthusiasm, remembering that peace has her victories no less glorious than war, is looking out with ardour for fresh fields of darkness and ignorance to conquer. Miss Weston has done much, and this book, if it should prove her swan-song, will have gained her the genuine admiration and affectionate esteem of those who believe that one of the surest tokens of the true greatness of a people is the honour in which they hold the accomplishments of their forefathers. Her latest volume is a clear call for Welsh students to take up the burden of research into the life and labours of one of their own kith and kin. Who will be the Sir Galahad?"


Moreover, the significant body of work on the history of scholarship, and especially on women scholars, that has appeared since the 1980s makes possible a thorough consideration of Weston in her historical context. At the same time recent studies of the multiplicity of feminisms in early twentieth-century Anglo-America have illuminated contexts in which Weston’s remarkable contributions to scholarly, feminist, and religious practices can be seen more clearly. Even in literary modernist studies, whose relationship to Weston has long been most fraught and least productive, her work is again a topic of scholarly interest. Studies of women’s writing have begun to examine Weston’s work as a source for the fiction of Virginia Woolf and Mary Butts. But these treatments of Weston persist in assigning her to the same role she has long played in relation to Eliot by treating her work exclusively as source material for modernist art rather than as an artistic creation itself. By contrast, in this chapter, I treat Weston’s writing as a literary practice to be explored and appreciated through a close reading of its formal and thematic elements. I neither read Weston to illuminate the creative efforts of other authors, nor to evaluate the accuracy of her claims. I focus instead on how Weston’s own writing, with its curious place in literary history and its equally curious claims, offers a creative and critical engagement with


158 See Bonnie Smith, The Gender of History (Harvard UP, 1998); Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence, and Gill Perry, eds. Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge, 1790-1900 (Manchester UP, 2000); and Alison Booth, How to Make it as a Woman. (U Chicago P, 2004). This material will be discussed in greater detail below, in the section “The Victorian Woman Scholar.”

159 The critical effort to recover the range of feminist discourses and practices in the modernist era has been bolstered by historian Lucy Delap’s The Feminist Avant-Garde (Cambridge UP, 2007). Literary Compass’s “The Future of Women in Modernism” (January 2013) and Modern Fiction Studies’s “Women Writers, the New Modernism, and Feminism” (Summer 2013) present complementary work within literary studies. These works revise the still dominant narrative of the centrality of “liberal feminism” to a monolithic “First Wave” women’s movement, and de-center Virginia Woolf from her position among modernist-era women writers.

ways of writing history, religion, and literature at the turn of the twentieth-century. I call this mode of engagement “studied enchantment.” This practice was once widespread in the British Empire and beyond, but has long been marginalized and misconstrued in ways that minimize the contributions of women writers to literary production; obscure the significance of racist and occultist science in the history of modern disciplines; and oversimplify literary engagements with religion.

There is an alternative history of Weston’s place in literary history in which From Ritual to Romance is the text, and The Waste Land the paratext. In a 1941 “Comment” in the little magazine Horizon, the editor Cyril Connolly describes the modern “search for a Myth,” tracing it from The Golden Bough to

one of the few mythological poems of our time (T. S. Eliot’s Waste Land) and to the even more remarkable book behind it. This is Miss Weston’s From Ritual to Romance (Cambridge, 1920), which, alas, is almost unprocurable. According to Eliot, The Waste Land is largely a poetical adaptation of Miss Weston’s account of the Grail Legend correlated to the present day (1922), and with some references to Frazer’s Attis: Adonis: Osiris added. In this account, The Waste Land is parenthetical to, and even “largely a poetical adaptation” of, Weston’s original. Notably, the poem is placed in a lineage including The Golden Bough as well as From Ritual to Romance, suggesting how Connolly reads each of these texts as literature rather than separating them into non-literary source texts and creative text. He expounds upon what makes From Ritual to Romance in particular so “remarkable”: “It would not be fair to give a resume of Miss Weston’s book, for in reading it one is transported into a whirl of

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161 In this way, I follow to a degree twentieth-century literary studies’ treatment of Frazer, whose works of popular scholarship began to be read as literary works at the same time as they began to be definitely discredited as works of accurate history and anthropology. (See Chapter Three.)

argument and magic that is incommunicable” (82-83). Connolly is a sensitive reader of Weston’s work, and suggests how it works to encourage a state akin to an ineffable experience of magic in the reader. Moreover, by claiming that this effect cannot be adequately represented by a “resume,” he suggests how the transporting “whirl” is a function not of the book’s “daring argument,” which he goes on to summarize, but of something more mysterious.\footnote{Earlier reviews too suggest an appreciation of From Ritual to Romance as a quasi-magical text, or what I have described in Chapter Three as fantastic scholarship. See, for example, the review in The Times Literary Supplement, “Romance and Religion,” May 27, 1920: 33, in which the reviewer locates Weston’s study in the tradition of scholarship that provides the pleasures of fairy tales alongside increased knowledge: Folk-tales have their happy fortune. Let but the formula of “once upon a time” be uttered, and, as children, forthwith we sojourn in the entrancing realms of romantic happenings and desires that meet with fulfillment speedy or not too long delayed. And when we are grown up added knowledge need not mar our enjoyment, dispel illusion, turn our treasure to Dead Sea fruit and dust. [...] We feel no sense of loss because our knowledge of them is increased.}

While the idea that religious experience was necessarily “incommunicable” was {	extit{au courant}} in Weston’s circles, Weston’s work illustrates how certain kinds of religious experience can not only be described in language, but created by it.\footnote{For example, this idea was central to Evelyn Underhill’s writing on mysticism. Underhill was, like Weston, a regular contributor to G. R. S. Mead’s quasi-occult periodical The Quest, and lectured in the Quest series Weston was known to attend. For the historical construction of religion as ineffable, see Peter Harrison, ‘Religion’ and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (CUP, 1990) and Richard King, Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East” (Routledge, 1999).} Here I focus on Weston’s use of scholarly conventions in structuring such experiences for her readers, examining From Ritual to Romance as a text rather than a paratext of literary modernism— or more properly, of off-modernism. For this concept, I am guided by Svetlana Boym’s idea of the “off-modern.” For Boym, “‘Off’ suggests a dimension of time and human action that is unusual or potentially embarrassing. In her manifestos on the “Off-Modern,” she speaks of it mainly as a position applicable to the present, but it is additionally useful for looking at the off-modernist for a “detour into some unexplored potentialities of the modern project.”\footnote{For more on Boym’s off-modern, see my Introduction. See Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgic Technology: Notes for an Off-Modern Manifesto,” Nostalgic Technology: http://www.svetlanaboym.com/manifesto.htm. Emphasis in original.}
Weston and the other scholars I consider here mark the points of such detours, with their construction of ways into modern forms of enchantment.

By analyzing *From Ritual to Romance* as a literary text in the historical context of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arthurian studies and with reference to the literary, critical, and scholarly conventions and practices with which it engaged, I illustrate how it epitomizes the historical literary practice I call “studied enchantment.” Through its deployment of scholarly and novelistic conventions, *From Ritual to Romance* structures an optimistic and ambitious response to the threat of disenchantment that takes historiographical, scientific approaches to knowledge generally seen as secularizing as themselves a means to enchantment. Weston’s study offers a crucial instance of studied enchantment’s manifestation in a mixed genre of fiction and scholarship that not only used scholarly conventions to investigate the past, but also performed scholarship so as to foster—rather than dispel—enchanted experiences in its readers.¹⁶⁶

To adequately treat Weston’s remarkable literary work, it is necessary to take a fresh look not only at her most famous publication but at the conditions under which she wrote it. Situating her work within the context of her broader literary and scholarly practices, and among the diverse network of academic, amateur, and occult scholarship with which she was engaged, we can see how her innovations in scholarly methodology, historiography, and literary form yielded an alternative way of approaching and envisaging how to be modern at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain. As scholarship, Weston’s work was originally both conventional and unusual: it built on the tradition of fantastic scholarship to create an alternative, feminist version of the practice. By “feminist” I mean not only that Weston’s

¹⁶⁶ For a long history of scholarly endeavors aimed at encouraging rather than dispelling enchantment, see Mark A. Schneider’s *Culture & Enchantment* (U of Chicago P, 1993).
scholarship celebrated women and the feminine, but that it practiced a feminist methodology recognizable as a transformation of conventional Victorian women’s scholarship.  

**Victorian Woman’s Scholarship**

Weston began her career in the 1890s as a typical Victorian woman scholar. A privately educated translator and editor of medieval romances, she was working in the tradition of the previous generation of translators of medieval texts such as Lady Charlotte Guest (*The Mabinogion*, 1838-1849). Her initial work came out of her involvement in the enthusiastic, amateur, feminine world of Wagnermania. She “made her scholarly reputation” with her translations and textual studies of medieval Arthurian romances for both scholarly and popular audiences. In the same period, again like the conventional Victorian woman historian, she also published poetry and historical fiction. She aimed to

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167 I use the term “feminist” in reference to Weston both in its contemporary academic sense of indicating a commitment to the furthering of women’s interests—a sense that was just beginning to solidify in Britain and the United States during the 1920s—and in the narrower sense in which Edwardian “avant-garde feminism” indicated a commitment to the furthering of women’s individual, internal development (Delap 311).

168 As discussed in Chapter One with regard to George Eliot, Victorian women’s scholarship had strict generic conventions: women could work with modern, not ancient languages as translators and editors; they could produce materials such as edited versions of original sources that men could use in original theoretical arguments; they often published poetry and fiction that engaged with the same subjects as their scholarly editing and translation. As Bonnie Smith argues in her definitive book on the subject, “the development of modern scientific methodology, epistemology, professional practice, and writing has been closely tied to evolving definitions of masculinity and femininity” (Smith 1). In particular, “Within nineteenth-century culture, ‘scholarship’ was widely perceived as an essentially masculine activity.” (Bellamy 7). Yet while scholarship was seen as necessarily masculine, there was a recognized feminine version, too. Although their “supposed incapacity for objectivity” kept women from being the kind of sound scholars who could make original contributions to a field, they were seen as capable of textual scholarship, such as translation and editing, in the modern (as opposed to the classical) languages (Bellamy 7). Such contributions to scholarship supported the work of men who could use in original theoretical arguments the materials women translators and editors produced.

169 See Grayson 42.

170 Brookman 119. Between 1894 and 1914, Weston published seventeen translations and textual studies of medieval texts for scholarly and popular audiences, in addition to several scholarly articles, reviews of scholarly works, and all thirteen entries on Arthurian topics in the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

171 Smith notes of women amateur historians: “Almost all of them produced at least one work of historical fiction” (Smith 19). Weston’s poetry included the volume *The Rose Tree of Hildesheim and Other Poems* (David Nutt, 1896). She published a book of short stories, and short fiction in *The Quest*, including a story that recounts the experience of an initiate into the grail rite she later theorizes in *From Ritual to Romance*. See *The Soul of a Countess* (David Nutt, 1900) and “The Ruined Temple,” *The Quest*, 8 (1916), 127-39.
reach general audiences, and presented herself as benefiting from and in turn supporting the work of great men, whether her scholarly mentors or, more indirectly, Richard Wagner. But before the decade was out, Weston began to rework these recognizably feminine practices into feminist practices committed to a profound and sweeping transformation of her field, and of humanistic scholarship more broadly. The culmination was From Ritual to Romance, which aimed to transform modernity itself through its innovative historiography.

Weston was working at a time when gendered ideas of scholarship had become increasingly rigid in discourse, but fluid in practice: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women, working class men, colonial subjects, and other feminized subjects of the British Empire found ways to engage in scholarship via learned societies, new institutions of higher education, and through reading popularizations of cutting-edge scholarship that addressed lay readers as colleagues. The undermining of these gendered distinctions operated both to change the idea of what constituted a scholar, and what constituted femininity and masculinity. As the alignments between sound scholarship and masculinity became more explicit, and scholarship in the form of higher education and mass publications itself more accessible, scholarly practice became an identifiable route to achieving a privileged masculine status or identity.

But some took this route further: instead of aiming only at transforming themselves by achieving a masculine status via scholarly practice, they aimed to transform the standards of scholarship and with them conventional standards of masculinity and femininity. The new standards of so-called scientific scholarship in particular appeared to offer a way to change

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172 Weston’s relationship to her male mentors is typical of women scholars of the period. She credits the folklorist Alfred Nutt with encouraging her translation efforts, and includes notes by Nutt in the backmatter (Weston Parzival xv). Weston’s other mentor was Gaston Paris. As late as From Ritual to Romance, Weston credits these men for their guidance and encouragement; but by then she has moved far beyond their shadow, both men having died in the early years of the twentieth century, before the height of her career.
standards of gender: science was seen as both unnatural for women and non-westerners, but also “as universal, as available to all, as unmarked, and ungendered; scholarship was thus the conduit away from a degraded femininity toward the higher universal” (Smith 197). If women and non-westerners could practice science, then they could access a universal humanity (but, as the usage of “man” for “humanity” in this period suggests, this status was still masculine). At the same time, their identity as marked subjects undermined the idea that such a status was exclusively masculine and western. Eventually, what Smith calls “modernist history” of the early twentieth century began to incorporate the marked identities of its new practitioners, and with them “absorb[ed] the terrain of the amateurs and even express[ed] aspects of a feminine sensibility, and moderniz[ed] the scientific image by intensifying the old demands for factuality, data, and transcendence” (Smith 218). Thus, in this period, scholarly discourse both deployed and reconfigured gender as an organizing metaphor. In particular, women scholars such as Weston, as well as men in emerging fields or otherwise also on the margins of mainstream academia—whose work and careers were especially marked by the metaphor of gender—were key figures in reshaping it.

Weston was thus far from the only scholar to transform feminine scholarship in this way. Jane Ellen Harrison was engaged in a similar project, and the work of historians such as Bonnie Smith suggest an even larger archive of potential case studies of figures engaged in such transformational work. The importance of Weston’s role in this endeavor is not tied to priority or uniqueness; rather, analyzing her transformation from conventional feminine to avant-garde feminist scholar makes visible a pervasive but largely overlooked engagement with gender and modernity in turn-of-the-century Britain, and the central role of the literary form of scholarship itself in structuring this off-modern imaginary. Moreover, the case of Weston continues our exploration of the alternative value system we found in Pater in which
priority and originality are inferior to precedent and communal creation— but with an eye to progress, not to conservative or anti-modern reaction. In the remainder of this section, I trace this transformation in Weston’s work, ending with an examination of her particular form of avant-garde feminist scholarship.

Weston’s first publication offers a base-line of feminine scholarly practice. Parzival: A Knightly Epic (David Nutt, 1894) is a two-volume translation of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s twelfth-century German poem. The volumes were published almost a year apart, and the second already manifests the avant-garde approach sketched above. In volume I, Weston presents herself as a translator and popularizer conversant in contemporary practices of textual scholarship, offering “some words” on “the method followed in translation” (Weston Parzival I.xiii). Her own method is less rigorous and “scientific” than the one she will follow in later translations: rather than consulting original manuscripts, she used a German edition of the medieval text, and a modern German translation as an additional guide (Weston Parzival I.xiv). In keeping with other translation work of the period, Weston takes a historicist approach to her text, emphasizing its foreignness to a modern, English audience:

“The lapse of nearly seven hundred years, and the changes which the centuries have worked, alike in language and in thought, would have naturally operated to render any work unfamiliar” (Weston Parzival I.ix). She looks to bridge this gulf by conventional translational strategies, aiming to create a translation that is “faithful to the original text, and easy to read” (Weston Parzival I.xiv). Her tone is conventionally modest, yet matter-of-fact

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174 The translator and poet Augusta Webster enumerated these conventions in two essays, “The Translation of Poetry,” A Housewife’s Opinions (Macmillan, 1879): 61-5, and “A Transcript and a Transcription,” A Housewife’s Opinions (Macmillan, 1879): 66-79. A translator must take care to preserve the letter and spirit of the original;
about the originality of her contribution—the first translation into English of this major, and
difficult, medieval German poem.175

Presenting herself as a popularizer of Arthurian romance, Weston makes a similarly
ambiguous claim to an unintimidating worth as a scholar: she both places herself as
subservient to, but still in the company of, great male “genius[es]” of the nineteenth century
such as Tennyson and Wagner who have created a ready audience for translations of
medieval romance (Weston Parzival I.ix). Invoking Tennyson and Wagner, and dedicating
her book “To the memory of Richard Wagner whose genius has given fresh life to the
creations of Mediaeval romance,” she endorses a conventional idea of the importance of
individual original creation, and of a man’s genius as the agent of such creation. Wolfram too
is such a genius: his poem is “the greatest work of Germany’s greatest medieval poet”
(Weston Parzival I.ix). As a translator, Weston presents her role as supportive to these men’s
work: “[I]f it [the translation] should encourage others to study the original for themselves,
and to learn to know Wolfram von Eschenbach, while at the same time they learn better to
understand Richard Wagner, she will feel herself fully repaid” (Weston Parzival Ixiv). Her
work aims to help to better know the work of Wolfram and Wagner; it is not an end in itself.

Just as Weston embraces conventional ideas of creative genius and translation in
Parzival, she also works almost entirely within generally accepted theories of the origins of
Arthurian romance that celebrate the twelfth-century French aristocrat Chrétien de Troyes as
the inventor of the grail stories of Arthurian romance (Weston Parzival Ixi). Consistent with
methodologies of philological (i.e., textual) criticism conventional since the mid-nineteenth

175 “That there must of necessity be many faults and defects in the work the writer is fully conscious, but in the
absence of any previous English translation she can only hope that the present may be accepted as a not
altogether inadequate rendering of a great original.” (Weston Parzival xiv)
century, in volume one of Parzival Weston embraces conjectural practices. The earlier textual scholarship that has made her translation possible operates by these tactics: “it is only within the present century that the original text of the Parzival has been collated from the MSS. and made accessible, even in its own land, to the general reader” (Weston Parzival I.ix). In this kind of textual scholarship, an “original text” of a romance is created by comparing the extant manuscript versions of the romance and determining which features most probably belong to its first inscription. Original features would be those that appear most often in later versions, that appear to date from the likely period of the first version, that appear to add clarity rather than confusion to the story (according to the criterion of coherence). In this way, one “collate[s]” an “original text” from multiple manuscripts, creating unity and authenticity from variety. The “original text” is actually a conjectured text, a reconstruction from surviving materials of a lost, inferred original. This comparative and conjectural approach was seen as linked to the comparative and conjectural approach sweeping the natural and human sciences in the nineteenth century, and the prestige of the more broadly applied method and of the more established textual approach rubbed off on each other. By the launch of Weston’s career, comparison and conjecture were seen as constituting the most advanced scientific practices; as an Oxford historian claimed grandly in 1872, “the discovery of the Comparative Method in philology, in mythology—let me add in politics and history and the whole range of human thought—makes a stage in the progress of the human mind at least as great and memorable as the revival of Greek and Latin learning” in the Renaissance.177

Avant-garde scholarship

In Volume II of Parzival, Weston begins to position herself less as a Victorian woman scholar, supporting the work of great men of genius, and more as a masculine scholar whose work is valuable for the information it independently offers. In this transition, she also begins to play with the conventions of emerging Victorian avant-garde scholarship, constructing her work in ways reminiscent of both Frazer’s fantastic scholarship and, especially, Walter Pater’s myth-making scholarship, and more generally adopting the conventions of the masculine, heroic avant-garde scholarship captured in George Levine’s Dying to Know. She asserts the objectivity and rationality of her study—defining characteristics of self-consciously modern, late Victorian masculine, sound scholarship as found in Frazer and more broadly among other practitioners of the human sciences. Objectivity is necessary to solving scholarly mysteries: by “divesting our minds of all preconceived ideas in favour of this or that theory, carefully examin[ing] the indications afforded by the poem itself, we may find that there is a solution” (Weston Parzival II.190). Furthermore, the correct solution will reveal that there is a “rational explanation” for even the most apparently strange aspects of a text. Both the scholar and the text must be rational in this method. A reading of a text as essentially irrational or lacking in coherent meaning is inadmissible—there must be meaning in complexity! As Weston asserts of details of Parzival, “It is impossible to believe that a personality so strange as that of Feirfis,


179 In the case of Parzival, the conjectured “existence of such a writer as a travelled Angevin might well have been” enables us to “find all the principle problems of the Parzival admit of a rational explanation” (Weston Parzival II.192).
so closely connected with the hero of the poem, and brought into special prominence at the turning-points of his career, means nothing at all” (Weston Parzival II.195). Weston has adopted the “criterion of coherence” central to self-consciously modern and rational conjectural scholarship.

Weston’s early twentieth-century publications make further claims upon the territory of masculine avant-garde scholarship by explicitly evoking their engagement with science and modernity, as well as rationality. In these texts, having mastered the masculine avant-garde of Victorian scholarly practices, Weston then builds on it to develop a markedly feminine and totalizing sacred-scientific approach to knowledge. Such an approach is recognizable as part of the feminine avant-garde Bonnie Smith delineates in her account of women amateur historians, whose work formed “the intellectual avant-garde of a general historical project to reach the past” and helped produce a recognizably modernist aesthetic (Smith 184). In this twentieth-century work, Weston pushes for changes to established scholarly practices, promoting a different, improved praxis for her field. In The Three-Day’s Tournament (1902), she presents herself as working actively against outmoded standards, proclaiming that she and her colleagues need to “shake ourselves free from the traditions and methods of mere textual criticism” (Weston Three vii). Such “traditional methods” have “operated disastrously in retarding the progress of Arthurian criticism” (Weston Three vii). In contrast, a different, “more scientific method” will allow scholars to engage in more productive inquiry on a “wider basis than such questions usually demand” (Weston Three vii). This wider basis is that of the linked fields of anthropology, folklore, and comparative religion, and the comparative method (what Weston calls the “parallel method”) (Weston Three 5). Weston thus aligns herself with avant-garde scholars in presenting these emerging fields as the pinnacle of modern, scientific scholarship; as more valid, generative, and
worthwhile than textual or literary scholarship. This is not only about endorsing scientific scholarship over belletristic criticism, but of an alternative kind of scientific scholarship that does not limit itself to textual, documentary evidence. This is a major shift from the position of the Victorian woman scholar, who, drawing on the standards of early-to-mid-nineteenth-century philology, established her *bona fides* based on the prestige of textual evidence.

While Weston decries the “traditional methods” of nineteenth-century scholarship, she makes room for what Carlo Ginzburg calls “low” forms of knowledge (29). She thus expands the borders of her scholarly practice to include other modes of knowledge—especially those tied to folk knowledge. In her revision of Victorian scholarly practice, she creates a practice of what I will call folk authorship that offers a set of values aligned with precedence rather than new creation. Her approach is reminiscent of Pater’s myth-making scholarship, though it appears to come out of her engagement with folklore rather than from direct engagement with aesthetic circles.¹⁸⁰

**Folk authorship**

Weston’s first exploration of the practice of folk authorship is in her second publication, *Lohengrin: Fifty Years After* (David Nutt, 1895). Billed as a “retelling of the legend in ballad form,” it is Weston’s version of the legend, which is found in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* and was made famous by Wagner’s 1847 opera, “Lohengrin.”¹⁸¹ While Weston is implicitly identified as the author thanks to the inclusion of an advertisement for her translation of *Parzival* facing the title page, the cover and title page itself identifies the author only as “One of the Folk.” For Weston, steeped in Wagnermania and increasingly in

¹⁸⁰ There is no evidence of Weston’s direct engagement with Pater, though aspects of Pater’s work likely filtered to her through folklore scholarship via Andrew Lang and others, and later, through Harrison.

¹⁸¹ From an advertisement for the book in *Legends of the Wagner Drama* (1898).
the new folklore studies of Alfred Nutt (brother of the publisher David) and his colleagues in the British Folk-Lore Society, “the Folk” were the “common people” of Europe who held on to old pagan beliefs, and whose minds still worked mythically, interpreting nature in terms of gods or spirits (Weston *Wagner* 332-3). The folk were a community united in a common spiritual identity, such as the English folk to whom Weston credits the creation of King Arthur as a folk hero. While “the English people” were “representative of the Saxon, Danish, and Norman invaders of British soil,” they ultimately “became welded into one folk,” who took Arthur for “the traditionary embodiment of the spirit of their land” (*KAK* 4). Weston believed that the appeal of the Arthurian legends—their “unexampled popularity”—was due to the “persistent vitality and pervasive quality of that folk-lore element” within them (Weston *Guingamor* xv, xiv). This element, belonging to “the childhood of the race” was essentially “vital[…]” in its connection to the origins of life and culture in prehistoric time (*Guingamor* xiv). While Weston’s byline as “One of the Folk” could be seen as an instance of women writers’ conventional practice of “distanc[ing] themselves from their work” via pseudonyms, her engagement with folklore suggests rather that it signifies not a retreat from the position of author, but a glorification of her authorial role as a bearer of an authentic, vital tradition (Bellamy 6). Weston’s work no longer exists to support the cult of Wagner, but to work within the same tradition as Wagner to translate folklore for a modern audience. Identifying herself as “One of the Folk” is consistent with her developing persona as a scholar of the myth-making style, importing values and methods seen as traditional to folklore, but not scholarship, into a modern form of scholarly practice.

Weston further develops the values and methods of folk authorship in her early scholarship on Richard Wagner. Beginning with 1898’s *Legends of the Wagner Drama: Studies in Mythology*, Weston conflates the role the bearer-of-tradition with that of the editor, compiler,
and collector, valorizing it as a voice of authenticity. Weston first increases the value of these roles, usually associated with the feminine trait of derivativeness, by placing Wagner within them. While she acknowledges Wagner’s status as the quintessential Romantic genius of the second half of the nineteenth century, she also presents the value of his work as due not only to romantic genius, but also to folk genius—the eighteenth-century idea of genius as *geist*, or folk spirit: “We need to realize that the life of the Wagner Drama is the genius, not alone of the musician-dramatist, but of men whose work has already stood the test of centuries” (Weston *Wagner* 5). Indeed, for Weston, Wagner is primarily a mediator of folk genius: “Wagner was an *interpreter*, and only where necessity arose a *creator*” (Weston *Wagner* 5). As such, he operates much like a textual scholar, who also “*interprets*” given material, as well as like Pater’s aesthetic critic who like the mythmaker of the third stage recombines traditional material into new forms.

And like a Victorian textual scholar or aesthetic critic, Wagner’s method consists of selection and recombination. Weston praises

the skill with which Wagner selected those incidents which would ‘tell’ most effectively on the stage, re-combined them so as to preserve (in some cases restore) the original simplicity of the story, and grasped with unerring instinct hints of his predecessors which, superfluous for the epic, were big with possibilities for the dramatic form […]. (Weston *Wagner* 4)

He selects, recombines, and preserves, and even restores, elements of earlier stories. This practice equally describes Weston’s own practice as a translator, in which she selects what
she believes to be the “incidents” most suited to scholarly popularization, and re-combines them to “preserve” or “restore” the original version of the story for a modern audience.\footnote{182 Brookman describes this practice: “She simplified the narrative, making silent abridgements, and engaged in a ‘softening of medieval manners and customs’ on grounds of taste, which her critics disliked” (Brookman 131, qting review in the Academy from 1899 of Tristan and Iseult, p. 680). As Weston presents it, she “carefully collated the translation [between two MSS] and have added a few touches omitted in the later version. They were unimportant in themselves, but helped to fill in the picture. Here we realise exactly the kind of MS. which must have lain before Malory.” Weston, Sir Gawain at the Grail Castle (David Nutt, 1903): xv.}

To evaluate Wagner in his dual role of scholar and bearer-of-tradition, Weston introduces the standards of folk authorship, which value authenticity over artistry. According to these standards, she finds his success as a compiler more assured than his success as an original creator. Weston judges Wagner’s operas by how far each is “a successful representation of an old-world myth”; she is less concerned with evaluating them as “music-drama[s]” (Weston Wagner 217). The criteria for a successful representation are “that it shall lose nothing of its old characteristics while it becomes charged with a fuller meaning” (Weston Wagner 217). \textit{Parsifal} is Wagner’s most successful work along these lines: “As a music-drama, the position assigned to Wagner’s latest work may vary; as an attempt to retell an old legend with due reverence for its traditional form, and full sympathy for the modern spirit, the \textit{Parsifal} will, in all probability remain eternally unrivalled” (Weston Wagner 217). A “representation”—a form of translation—of a myth must have “due reverence for its traditional form” and spirit, but also connect with “the modern spirit.” It must preserve elements as it re-presents them.

With reference to the “traditional form,” Weston suggests how her own work is superior to Wagner’s by the standards of folk authorship. The traditional form is commensurate with what Weston calls the legend’s “true” or “correct” form (Wagner 128, 143). While Weston celebrates Wagner’s “unerring instinct” for these correct versions of legends, she also points out parts of his drama that pass over such versions (Wagner
4). For example, Weston asserts that there is actually a more “correct version” of the legend of Brynhild than Wagner uses in the *Ring*. Where Wagner has Brynhild “publicly proclaim[...] the nature of her relations” with Sigfried, thus betraying her former lover in revenge for his forgetting her, Weston maintains that “a woman of the dignified character attributed to Brynhild would have died rather than do” such a thing (Weston *Wagner* 129-130). Rather, the real Brynhild would have “suspect[ed] the real nature of the case, and [kept] silence” (Weston *Wagner* 129-130).

That this is the correct version, and the one which lies at the root of both Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied, is evident, as it is the only solution of Brynhild’s enigmatic conduct. […] In this, the true version of the story, it is impossible not to sympathize with Brynhild. (Weston *Wagner* 128-9)

According to Weston’s folk authorship standards, “correct” or “true” legends are almost always the earliest versions of the story—the “root” of later versions. And, essentially, they are narratively superior to—that is, more coherent than—other (later, corrupted) versions. The “true” version of Brynhild’s story is rational (it accounts for the character’s apparently “enigmatic conduct”) and engages the reader’s sympathy. While for Weston the “true” legend is its most traditional, even “primitive” form, significantly, this “primitive” form may not be the oldest extant version: “though not oldest in form, [a particular version] was really most closely in accord with primitive tradition” (*Wagner* 128, 143, 93). Thus “primitiveness” is not merely a matter of age, but of sensibility. Weston’s approach here is typical of the new field of folklore, which synthesized impressionistic and so-called scientific methods of literary criticism. Subjective aesthetic judgments—as when Weston judges how sympathetic Brynhild appears and the coherence of her story—provide evidence for questions of historical truth. Impressionistic aesthetic evidence and historical evidence are both used in
investigating a text’s fidelity to meaning and tradition. But while a certain kind of aesthetic success — e.g., coherence — may be evidence for such authenticity, in folk authorship authenticity rather than aesthetic felicity is the ultimate measure of worth.

At the end of *Legends*, Weston even presents herself as working in opposition to Wagner for the sake of the original stories, ascribing a chivalrous folk mission to her work. She judges Wagner’s work as “fully representative, and in all respects worthy, of the pre-Wagner conception” (Weston *Wagner* 372-3). In evaluating Wagner in terms of how well he translates “pre-Wagner” legends, Weston presents herself as among a band of chivalric defenders of the “honor” of the old romances: “it is in a spirit of jealousy for their honor that [such scholars] approach the Wagner drama” (Weston *Wagner* 372-3). Weston is less concerned with appreciating Wagner than with appreciating, and offering alternative representations of, the source material of his operas. Her translations and textual studies are motivated by a mission to reintroduce folklore material to “our English folk” (Weston *Lys* xv-xvi). Through her scholarship, she aims to smooth out the broken chain of tradition, discovering the “true” versions of old legends and creating “a restored and modern rendering” of these original versions that will appeal to the modern folk as they did to the folk of medieval England (Weston *Lys* xv-xvi). In this way, Weston’s folk authorship aims to catalyze a modern version of folk unity among her audience, and reintroduce the vitality of such early productions into modern society. By putting her readers in touch with ancient traditions that, through her mediation and according to her claims, reflect and connect with “the modern spirit,” her work aims to bring about an enchanted experience of life in which

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183 Weston hopes that additional textual scholarship will allow modern writers eventually to “do justice” to the “true” character of Gawain. “Then,” she writes, “perhaps, we may have a demand for his real story, and it may be possible once more to rejoice the hearts of our English folk with a restored and modern rendering of the *Geste of Syr Gawain*, even as Bleheris told it well nigh a thousand years ago.” Weston, *Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys* (David Nutt, 1907): xv-xvi.
the individual exists as part of a cohesive community of “folk” that itself is in touch equally with past roots and modern forces. This is a society-based experience of enchantment, evocative of the idea of the coherent pre-modern society depicted in work such as Frazer’s, but, according to Weston, attainable in the modern world through encountering her reworkings of folk material.

Folk authorship also invokes, and involves, another kind of community: a group of collaborating scholars. Weston’s new method claimed to build on and transcend the most-up-to-date standards of scientific inquiry by offering a holistic, totalizing, sacred-scientific approach to knowledge grounded in practices of collaboration and generalism. In an earlier book in which Weston tests out the arguments she will make definitively in From Ritual to Romance, she leads up to this method by outlining the need for a combination of wide-ranging secular and sacred expertise in order to investigate the grail legend:

I am of opinion now, that it should be perfectly possible to write a really scientific History of the Grail Legend, provided a scholar, who was at once a thorough Classicist, a trained Folk-lorist, a Theologian, a Mystic, and who had a first-hand knowledge of the Grail texts, were forthcoming; and after all, such a combination of gifts is not unattainable. Let us hope this book may fall into the hands of one who may feel impelled to qualify for the task! 184

With her call for such a sacred-scientific scholarship, Weston was writing in a tradition of intellectual and spiritual seeking that had taken shape in the late nineteenth century, when her own career also began. Anthropologist Peter Pels has shown how this tradition was “plebeian”—that is, it featured intellectual approaches that were particularly, as he writes,

“accessible to the autodidact.” Such approaches were also especially hospitable to the woman scholar, who even when trained academically in the first women’s colleges, was assumed to have gaps in training, capacity, and knowledge. They featured the application of conjecture to fill in gaps in fragmentary collections of data (both because of the accessibility of conjectural approaches to those without formal education and because of the incomplete nature of the historical record), the criticism of specialization, and the privileging of textual over oral or material evidence. Plebeian scholarship was also particularly friendly to collaboration, in which scholars with varied skills and expertise could work beyond their individual limits. This plebeian scholarship was especially active in the emerging fields of anthropology and comparative religion, which were marked by great activity and exchange among scholars based in the academy as well as amateurs associated with learned societies and especially the emerging occult organization, the Theosophical Society.

Weston’s sacred-scientific scholarly practice embraced a combined collaboration and generalism. From her preface through her footnotes in From Ritual to Romance, Weston declares her explicit interest in a scholarly approach that involves interdisciplinarity in these ways, and which is guided by the standard of coherence. She rejects “the faulty method which has failed to recognize in the Grail story an original whole, in which the parts—the action, the actors, the Symbols, the result to be obtained, incident, and intention—stood from the very first in intimate relation the one to the other” (68). Inquiry must begin with the idea of a whole, and continue until it has shown how all the elements of a question are interconnected. In order perceive this totality, scholarship must be a more collaborative enterprise. Weston complains that though “[v]aluable material has been collected, […] the


186 See Andrew von Hendy, The Modern Construction of Myth (Indiana UP, 2002).
studies, so far, have been individual, and independent, the much needed travail d’ensemble has not yet appeared” (81). But such “travail d’ensemble” is not only a matter of collaboration, of specialists working together; rather, generalists must engage the same questions, drawing on specialist work, in order to show how more significant conclusions can be reached. Weston laments the “the modern tendency to specialize which is apt to blind scholars to the essential importance of regarding their object of study as a whole,” maintaining that “this method of ‘criticism by isolation’ has been, and is, one of the main factors which have operated in retarding the solution of the Grail problem” (67). Weston was not alone in her frustration with specialization. This was already a familiar criticism of scholarship in the late nineteenth century, through which Weston, like Pater, was more invested in pushing for new methods than in nostalgia for the belles-lettres history of the first half of the nineteenth century. By redefining a maligned and feminized generalism as the modern, scientific approach that will allow Arthurian studies to progress, Weston makes generalism an active, prestigious choice aligned with masculine values of rationality and science, not a condition necessitated by inadequate training associated with women’s education.

A spiritual scholarly archive

In addition to advocating a more collaborative and generalist scholarly practice, Weston asks her colleagues to accept a wider range of kinds of evidence in scholarship. In particular, she demands the acceptance of the non-textual archive, arguing that oral and ritual forms of evidence are necessary, and even better suited than textual evidence, for inquiry into religion. Quoting a German scholar, she writes, “Mysteries such as divinity are

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187 In this way, Weston can be seen as advocating for a sort of professionalized amateurism—what Bonnie Smith calls amateurism as “the intellectual avant-garde of a general historical project to reach the past” (184). This amateurism consisted of those who were “producers of the closest approximation to the progressively outdated whole—those who covered a wider spectrum than the professionals” (160).
entrusted to speech, not to writing, [...] Setting such things down in writing is already almost profanation.’ A just remark which it would be well if certain critics who make a virtue of refusing to accept as evidence anything short of a direct and positive literary statement would bear in mind. There are certain lines of research in which [...] probability must be our guide” (FRR 142-143). To Weston, the conjectural method is expressly compatible with such nontraditional archives. Her conjectural, non-textual methodology reverses an older order of legitimate scholarship. Since the early nineteenth century, textual scholarship such as philology had been more prestigious than other humanistic subjects, such as history; but Weston, working from her position as a respected though non-academic textual scholar, aims to extend her textual scholarship into questions beyond the text, and to affirm the value of such endeavors as more valuable than textual scholarship. Instead of seeing herself as moving from a more prestigious to a less prestigious form of scholarship in moving from the exclusive study of texts to the “wider basis” of anthropology, folklore, and comparative religion, she presents herself as moving from an old-fashioned, even moribund approach to a superior because more modern, advanced, and vital mode of inquiry.

The association of such archives with religious practices leads Weston ultimately not only to call for their recognition as scholarly evidence, but to assert their superiority over textual evidence in the investigation of religion, thereby challenging a major tenet of femininized, professional scholarship. As she outlines in the first few pages of her study, Weston was only able to propound her “key to the secret of the Grail” once she had access to “personal testimony, the testimony of those who knew of the continued existence of such a ritual, and had actually been initiated into its mysteries” (FRR 137, 4). But, she continues,

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188 Weston’s citation of “personal testimony” in support of her theory is not primarily the occult practice it has been painted as by later critics. Consistent with her modern folk and generalist methodology, it is a practice that has roots both in nineteenth-century amateur history and the new sciences of folklore and anthropology. When
anticipating objections to this material, “for such evidence the student of the letter has little respect. He worships the written word; for the oral, living, tradition from which the word derives force and vitality he has little use” (FRR 4-5). Weston lets us know she has compromised with these standards: “Therefore the written word had to be found. It has taken me some nine or ten years longer to complete the evidence, but the chain is at last linked up, and we can now prove by printed texts the parallels existing between each and every feature of the Grail story and the recorded symbolism of the Mystery cults” (FRR 4-5). But she later reminds us that the scholar who only accepts textual evidence cuts himself off from important information, and even connection with the literally as well as figuratively vital elements of his subject. For instance, the extant vitality of nature cults in the “living tradition” of the grail legend is only available to those who admit non-textual evidence; in contrast, the “exclusively literary critic” “has little idea” “how truly living” such traditions are (FRR 49 n29).

The artist as bearer of tradition and the folk scholar meet standards distinct from those of either the traditional second-class female textual scholar or the first-rate male genius. The folk scholar engages in “recreative,” rather than derivative or individualistic creative literary processes. She is grounded in a scholarly idea of folk tradition, and

she cites in a discussion of ritual magic “a private letter” from W. B. Yeats, “whose practical acquaintance with Medieval and Modern Magic is well known,” she both privileges an eye-witness account and a personal connection that showcase her privileged access to powerful people—tropes of early nineteenth-century amateur history (FRR 79, 79n20). In the same footnote in which she cites Yeats’s letter, she reminds the reader, “The ultimate object of Magic in all ages was, and is, to obtain control of the sources of Life. Hence, whatever was the use of these objects (of which I know nothing), their appearance in this connection is significant” (FRR 79n20). She thus displays her access to expert knowledge on magic while disavowing direct experience of what could be seen as disreputable knowledge, even in the open-minded scholarly circles in which she moved. In this way, she models the position of the folklorist or anthropologist, who gains the trust of knowledgeable informants without “going native” and participating in that which she studies.

189 Brookman argues that “The line between scholarship and re-creation was not a clearly defined one for Weston” (Brookman 143 n 76). I contend that to Weston, legitimate scholarship as she practiced it and regarded it was recreation. Weston’s recreative practice of folk authorship participates in— and I would argue, helps inaugurate—the “poetics of unoriginality” Marjorie Perloff describes in *Unoriginal Genius*. Perloff’s monograph is concerned with developments mainly in twentieth and twenty-first century American poetry;
preserves that tradition in her work, modernizing it as far as is necessary to reach her audience. She is Augusta Webster’s model translator who preserves both letter and spirit of the original text; she translates the spirit of vital traditions whose literary forms are historically and linguistically foreign to modern British readers, but whose spirit, she holds, has something essential and universally human to communicate to that audience. More than this, she is able to conjecture lost texts, constructing new forms for the vital spirits of traditions whose exoteric vehicles are in fragments. Folk scholarship thus suggests a way to understand how fragments can indeed be shored against ruins.

Redefining the feminine

Through her folk practices and the alternative history she articulates with them, Weston offers a redefinition of femininity as it relates to her scholarly practice and the medieval material that constitutes her primary subject matter. While From Ritual to Romance’s alternative history of religion is not as explicitly woman-centered as Jane Harrison’s classical studies, it offers a recognizably feminist history in its framing and its context. From the start, Weston’s engagement with comparative religion signals a feminist investment in something other than great-man history, as well as an engagement with a field and a period associated with the idea of women in power in both sacred and secular contexts. By the late nineteenth

however, her discussion of “citational poetics,” which grounds itself in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land and Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project, provides an illuminating and historically relevant idea of form to bring to the analysis of Weston’s work. Perloff identifies The Waste Land as a “foundational text” of citational or “appropriative” poetry and Benjamin’s Arcades Project as “a paradigm for the poetry of ‘unoriginal genius’ to come” (Perloff 12, 23). While these texts may be starting points for twentieth and twenty-first century poetry, each is also a culmination of late nineteenth and early twentieth century fantastic scholarship. Perloff sees these citational approaches as “other ways of Making It New” (Perloff 23). Indeed, they are paradigmatic of the “off-modern,” or perhaps of what Meredith Martin calls “making it old.” Perloff’s attention to the citational poetics of The Waste Land, moreover, supports my contention that the significant connection between From Ritual to Romance and Eliot’s poem is not so much in the thematics as in their shared citational form. See Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century (U Chicago P, 2010) and Meredith Martin, The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860—1930 (Princeton UP, 2013).
century, the history of religion had become notably hospitable to theories of prehistoric
goddess-worshiping societies. Historians hypothesized that the origins of religion and
civilization more broadly were located in matriarchal or at least matrilineal societies. Some,
such as Karl Pearson, suggested that such theories provided important precedents for the
contemporary women’s movement.

Weston draws on these associations of prehistory with goddess worship and woman-
centered modes of social organization when she traces the history of the grail ritual back to a
manifestation of goddess worship at a key point in Western history. She contends that “the
center of Western civilization” was actually under the sway of Eastern (“Phrygian”) and
female (“Magna Mater”) deities. These woman-centered religions had a “profound influence”
over the “better known” religions to come. Western civilization is revealed to be originally
and essentially feminine, and Eastern (which had its own connotations of effeminacy for
Britons of this period). From Ritual to Romance thus features not only a feminist scholarly
methodology, but offers an alternative history of Western civilization as itself fundamentally
feminine. In Weston’s account, one of the great literary traditions of western civilization is
neither western nor literary; rather, the grail legends are the product of an oral tradition that
preserved the record of a religious practice that persisted in opposition to western
civilization, and especially its orthodox religion. In constructing this narrative, Weston

190 Work by J. J. Bachofen, Friedrich Engels, E. B. Tylor, Karl Pearson, Jane Harrison, and more, suggested
that man’s earliest communities were matrilineal, matriarchal, and goddess-worshipping.
191 Pearson specifically advocated the study of this subject for women. In a lecture to the Somerville Women’s
Club, he presented woman-centered modes of domestic organization as the “real basis of our civilization to-
day, and not only the basis but a good part of the super-structure” (II.48). He also believed that the study
of these prehistorical social modes would support the struggle of modern women to play active, public roles in
society: “When we have one fully recognized the real magnitude of what women achieved in the difficult task
of civilization in these olden times, then we shall be the less apt to think her status unchangeable, to assume
that she is hopelessly handicapped by her function of child-bearing, and that the hard work of the world must
be left to men” (II.49-50). See Pearson, “Woman as Witch” in Chances of Death, and Other Studies in Evolution (E.
Arnold, 1897). Harrison too connected matriarchal societies and the modern women’s movement, as when
writing of Athenian women having the vote in Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge UP, 1903).
valorizes minor, feminized figures of history. Rejecting the widely accepted theory that Chrétien de Troyes invented the grail saga, Weston maintained that it originated in and was preserved by a network of minor figures of Western history: its first literary author was a Welsh bard, and prior to this inscription, the legend had been transmitted via folklore and the practice of an ancient “Mystery” religion originating in the “East” (FRR 150).

By revealing western history to be driven by metaphorically feminine figures and traditions, Weston presents such figures and traditions as active agents and forces. In her monograph, feminine forces become associated with the practice of the “successful defiance” of mainstream forces (FRR 45). The fertility rite that corresponds to the secret ritual at the center of the grail legends is preserved in Britain from the time of the Romans through a potent folk transmission: it “lingered on in the hills and mountains of Wales,” among the defiant conquered people of Britain (FRR 173). The secret ritual was “celebrated in sites removed from the centres of population—in caves, and mountain fastnesses; in islands, and on desolate sea-coasts” (FRR 204). Over the course of From Ritual to Romance, Weston’s language describing this secret, anti-colonial transmission becomes increasingly evocative of romantic rebellion. The tradition of the grail ritual survives thanks to resistance from the margins, from the romantic landscapes of the Celtic fringe, from the yet wild parts of Britain.192 By claiming the persistence of these traditions among the conquered, colonized, and marginal, Weston offers an account of a history of “successful defiance” of civilization by feminine, but also vital and virile, agents.193

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192 Such spaces are ambiguously gendered: as wild, uncivilized, marginal places they are feminine; as savage places they are also associated with an atavistic virility. “Savage” virility had come to contrast with stereotypes of the emasculated, enervated civilized man; this contrast is familiar in nineteenth century discourses from Walter Scott’s widely read Waverley novels to late century anxieties pervasive in the press about the fitness of modern men to Britain’s imperial needs. Yet even in such virility, there is still a sense of femininity, itself of an atavistic kind, as in the Jacobite “virago” and “bacchante” of Waverley (volume II, chapter 1).

193 Weston’s attribution of the literary origins of the grail romances to a Welsh bard aligned her with a modern-day version of such anti-colonial resistance. While the theory of Welsh origins for the grail romances had been
When Weston does explicitly discuss women in the grail romances, she propounds a similar model of virile femininity. In contrast to other writers on the Arthurian legend in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Weston ignores the usual female suspects—Guinevere, Morgan Le Fay, Vivian—in favor of lesser known grail “heroine[s]” (175). By focusing in the first place on the grail legends rather than the more popular tales centered on the Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere love triangle, Weston already registers a preference for alternative conceptions of the feminine, explicitly dismissing the conventionally misogynistic Guinevere story by relegating it to a later literary invention of romance unconnected with the “deeper stratum” of the more significant elements of the Arthurian saga (FRR 29). In contrast, she calls attention to how the grail romances, which she asserts to be the most important of the Arthurian romances, give a “prominent position” to women (168). In the grail story, women characters include “a female Grail messenger,” “a maiden who directs the hero on his road to the Grail castle, or reproaches him for his failure there,” and even “sometimes […] a heroine” (168-169, 175). Weston enumerates the grail heroines, who, just as the heroes do, “meet[…] with a strange and terrifying adventure in a mysterious Chapel, an adventure which, we are given to understand, is fraught with extreme peril to life” (FRR 175). These heroines—“protagonists” of the grail stories—include “the young Queen of
Garadigan, […] who dares the venture to win her freedom” by obtaining an altar cloth from the Perilous Chapel (FRR 178). In such a characterization of a “dar[ing]” grail heroine, as well as in similar ascriptions of power to metaphorically feminine figures in her argument, Weston reshapes the meaning of the feminine.

Weston further reconfigures the feminine through her self-presentation in *From Ritual to Romance*. In her scholarly account of the legend, she too is a heroine of the grail quest. Weston associates the figure of the scholar and the questing knight, warning the “critic” of “paths which lead him far astray from the goal of his quest, the Grail Castle” (FRR 66, 162).

The image of scholar as quester was a familiar one in Weston’s milieu. It was explicit in the self-definition of The Quest Society, to whose journal Weston frequently contributed.195 *The Quest*’s mission statement proclaims, “The Quest Society is essentially a Society of Seekers,” and evokes the image of a band of knights in its open invitation to any “who desire to aid in the Quest.” In *From Ritual to Romance*, the best kind of scholar is also a “seeker” in this sense: only “those who are at pains to seek” will find the true significance of the grail story (136).196 The seeker-scholar is also like a grail knight in the significance of her calling. To seek the grail is to pursue the “mystery of Life”; “the Quest of the Grail became the synonym for the highest achievement that could be set before men” (FRR 174). Weston therefore positions herself—and her sympathetic readers—as seekers attempting this “highest achievement.” Weston emphasizes how this role makes her a peer of the best of men: “The knowledge of the Grail was the utmost man could achieve, Arthur’s knights were the very flower of

195 The journal’s mission statement delineates this association: “As the name sufficiently indicates, The Quest Society is essentially a Society of Seekers; it does not offer the results of a task fulfilled, but the plan of an undertaking in progress. That undertaking is to note the results of specialized work in all departments of religion, philosophy, and science, and to apply the same to the deeper and more vital needs of the human soul. The Society therefore welcomes as Members—whatever their views may be—all who desire to aid in the Quest, to add their own experience to the sum-total, and thus to enrich, intensify, and beautify human life.”

196 “If the Grail story be based upon a Life ritual the character of the Fisher King is of the very essence of the tale, and his title, so far from being meaningless, expresses, for those who are at pains to seek, the intention and object of the perplexing whole.” (FRR 136)
manhood, it was fitting that to them the supreme test be offered” (FRR 174). As a questing scholar, Weston attempts the pinnacle of manly accomplishment. Moreover, Weston claims to have discovered the secret of the grail where so many others have failed. In her account, she is the first outsider to interpret this “sometimes partially understood, sometimes wholly misinterpreted, record of a ritual” after centuries of error (FRR 113). Weston thus presents herself as the triumphant questing knight who comes to the grail castle and solves the mystery there.

In this story, Weston is the successful scholar, who approaches a problem from the outside, with recourse to her expertise and training. At the same time, with ambiguity that itself suggests mysterious power, Weston presents herself as a sort of insider, or initiate to the secret; not an author of its exposé, but its respectful guardian. Ultimately, she emerges from her monograph not just as folk author or grail heroine, but as grail priestess. This role combines the folk author’s claims to authenticity, the power of the heroine, and the initiate’s aura of authority and privileged access to elite and esoteric knowledge.

Weston invokes this esoteric authority vividly. Her close relationships with her occult informants, her knowing use of terms such as “astral plane,” her declarations of what “was, and is” so about the state of magic in the world, suggests her proximity to an esoteric elite. She also takes on a priestess-like role in “ventur[ing] to speak” of the grail (137). Weston recounts the rule expressed in some of the romances that “If [the grail is] spoken of at all it

197 By endorsing such a depiction of Arthur’s knights, Weston is building on—by reworking—a Victorian project of defining a chivalric masculinity that involved a combination of conventionally masculine and feminine traits, a “new concept of masculinity which reformulated the image of the gentleman as an idealized medieval knight embodying the virtues of bravery, loyalty, courtesy, generosity, modesty, purity, and compassion” (Barczewski 220). At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, depictions of chivalric masculinity used the figures of Percival and Galahad as “models for male conduct [. . .] who emphasized moral and spiritual concerns over material ones” (Barczewski 220). In this context, Percival and Galahad were always depicted as Christian knights, and their “moral and spiritual concerns” as specifically Christian. In contrast, Weston’s chosen grail hero is Gawain, whom she presents as a pre-Christian hero; and, as we have seen, the [morality and] spirituality endorsed in From Ritual to Romance is heretical to dominant Christianity. Part of its heresy is its openness to women as active participants.
must be with scrupulous accuracy.” Moreover, “It is so secret a thing that no woman, be she wife or maid, may venture to speak of it. A priest, or a man of holy life might indeed tell the marvel of the Grail, but none can hearken to the recital without shuddering, trembling, and changing colour for very fear” (FRR 137). Weston dares this “venture”; in additionally speaking of it “with scrupulous accuracy” as her scholarly mode implies, she proves she is worthy of the ambition—a viable initiate. Moreover, in speaking of the grail, Weston overcomes the obstacle of the prohibition against speaking of the grail by transgressing it, and, later in her study, by arguing that the rule is a later corruption of the true story when she suggests the prohibition regarding women in grail romance is a “contamination” from a later version of the fertility cult (169). By continuing to preserve the truth of the grail via a combination of scientific, folk, and religious practices against dominant arguments for its Christian origin, and by making it newly available to her modern audience, Weston carries on the long history of the “successful defiance” by feminine forces of dominating, orthodox institutions of western civilization.

Thus, through both her theory and her persona in From Ritual to Romance, Weston becomes an agent of these feminine forces, which, like Pater’s “spiritual forces,” promise to act as modernizing agents—what Weston calls “agents of evolution”—in this era of new possibilities (FRR viii). Also like Pater’s “spiritual forces,” these feminine “agents of evolution” are “vital” (FRR 188). The idea of folk transmission Weston has developed throughout her previous work culminates here, in her own ambiguously exoteric and esoteric vehicle for the grail tradition. The secret of the grail may, now that it has been rediscovered in scholarship, even affect the future course of history: “[I]t may indeed sink out of sight, and, for centuries even, disappear from the field of literature, but it will rise to the surface again, and become once more a theme of vital inspiration” (FRR 188). In this way, Weston
presents the feminine as a modernizing force; as a force that could revitalize modernity by putting it in touch with ancient and essential truths. This is not the modernism of “make it new,” but neither is it the anti-modernism of reactionary movements that desired tradition without evolution. Rather, it is a syncretic modernism that conflates tradition and evolution, spiritual essences and material history, to imagine a modernity that exists in and draws equally on sacred and secular time. It is a modernism for this world and the otherworld, an off-modernism that “makes it old” in a new way.

Redefining the sacred

*From Ritual to Romance* presents its history, and its vision of modernity, as grounded in the sacred and feminine. Moreover, *From Ritual to Romance* redefines the sacred itself as meaningfully associated with the feminine and the non-Christian (which themselves are associated with one another). In the remainder of this chapter, I will first explore Weston’s reframing of the sacred in these terms, and then show how Weston’s monograph guides her reader to experience its version of the feminine sacred through its use and performance of scholarly form. Instead of locating the holiness of the “Holy Grail” in its association with Christianity, as was conventional, Weston first rejects its Christian significance and then replaces it with a holiness located in the ancient past, specifically in the feminine realm of prehistory. Through positing its origins in the most distant past, her theory grants the grail legend “as august and ancient an origin as the most tenacious upholder of Its Christian

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character could desire” (FRR 5). The grail legend is hallowed enough to be worthy of capitalization in noun and pronoun form (Weston capitalizes “Grail” and “Its” when referring to it throughout the book)— but not in the familiar Christian way. Rather, Weston gives the grail legend an origin in a lost, pre-Christian, even pre-Classical, civilization.199

Weston brought to the familiar idea of traditions made sacred by long practice the occult theory of a historical golden age in which a now lost civilization— superior to contemporary civilizations— had flourished. According to this devolutionary theory, present-day societies are the degraded remnants of this superior community, often construed as a separate “race.”200 Prominent versions of this theory in occultism understood this lost civilization to have been founded by humans imbued with divinity or some form of otherworldly knowledge.201 This lost civilization thus represented both the prestige of divine origins and of great antiquity. In her “Introductory” chapter, Weston sets forth her allegiance to the lost civilization theory, which underlies the rest of her argument without appearing explicitly again. She asserts that the records of early religious practices preserved in

199 See Cathy Gere, Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism (U Chicago P, 2009) on early twentieth-century British archaeologist Arthur Evans’s promotion of the discourse of a lost matriarchal civilization. Evans was a crucial influence on Harrison, and via Harrison, Weston. I thank Brian Pietras for this citation.

200 In this theory Weston was heavily influenced by G. R. S. Mead, her friend and editor, and the author of Fragments of a Faith Forgotten (1900), among many other books on occult and esoteric topics. Mead had been H. P. Blavatsky’s secretary at the Theosophical Society. He was part of an elite group within the society and edited its journal Lucifer (later The Theosophical Review). In 1907 he was offered the presidency of the European Section of the Theosophical Society, but declined, and left the society to found his own Quest Society, a venture which emphasized scholarly endeavor and which was open to non-occultists, and of which Weston was a member. For more on Mead, see Nicholas and Clare Goodricke-Clark, G.R.S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest (North Atlantic Books, 2005); for Mead in relation to High Modernism, and especially his relationships with Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats, see Leon Surette and Demetres Tryphonopoulos, eds. Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition. (The National Poetry Foundation, 1996).

201 Such theories are still the subject of popular books and documentaries today, and include such evocatively named versions as the “Ancient astronauts” hypothesis. It may be hard to imagine such theories as part of a Cambridge University Press-issued book; and indeed, their presence is subtle in From Ritual to Romance. Yet diffusionist theory, which engaged with and was very compatible with such ideas if not always aligned with them, had academic cachet during this period when “there was a short-lived domination of this theory in British Social Anthropology.” T. C. Champion “Egypt and the diffusion of culture,” in Jeffreys, D. (ed.) Views of Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, colonialism and modern appropriations (UCL Press, 2003): 129, quoted in Kathleen Shepherd, Margaret Alice Murray: A Life in Archaeology (Lexington Books, 2013). This will be discussed further in Chapter Five on Murray. See also Ramaswamy for an in-depth look at the version of this theory that focused on the “lost land of Lemuria.”
the grail legend are in fact “disjecta membra of a vanished civilization” which constituted the “spiritual, not [...] material, origin of the human race” (7). It is thus a theory of origin that both attempts to unite all humanity across modern divisions, and is pointedly racist in its rejection of the idea that a spiritually valuable religion could “have been evolved from such germs as we find among the supposedly ‘primitive’ peoples, such as e.g., the Australian tribes” (7). In such a view of history, “the supposedly ‘primitive’ people” are seen not as closer to man’s origins, but as degenerate descendants from more noble ancestors.

According to this theory, as Weston expresses it in From Ritual to Romance, the first widespread religion of Greece (e.g., Attis-Adonis worship) did not evolve out of folk religious practices, as Frazer suggested in The Golden Bough; rather, a coherent religion was granted to man in this “vanished civilization,” and the folk practices are “but surviving fragments of a worship from which the higher significance has vanished” (FRR 7). Following work in occult scholarship, Weston uses the framework of scientific, secular history— that the history of human beings is a long story of gradual change going back into a distant past far anterior to Biblical history— to posit pre-Judeo-Christian divine origins of mankind. The new idea of prehistory and deep geological time created room for the possibility not only of primitive matriarchal societies, as posited by Engels, Bachofen, Evans, etc., but of sophisticated “vanished” civilizations sketched out by Blavatsky and others (FRR 7).

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202 This is one of several places in her argument where Weston builds on Frazer’s theories and methods and takes them further than Frazer countenanced. While there is no record of Frazer having read or responded to FRR, he vehemently rejected the theory of cultural diffusion Weston assumes here.

203 Notably, by locating the origins of the grail ritual in this lost civilization, Weston locates the significance of the legend outside of national boundaries altogether, further removing her theory from the realm of masculine political history. That the earliest hints of this “vanished” civilization are preserved in the “traditions of our Aryan forefathers” invokes a racial community that precedes and transcends nationalisms, and even the major nineteenth-century binary of east/west (FRR 7, 81). In this way, her theory shares affinities with contemporary socialist/progressive ideas of international brotherhood. By positing a common, sacred origin for man in a pre-national civilization, Weston offers a precedent for inter-, or even, post-national cooperation.
These vanished civilizations offered precedents and even potential sources for Weston’s ambition for a totalizing sacred-scientific scholarly practice. Such a conflation of precedent and source can be clearly seen in the work of the actress, occultist, and writer Florence Farr, who in the 1890s wrote Egyptological scholarship that “sought an underlying order to the universe that neither science nor religion had the power to interpret or manipulate, but that the more holistic epistemology of the Egyptian priests could conquer.” For Weston and Farr, their scholarship was both an investigation of and a preservation of superior forms of ancient knowledge. In this way, it was a continuation of the occult wisdom tradition that drew on but also claimed to go beyond, modern scholarly practices.

Furthermore, in aligning the developmental, evolutionary idea of prehistory with the occult theory of mankind’s sacred origins in a “vanished civilization” centered on a “faith forgotten,” Weston unites two conceptions of secular and sacred time. Prehistory here contains both the secular time of natural history and the time of the sacred origins of mankind in an original, now fragmented, revelation. In addition, Weston introduces the idea of mystical practices which originated at the sacred origins of man, but which allow access to the experience of the sacred at any point in secular time. Such practices are a part of the first religion, and, in her account, persist into early Christianity. In turning to the history of Christianity, Weston again brings secular and sacred time together by making their separation an event in history. In Weston’s version of history, the early history of Christianity both attests to the presence of sacred time accessible through mystical practice, and the efforts of an organized, worldly religion to suppress such practices. With “Imperial Rome,” “Christianity, originally an Eastern, became a Western, religion,” and its “Mystery elements”

and “kinship with pre-Christian faiths” were “ignored, or denied”; resemblances between such faiths and Christianity were attributed to Satan’s work; “Christianity was carefully trimmed, shaped, and forced into an Orthodox mould” (FRR151). Division came with the progression of history, and a Christianity formerly united with mystical traditions that allowed direct experience of the sacred was separated out, to its detriment.

In returning to early, pre-dogmatic Christianity, Weston unites sacred time with conditions of society apparently more sympathetic to women, complementing the association of prehistoric religious origins with matriarchal modes of organization. She brings this connection to her discussion of the grail romances, some of which appear to preserve the mystical “Creed” of the “original conception” of heterodox Christianity, while others reflect a later, corrupted western, orthodox Christianity:

Finally the rising tide of dogmatic Medievalism, with its crassly materialistic view of the Eucharist; its insistence on the saving grace of asceticism and celibacy; and its scarcely veiled contempt for women, overwhelmed the original conception. Certain of the features of the ancient ritual indeed survive, but they are factors of confusion, rather than clues to enlightenment. (207)

Here, Weston indicates, by listing their opposites, the superior elements of early eastern, heterodox Christianity. Its rituals are spiritual (not “crassly materialistic”), yet it embraces rather than denies embodied and erotic pleasures; finally, it respects women. Originally, Christianity, with its connections to pagan mysteries, was life-affirming; later, it becomes repressive and negating. Weston dismisses the later grail romances that succumbed to “the

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205 Like many other Protestant writers in the nineteenth century looking to revitalize Christianity, Weston, following a religious sense of sacred origins, looks to its early forms as the source of its true value. In this view, only with its consolidation in Rome did Christianity become corrupted and problematic. Such an approach is found in the Biblical criticism of German protestants as well as British historical novels of primitive Christianity.

206 Weston, in recounting this story, and recovering the nature of those traditions, furthers the project of uniting Pagan and Christian religions once again, in the tradition of Pico and Pater.
rising ride of dogmatic Medievalism” as corrupted records of the grail ritual: “features of the ancient ritual indeed survive, but they are factors of confusion, rather than clues to enlightenment” (207). In contrast, the grail romances on which her study focuses are recognizably heterodox.

A key aspect of their heterodoxy is their suggestion of a direct revelation from Christ to followers outside the Apostles. In support of this latter point, Weston turns to literary evidence: “Scholars have been struck by the curiously unorthodox tone of the Grail romances, their apparent insistence on a succession quite other than the accredited Apostolic tradition, and yet, according to the writers, directly received from Christ Himself” (FRR 170). As records of an alternative mystical, mystery tradition within Christianity, such romances evoke the heresy of an alternative direct transmission of the revelation of Christ. At the same time, they preserve evidence of direct mystical communion—or the means to it—with the divine. Thus, drawing on both the literary elements of the romances and her account of religious history, Weston connects with the grail romances two forms of direct connection with the divine: uninterrupted transmission of a revelation given at a specific point in history (or prehistory) and mystical communion available at any point in history. In this doubling of direct connection, we have another version of complementary historical and spiritual truths: the grail romances offer both an account of a one-time historical connection with divinity via direct, original revelation, and the possibility of an ever-present spiritual communion. Weston’s history of the grail rite as history of religion tells a story of historical origins and spiritual essences, sometimes conflating them, sometimes using one as evidence for the other. Thus, in her theory of divine, ancient origins of the grail ritual, Weston aligns apparently contradictory concepts of historical evolution and sacred origins. Such a linkage is similar to that found in She, where systems of evolution and degeneration co-exist, as is
especially evident in the titular *She* herself. Ayesha is at once the representative of a forgotten ancient civilization superior in knowledge and power to any in the present day, and an evolutionary throwback driven by a primitive jealousy who indeed regresses into a monkey before dying at the novel’s end. Similarly, the grail ritual is at once a “force of evolution” itself and a remnant of a superior, ancient civilization extant now only in fragments.

In this way, the account can be seen to meet both standards of historical as well as spiritual truth, or, in their conflation, to be inadequate to both.

**Studied enchantment**

For those readers of Weston who, like the *Horizon*’s Cyril Connolly, were “transported into a whirl of argument and magic that is incommunicable,” *From Ritual to Romance* offers a dizzying experience of an encounter with an alternative world history that centers on figures and forces professional historical discourse had largely deemed marginal or even ahistorical: women, colonized peoples, and spiritual experience. In offering readers a coherent theory and account of such an alternative history, Weston’s monograph encourages its own remarkable form of spiritual experience. By bringing together the sacred and scientific in her writing, Weston performed the conventions of scholarship to create feelings of awe and wonder, and to encourage readers to experience the mystical within a scientific framework. It presents the fact of meaning itself as awe-inspiring in ways akin to the religious experiences it also chronicles. It fosters such experiences not only through aligning itself with standards of both scientific and spiritual truths, but also through its creative deployment of scholarly conventions—most centrally the comparative method, through which it constructs a coherent theory of an original whole through a synthesis of observed facts and inductive inferences, or conjectures.
Weston exploits the potential of conjecture and the comparative method to unite superficially distinct phenomena by revealing underlying connections that can only be apprehended indirectly, through interpretive (e.g., imaginative) work. In this way, she uses this convention of scholarship to find meaning in apparent randomness, bring order to chaos, and to convince her readers of her theories, invoking their rationality to demand a strong belief in the coherent, inherently meaningful world her theory creates. Weston explicitly embraces the comparative method as it was made famous in the study of religion by Frazer. In the preface to From Ritual to Romance, she declares herself an “impenitent believer” in The Golden Bough. And like Frazer, she reflects often on the method, invoking the image of the conjectural chain to structure her theory. Early in the book she claims, “The chain of evidence is already strong, and we may justly claim that the links added by further research strengthen, while they lengthen, that chain” (42). By the end, the chain is nearly complete, and satisfies the criterion of coherence:

While there are still missing links in the chain of descent, versions to be reconstructed, writers to be identified, I believe that in its ensemble the theory set forth in these pages will be found to be the only one which will satisfactorily meet all

207 For some readers, this method of persuasion backfired, as it invoked improbable fantasy rather than credible history. One contemporary reviewer complained that, “The argument clearly relies on faith rather than fact. The true believers are not likely to be shaken by the sceptic’s inability to accept an improbable possibility unsupported by evidence as the magic key which is to unlock the mysteries of the Grail.” The reviewer suggests, critically, how the monograph reads like fantasy literature, invoking Alice in Wonderland and one of H. Rider Haggard’s adventurers to introduce it: “‘Curiouser and curiouser,’ said Alice to herself upon an occasion of bewilderment, and some readers of Miss Weston’s latest study of the Grail legend will find themselves doing the same, as they progress along the path from ritual to romance. For it needs an Alan Quartermaine to adopt without surprise the assurance that the story of Chaus, the son of Yvain the Bastard, ‘is the story of an initiation carried out on the astral plane and reacting with fatal results upon the physical,’ or that the legend given in the text known as the Elucidation may have a foundation in the historical fact of an outrage offered by some chieftain to the priestess of an esoteric Mithraic cult, which had survived into the Middle Ages in the fastnesses of Wales.” Liverpool Post and Mercury, “The Mystery of the Grail” (March 31, 1920).

208 Weston makes this claim at a time when Frazer himself had begun to disavow his more definite pronouncements in his earlier work. She makes it clear that she is no naive believer, but a knowing heretic: “I am, of course, familiar with the attacks directed against the ‘Vegetation’ theory, the sarcasms of which it has been the object, and the criticisms of what is held in some quarters to be the exaggerated importance attached to these Nature cults” (6).
the conditions of the problem; which will cover the whole ground of investigation, omitting no element, evading no difficulty; which will harmonize apparently hopeless contradictions, explain apparently meaningless terminology, and thus provide a secure foundation for the criticism of a body of literature as important as it is fascinating. (208-209)

The chain is evolutionary—or rather, devolutionary: it is a “chain of descent.” It is both linear and vast—more of a network than a single-strand chain. It “cover[s] the whole ground” of the field of inquiry, providing a “secure foundation” for future work, and in its expanse “harmoniz[ing]” and connecting apparently distinct and distant elements.

She presents the nearly completed chain of the grail tradition, as elucidated by her study, as thrilling in itself; in addition, she uses formal strategies that create pleasurable awe in the reader. In the “Task of the Hero” chapter, for example, she presents in succession ten variations of the story of the grail quest from medieval romances in order to show, as the chapter asserts on its first page, “at once a uniformity which assures us of the essential identity of the tradition underlying the varying forms, and a diversity indicating that the tradition has undergone a gradual, but radical, modification in the process of literary evolution” (12). The collection of stories shows both fundamental unity and evolutionary difference, attesting to the grounding of the grail story in history, and its constant identity even through historical change.

And just as Frazer’s encyclopedic work can be read as a series of folktales, the anthology form of “The Task of the Hero” chapter creates a place for narrative pleasure early in the study. Narrative pleasure also manifests in Weston’s expressions of excitement when she describes parallels that support her theory. For example, in a chapter connecting ritual dances to the grail legend, she exclaims, “In one form of the Morris Dance, that
performed in Berkshire, the leader, or ‘Squire’ of the Morris carries a Chalice!” (99). In such moments, she is not so much marshaling evidence while building up to a conclusion as celebrating the way a detail affirms her already formulated theory. She is a reader of her own theory, expressing delight at the way it comes together. For Weston the highest pleasure of her study is not in “mere literary invention” but in both the effect of narrative coherence, and in what the completed, coherent narrative suggests: that the literature she examines encodes a fundamental unity of human religious experience that is at once the origin and essence of religion (30).

While the ostensible source of meaning in the world is this original religious experience, it is through conjecture and the comparative method that Weston formally illustrates a world saturated with meaning, and thereby creates an experience of studied enchantment for her readers. Weston embraces the assumptions of Victorian avant-garde scholarship that every detail, whether of a text or of the historical record itself, has meaning as part of a coherent whole. There is no such thing as a random coincidence—a “correspondence can hardly be fortuitous” (80). Neither are there unimportant details or phenomena: the most apparently trifling detail often proves of great significance in connection with something else. “[A] curious little poem,” for example, offers “a most striking and significant parallel to certain surviving Fertility processions” and an apparently “fantastic fairy tale” has meaning as a symbolic account of historical fact (103, 173). Correspondences, always inherently suggestive, gain definite meaning in the context of a large body of evidence: “certain parallels with our Grail stories which, if taken by themselves, are perhaps interesting and suggestive rather than in any way conclusive, […] when they are considered in relation to the entire body of evidence, assume a curious significance and importance” (25). The very cataloguing of facts within an overarching narrative argument
such as *From Ritual to Romance* offers the reader an experience of perceiving the “significance and importance” of the study’s details as parts of a coherent whole.

While meaning is everywhere in this representation of the world, sublime mystery persists alongside it. *From Ritual to Romance* presents the fact of meaning itself—of the existence of connections between superficially distant details—as awe-inspiring. In one case, “the full force of the parallel” between details “is nothing short of astonishing” in view of “their close correspondence” despite “their separation in point of time (3000 B.C.; 1200 A.D.; and the present day)” (61). In addition to revealing apparently unimportant details to have significance, Weston’s conjectural method shows apparently unrelated phenomena to be in “a close and intimate union” (5). Her study registers, and then fulfills, a desire for “gulf[s] to be bridged” (52). Over the course of the monograph, Weston claims to have bridged the gulfs between “Classical, Medieval, and Modern forms of Nature ritual” and prehistoric “Aryan practice” (56); “the position of the people of the Shilluk tribe, […] the subjects of the Grail King, […]and[…] the ancient Babylonians” (60); the “prehistoric record” and “the extant practice and belief of countries so widely separate as the British Isles, Russia, and Central Africa” (113).

Weston’s eventual revelation of the mystery of the grail is similarly steeped in an atmosphere of awe. She presents her solution to the mystery as itself “a strange and startling thought” (149). She proposes that it lies in a “one-time claim of essential kinship between Christianity and the Pagan Mysteries that we shall find the key to the secret of the Grail” that went beyond Christianity’s adoption of the outward forms of the oriental mystery faiths, to “a rapprochement […] inherent in the very nature of the Faith” which consisted of the belief of “some of the deeper thinkers of old, [that] Christianity should have been held for no new thing but a fulfillment of the promise enshrined in the Mysteries from the beginning of the
world” (149). In this “strange and startling” story of “inherent” connections between superficially distinct phenomena, the solution to the “mystery” itself maintains a sense of mystery—of messianic “promises enshrined,” of traditions dating “from the beginning of the world.”

To give her readers experience of an awe-inspiring belief in the historical and spiritual reality of the grail ritual—to convince them of her theory—Weston ultimately uses conjecture to create an even stronger sense of rationalized certainty than Frazer does in The Golden Bough. Where Frazer subtly moves from lesser to greater probabilities, and builds upon his conjectures over hundreds of pages to suggest a cautious though powerful conviction, Weston asserts certainty early and often, giving her book a tone of “shrill pugnacity” to some and of obscure authoritativeness to others. An element of her theory is less likely to be simply “probable” than “most,” “extremely,” or “exceedingly” probable. Much “seems certain” and other ideas are “beyond doubt” (161, 189). For example, similar forms appear not only to imply but to guarantee similar origins: in a case of two phenomena, Weston finds “a parallel so extraordinarily complete, alike in action and significance, that an essential identity of origin appears to be beyond doubt” (86). Other parallels guarantee meaning in apparent coincidence: Weston finds “a connecting link which proves beyond all doubt that our modern dances, and analogous representations, are in fact genuine survivals of primitive ceremonies, and in no way a mere fortuitous combination of originally independent elements” (91). Such a link “proves” that certain phenomena are meaningfully, not randomly, connected.

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210 Out of the eleven instances of “probable” in the body of the text, six are modified by one of these adverbs.
There is a fantastic literalization to Weston’s method: she “proves” that apparent representations are actually forms of real things, ancient practices that manifested the original and essential meaning of mankind’s relationship to the sacred.\textsuperscript{211} Weston invokes this dynamic at the climax of her study, which features a highly dramatic rhetorical set-up of a mystery and then its equally dramatic solution:

Now how can we account for so wild, and at first sight so improbable, a tale assuming what we may term a semi-historical character, and becoming connected with a definite and precise locality?—a feature which is, as a rule, absent from the Grail stories.

Weston’s unaccountable tale is not just the “tale” itself, but how such an apparently impossible story—of a young man who dreams of visiting the grail chapel, where he sustains a wound, only to wake up and to find the wound real, and fatal—comes to have the specific characteristics of a historical story. She then promises to solve this puzzle—but with an explanation equally strange:

At the risk of startling my readers I must express my opinion that it was because the incidents recorded were a reminiscence of something which had actually happened, and which, owing to the youth, and possible social position, of the victim, had made a profound impression upon the popular imagination.

For this is the story of an initiation (or perhaps it would be more correct to say the test of fitness for an initiation) carried out on the astral plane, and reacting with fatal results upon the physical. (182)

\textsuperscript{211} Weston also applies this approach beyond the central question of her study, and in a way common to her scholarly milieu, suggesting historical interpretations of fairy tales: In one case, she reveals an apparently “fantastic fairy-tale” to be a symbolic account of historical fact: “Now at first sight this account appears to be nothing but a fantastic fairy-tale […] Yet, on the basis of the theory now set forth, is it not possible that there may be a real foundation of historical fact at the root of this wildly picturesque tale? May it not be simply a poetical version of the disappearance from the land of Britain of the open performance of an ancient Nature ritual?” (173).
In this solution, Weston asserts that the events of a story, which itself recounts a dream, records a historical event. According to her, the story is not “mere literary invention,” but history. But it is not less remarkable for this change from a literary to a historical register. If anything, the marvelousness of the story has increased: for what actually happened attests to the reality of “the astral plane” by marking it as historical. The historically actuality of this event proves the existence of an otherworld. More than this, it is an otherworld intimately connected to this one—in which events in the former “react[…]” upon the latter.212

Weston opens this conclusion with typically rationalistic language: as a scholar, she aims to “account for” a tale “so wild” and “so improbable.” Like the sound historian of religion, she is taking a rational approach to irrational material. The set-up includes other terms of rational inquiry: the “semi-historical,” the “definite,” the “precise,” the observation of “a rule.” She then frames her revelation by invoking skepticism: she knows she might “startl[e]” her readers with the solution she offers; yet she “must” offer it. Finally, the italicized conclusion is interrupted by a non-italicized parenthetical that illustrates her scholarly caution (“or perhaps it would be more correct to say”) even in the midst of her experience of making an exciting discovery. Weston thus assures us of her scholarly bona fides at this crucial moment. This formal strategy, moreover, replicates within a short passage the structure of the fantastic frame/tale narrative, playing with the invocation of skepticism and

212 In Perceval, volume II, Weston specifies the context of the language of the astral and physical planes. She takes from “the dominant idea of Mediaeval Symbolism and Mysticism, that of the triple character of all action” (256). This is, furthermore, “the root principle of Occult Philosophy,” as she writes, referencing Agrippa (256n3). The “triple character” of action refers to the three plans on which phenomena simultaneously occur: the “middle plane” of “Humanity, or Actuality” which corresponds to “external” popular folk rites; the plane “below,” which is “the Phallic” plane of secret teaching; and “the highest plane” or the “Spiritual” plane on which the grail is the “source of Spiritual, undying, Life” (258). On the highest plane, the grail is “invisible under normal conditions—the vision is only vouchsafed as the reward of severe testing” (258). According to Weston, “Not only do these three worlds influence one another, but action on the one plane, or world, is reflected on the others, and each object has its corresponding image” (257).
the invitation to credulity, weaving them together to yield an apparent rational affirmation of
the reality of a conventionally irrational idea.

Crucially, in Weston’s theory and method, additional study increases the significance of the phenomena examined, rather than reducing it or explaining it away. As Weston writes, “we find that their [the Grail stories’] mise-en-scène provides a striking series of parallels with the Classical celebrations, parallels, which instead of vanishing, as parallels have occasionally an awkward habit of doing, before closer investigation, rather gain in force the more closely they are studied” (48). In Weston’s method, closer scholarly scrutiny only increases the “force” of correspondences. In contrast to the stereotype of the reductive nature of professional scholarly study, Weston suggests that scholarly study reinforces the vitality of the subjects it is brought to bear on. As Weston rhapsodizes, “The more one studies this wonderful legend the more one discovers significance in what seem at first to be entirely independent and unrelated details” (183). For Weston and her sympathetic readers, studying “this wonderful legend” leads to greater pleasure and appreciation: increased study only makes the legend more wonderful, and never threatens to reduce it to something less marvelous.
Chapter Five: Jane Ellen Harrison’s Ritual Scholarship

In 1888, Walter Pater wrote that “the scholarly conscience” was necessarily “male” (A8). But by then his London acquaintance Jane Ellen Harrison was already developing a scholarly style and persona that were distinctively female— and doing so in Pater’s spheres of classics, aesthetics, and archeology, no less. Harrison, the “most famous female classicist there has ever been,” was by 1888 already a celebrity scholar, addressing crowds of hundreds at her lectures. She had been among the first students at Newnham College, the second woman’s college at Cambridge, in the 1870s, and then had a successful career in London giving popular lectures on Ancient Greek art at the British Museum and for university extension courses. She moved in aesthetic circles and published well received studies of Greek art. During this time, she travelled widely— to Greece and elsewhere around Europe, studying at libraries and archeological sites with prominent scholars— and applied unsuccessfully for academic posts. In 1898, following a decade in which she had begun to shift her focus from Ancient Greek art to Ancient Greek religion and ritual, she accepted the first research fellowship at Newnham. She remained there until 1922, when she moved to Paris with her companion, the writer (and her former student), Hope Mirrlees. Harrison was noted for her unorthodox politics, unorthodox lifestyle, and unorthodox scholarship on Ancient Greek religion. She published ten scholarly books during her career, most notably Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion in 1903, Themis in 1912, and Epiglomena to

213 Harrison was a sometime— perhaps frequent— dinner guest of Pater and his sisters. (She recalls meeting Henry James there “often.”) In her memoir, she recalls that “Pater and his sisters were good and opened their house to me; I always think of him as a soft, kind cat; her purred so persuasively that I lost the sense of what he was saying.” This suggests a dig at his style over substance— a rather unfair one, as Pater seemed to have influenced Harrison significantly in both areas. Harrison, Reminiscences of a Student’s Life, (Hogarth Press, 1925): 46). (Henceforth cited as RSL.)
the Study of Greek Religion in 1921. *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), a scholarly work for a lay audience, was probably her most widely read book. In addition, she disseminated her theories through reviews, critical and autobiographical essays, many collected in *Alpha and Omega* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1915), and a memoir, *Reminiscences of a Student’s Life* (Hogarth Press, 1925). The trajectory of her career and work parallels Weston’s: Her scholarship on religion was controversial from the beginning and its ardent fans and critics ensured its pervasive influence both within the academy and among the educated public. In the 1930s, the rising generation of increasingly professionalized scholars began to discredit her work, and it remains marginal to intellectual and literary history today.214 During the same time, her books were embraced by founders and practitioners of New Age religions, feminist theologians, and other counter-cultural figures.215

Harrison’s scholarly writing offered an alternative history of religion and secularization and an alternative practice of scholarship which ought to be far better known

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215 From its first publication, Harrison’s work on Greek religion was embraced by Neopagan enthusiasts, such as Ernest Westlake, whose Order of Woodcraft Chivalry was, in his words, “an application of Miss Harrison’s work” (quoted in Hutton165). Later, the radical Catholic theologian Mary Daly cited Harrison in her own alternative feminist histories (94). Neopagan writers such as Z Budapest claim Harrison as a “main source” for tenets of feminist spirituality (Acknowledgments). In a different countercultural vein, *From Ritual to Romance* makes a cameo appearance on Kurtz’s nightstand in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979).
than they are, both as part of literary history, and of a history of the Anglo-American humanities more broadly. Harrison took Victorian theories of religion centered on the decline of faith—what Charles Taylor calls a “subtraction” story of secularization—and reworked them to insist on, and celebrate, religion’s persistence into the twentieth century. Moreover, she rejected the definition of religion as a set of beliefs or doctrines, and instead elaborated an understanding of religion grounded in social, ritual, and mystical experience. Religious experience was central to her inquiry into what she saw as the linked histories of women and religion, and to her ways of writing about what she saw as their equally linked fates. I argue that Harrison’s work constitutes a project to make a new version of what she saw as a very old religious experience available to her audience through her scholarly writing. Her scholarly books, with their emphasis on emotional experience, act as sacred—even liturgical—texts of her woman-centered religion. I call this body of work her “ritual scholarship.”

Harrison has recently become an increasingly prominent figure in three major projects of humanistic scholarship: the historiography of religion and secularization; the history of modernist literature; and the history of Victorian classics. Arguably, and

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216 See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard UP, 2007): 570-574. Taylor defines it as the claim that “the transition to modernity comes about through the loss of traditional beliefs and allegiances,” a loss that thereby reveals a reality that can only now be seen clearly (570). For “the Arnoldian replacement theory,” see Michael W. Kaufmann. “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession.” *New Literary History* 38.4 (2007): 607-28. Kaufmann defines this as “the belief, whose origins are often attributed to Matthew Arnold, that poetry/literature replaces a religion that had become too dogmatic, and thereby takes on the cultural function of transmitting moral and spiritual values to at least as segment of society” (616).

particularly in light of the place of her work among practitioners of forms of New Age religion, Harrison should also be a prominent figure in histories of contemporary theology.\textsuperscript{218} Historian Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay presents Harrison as the last of the major nineteenth-century practitioners of the “science of religion,” and Harrison’s body of work as illustrating “a radical alternative to Victorian Christianity” and, most vividly, to “the modern dilemma as regards religion”— the struggle to link past to present, tradition to modernity, emotion and intellect (Wheeler-Barclay 239, 242).\textsuperscript{219} In his study of the history and ethics of the “process of secularization” and “secular” or “cultural” criticism, Vincent Pecora presents Harrison as an exemplary, if minor, figure among the many intellectuals pursuing a non-reductive rational study of religion at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{220} Harrison was one of those promoting a “new secular religion of modernity” marked by “a sense of the social as sacred” and “a rich and suggestive, but also highly unstable, merging of social theory and religious...
thought” (Pecora 119, 121, 116). Both Wheeler-Barclay and Pecora present Harrison as reacting against Victorian ideas about religion to theorize a new religion for modernity.

Harrison’s current role in literary studies is primarily that of writer of source material for modernist authors, rather than that of an author of literary material in her own right. She has featured in histories of modernist literature since the 1970s, when feminist critics canonized Virginia Woolf, and noted Woolf’s interest in Harrison, who appears in *A Room of One’s Own* as “the famous scholar, [...] J— H— herself,” glimpsed in the garden at “Fernham.” Before this small renaissance, Harrison had two roles in literary studies: First, during her lifetime her theories of the origins of art (especially drama) and religion were taken up by writers such as T.S. Eliot and Jessie L. Weston in their creative and critical writing on literature. In the 1950s and 1960s, her work was revisited by the myth-ritual critics Stanley Edgar Hyman and Herbert Wiesinger, who similarly referred to the mythic patterns she described in their analyses of modern literature. But her work was discredited anew in this context when the classicist Joseph Fontenrose published a devastating attack on Frazer and Harrison and two of their followers (including Hyman) in *The Ritual Theory of Myth* (University of California Press, 1966). As Robert A. Segal notes, “There has been no formal rejoinder to Fontenrose.”

In both the myth-ritual context of the 1950s-60s and the feminist criticism of the 1970s-90s, Harrison was mainly cited for contributing female “archetypes” such as the maid/mother/crone and earth goddess. As Shanyn Fiske notes, more recently critics have begun to pay attention to Harrison’s formal as well as thematic contributions to the project of “shaping alternative forms of knowing that allowed for a sense of historical, emotional,

and moral continuity so desperately lacking after World War I” (Fiske “Ritual” 184-185). While Woolf still constitutes the central site for work on Harrison in modernist studies, work on H.D. and lesser known writers such as Mary Butts and Hope Mirrlees has also drawn further attention to Harrison’s writings, though such work still tends to see them still as source texts. Most recently, and promisingly, studies by Shanyn Fiske and Jean Mills have explored Harrison as a creative-critical writer worthy of consideration outside her role as source for other more famous writers.223

Harrison’s status as a major figure is most assured in the interdisciplinary field of classical reception studies. She is the subject of two recent biographies by classicists, Annabel Robinson (2002) and Mary Beard (2000).224 In the past twenty years, scholars have thoroughly revised and expanded our understanding of what we might call nineteenth-century Ancient Greece, and Harrison has emerged as a central figure in the new, broader view. Margot K. Louis, building on the work of Yopie Prins, among others, illuminates a late Victorian Hellenism marked by a turn from Arnoldian sweetness and light to an embrace of Dionysian violence, ecstasy, and mysticism, and from the Olympian gods and “golden century” of 5th century Athens to the chthonic deities of archaic Greece.225 Harrison’s “profoundly religious—and profoundly unchristian—[…] approach to myth” marked the zenith of this turn (352). Shanyn Fiske presents Harrison, alongside George Eliot and


224 For much of the twentieth century, Harrison’s status in classics was minor. The recovery of Harrison began with Robert Ackerman’s work on the so-called “Cambridge Ritualists” in the late 1960s, and achieved its most evident success with Robinson’s and Beard’s biographies.

225 Louis’s argument is particularly significant for showing the influence of Romantic and Victorian poetry on the emergence and profusion of these ideas in scholarly writings on Hellenism. For a recent expansion of this work, see Olverston, T. D. Women Writers and the Dark Side of Victorian Hellenism (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). All this work builds on Turner’s groundbreaking study, The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain (Yale UP, 1981).
Charlotte Brontë, among others, as a major practitioner of what she calls “Heretical Hellenism,” an approach to Ancient Greek art, literature, and myth developed by nineteenth-century women writers out of the constraints of their education and desire for artistic and intellectual authority. I build on this work to show how her classical scholarship is part of an efflorescence of scholarly writing on religion by women in early twentieth-century Britain (including Jessie L. Weston’s medievalist and Vernon Lee’s modern European studies, explored in Chapters Four and Six, respectively) that represented religious experience as a component of modernity and a driving force of cultural change.

**Victorian classics, secularization, and “the view from Dover Beach”**

Harrison was intimately familiar with what by the late 1880s was already the best known account of religion in the Victorian era: the crisis of faith and the subsequent decline of belief in Christianity in Britain. Notably, this Victorian narrative of secularization identified historical scholarship as the key catalyst to doubt and unbelief: the Christian believer experiences unwelcome doubts about his faith—most often precipitated by an encounter with the new historical scholarship—and then wrestles with his doubts, ultimately feeling constrained by honest self-searching and the demands of rationality to give up his faith in the divine Christ, though not his belief in the moral value of Christianity.226 This narrative of secularization and disenchantment by way of scholarship and struggle is well

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226 As Simon Goldhill notes, Darwin and biological science was a late addition to the causes of doubt. He cites Mrs Humphrey Ward’s claim, widely dispersed through her bestselling Robert Elsmere (1888), that it is “the education of the historic sense which is disintegrating faith.” Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity*, (Princeton UP, 2011): 6. Indeed, in the cases of Eliot and others, whose struggles with doubt took place in the 1840s and ‘50s, *The Origin of Species* was published too late to be the catalyst. And even as late as 1888, Mrs. Humphrey Ward (the former Mary Arnold, niece of Matthew) gave pride of place to historicism and Higher Criticism in the crisis of faith of her hero Robert Elsmere in the bestselling novel of that name. Offering another cause, Margot K. Louis reminds us, citing Murphy, that theodicy was also a significant force in the Victorian crisis of faith. In this sense, scholarship on religion was a “response to” not a “cause of” nineteenth-century religious turmoil, as Wheeler-Barclay argues (Wheeler-Barclay 2).
known to Victorianists from the lives of prominent figures such as George Eliot.²²⁷ Brought up in a Christian evangelical family, and devout through her teen years, Eliot turned to the Higher Criticism “to know the truth” about Christianity.²²⁸ But in her deep reading, she was led to give up her faith in the divine Christ, and came to “regard these [Biblical] writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction,” though she professed admiration for “the moral teaching of Jesus himself.”²²⁹ She stopped attending church, creating a rift with her father and family. Her first book-length publications were translations of German Biblical criticism: of The Life of Jesus Critically Examined by David Strauss [1835] (1846) and of The Essence of Christianity by Ludwig Feuerbach [1841] (1854). She went on to rewrite her struggles with faith and doubt in her novels, ultimately creating in them what has been called her “religion of humanity,” a Feuerbachian version of Christianity founded on an appreciation of the moral value of its human truths, and a denial of any miraculous ones.²³⁰

This narrative combines what has been called “the view from Dover Beach” with the “Arnoldian replacement theory” of secularization.²³¹ In Arnold’s 1867 poem, “Dover

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²²⁷ It was not widely known about Eliot during her lifetime, however. Only with the publication of John Cross’s George Eliot’s Life (1885) did the general outline of her struggle with faith become known outside her own circle. I thank Barry Qualls for discussion on this question. In the nineteenth century, this narrative was popularized most extensively by Robert Elsmere, the best-selling novel by Mrs. Humphrey Ward (the former Mary Arnold, niece of Matthew). Robert Elsmere gave pride of place to historicist Higher Criticism in the crisis of faith of the clergyman Elsmere.

²²⁸ Eliot to Maria Lewis, Nov 1841 (quoted in Rosemary Ashton, George Eliot: A Life: 35)

²²⁹ Eliot to her father, 28 Feb 1842 (quoted in Ashton GE: 44)

²³⁰ In his classic study of Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel (Princeton UP, 1964), U. C. Knoepflmacher cites the familiar narrative of Eliot’s “break with her father’s faith, her despair over ‘leathery Strauss,’ her typical refuge in the pantheism of Spinoza and Wordsworth, and, finally, her confrontation with the anti-theological theology of Feuerbach” (44). His argument emphasizes how she drew on Feuerbach especially in her depiction of a “religion of humanity” in her novels.

²³¹ For “the view from Dover Beach,” see Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Harvard UP, 2007): 570-574. Taylor defines it as the claim that “the transition to modernity comes about through the loss of traditional beliefs and allegiances” (570). This is also the “subtraction view of modernity,” in which the loss of religion reveals a reality that can only now be seen clearly (571). For “the Arnoldian replacement theory,” see Kaufmann, Michael W. “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession.” New Literary History 38.4 (2007): 607–28. Kaufmann defines this as “the belief, whose origins are often attributed to Matthew Arnold, that poetry/literature replaces a religion that had become too dogmatic, and thereby takes on the cultural function of transmitting moral and spiritual values to at least as segment of
Beach,” as faith recedes from the world—in the “Sea of Faith’s [...] melancholy long withdrawing roar”—it leaves behind “the naked shingles of the world,” which Charles Taylor interprets as a reality that has always been there but was previously inaccessible. The beach left bare by the withdrawing sea of faith corresponds to a reality no longer obscured by outmoded, irrational superstition. To face this disenchanted reality honestly was a heroic and necessary act through which one acknowledged one’s identity as a rational and modern man. Often in this account, the intellectual, bereft of faith, replaces his religion with a humanist ethics grounded in high art and literature, or, in a word, “culture”—Arnold’s “best that has been thought and said.” One strand of this “Arnoldian replacement theory” culminated in nineteenth-century aestheticism, with its “religion of art.”

By her own account, Harrison’s lived experience of Victorian secularization recapitulates these narratives, and even features their key texts. Like Eliot, Harrison was brought up in a provincial nonconformist family, though in her case, with the particular addition of an unwelcome evangelical stepmother. And like Eliot, she claimed her crisis of faith was precipitated by reading the Higher Criticism—in this case, Eliot’s own translation of Strauss’s The Life of Jesus. Harrison was a great admirer of Eliot, and it is likely her autobiographical account reflects some modeling on Eliot’s biography; but I’m less interested here in how Harrison lived these experiences at the time they occurred than in the use she makes of her reconstructed account of them. Elsewhere, she explicitly cites these

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232 In aestheticism, which was more associated with Walter Pater, who wrote in opposition to Arnold, art not only replaced Christian religion, but sometimes suggested alternatives to Christian ethics and morality. While the replacement of religion with culture as an ethical guide was reconcilable with the heroic Victorian doubters, aestheticism’s “religion of art” was seen by some of its critics as an effeminate, facile, and pernicious response to the loss of faith.

233 The few personal papers of Harrison’s that remain from the era she points to as that belonging to her Victorian crisis of faith (1870s) do not reflect this narrative quite so exactly. It is likely that Harrison’s later accounts, written in the twentieth century, borrowed their shape from the secularization stories of the 1880s.
experiences as a factor in shaping her theories of religion.\textsuperscript{234} For Harrison, “Thought, to be living, does and must arise straight out of life,” and lived experience is a crucial kind of scholarly evidence (\textit{AO} 184). Particularly important to Harrison was her later sense of herself as a Victorian relic. As she said to her young audience at the Cambridge Society of Heretics in 1912, “Perhaps I am the only person left in this room who was brought up in the old evangelical doctrine,” once again invoking the parallel experience of George Eliot (\textit{AO} 59). In this way, Harrison treats her own experience as a source of authority: she knows the Victorian accounts of religious changes so intimately because she lived them—and thus she is all the more qualified eventually to critique them.

In her twentieth-century autobiographical writings, Harrison presents herself as a veteran of Victorian religious education and the crisis of faith. She recalls her first encounter with doubt in the context of the Higher Criticism: while she was a teenager in Yorkshire, a new curate arrived in town “fresh from Oxford” (\textit{RSL} 27). “Rashly in one of his sermons he drew attention to a mistranslation. This filled me with great excitement and alarm. I saw in a flash that the whole question of the ‘verbal inspiration of the Bible’ was at issue. That afternoon I took my Greek Testament down to the Sunday School and, eager for further elucidation, waylaid the helpless curate. I soon found that his knowledge of Greek was, if

\textsuperscript{234} “I have come to this conclusion [that some element of religion is essential to human progress] very slowly and, I admit, reluctantly, and to show how I came I must for a moment lapse into autobiography” (\textit{AO} 183). She can also be humorous about it, as when she cites her experience of “committee work” as evidence of the irrationality of groups: “Intellectually the group is weak; everyone knows this who has ever sat on a committee and arrives at a confused compromise. Emotionally the group is strong; everyone knows this who has felt the thrill of seeking to or acting with a great multitude” (\textit{Themis} 43).
possible, more slender than my own.” But in the wake of this, Harrison maintained her “conventional beliefs” a while yet (Peacock 28). At Cheltenham, she became very close to the headmistress Dorothea Beale, and was influenced by Miss Beale’s more wide-ranging, though still largely conventional, approach to Christianity. After leaving Cheltenham, she returned home to teach her younger siblings. It was there that, sometime between 1870 and 1874, she read Eliot’s translation of Strauss, which “shook [her] faith completely” (Peacock 28).

By the time she arrived at Newnham in 1874, Harrison had by her own account passed through the major stages of the Victorian crisis of faith. At Newnham, she found an alternative to her newly unsettled Christianity: Hellenism. In her memoir, she describes her encounter with Aristotle’s *Ethics*, which was assigned to her in class, as epoch-making: It was the first of three books “marking three stages in my thinking” (RSL 80). She recalls her experience of reading it in the context of Victorian Hebraism and Hellenism:

To realise the release that Aristotle brought, you must have been reared as I was in a narrow school of Evangelicalism—reared with sin always present, with death and judgment before you, Hell and Heaven to either hand. It was quite like coming out of a madhouse into a quiet college quadrangle where all was liberty and sanity; and you became a law to yourself. The doctrine of virtue as the Mean—what an uplift to

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235 This exchange led to a romance (which Harrison dismisses more than her biographers do), and her being “summarily despatched insue disgrace to Cheltenham” (RSL 27).
236 Harrison’s biographer Robinson notes that “Miss Beale was known to be something of a mystic, with High Church sympathies and in interest in theosophy. Her esoteric interpretations of the Scriptures sent Jane ‘nearly crazy with excitement’” (Robinson 28).
237 In this, she would have much in common with her classmates, several of whom in memoirs recall similar experiences at or around their time at Newnham. Mary Paley, one of the first Newnham students and a friend from Yorkshire who encouraged Harrison also to attend, recalled that while at Newnham, “Mill’s Inductive Logic and *Ecce Homo* and Herbert Spencer and the general tone of thought gradually undermined my old beliefs” (Paley qtd in Peacock 49).
238 To be followed by Bergson’s *L’Evolution Creatrice* and Freud’s *Totemism and Taboo*.
239 As Robinson notes, “To Harrison, brought up under rigid Hebraism, with its heavy emphasis on sin, the discovery of Hellenism was the first stage of liberation” (Robinson 67).
one “born in sin”! The notion of the sumnum bonum as an “energy”, as an exercise of personal faculty, to one who had been taught that God claimed all, and the notion of the “perfect life” that was to include as a matter of course friendship. I remember walking up and down in the College garden, thinking could it possibly be true, were the chains really broken and the prison doors open. (RSL 80-81)

Harrison’s narrative of her experience of secularization, with its progression from an unsettling encounter with a question of Greek translation in the New Testament to liberation via Aristotle’s Ethics, points to a crucial fact: her chosen field of classics was especially implicated in Victorian accounts of secularization, as both a site of historicist contention over Biblical truth and as a site of the development and discovery of alternative, non-Christian guides to morality, ethics, and even religion.

Ancient Greece had emerged in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for the first time as a topic of sustained interest that might, like Ancient Rome, offer precedents and parallels for contemporary British art, ethics, and politics. Classics thus became established in the nineteenth century not only as the most prestigious and gentlemanly field of knowledge, but Ancient Greece in particular came to be presented as a precedent for Victorian Britain. Thus, over the course of the century, to write about citizenship, sexuality, and religion in Ancient Greece was also to be writing on these topics as they related to modern Britain. In particular, following Arnold, many Britons held up

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240 (See Turner 1981 xii). Ancient Rome had been an established topic of interest in Britain for centuries. It had offered models for politics and civil engagement, as well as scope for engaging with Christianity (e.g., Gibbon’s famously skeptical Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire). Ancient Rome too was an important locus in Victorian concerns about Christianity: in the mid-nineteenth century, it became the focus of nonfiction and fiction writing on early or “primitive” Christianity which, variously, championed Anglican or Catholic Christianity for the current age. But Ancient Greece was even more central to questions of religion in nineteenth-century Britain.

241 As Turner summarizes, “Writing about Greece was in part a way for the Victorians to write about themselves” (Turner 1981 8). These writers assumed that “the Greeks has been like the Victorians and that the historical situations of the two civilizations were essentially similar” (Turner 1981 11).
Greece as model of progress, secularization, enlightenment. According to Arnold, Athens and Britain shared a “common modernity,” marked by the passing away of superstitions and the dominance of rationality.\footnote{Matthew Arnold wrote of the “common modernity” of fifth-century Athens and nineteenth-century Britain in “The Modern Element in Literature” (1869), his inaugural lecture as professor of poetry at Oxford. This common modernity was marked by a “critical spirit” (Turner 1981 27). In Arnold, Hellenism is aligned with science and criticism, which allow man to “see things as they really are” (Turner 1981 19, qting Arnold). This idea persisted into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well: e.g., G. Lowes Dickinson, in \textit{The Greek View of Life} (1896) that the “special achievement of the Greek spirit” had been “to humanize barbarism and enlighten superstition” (Dickinson 41-42 qtd in Turner 75).} In both a secularizing process driven by science and historical criticism had liberated humanity from superstitious religion and enabled people to begin to “see things as they really are,” in Arnold’s famous phrase. For much of the nineteenth century, discussions of Ancient Greece in connection with modern Britain thus reflected “the view from Dover Beach.”

Harrison’s early writings recapitulated a particularly aesthetic version of this account. Her \textit{Introductory Studies to Greek Art} (1885), a book based on the lectures she gave at the British Museum in the early 1880s, celebrates fifth-century Athens as a Golden Age featuring “the happiest of all faiths, that the beautiful is the good” (183). This new faith was brought about by “the shock of criticism” (205). After the philosophers “had […] spoken,” it was no longer “possible to think of the gods in quite the old, blind, superstitious way” (205). In this account, secularization, modernization, and rationalization had occurred in conjunction in Athens as they appeared to be doing in Britain, to generally good ends.

And as in Britain, there were two main effects among those who engaged with the criticism: loss of faith, and desire for the reform or modernization of religion.

The weaker spirits, whose faith was shattered by the shock of criticism, fell away altogether, became materialists and sophists; the finer and stronger intellects purged away from their faith the false and unclean and kept the pure and true. Such were
Perikles, such Pheidias, such Aeschylus and Sophokles, such too were Sokrates, though the mob condemned him to death for impiety. (ISGA 205)

Just as in Victorian Britain, there emerged materialists who denied faith, and others, who in Harrison’s formulation, rose to the challenge and remade their religion into a more “pure and true” form. These latter likely correspond to the Victorian sages such as Arnold who were, like Socrates, accused of impiety by the orthodox, but who, to a sympathetic audience, were aiming rather to salvage the best of religion in morality and ethics via a new faith. In fifth-century Athens, this new, purified faith could be seen in art such as “the face of the Olympian Zeus,” in which, as Harrison writes, “with the majesty of godhead, all human kindliness was blended”— an image that evokes the human Christ beloved of mid-Victorian humanism (ISGA 205-206).

Notably, in the same text as this gentle invocation of the human in the god, Harrison includes a jibe at a crucial supernatural element of Christianity. In the sort of dry rationalist style Frazer would use to great effect five years later in The Golden Bough, she invokes comparative religion to suggest skepticism regarding Christian dogma, writing slyly of the implications for “other faiths” of the dying and resurrected god Osiris: “Osiris had died and lived again, and the just man so died in like manner and lived again with and as Osiris. Into the meaning of this curious belief, not without analogies in other faiths, it is not our purpose to enter” (ISGA 21). Harrison’s appositional reference to “analogies in other faiths” highlights the how “the meaning of this curious belief” might threaten the doctrinal meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection. The comparison case of Osiris was not the only implication for Christianity offered by Introductory Studies. By presenting fifth-century Athens as a historical setting where a decline in superstitious religious belief among the elite had led to the emergence of a rational humanism— a clear-eyed view of the world akin to that
revealed through the decline of faith in a divine Christianity in Britain—Harrison offered an optimistic lesson for her own society. As this secularized fifth-century Athens was also the setting of the greatest art and literature of Ancient Greece, it provided a precedent for the highest culture emerging out of a site of disenchantment, and encouraging an embrace of the “replacement” of religion with art and culture.\footnote{Turner refers to this as the “golden century” of \textasciitilde{}530 BC-430 BC. Its art, literature, and philosophy were “of the highest possible beauty and value” (Turner 1981 29, quoting Arnold “Pagan and Medieval Religious Sentiment” [1864]). This Arnoldian version of Hellenism offered “an idealized depiction of Greek life in the fifth century B.C. that embodied many of the values perennially associated with English humanism” (Turner 1981 16).}

At Newnham and for a decade after, Harrison lived the “replacement” part of the Arnoldian secularization narrative, embracing the “religion of art” in the context of classics and aestheticism. Aestheticism was the rage among the Newnham students of the 1870s, as they recalled in later years. Harrison was particularly remembered for her striking aesthetic dress, and herself recalled the William Morris wallpaper with which she and her classmates decorated their college rooms (Robinson 43). When she moved to London after Newnham, Harrison became active in aesthetic circles and projects. She knew Pater, Edward Burne-Jones, Arthur Symonds, and Oscar Wilde, and in various ways was encouraged by each of these men.\footnote{Pater was a frequent host; Burne-Jones specifically encouraged her publication of \textit{Greek Vase-Paintings}; she was a member of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies and writer for its journal, which included Symonds and Wilde on its council, and she wrote for \textit{Woman's World} under Wilde’s editorship.} She was also heavily involved in \textit{The Magazine of Art}, a Ruskinian enterprise, as Stefano Evangelista writes, “to train educated amateurs in modern art criticism” (Evangelista 2011 531).\footnote{Harrison’s early work follows in marked ways from Pater’s aesthetic criticism. \textit{Introductory Studies} features resounding echoes of Pater’s aestheticism: She is truly practicing aesthetic criticism by noting an element and its effect on her and analyzing that effect until she gets to the “quality” that causes it—as when she asks why Greek art is more than a “historical interest” or “antiquarian curiosity,” “what it is that impels us to learn” it, and why it is “vital forever,” and then notes its “certain peculiar quality”— “Ideality” (v-vi). There are echoes of Pater everywhere, from the method to the vitality of Greek religion and its more than “antiquarian” interest. She also intends the book to cultivate “taste” in her audience (vii).}
In her writing from this period, Harrison is explicit about her replacement of religion with art. She celebrates “Ideality” as the unique quality of the best of Greek art, and in the classic manner of “replacement theory,” likens it to religion, and then proposes it as a substitution for it, noting that the ancient critics associated ideality with a “revelation” of religion. She also notes that her own contemplation of ideality in art evokes feelings conventionally associated with religion such as “wonder” \textit{(IGA} 221, 210)\textsuperscript{246}. Her aesthetically guided experience of art replaces a divine revelation (whether Greek or Christian) with a secular one.\textsuperscript{247} In a letter reflecting on her scholarly practice from this period, she admits, “art has to me taken & more than taken the place of religion.”\textsuperscript{248}

**Crisis in the religion of art**

While Harrison lived and recapitulated in her writings Arnoldian secularization narratives of subtraction and substitution in the 1880s, in a decisive turn for her career, she broke with these approaches at the end of the decade. Even while Arnold’s influential and linked accounts of Hellenism and secularization still dominated Harrison’s writing, she was at the same time exploring, like Walter Pater, a tradition of Hellenism very different from Arnold’s mid-century “sweetness and light.” This Hellenism was informed by new work in ethnology, anthropology, and archeology, and focused on the pre-classical, archaic Greeks.\textsuperscript{249}

\textsuperscript{246} In this way, her writing participates in the conventions of art writing that Richard Stein identified: such writing treated art as if it “contains not official, formal religion but a substitute for it, a quasi-religious experience, valued not simply for its truth but its expression, its power to address and move an audience” \textit{(Stein} 18).

\textsuperscript{247} As Evangelista notes, “Harrison applied to her ancient artifacts Ruskin’s theory that the ability to see clearly holds the power of a secular revelation” \textit{(Evangelista} 2011 524).

\textsuperscript{248} Letter from Harrison to Douglas Sutherland MacColl, \textit{(Sunday, Feb 6, 1887)}, H157 (3 pp), MacColl Papers, University of Glasgow Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{249} Arnold too was influenced by ethnology, but Harrison delved deeper into this and related fields than Arnold ever did.
These Greeks were “foster-brother of the Kaffir and Hairy Ainos”— that is, they were comparable to the so-called “primitive” or “savage” man studied by ethnologists and anthropologists (Turner 1981 13, quoting Gilbert Murray). This ethnological Hellenism shared affinities with the Dionysian Hellenism of Nietzsche, Pater, and the Victorian poets such as Swinburne, and, later, Michael Field. Since the 1870s, Harrison had encountered this Dionysian Hellenism through the writings of Pater and Swinburne, the latter of whom she quotes extensively from in her early writings. By the late 1880s she had read Nietzsche, and was expanding her readings in archaeology and anthropology. The Dionysian Hellenism she encountered in these texts focused on, and celebrated, ecstasy and darkness—the chaotic, irrational, and destructive rituals of underworld or chthonic gods of the lesser-known archaic era, and their recurrence in the later mystery religions of Dionysos and Orpheus.

Harrison’s switch from an allegiance to Arnoldian Olympian Hellenism to a Nietzschean Dionysian Hellenism also involved a recognition of the inadequacy of the subtraction theory of secularization, which failed to account for the historical facts she had begun to uncover, as well as for her own vivid experiences with religious feelings. This switch—which she experienced at the time as a crisis of faith in her religion of art—was

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250 Margot K. Louis has shown this Dionysian Hellenism to be a particularly influential but long overlooked tradition in nineteenth-century British and Continental mythography and especially British poetry. This writing on Ancient Greece asserted that the Hellenic Mystery religions prepared the way for Christianity historically, and offered a model for either a spiritual renewal of Christianity today, or for a pre-Christian alternative religion/spirituality, both based in this early heterodox moment. See “Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth Century,” *Victorian Studies* (Spring 2005): 329-361.

251 With this switch, Harrison became one among many Victorian writers who offered critiques of the dominant narrative of secularization. As Charles LaPorte reminds us, “the Victorians, too, critiqued triumphantist history [of secularization] as well as producing it” (281). In illuminating Harrison’s revision of Arnoldian secularization, I build on LaPorte’s project to use new frameworks in the critical discussion of religion, secularism, and secularization, to recover these earlier revisionist and alternative theories of secularization. See Charles LaPorte, “Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization,” *Literature Compass* 10.3 (2013): 277-287.
precipitated by criticism by a colleague, Dougal Sutherland MacColl.\textsuperscript{252} In 1886, MacColl wrote a “rather strongly worded” letter to Harrison after attending one of her lectures.\textsuperscript{253} He criticizes both her sensational style of lecturing, and the theory of “Ideality” she professed.\textsuperscript{254} In response, Harrison confesses to having up to this point taken art as a replacement for religion in her life— “art has to me taken & more than taken the place of religion”— and suggests that this is the root of what she now saw as her flawed and illegitimately successful lectures. While she had embraced art as a superior substitution for religion, in the wake of MacColl’s criticism, she sees her relation to art as only recapitulating a relation to religion that did justice neither to art, scholarship, nor to religion. This relation is marked by enthusiasm disconnected from rational reflection. She worried that her previous success as a lecturer reflected only her “fanaticism,” “the harmful force of an intense personal conviction” and not the “proper and legitimate virtue of [her] subject or its treatment.” In light of MacColl’s remarks, she comes to see the popularity of her lectures as due to her style, rather than to the substantive value of the ideas or even encounters with art they offer. Moreover, her relation to her subject is grounded in a bad irrationality and partiality, such as those associated with evangelical religious fanaticism. Tellingly, she confesses to having been a “Salvationist for Greek Art,” using here and throughout this mea culpa the language of the evangelical Christianity in which she was brought up and from which she had believed Hellenism had liberated her.

In this letter, Harrison accuses herself of not only taking art, but, more specifically, scholarly work on art as a replacement for religion. She describes her attachment to her

\textsuperscript{252} Harrison’s various biographers cite this as the turning point in her development as a scholar from Victorian aesthete to modernist-era archaeologist. MacColl also became a suitor and good friend, as well as a traveling companion in Greece, and co-author with Harrison of the art book, \textit{Greek Vase Paintings}, (Unwin, 1894).
\textsuperscript{253} Letter from Harrison to Douglas Sutherland MacColl, (Sunday, Feb 6, 1887), H157 (3 pp), MacColl Papers, University of Glasgow Special Collections.
\textsuperscript{254} MacColl’s letters to Harrison are not extant, so this account of his letter is based on her side of the correspondence.
theory of art as akin to a feeling or experience of religious faith: giving up the theory is also “giving up the habit of mind that demands a creed.” It has been her experience that “the shattering of a theory should depress as that the building of one should inspire”; Harrison acknowledges not just art, but the study of art and the theories she constructs through it offer the same disappointments and satisfactions as religious belief systems. But at this point she regards such experiences as a sign of her own mental insufficiency or imbalance: writing to MacColl, she imagines that he “with […] sane mind” will see this “as absurd.” She comes to see her “fanatic” lectures as both doing a disservice to the subject of Greek art, and as betraying her own sense of having transcended religious habits of mind.

While Harrison vows to MacColl that she will change her ways, and leave off a fanatical approach to her subject for a more legitimate one, a certain kind of fanaticism—perhaps better termed zeal or enthusiasm—goes on to define her work form this point, and especially to flourish in her twentieth-century writings. Beginning in the late 1880s, Harrison applied her zeal to a new object, and in a slightly different style. She moves from a focus on art to a focus on religion and ritual, and from aesthetic criticism to a scholarly practice that combines aestheticism with the more systematic practices of comparison and conjecture found in Frazer. She also became self-conscious in her embrace of zeal as well as caution: she valorizes emotion and irrationality, and emphasizes a compatibility between zeal and study. Taking the figure of the heretic as the model for the modern intellectual, Harrison meditates on the Greek word “hairesis” in which “there is this reaching out to grasp, this studious, zealous pursuit—always something personal, even passionate” (AO 27). This “hairesis” matches Harrison’s own description of her later scholarly practice, in which she identified herself as a heretic, an author of “dangerous” books (Themis viii). In this future work, instead of masking or disavowing her conflation of art, religious experience, and
scholarly practice, Harrison would try to account for her linked experiences of religious inspiration and scholarly inquiry.

**An alternative account of secularization in Ancient Greece**

Harrison’s later studious and zealous writings on art and religion argue for a new understanding of the relations among art, religion, and research as these categories appear in history and in her own scholarly approach. While her writings from the 1890s manifest these interests, they are most fully explored in the books Harrison called her “trilogy,” *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge UP, 1903), *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge UP, 1912), *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge UP, 1921), as well as *Ancient Art and Ritual* (Williams and Norgate, 1913), which she wrote for a lay rather than scholarly audience. These writings register a shift in focus from her pre-1886 writings from classical to archaic Greece, from the Olympian to the chthonic and mystery deities, from Apollonian to Dionysian Hellenism, and from art as her central subject to religion, and ultimately, ritual. In this work, Harrison puts forth new theories of religious change, and experiments with new forms of scholarly writing to better work them out.

In contrast to her earlier Arnoldian accounts of Ancient Greek religious change, which celebrated the humanist response of Greece’s artists and poets to the “shock of criticism,” Harrison’s later writings assert a shared modernity between archaic, rather than classical, Greece and turn-of-the-twentieth-century Britain, and replace the triumphalist account of secularization with a story of religious loss. Notably, this story of loss is not so much

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255 Harrison registers some ambivalence about her popular audience. In a letter to her friend and collaborator Gilbert Murray, she worries over making her ideas simply enough for the ideal “bank clerk” reader of *Ancient Art and Ritual*, which appeared in the Home Library Series, edited by Murray. But in a 1927 preface to the second edition of *Themis*, she has embraced her popular audience, and is pleased to note that *Themis* has appealed to the general reader. See Harrison to Murray, [January 1911], Box 2, Page 12, Jane Ellen Harrison Papers, Newnham College, Cambridge.
mournful as enthusiastic: when Harrison uncovers a history of goddess- and woman-centered religious practice in archaic Greece, she focuses on its potential to provide a precedent for alternative forms of religion that might be found, or fostered, in the present. Most vividly, Harrison's later work describes a historical change from a feminine, collective, mystical religion to a masculine, individualistic, rational religion. By focusing on the origins of Greek religion in woman-centered cults, Harrison asserts an alternative starting point for the history of religion and ultimately a new understanding of the history of the onset of modernity. Her later scholarship thus offers a compelling alternative history of religion that supports her sense of an incipient feminist new age, and, by strong implication, an alternative religion appropriate to this new era.

Harrison used Greek religion to present a theory of the universal origins of religion in woman-centered societies. At the center of her theory is an account of how religion and art arise out of a “common human impulse” for survival (AAR 18). This impulse led people to perform magical rituals, which then led to the projection of and belief in a god. When belief in the efficacy of the ritual began to fail, art developed as a form of the once magical rite. For Harrison, these stages aligned with a historical shift from what she calls, following Bachofen and other nineteenth-century scholars, “matriarchal” or “matrilineal” society with a corresponding goddess-centered religious practice, to a “patriarchal” society and god-centered religion. When ritual emerged from life, it reflected the organization of a matrilineal society. The deities first projected out of ritual were the goddess and her son. Over time, society shifted to a patriarchal order, and with this, the first projected demi-gods or “daimons” developed into what Harrison calls “full-blown” gods (Themis ix). Harrison illustrates this theory— that, as she writes in Themis, “the Great Mother is prior to the masculine divinities”— with the case of the chthonic deities and the Olympian gods of
Greece (Themis ix). The chthonic deities were daimons of the underworld and products of an early matrilineal culture; the Olympian gods emerged out of a later and patriarchal stage of Greek religion. Harrison argues that Ancient Greek religion was both originally and most authentically centered on women: even certain later iterations of religion in Ancient Greece such as the worship of Dionysos or Orpheus are “matriarchal” because of their associations with women and earlier structures of society and worship. “Dionysos,” for example, was “always more effeminate, less remote from the Mother” (Themis 443).

Crucially, unlike other accounts of religious evolution, such as Frazer’s, Harrison celebrates the earlier stages of development—when, in her account, religion was a matter of ritual practice in a society in which women were “dominant and central,” rather than of belief and dogma in a male-centered one (Themis 494). She inverts the values of Arnold’s common modernity, identifying the classical Zeus with the philistine “archpatriarchal bourgeois” (Pro 285). With this comparison, Harrison presents both classical Greece and Victorian Britain with its characteristic bourgeois paterfamilias as unfortunate episodes in history characterized by the worship of the god of the family, “a god violently dominant up to quite recent days” which had a history of “demanding and receiving holocausts of human and especially feminine lives” (AO 52). While writing on the Ancient Greeks, Harrison leaves the reader with little doubt as to her position on relations between men and women in her era. Moreover, in her modernist primitivism, modernity is akin to the primitive rather than the classical era: both the Victorian era and classical Greece have been superseded.256

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256 For the first works defining “modernist primitivism,” which mainly focused on visual art, see Robert Goldwater, Primitivism in Modern Art (Harvard UP, 1986) and William Rubin, “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (Museum of Modern Art, 1984). For more recent treatments that look at “modernist primitivism” in literature as well, see Mariana Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives (U Chicago P, 1991). Torgovnick offers a useful summary of primitivist tropes and a genealogy of the concept of the “primitive” in Europe. Harrison’s modernist primitivism is consistent with what Barkan and Bush note as the “self-consciously modernist conflation of the primitive and the futuristic” and is exemplary of “how the initially imperialist discourse of primitivism became a powerful engine of radical change both in
Harrison’s recuperation of Greek matriarchal goddesses at the expense of the “archpatriarchal bourgeois” Olympians drove her recovery of an ancient goddess religion as a precedent for a modern feminist religion. Through this history, she presented a “vision of ‘true religion’ [that] offered a radical alternative to Victorian Christianity,” acknowledging that her historical account had implications for religion in her own era (Wheeler-Barclay 239): “As my main object is to elucidate Greek religion, it would be both safe and easy to shelter myself behind the adjective ‘primitive’ and say that with modern religion I have no concern. But I abhor obscurantism” \textit{(Themis xxii)}. Harrison did not pretend to disinterestedness, but professed that her discussion of ancient religion was relevant and threatening to “modern religion,” that is, conventional Christianity. In Harrison’s theory, a better, truer religiosity resides in the matrilineal chthonic and mystery religions of Ancient Greece than in the patriarchal religion of the Olympians, and by extension bourgeois Victorian Christianity. Where the Olympians are “not only non-primitive, but positively in a sense non-religious,” Harrison wrote, the mystery “cultus of Dionysos and Orpheus seemed to me, whatever its errors and licenses, essentially religious” \textit{(Themis xi)}. Harrison thus located religiosity in the “primitive” and “mystery” elements of Greek religion, and saw the Olympic deities as abstract, artificial, and already secularized. Following Durkheim, she further argues that religion persists beyond the famed “death of God,” because it never exclusively belonged to a god in the first place: “the sanctity did not arise from the god, and it survives him” \textit{(Themis 63)}. That sanctity, according to Harrison, resides in society itself, in group emotions and group actions, which can be traced back to the common flux of the matriarchal age.

Harrison presented this “essentially religious” historical faith as a remarkably

\textit{society and in the arts” (16). I thank Mark DiGiacomo for consultation on this topic.}
attractive alternative to patriarchal bourgeois Christianity. Her descriptions of the ancient worship of Dionysus present this compelling version of religion: “Dionysus is a human youth, lovely with curled hair, but in a moment he is a Wild Bull, and a Burning Flame. The beauty and the thrill of it!” (AO 204-5). Harrison’s writing on Dionysus and his religion was attractive to some elements of her audience, and inspired them to see options outside of conventional society. As her biographer Annabel Robinson writes, “the vivid style of her writing […] carried her message far beyond academe. She offered to her readers a ‘real’ religion, a credible alternative to Christianity (credible because of its grounding in the practices of the highly esteemed ancient Greeks), built not on dogma but on the celebration of shared emotion. She thereby undermined the Victorian patriarchy and hierarchy that surrounded her” (9). The power of her message is not just in its “vivid style,” but in the way it specifically “share[s] emotion” with its readers by modeling and encouraging emotional responses to scholarly claims. Moreover, her account of an archaic goddess religion and its subsequent decline under the pressure of the Olympian religion argued that a superior version of femininity and of women’s place in society once coincided with an alternative, mystical religion, and implied that it could do so again. In Harrison’s version of the common modernity of archaic Greece and modern Britain, the triumph of rationality in each case is in the past; the future belongs to modern forms of irrationality and inspired ritual.

Harrison’s modern-archaic model of “essential” religion is not only aligned with magic and ritual, but also explicitly rejects theology. According to Harrison, theology is not a defining aspect of religion, but merely a “stage” in its evolution (Themis 488). It is eventually outgrown; and if it is not cast off, it presents a danger to the continued vitality of religion. As she wrote in her preface to Themis, “as profoundly as I also feel the value of the religious impulse, so keenly do I feel the danger and almost necessary disaster of each and every creed
and dogma” (xxii-xxiii). However, while valorizing ritual at the expense of theology, Harrison distances herself from modern magicians and occultists: “I do not propose to restore magical practices. What I mean is this: The idea underlying magic is nearer to our modern standpoint, more manageable, less irreconcilable, than any theological system” (AO 194). Moreover, Harrison holds that religion is itself necessary to modernity, and, specifically, to progress. She professes to be committed not to preserving “religious or magical hocus-pocus” but rather “the spirit that lies behind it—some element which I do believe to be essential to human progress, and therefore a thing to be conserved” (AO 183). I argue that through her study of ritual, Harrison preserves this spirit of religion, offering through her scholarship a new vehicle for the housing of this impulse in modernity.

For Harrison, modernity is hospitable to magic and ritual rather than to theology for two main reasons: first, that magic and ritual are compatible with modern science, and second, that theology is incompatible with the increasing prominence of women, and the feminine more broadly. According to Harrison, rituals such as “[s]acraments pre-suppose nothing more than just what science is disposed or compelled to admit: an invisible prepotent force on which and through which we can possibly act, with which we are in some way connected. Sacraments clash with no clear-cut conviction; they lend themselves to mysticism, to the notion of a god who is immanent, not imminent” (AO 195). They are compatible with the experience of “union,” which Harrison finds characteristic of her present moment in which man is no longer “very sure of his own selfhood and separateness,” but rather experiences selves as “forces interacting” (AO 195). Harrison sees her own historical moment as marked by porous selves and relationality. Ritual is, moreover, not only compatible with science, but science is compatible with the mystical state evoked by ritual. The “real man of science” works toward a kind of mystical experience, a “peace that
passeth all understanding” (AAR 221). Ultimately, she suggests that “[s]cience has given us back something strangely like a World-Soul” (AAR 246-247). Just as the ancient tribal community projected its daimons, Harrison presents the advanced scientific community as projecting a new communal deity, a modern World-Soul.

In keeping with this idea of science’s World-Soul, Harrison suggests how scholarship itself may offer a peculiarly modern form of ritual practice. Instead of revivals, Harrison argued, a new era demands new forms of art and ritual to address the needs of people. Scholarship, in Harrison’s hands, become one of these particularly modern forms of art and ritual. At the end of Ancient Art and Ritual, Harrison embraces the call of the Italian Futurists for new forms of art for the new reality of modern life (though, unsurprisingly, she is “not prepared to go all lengths, to ‘burn all museums’”):

If there is to be any true living art, it must arise, not from the contemplation of Greek statues, not from the revival of folk-songs [...] but from a keen emotion felt towards things and people living to-day, in modern conditions, including, among other and deeper forms of life, the haste and hurry of the modern street, the whirr of motor cars and aeroplanes. (237)

As we have just seen, one of the new ‘modern conditions’ stimulating ‘keen emotion’ is science. Harrison’s own self-consciously scientific scholarship, fueled by and responding to new emotions of a new era, functions as a modern art form in this way. It further functions as a modern ritual practice, as we will see below.

Harrison sees her modern moment as marked not only by scientific mysticism, but also by the prominence of women. “The present time,” she wrote in 1915, “is unmistakably one of the emergence of women to fuller liberty and increased influence” (AO 135). For Harrison, the emancipation of women is connected with the centrality of the social or what
she also calls the “race,” meaning the species (AO 136). According to Harrison, women, whether by training or nature, were more suited to social forms of knowledge production than men, and thus better able to pursue knowledge in this social era: “Our present age is an age of co-operation, marked not so much by individual emergence as by interdependent, collective advance, and for this pre-eminent genius is not essential. The great geniuses and, by parity of reasoning, the great criminals may yet remain men. We need not fret about it” (AO 122-123). For Harrison, the age of men and genius was past; the age of women and “collective advance” was at hand. Male genius had become so degraded it resided in criminals, and so insignificant that “We need not fret about” its vestigial persistence.

In this new era of women’s liberty and influence, Harrison argues, theology no longer has a place. It is one of the “purely man-made products” that is “untouched by hand of woman” (AO 135). This man-made theology has made God an “intellectual abstraction, divorced ever more and more from life”— a concept that no longer has purchase in the new, social age (AO 135). In contrast, women reject this desiccated kind of religion for something more vital. Harrison claims, “I have never met with a woman who is interested in theology. I have met a few who were religious, and by religious I mean in intimate contact, close touch with the bigger will, the larger life, that includes our own” (AO 135). The present time, according to Harrison, is an age marked by the prominence of women, and a form of vital religion associated with them and their particular affinity with the social.

Accordingly, Harrison advocates the historical study of magic and especially ritual out of a desire to conserve “the spirit that lies behind” religion. For Harrison, the contemporary prominence of women and non-dogmatic religion is accompanied by the centrality of scholarship as a major cultural practice. In her own study of ritual, Harrison preserves what she sees as the spirit of religion, offering through her scholarship a new
vehicle to house this impulse in modernity. In the next section, I show how Harrison used scholarly practices—especially social scholarly practices—not only to recount this alternative feminist history, but to create an alternative feminist historiography that encouraged her readers to practice scholarship as a modernist ritual. Harrison’s ritual scholarship enabled her readers to experience, and not merely accept, the historical validity of her feminist, post-theological religion.

**Ritual Scholarship: Harrison’s sacred scholarly texts**

Harrison’s writings on religion constitute both a body of scholarly work on the history of religion, and an attempt to remake religion for modernity. In each capacity, they deploy conventions of scholarly writing to make possible new theories of religion and new experiences of enchantment for their modern readers. Like Pater’s, Frazer’s, Haggard’s, and Weston’s prose, Harrison’s writings too adapt methods of comparison and conjecture to foster the experience of mysticism in a scientific framework, the particular version of modern enchantment we have been concerned with in the previous three chapters. But where Frazer emphasizes the rationality of his scientific framework and Weston the close scholarly scrutiny involved in hers to emphasize the legitimacy of their engagement with the subject of enchantment, Harrison works rather to undermine the strong rationalist and objectivist claims of advanced scientific inquiry in order to unsettle conventional divisions between magic and advanced science, emotion and intellect, and personal experience and scholarly evidence. In these ways, she offered not only the modern enchantment of advanced knowledge reconciled with mystical experience, but furthered what Harrison regarded as an incipient feminist epoch.
In this new era, women were not only increasingly prominent agents in the world, but conventionally feminized practices—especially those tied to collective work—too were coming into greater prominence, power, and esteem. Harrison theorized and practiced forms of collaboration that celebrated what by the late nineteenth-century were seen as feminized modes of knowledge production grounded in social experiences, in contrast to solitary practices associated with heroic great men. In turn, these social modes of knowledge production appeared uniquely capable of illuminating a mystical unity of human nature and culture across vast expanses of time and space. For Harrison, her capacity to conceive of both the unity of collective work and of human nature came out of what she felt were the constraints of her Victorian woman’s education. Following a tradition of Victorian amateur scholarship, Harrison saw collaboration as a way to work beyond the limits of her own knowledge. At the same time, she found collaborative practices particularly effective for identifying meaningful connections among far-flung phenomena treated more narrowly by specialists.\footnote{257}{For more on Harrison and collaboration, see Winick, “Scholarly Collaboration for a Feminist New Age in Jane Harrison’s and Jessie Weston’s Alternative Histories,” \textit{Relations} ed. Julie Fuller, Meechal Hoffman, and Livia Woods. Special issue of \textit{Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies} 11.3 (Winter 2015).}

In this way, Harrison, like George Eliot and Jessie Weston, came to develop a specifically feminine, and feminist, epistemology out of the constraints of her limited woman’s education. To the end of her career, Harrison was self-conscious about what she (and others) perceived as inadequacies in her philological training. She had colleagues such as the Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray correct her proofs, and check or supply her translations—even of her Latin dedications.\footnote{258}{Harrison to Gilbert Murray, Sep. 28, 1905, Box 1, Page 20. Jane Harrison Collection, Newnham College Archives, Cambridge.} At the same time as Harrison embraced collective work as a means of overcoming her felt limitations, she also consistently and
vehemently presented collaboration as an ideal of scholarship, not as a lesser approach. She faulted mainstream scholars for narrowness, and was particularly harsh on “the specialists” who “grub up the facts but don’t see the relations”. As Sharon Fiske has argued, Harrison “transformed what might otherwise have been a defeating educational deficit into the theoretical foundations of an intellectual approach that valued experience and what she called the ‘sympathetic imagination’ over textbook knowledge” (“Ritual” 181). In particular, “Through the irrecoverability of its language, archaic religion presented Harrison with an academic field wherein the consciousness of her inadequate linguistic training could be transformed into an epistemology of loss and a rationale for imaginative recovery” (“Ritual” 183).

Harrison’s field also informed her idea of collective work, one that shaped her scholarly practice. For Harrison, ritual, in origin and essence, is the collective dance. In this ritual dance, one feels “not mimesis, but ‘participation,’ unity, and community” (AAR 46). Importantly, such linked societal and ritual forms are not passé; rather, they are strikingly of the moment. While in modern civilization, “[t]he tribe is extinct, the family in its old rigid form moribund,” there are new social forms that are tribe-like: “the social groups we now look to as centers of emotion are the groups of industry, of professionalism and of sheer mutual attraction. Small and strange though such groups may appear, they are real social factors” (AAR 242). Such “small and strange” groups are like the “tribal” social collectivities of Harrison’s theories of history, but are newly suited to modern life— they are linked not by the practice of taboo, but by professional and personal affinity and modern, communal activities.

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259 Harrison to Gilbert Murray. Nov. 8, 1908, Box 2, Page 15. Jane Harrison Collection, Newnham College Archives, Cambridge.

260 As discussed in Chapter Four, such “labors of loss,” as Sumathi Ramawamy has called them, were a significant part of many enchanted scholarly practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Harrison’s relationships with other scholars constitute such groups, and she was an active participant in many “small and strange” learned societies of the day, such as the Cambridge Heretics. These groups met regularly to hear members present papers, and provided environments for socializing and intellectual and sometimes political discussion. She also belonged to and fostered more informal scholarly coteries, both among her students at Newnham and among her peers. Most prominent among these is the group that has come to be called “the Cambridge Ritualists,” which flourished from Harrison’s early years as a research fellow at Newnham to just before the Great War. This group consisted of the Oxford classicist, Gilbert Murray, a prolific translator of Greek drama and Regius Professor of Greek from 1908-1936; Francis MacDonald Cornford, a classicist and historian of philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge; and, more tangentially, Arthur Bernard Cook, a classicist based at Queen’s College, Cambridge, and the author of the magnum opus *Zeus.*

These groups—both the learned societies, and the more informal groups of scholars and students Harrison belonged to and cultivated—offered her the experience of participating in ritual, broadly construed. Harrison’s scholarly practice was collective and collaborative, involving the participation of colleagues and students, and interpolating the reader to participate as well. Most strikingly, in her major book *Themis,* two chapters are written by Murray and Cornford.

Harrison saw such collective scholarly work as addressing the “relations” she accused specialists of missing. These relations constituted the connections among diverse phenomena that pointed to an essential unity of human nature, which she often presented with a sense of awe. Like Frazer before her, Harrison connects the “apparently

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261 For a critique of this designation, see Beard pp. 116-117 and Robinson, “A New Light our Elders had not Seen: Deconstructing the ‘Cambridge Ritualists,’” *Echos du Monde Classique* / *Classical Views* 42.17.3 (1988): 471-487. Undoubtedly, these four people functioned as a group for Harrison, who was at its center.
unconnected,” granting meaningful relations to otherwise insignificant details, and suggesting a great whole to which these details belong (Themis xiv). Harrison promises such connection in the preface to Themis, with regard to a recently discovered ancient Greek hymn that unifies her theory in the same way the rite of the priest of Nemi unifies Frazer’s in The Golden Bough:

In the pages that follow, subjects apparently unconnected will come in for discussion. We shall have to consider, for example, magic, mana, tabu, the Olympic games, the Drama, Sacrementalism, Carnivals, Hero-worship, Initiation Ceremonies and the Platonic doctrine of Anamnesis. All these matters, seemingly so disparate, in reality cluster around the Hymn. (xiv)

The book that follows analyzes each of these phenomena in turn, showing how a historical understanding of each illuminates the meaning of the mysterious, fragmentary ritual.

Early on in the same study, Harrison invokes the commonality of humanity across vast distances, as revealed by ritual practices: “But everywhere, in Africa, in America, in Australia, in the South Pacific Islands, we come upon what is practically the same sequence of ceremonies” (18). And towards the end of the book, “gulf[s]” continue to be “bridged” through “analogy”: “there remains a certain gulf to be bridged […] The bridge is easily crossed if we examine the analogy of primitive initiation rites” (511). Harrison’s scholarly writing repeatedly invokes the unity of human society and psychology. In this way, it joins in what she described as a “new academic spirit that sees and feels its own specialism in wider, indeed, in world-wide, relations.”

Just as Harrison’s anthropological method compared Ancient Greek customs with those of tribes in colonized nations as well as those of the European “folk,” connecting her subjects of inquiry across the globe, her ideal of

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academic endeavor forged a sense of global connection among the producers of knowledge, in which specialized ideas are connected as part of a larger whole across vast expanses.

Harrison linked such a sense of global scholarly connection with mystical experience. She describes the “mystical apprehension” as involving a characteristic feeling of “extraordinary exaltation, of peace and joy unutterable” which “often, and, indeed, usually, takes the form of a sense of the sudden and almost intolerable significance in things” (AO 62). In this feeling of “significance in things,” “The relation of the whole of things is seen, or rather, perhaps, felt, directly, intuitively,” and one feels “a sensation of oneness” (AO 63). Such an experience is fostered by the extreme practices of Victorian anthropology and comparative religion in which Harrison’s work engages. These practices find meaning in each trifling detail thanks to its position as part of a larger whole, whether hymn or grand narrative of religious evolution, and in connections with other details across vast expanses of time and space.

Harrison defines her mystical ritual epistemology by contrasting it with forms of disenchanting scholarship, such as analysis and taxonomy. She considered these forms of knowing through division reductive: “A definition however illuminating always desiccates its object” (Themis 487). In this kind of inquiry, “The procedure is from synthesis to analysis, from the group to the individual” (Themis 471). Following Nietzsche, Harrison associated analysis with her detested Olympians, who “represent that tendency in thought which is towards reflection, differentiation, clearness,” and contrasted it with the move to fusion of her beloved daimons which “represent[…] that other tendency in religion towards emotion, union, indivisibility” (Themis xxi). Harrison’s scholarly method rejects Olympian analysis and pursues daimonic emotion and union. In its use of comparison and conjecture, it proceeds
from analysis to synthesis, and from the individual to the group, from the part to the reconstruction of the whole.

Contrasting her work with another form of disenchanting scholarship, Harrison explicitly rejects theories in which the facts are too “plain.” Specifically, she decries Euhemerist interpretations of myth and ritual in favor of interpretations that make room for “magic.” Ventroliquizing Sir William Ridgeway’s theory of the origins of Greek religion in the worship of dead human heroes, Harrison mocks it for banality: “We have got to facts at last, simple, historical facts. All now is plain, concrete, \textit{a posteriori}. ‘You must not say that […] Menelaos is a tribal hero; Menelaos was a well-known infantry officer with auburn whiskers.’ Let us look at facts” \textit{(Themis} 261). In contrast, she finds in those “facts” something much stranger and more exciting than “auburn whiskers.” Discussing the supposed hero Cecrops, she cites Ridgeway’s interpretation, and then challenges it: “But in this unblemished [apparently historical] career there is one blot, one skeleton in the well-furnished cupboard that even the most skilled Euhemerism cannot conceal. […] Cecrops the humane, the benevolent, has a serpent’s tail” \textit{(Themis} 261-262). This historically impossible detail Harrison takes as proof that “Cecrops is a projection […] not] a real actual man” \textit{(Themis} 267). Triumphanty she declares her rejection of the dull explanation of Euhemerism: “Are we driven at last by facts, back to common-sense and Euhemerism? A thousand times ‘No’” \textit{(Themis} 400). Instead, she ends on idea of the “magical,” by which she means not the supernatural, but the marvelous imaginative power of the community: “The omphalos is a grave compounded of mound and stele; yet the grave contains no real man but a daimon-snake; the stele is […] a thing not commemorative but magical” \textit{(Themis} 400). In her scholarly practice, Harrison rejects the reductive (a mere “actual man”) in favor of the expansively mysterious (“a thing […] magical”).
Celebrating “thing[s…] magical,” Harrison fosters feelings of awe at her evidence and conclusions. In this way, she presents her scholarship as functioning like ritual in its evocation of emotion. In her theory, ritual creates an emotion, either in anticipation of what one wants to feel, or in celebration of something felt. In the former case, a ritual emerges as the enacting of a desire: “In ritual the thing desired, […] is acted” (AAR 18). Describing a Russian harvest ritual, Harrison notes how the participant “does what she wants done. Her intense desire finds utterance in an act” (AAR 33). (In this case, the participant’s desire for the flax to grow high finds utterance in a ritual of dancing and leaping.) The female pronoun is suggestive here, especially in light of the way Harrison’s scholarship was criticized as putting forth feminist theories of history with more basis in wish fulfillment than in historical evidence. Harrison too, in making claims about originary women-centered societies and religions “does what she wants done.” Through her historical scholarship, she conjured precedents for women’s full participation in society, an alternative version of femininity, and for matrilineal societies.

Harrison also “does what she wants done” in her work by valorizing ritual and using her scholarship to recreate the satisfaction she feels in her study of it. She affirms the significant value ritual holds for her as a scholarly topic: “as a subject of singular gravity and beauty, ritual is well worth a lifetime’s study” (AAR 205). She further attests to the satisfaction she finds in the study of ritual vividly in her autobiographical writings:

[M]y real subject— religion. When I say “religion,” I am instantly obliged to correct myself; it is not religion, it is ritual that absorbs me. I have elsewhere tried to show that Art is not the handmaid of Religion, but that Art in some sense springs out of Religion, and that between them is a connecting link, a bridge, and that bridge
is Ritual. On that bridge, emotionally, I halt. It satisfies something within me that is appeased by neither Religion nor Art. […]

I mention these ritual dances, this ritual drama, this bridge between art and life, because it is things like these that I was all my life blindly seeking. A thing has little charm for me unless it has on it the patina of age. Great things in literature, Greek plays for example, I most enjoy when behind their bright splendours I see moving darker and older shapes. (RSL 87)

In this late publication, Harrison illuminates the motivations and the aims of her life’s work: she has “all [her] life been blindly seeking” the experience she finally locates in the study of ritual. It “satisfies” her in a way neither art nor religion can. For Harrison, ritual is the site of the inchoate and ultimately uncontainable “darker and older shapes,” the originary impulses behind religion and art. It allows her to access what she sees as an authentic, because ancient, religious experience, which she believes is important to recover for modernity.

Importantly, Harrison does not find satisfaction in participating in the rituals she describes—she has only ever even seen such rituals twice in her life, and has no interest in revivals— but in studying them. In a 1915 essay she reflects on how she was drawn to subject of Greek ritual and religion:

Please don’t misunderstand me. It was not that I was spiritually lonely or “seeking for the light”; it was that I felt religion was my subject. Well, of course, I plunged into comparative religion. That only confirmed my own agnosticism as to all theology. […] Then I began to think, was I really devoting my life to the study of a number of pernicious superstitious errors? Of course, some people can and have

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263 “If there is to be any true living art, it must arise, not from the contemplation of Greek statues, not from the revival of folk-songs, not even from the re-enacting of Greek plays, but from a keen emotion felt towards things and people living to-day, in modern conditions” (AAR 237).
done that. I felt absolutely certain that it was not so with me; that I was studying a vital and tremendous impulse—a thing fraught indeed with endless peril, but great and glorious, inspiring, worth all a lifetime’s devotion. (AO 185-6)

Harrison has found spiritual satisfaction in scholarly investigation, not religious faith (or the religion of art). She embraces the essentially spiritual element in her scholarship. Her work is her way of “devot[ing]” herself to this “vital and tremendous impulse,” this “spirit behind religion”; it becomes a form of spiritual practice. Yet Harrison’s study of ritual does not function as a simple substitution for religion, or a “cover story” in which apparently rational enquiry masks a desire to encounter religious feeling. Rather, she finds in ritual a defining aspect of religion superior to other understandings of religion—as theology—that she had rejected as unsatisfying, and even false and damaging. Through her scholarship, Harrison redefines the essence of religion as a mystical experience aligned with ritual practice, and as best encountered in the study of ritual. Scholarship allows her to rewrite historical and sociological accounts of religion to assert the centrality of women and experiences of mystical ecstasy; it further allows her to experience feelings that can be construed as religious in a new, modern form, preserving the historical religion she describes in a way accessible to moderns like herself.

Like Pater in particular, Harrison was interested in recreating for her reader historical emotions; that is, emotions she believes were felt in other times and places, and which are

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264 See Victoria Nelson, The Secret Life of Puppets, (Harvard UP, 2001), for the notion of academic work as a “cover story” exemplified in “the tendency of many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western writers and scholars to disguise their religious instincts (from themselves as much as from others) within an intellectual quest to discover a surviving pagan or indigenous authenticity” (12). But Harrison reflects on and dismisses this very idea, embracing her scholarly work as also religious work. This has been a critique of Harrison’s group specifically. See, e.g., the classicist Gerald F. Else who “dismiss[es] ritualism as an epiphenomenon of the Zeitgeist—because the moderns hunger for religion, their scholars serve it up to them in an oblique and sophisticated form.” (Ackerman Myth 185).
not native to her own modern British setting. She evokes in *Ancient Art and Ritual* the right effect of a well-translated Greek chorus: “a thrill from the chorus quite unknown to any modern stage effect, a feeling of emotion heightened yet restrained, a sense of entering into higher places, filled with a larger and a purer air— a sense of beauty born clean out of conflict and disaster” (*AAR* 122). This experience is somewhat indirect— it is a “feeling of emotion,” not simply an emotion. It is mediated by the translation of the Greek play, not to mention by the particular actors. But it enables access to a feeling “quite unknown to any modern stage effect,” to a feeling apparently peculiar, rather, to the theater of Ancient Greece. In an analogous way, Harrison’s scholarship recreates the emotions of her joyous experience of scholarly practice, including the “thrill” of “a feeling of emotion” out of a mediated encounter with the ancient past.

But Harrison’s ritual scholarship differs from Pater’s aesthetic criticism, in which he endeavors to “feel our way backwards” to an image of the Ancient Greeks, by its explicit engagement with “feel[ing] forward” (*AAR* 240). Harrison writes,

> [I]n art we must look and feel, and look and feel forward, not backward, if we would live. Art somehow, like language, is always feeling forward to newer, fuller, subtler, emotions. She seems indeed in a way to feel ahead even of science; a poet will forecast dimly what a later discovery will confirm. (*AAR* 240)

Harrison, as a classicist, an archeologist, a writer on the origins of art and religion, and with an admitted yen for the archaic, is yet explicitly oriented toward the future. Her recreations, like Pater’s, are self-consciously modern constructions; but more than Pater’s, they are optimistic about the future. Perhaps this is hardly surprising, as Harrison saw “The present time [as] unmistakably one of the emergence of women to fuller liberty and increased influence” (*AO* 135). Where Pater died at the end of the nineteenth century, at a moment
when, as Heather Love argues, he was out of time, “marked as backward” (Love 2007 6), Harrison lived on into the 1920s, playing with her status as a Victorian relic and invoking it in her writings to help create the conditions for the sacred feminist modernity she believed to be on the cusp of flourishing (and which, even after the devastation of the Great War, she did not give up on). At her present moment, her idiosyncratic scholarly practice worked to reincorporate the spirit of religion; give it new form in the rituals of research; and yield her own version of enchanted scholarship, and of an enchanted feminist modernity.

Primarily, Harrison feels, and re-creates, kinds of ecstasy in her scholarship. She makes the sexual nature of this ecstasy explicit. In an essay on women and knowledge, she writes,

Intellect is never whole and separately intellectual. It is a thing charged with, dependent on, arising out of emotional desire. [...] Anyone who makes even a very small mental discovery can note how, at the moment of the making, there is a sudden sense of warmth, an uprush of emotion, often a hot blush, and sometimes tears in the eyes. Who can say that a process so sensuous and emotional, or at least attended by concomitants so sensuous, is insulated from a thing as interpenetrating as sex? (AO 140-141)

Throughout her scholarly writing, Harrison continually describes such ecstatic experiences of the confirmation of hypotheses, and also invites her readers to share them. More broadly, she repeatedly invokes the joy of scientific inquiry, aligning this joy with erotic ecstasy: joy, in contrast to pleasure is “not the lure of life, but the consciousness of the triumph of creation” (AAR 213). It is sexual, but not merely sensual, like pleasure. As “the consciousness of the triumph of creation,” joy belongs to sexual reproduction which creates new life; and, as a matter of “consciousness,” such joy emerges out of mental as well as bodily experience to
drive artistic and intellectual creation. In its spiritual and sexual valences, this joy evokes the fertility ritual of the sacred marriage, which, when it is performed in the context of a mystery religion, joins sex with a spiritual meaning.265

Such joy is continuously invoked by Harrison as an affect of scholarly practice. In _Ancient Art and Ritual_, she celebrates the discovery of a connection she was hoping to find: “What was the Dithyramb? We shall find to our joy that this obscure sounding Dithyramb [...] was in origin a festival closely akin to those we have just been discussing” (AAR 76). The reader is invited to share “our joy.” On the same page, the reader is further encouraged to share “our delight” in parallels between Harrison’s theories and Aristotle’s that bolster Harrison’s account of the origins of Greek drama. A little further on she declares of Plutarch, “And then, by a piece of luck that almost makes one’s heart stand still, he gives us the very words” she had been looking for (85). Pausing in her explanation to describe this pleasurable shock of heart-stopping discovery in the present tense, Harrison recreates in the grammar of the sentence her feeling of intense joy in her reconstruction of the past as she finds her hypotheses confirmed by evidence.

Harrison’s evocation of ecstasy in scholarship aligns her scholarship with ritual through a shared approach to inquiry. Harrison considers ritual to be means to knowledge, even “the only way of apprehending some things, and these of enormous importance” (AO 176). Ritual and the “mystical apprehension” it enables leads to knowledge that “cannot be put into language without being falsified”; rather, it must “be felt and lived than uttered and intellectually analyzed” (AO 176). Ritual, unlike theology, supports knowing through experience and not through language. Harrison’s recreation of emotion in her scholarship is

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265 The association with sacred marriage is even more relevant to Harrison’s claim that she need’s a man’s mind to help her “birth” ideas at a certain stage of her work: “Your thoughts are—for what they are worth—self-begotten by some process of parthenogenesis. But there comes often to me, almost always, a moment when alone I cannot bring them to the birth, when, if companionship is denied, they die unborn” (AO 130).
a strategy for understanding and communicating such “mystical apprehensions.” She argues that feelings of this kind play a crucial role in knowledge: “To feel keenly is often, if not always, an amazing intellectual revelation” (AO 113). She recalls how she learned certain things through her bodily experience. Writing of how she came to acknowledge the claims of women’s suffrage, she recalls: “Something caught me in the throat. I felt what they were feeling, and then, because I felt, I began to understand” (AO 113). In an essay on religion, she comes to a conclusion “when suddenly I felt a hot wave of conviction” (AO 58-59). Harrison knows she is making a contentious, gendered argument by privileging feeling as a form of or route to knowledge. She recounts how “[b]etween feeling and knowing there is a certain antithesis,” and that, historically, “the province of women was to feel: therefore they had better not know” (AO 118). But Harrison claims both feeling and knowing as the provinces of modern women, and feeling as moreover essential to knowing history. For Harrison, feeling in general, but especially ecstasy, functions as scholarly subject matter, scholarly practice, and, in connection with the latter, scholarly evidence. Above all, Harrison aligns scholarly joy with the “mystical apprehension” of “[t]he relation of the whole of things” (AO 62, 63). In the ecstatic moments of Harrison’s scholarship, we see how pieces of evidence did more than bolster her theories: they occasioned joy connected with the knowledge of significant truths, offering Harrison and her sympathetic reader a mystical experience.

For Harrison, ecstasy and the only slightly more sober “delight” function as scholarly subject matter (as in the ecstasies of the Bacchic-style rites she investigates), as scholarly practice and epistemology, and, in connection with the latter, as scholarly evidence. Each delightful discovery is of a piece of evidence that affirms one of Harrison’s claims about the origins of Greek drama in ritual. Moreover, by confirming her predictions, these discoveries affirm the larger truths to which Harrison has tied her hypotheses. All this evidence for the
origins of Greek drama in the Dithyramb in Ancient Greece not only supports Harrison’s theory of the origins of Greek drama in ritual, but buttresses her broader claims about the origins of all art and religion in ritual, and her idea that the essence of religion and art can also be found in ritual and not in gods or theology. With these implications, Harrison aligns scholarly joy with the “mystical apprehension” of “[t]he relation of the whole of things” (AO 62, 63). As Gilbert Murray wrote in a eulogy for Harrison, “she was always in pursuit of one or the other of two things: either of some discovery which was not a mere fact, but which radiated truth all about it, or of some creation or fresh revelation of beauty” (Murray in Harrison Themis 560-561). In the moments of ecstasy Harrison expresses in her scholarship, we see indeed how “facts” were more than pieces of knowledge that might bolster her theories: they were occasions for joy that “radiated” and implied significant truths, offering Harrison and her sympathetic reader a mystical apprehension of unity, and, more broadly, an experience of modern enchantment.
Chapter Six: Vernon Lee: Amateur by Choice

Vernon Lee (b. Violet Paget; 1856-1935), aesthetic essayist, novelist, historian, and scholar of “psychological aesthetics,” was studied enchantment’s most insightful contemporary critic. While she was unspiring in her criticism of the practice as elitist, intellectually confused, and offering impoverished conceptions of both art and the natural world, she expressed these views as a fellow worker in the larger project of creating a new, more capacious mode of scholarship that valorized embodied knowledge, affection for one’s objects of study, and was invested in questions about ethics as well as ontology. Lee’s own positive contribution to this larger project was the creation of the persona of the sophisticated amateur scholar, a figure that emerges as character or authorial voice in her fantastic and historical fiction, and as a model in her nonfiction writing. The sophisticated amateur is distinct not only from the specialist—the subject-matter expert with a university position becoming increasingly prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—but also from the old-fashioned amateur, whether the man of letters or the female enthusiast, who lacked the discipline and deep knowledge that were coming to define the most advanced knowledge practices in the same period. The sophisticated amateur is one who knows the conventions of amateurism as well as of professional specialism and mixes them in pursuit of a true understanding of her subject. Through this persona, Lee explored the subject that engrossed her across her varied oeuvre: the way a writer manipulates a reader’s attention, and more broadly, how an aesthetic object acts on its audience.

Lee was a contemporary of Jane Ellen Harrison and Jessie L. Weston (both 1850-1928). Though she too was English, she lived in Italy for most of her life. Her education was informal and rather autodidactic. As a young woman, she began to spend summers in England, where she became close with Walter Pater, who became a mentor. There, she also
got to know Harrison and others in aesthetic circles. Abroad, she socialized with other expatriates including Henry and William James, and the art critic Bernard Berenson and his wife, who were neighbors of hers outside of Florence. Lee was known for her strong personality and a certain masculine glamour, as well as for her intense romances with other women, including fellow writers F. Mary Robinson and Clementina (Kit) Anstruther-Thompson. Lee was a prolific author in many genres, from essays to dramas to novels, and published widely in England and in Europe from the 1880s through to her death in 1935.

Lee, like Harrison and Weston, lived and worked far enough into the twentieth century that the now familiar boundary between the “Victorian” and “Modernist” literary periods had become perceptible even to those living in the period. But unlike these contemporaries, Lee has become the subject of scholarly critiques of literary criticism’s conventional periodizations. In literary studies today, Lee is considered primarily as a Victorian writer, and more specifically as one of the “female aesthetes” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who bridge the gap between canonical women writers George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, and between the Victorians and Modernists more broadly. Most attention is focused on her late Victorian aesthetic writing, which promoted an ethics of socially responsible “art for life’s sake” instead of a more hedonistic “art for art’s sake,” and on her fantastic short stories, especially those from *Hauntings* (1890). Indeed, to literary scholars outside of Lee studies, Lee has become best known as an aesthetic writer of weird ghost

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267 See Schaffer and Schaffer and Psomiades. Lee’s version of aestheticism was seen as “socially inclusive” and explicitly concerned with social responsibility to the poor (Townley 529). As Sarah Townley has shown, however, Lee’s aestheticism was not the popular women’s aestheticism of, say, Ouida, but an aestheticism that was elite, though in different ways than Walter Pater’s. Where Pater addressed a “scholarly” (and a specifically male) audience, Lee addressed a similarly erudite, well-read readership, but one whose reading may have come through less formal channels than Pater’s. After all, the autodidact in Victorian Britain was famous for his or her voluminous and wide-ranging reading. See Sarah Townley, “Vernon Lee and Elitism: Redefining British Aestheticism” *English Literature in Transition*. 54:4. (2011).
stories. Lee herself was interested in periodization, not least because she felt herself to be out of sync with her historical moment. In 1932, she lamented that her fame should have come fifty years ago, in response to her first book *Studies of the Eighteenth-Century in Italy* (1880) and her aesthetic essays, instead of in the 1930s when she was coming into her “mental maturity” alongside “the generation to which I ought to have belonged.”

Today, Lee is understood as a “coterie” and “prestige” writer— as someone who wrote for and was read by an elite audience, but whose reputation stretched beyond that small circle (Towheed 2005 201, Townley 532, quoting Colby bio p. 308). Moreover, she is understood as a marginal writer: both as a recently recovered writer for twenty-first century literary studies, and as having occupied a marginal authorial position in her own lifetime. As an Englishwoman living in Italy, as a woman scholar, as a woman who had love affairs with other women (some of which fundamentally shaped her writing), Lee wrote aslant to mainstream British literary culture.

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269 This sense has persisted since early in Lee’s career— indeed, Lee understood herself to occupy this position, writing in 1891, a decade into her career, that she was “well known but not well read” (1891 post card to Matilda Paget, qtd in Shafquat Towheed, “Determining ‘Fluctuating Opinions’: Vernon Lee, Popular Fiction, and Theories of Reading,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 60:2 (September 2005), 199-236: 236.

270 Lee’s sui-generis, off-center position has been attributed to her expatriate condition— she was an Englishwoman born in France who spent almost all her life living in Italy— and to her gender and sexuality: as a “female intellectual in the business of defining culture,” she “speaks, as a foreigner, from difference” and
Critics agree that in practice as well as position, Lee was an unusual writer: hard to define or categorize, except perhaps as a writer who can best be understood as publishing primarily across, between, or outside of established categories. Her placement regarding emerging categories such as public intellectual, amateur scholar, and professional critic is particularly fraught. A recent biography identifies her in its title as a “public intellectual,” positioned between popular writing and the academy. But this is an anachronistic label, implying a more coherent role than Lee played. Instead of accepting this term, I argue that Lee created her own role in the persona of the sophisticated amateur by playing off of the conventions associated with the professional specialist, the old-fashioned amateur, the aesthetic writer, the novelist, and eventually, the intellectual.

Coming of age in a late Victorian moment when, as Anne DeWitt has shown, novelists and “men of science” had begun to overtake “men of letters” as the public voices of “moral authority,” Lee created a writerly persona in relation to these established roles. She adapted “the original image of the man of letters” in her position as commentator on “wide-ranging cultural issues within an historical and social context […] for an uninformed public.” At the same time, she desired the increasingly powerful platform of the late Victorian novelist (Towheed 2005 201). However, she did not want to write novels: indeed, even as early as 1874, she saw publishing novels as a means to publishing the critical works she really wanted to write. In a letter to her mentor, the novelist Henrietta Jenkin, Lee spelled out this

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271 Harrison too has recently been categorized this way. For Harrison as a public intellectual, see Jean Mills, *Virginia Woolf, Jane Ellen Harrison, and the Spirit of Modernist Classicism* (Ohio UP, 2014).


ambition: “what I should like eventually would be to write serious works on literature and art, but that would need years of training and study and an already more or less established literary reputation” (qtd in Towheed 2005 210). As it turns out, Lee’s prediction was off: her first book, a historical study on eighteenth-century Italy that focused on literature and art, published in 1880, was extremely well received and established her as a promising and indeed already accomplished literary and scholarly writer. Ironically, her first full-length novel, *Miss Brown* (1884), mostly served to damage her reputation and alienate her from admirers without meaningfully expanding her readership. But in this trajectory, Lee was bucking a convention she had perceptively noted.

By providing Lee (as it had Harrison early in her career) with an acceptable and accessible model of expertise for a woman writer, aestheticism enabled Lee to launch herself first as a scholarly writer rather than as a novelist. (She may also have been right that her masculine pseudonym initially helped too, though it was soon unmasked). In aesthetic discourse, Lee could write of history through focusing on art objects, which she could discuss with authority grounded in deeply felt observations that did not require the philological expertise seen as necessary for writing non-aesthetic histories. As her career progressed, Lee became increasingly interested in scientific writing: she read widely in the natural and social sciences, especially what she called “psychological aesthetics.” At the same time, she continued to pursue a wider readership for her “serious works on literature and art,” including her early twentieth-century works on religion, morality, and psychology. By this point in her career, the immediate context for writerly authority was no longer the man of letters or man of science, but what was coming to be called “the intellectual.”

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professional, often university-based scholar. But the intellectual for Lee was still too close to what she disparaged as “Man-of-Letters-kind” and “professional prophets.” She needed to create her own category.

In my exploration of Lee’s scholarly persona, methods, and forms, I focus on her published and unpublished writings of the 1910s, in which she was especially preoccupied with delineating her objections to a Harrisonian studied enchantment grounded in ecstatic forms of unity. First, I consider these objections as they are expressed in an unpublished lecture delivered to the Cambridge Heretics in 1915 and in a collection of essays, *Vital Lies* (1912). In this discussion, I also consider Lee’s continued engagement with such enchanted scholarship in her working notebooks of the 1910s-1930s (held in Colby College Special Collections). These writings attest to more ambivalence about such modern enchantments than Lee articulates in her public writings. This ambivalence is evident in the content and duration of these private writings: Lee’s engagement with these issues in the notebooks persists up to the end of her life. Next, I turn to a discussion of Lee’s theory and practice of the fantastic, drawing on some of her late nineteenth-century writings and focusing on her sustained interest in the effects art has on its audience. Finally, I analyze her 1914 epistolary novel, *Louis Norbert*, as an instance of how her sophisticated amateur persona delineates an embodied, interactive, joyful, and also rationalist intellectual practice.

**Criticizing modern enchantments**

By the start of the Great War, Lee had published extensive criticism of the kind of writing that I have been calling “studied enchantment.” At that time, such narratively compelling theories, which conflated and claimed to satisfy the demands of science, aesthetics, and spiritual experience, had become prominent in Lee’s circles. J.G. Frazer’s *The
Golden Bough was on its way to becoming a mass culture hit; Jane Harrison was a celebrated writer and speaker on art and religion; and Lawrence, Nietzsche, and Freud, and what Lee disparagingly called their “keys to the universe,” were growing in influence. Lee protested the popularity of these writers and their theories of art, myth, religion, and history, which, according to her critique, redefined truth as what is most useful or entertaining, did justice neither to the wonders of art nor ontology, and courted an elitist, even anti-democratic politics.

But Lee’s criticism of such enchanted scholarship did not itself aim to disenchant—to reduce art or religion to something disappointingly mundane. Rather, it offered an alternative approach that carefully distinguished between aesthetic and scientific value, and between imagination and reality. For Lee, enchantment is a condition of the world only in so far as it is a human experience, an effect of a certain orientation. Unlike for Weston, for whom aesthetic objects may be full of divine significance, for Lee, any art or apparently religious object is man-made and artificial, and worth celebrating for those very qualities. This attitude is clearest in her informal notes on the “sacred,” which is “holy because it is man-made.”

It is “greater, more glorious, more lovely” as a human creation than if it were a divine one. Lee best illustrates this artificial enchantment through her practice of a self-conscious amateurism. It is a project with vast ambitions: although Lee was fiercely critical of modern enchantments, what bothered her was not their aim to inform life philosophies, but the values on which they based their life philosophies. For Lee, aesthetic or literary value was not and should not be conflated with truth value. By separating these categories, and

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276 Notebook 23, “1933=4/ November=Feb 15”, Vernon Lee Collection, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.
277 Notebook 18, “Summer./ ’XXXII’/ Oxford-Chelsea,” Vernon Lee Collection, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.
celebrating artificiality, fabrication, and idiosyncrasy, she pursued a sophisticated amateur poetics that was her updating of the aesthetic attitude and her answer to studied enchantment.

**Amateurism and Jane Harrison**

Across her writing, Lee embraces the practice of the sophisticated amateur over the practices of the expert or modern professional and his usual foil, the old-fashioned amateur. More specifically, Lee often depicts and embodies a purposefully naive woman amateur scholar. As Stefano Evangelista has pointed out, Lee's pose of naiveté is constructed, but also grounded in the actual circumstances of her education, which was at the hands of tutors and family members.  

This may have been something of a choice—we know from Harrison's biography that gifted middle-class women could enter schools, even at the level of higher education in this period—but Evangelista claims that Lee “was never attracted by the prospect of a formal education” (63). Where academic scholarship was an aspiration and eventual conquest for Harrison, Lee was skeptical of academic scholarship from early on and was critical of it from a greater remove than was Harrison.

Lee’s and Harrison's differing relationships to academia reveal much about each of them, and, more broadly, about women’s literary and scholarly strategies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the authorial positions imaginable to them. Both women were intrigued by academic scholarly practices, but Harrison embraced them (if with reservations and revisions), ultimately making her career largely within the academic

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278 Stefano Evangelista has called attention to this constructed persona: in her autobiographical essay, “The Child in the Vatican,” Lee’s “emphasis on her lack of formal training creates a form of self-mythology” in which she claims a “natural taste for the arts,” a form of “cultural capital […] which increases in value and authority precisely in proportion to how much it is perceived to be unschooled.” See *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 62.
institutions of Newnham College, Cambridge and the Cambridge University Press. In contrast, Lee formed her career at a distance from academic institutions and practices, only dipping into them at times and always with ambivalence. Even in her later work, after she too had published with Cambridge University Press, and before she had her MS of *Music and Its Listeners* sent to Oxford University Press in 1931 (which did not publish it), Lee “would keep searching for alternatives that take the experience of art away from academic study, the discourse of specialization, and stuffiness of all sorts” (Evangelista 64). For Lee, one had to go outside of academia to avoid such specialization and stuffiness, while Harrison pursued and encouraged non-stuffy methods within it, the better to bring about her “ideal university.” Importantly, while both women were interested in modernizing knowledge at the same time as they found inspiration in earlier, even ancient, modes of knowledge, they were never reactionaries. They pursued the latest findings, tried and formulated innovative methods, and cited and published in the newest journals.

Harrison served as a foil for Lee throughout her career. Lee knew Harrison when Harrison was a recent Newnham graduate and they were both aesthetic writers and members of Pater’s London circle in the 1880s (Harrison then lived in London, and Lee visited from Italy in the summers). In this period, Lee was an ardent, if private, critic of her peer. She faulted Harrison especially for a lack of artistic sense, writing to their mutual friend Eugenie Sellars, a scholar of Roman antiquity, that “despite [Harrison’s] great ability and classical knowledge, she had no instinct for art of any kind and a want of knowledge of other art besides that of antiquity.”

Thirty years later, Lee’s relation to Harrison remained fraught:

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by the 1910s, Lee grouped Harrison in with the scholarly writers she deprecated as “Vital Liars.” Indeed, Lee’s ambivalent feelings about Harrison suggest how her criticism of such modern enchantments informs her sophisticated amateur practice.

Harrison loomed large as a celebrated scholar in the years leading up to the first World War, with her authority grounded largely in her university position (she had become a research fellow at Newnham College, Cambridge in 1898 following a successful career as a lecturer in London). In a lecture delivered to the Cambridge Heretics (of which Harrison was an early and prominent member), Lee engages directly with Harrison and her most recently published writings on Harrison’s own academic turf. As Lee noted in her talk, entitled, “War, Group-Emotion, and Art,” “Group Emotion” “means, in reality, Miss Jane Harrison.”

Lee’s ambivalence about Harrison is strong: she finds her book *Alpha & Omega* to be “a suggestive book, an instructive book, a noble, a loveable, an exasperating and enchanting book” (a description revised up in the MS from the more negative an “irritating” and “intolerable” book) (6). Lee further expresses her ambivalence in ambiguously teasing and patronizing diction: Harrison, when she is wrong, is both “tantalizing— and only the more endearing” (26-27). In this way, Lee acknowledges Harrison’s appeal, but also presents herself as admiring her from a condescending distance, rather than being fully taken in. Lee is ultimately skeptical of this university-based, professional scholar.

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281 Later in the talk, Harrison herself is apostrophized as “most delightful and exasperating,” and it is revealed, “exasperating above all in not being here at the present moment” (29). Lee’s disappointment is palpable; perhaps she is even miffed at her absence.
Despite, or perhaps because, of her skepticism of Harrison, Lee presents herself as Harrison’s inferior in her lecture to the Heretics. This could simply be deference to a respected figure at her own institution, but that kind of deference would be unusual for Lee. Instead, it seems to reflect her uneasiness at criticizing such a popular, charismatic, and authoritative figure. In her talk, Lee likens reading Harrison’s book to engaging with “a friend who is an opponent, and an opponent who is a master” (7). She distances herself from Harrison—not claiming her as a friend directly, but likening reading her book to debating with one—and elevates her to the level of “master.” Elsewhere, Lee gets their relative ages wrong, placing herself in the more out-dated position: though Harrison is six years Lee’s senior, Lee refers to herself as “being […] older and more old-fashioned than Miss Harrison” (28). Where Harrison is one of “our vitalistic and mystical opponents” who “has written “propaganda in favour […] of the anti-rationalistic philosophy of our day,” Lee, using Harrison’s own language from her essay “Crabbed Age and Youth,” identifies herself in contrast as “a crabbed aged Rationalist relic” (20, 15, 19). Harrison is the younger yet also more “master[ful]” scholar.

Yet later in that talk, Lee associates Harrison not with the modern, if misguided, reaction against rationalism, but with an old-fashioned, Victorian amateurism. In contrast to this characterization, Lee presents herself as a more rigorous if less entertaining thinker. Having earlier described “the genial guesswork of Samuel Butler” as opposed to a “scientific and logical method,” Lee goes on to claim that “genial guessing is [Harrison’s] privilege not my plodding business” (50-51, 98). Here, Lee aligns Harrison with an outdated and

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undisciplined enthusiastic amateurism, and herself with its usual foil, “plodding” pedantry. While this description takes Harrison down a peg, it does not elevate Lee very far. It is a relatively modest contrast, emphasizing Lee’s scholarly care, and eschewing all claims at “genial[ity]” or even artistry in her own work. Ultimately, it suggests that Lee sees herself as less appealing or entertaining than Harrison, but also as more accurate.

Lee further discredits a crucial part of Harrison’s popular appeal, linking her famous “enthusiasm” with the worst consequences of “vital lies.” Harrison was celebrated for her passion for her subjects by colleagues and students, but Lee turns this usually positive (if highly gendered) trait into a sign of Harrison’s obscurantism, crediting her with “contagious enthusiasm” (38). Since Lee explicitly finds “contagious emotion” or “contagious imitation” to foster a harmful form of unity in an audience, one that is “ego-centric,” this cannot read as a compliment the way it might have from, say, Gilbert Murray’s pen (38, 39, 41). Moreover, it conveys a sense of infection— that Harrison’s dangerous enthusiasm will be passed on like a disease. Ultimately, as Lee sees it, Harrison’s enthusiasm implicates her in the worst parts of the war-mongering present, marked by the madness of crowds, even though she was, like Lee, an outspoken pacifist. Indeed, it is in the context of Harrison that Lee first explicitly links the enchanted scholarship to which she objects to the Great War, in which “countries [are] at present destroying each other on behalf of their various Vital Lies” (91). Lee further suggests that Harrison’s scholarly practice is morally inferior to Lee’s amateur practice, which in contrast is vigilant against the temptations of delusional modern enchantments.
Harrison was one of many contemporary scholars with whose work Lee engaged intensely in her talks, published essays, notebooks, and most vividly, in the margins of her books. Lee read voraciously in the contemporary literature of the natural and human or social sciences. She was often critical and always strongly opinionated in her recorded responses to such work, but she was also notably open-minded, reading widely and recording the kinds of mixed feelings of admiration, ambivalence, and antagonism apparent in her discussion of Harrison. In particular, she registered a fascination with the broad archive of what we have been exploring as fantastic scholarship and studied enchantment—or what Lee called “wholehoggish historical explanations & prophecies.” Her response helps us see how visible this kind of writing once was in early twentieth-century European letters. It included, in her terms, the “pseudo or surrogate religions” of H.G. Wells and Alfred North Whitehead; the works of the “Saviours—discoverers of keys to the universe,” among whom she includes Nietzsche and Lawrence; the superstitions of “Yeats & Co.”; and many anthropological writers’ texts on religion. While her criticism of these texts is fierce, she also acknowledges her attraction to their flawed theories, and in some cases admits to their influence on her own thinking and writing. Lee’s criticisms of these sorts of modern enchantments appear as threads in several works from the 1910s, including the 1915 lecture on Harrison’s writings on “group emotion” and the novel Louis Norbert (1914), and recur in

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her notebooks from 1926 to 1935, the year of her death. Most prominently, she takes them as her subject in her essay collection, *Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism* (1912).

In *Vital Lies*, Lee identifies a modern movement driven by those she calls “Obscurantists” and “myth-mongers,” and which she associates particularly with the discourses of vitalism and what she calls William James’s “‘Will to Believe’ Pragmatism” (2.119, 2.100). In the volume of essays, she divides her discussion between “Theoretical obscurantism,” which includes this bad, “‘Will-to-Believe’ Pragmatism” along with mysticism, and “Applied obscurantism,” which includes Father George Tyrell’s reformist movement of religious “Modernism,” what she calls “Anthropological apologetics,” and the political priestcraft of Georges Sorel’s “Syndicalist Myth.” To readers of *Vital Lies* today, William James might seem to be in odd company. Indeed, his prominent place in the volume testifies to a very different view of scholarly writing available to Lee: James was not yet the epoch-making scholar of pragmatism, psychology, and religious experience, though his influential work on these topics had already been published and well received. But the “epoch” in which James would become a central figure in Anglo-American intellectual history, while Tyrell and Sorel would be mere footnotes to those working outside the history of theology or Marxism, had not yet been made. To Lee, James was a one among (too) many scholars who embraced a rationalist critique of rationalism that accepted the fantastic

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286 The Harrison lecture and the notebooks are all held in Special Collections, Colby College.
287 Lee’s criticism was in sync with that of Max Weber. As Wolf Lepenies chronicles, Weber accused Men of Letters (“*Literaten*”) in Germany of producing “an irresponsible brand of writing that had degenerated into emotional nationalism, social-economic utopias and fun revolutions”—“the ideas of 1914” (Lepenies 221). Weber was responding to the same trends as Lee: the emergence in the years leading up to the Great War of the Nietzschean “visionary human sciences” of Oswald Spengler and others in which “science was beginning to become art,” and which rejected the “values of modern mass democracy” (Lepenies 213). Wolf Lepenies. *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, Cambridge UP: 1988. For a more recent consideration of these trends in the context of modern enchantment, see Michael Saler and Joshua Landy, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford UP, 2009), which includes essays on Lee’s bêtes noirs William James, Georges Sorel, and Nietzsche.
Lee saw James and his fellow travelers as reacting against the secularizing rationalism of the nineteenth-century: they were unwilling unbelievers who, “taking advantage of” a European tradition of the criticism of reason going back to the eighteenth century, looked for “excuses to disbelieve whatever has made them unbelievers” (Vital Lies 1.vii). In their reaction against rationalism, they used the same tools as secularizing scholarship, but to enchant rather than disenchant. As Lee wrote accusingly, “Philological exegesis, anthropological study of myths and institutions, psychology and metaphysical analysis, and all the sciences which have undermined what used to be called religious truths, are now invoked to re-instate some portion of them in the garb of desirable and valuable errors” (1.vii). In their salvaging of old beliefs, they came to valorize irrationality over rationality, instinct over logic, and, most damningly, to redefine truth as whatever seems most to satisfy the inquirer.

As Lee saw it, such writers wound up embracing obscurity over clarity. Moreover, this obscurity is highlighted by a context that would lead readers to expect transparency: these writers make use of the very scholarly approaches that in the preceding century had done so much to demystify and disenchant. They dispense with a “humdrum rational proposition” in favor of a “mysterious, nay, [...] cabalistic pattern” (1.242). In the work of such would-be cabalists, Lee finds, as Cyril Connolly did in his discussion of From Ritual to Romance, that it falls to the commentator to give the straight-forward version of an idea—and that when one does this, its magic dissipates (2.8). Writers of “vital lies” aim not to reach the truth through increasingly clarified thinking, but to intrigue, delight, and thrill through obscurity. Lee sees such writers as encouraging an experience of sublimity in the reader: they
train the reader to feel “that where we do not understand there must be many greater and finer things than where we do understand; a feeling akin to that of the sublime as of finding oneself in a huge building dimly lighted” (2.12). Such writers are after an aesthetic effect rather than the essentially ordinary truth.

Lee’s description of the “cabalistic pattern” of such writing recalls the highly suspicious, even paranoid, interpretations—e.g., that texts are to be de-coded—that we find vividly in fantastic scholarship such as *From Ritual to Romance*. Lee finds this pattern, for example, in the work of Oswald Spengler, whose “‘magian’ belief in esoteric meanings deliberately hidden in the written word” exemplifies the kind of historiography to which she objects. 288 Such paranoid hermeneutic practices are linked for Lee to the creation of hyper-coherent systems of thought, which she rejects in favor of more fragmented accounts. 289 But she can see the appeal of these coherentist narratives, acknowledging the specifically “aesthetic” “satisfaction” to be found in them: “the satisfaction inspired by this book of Father Tyrell’s is almost moral, and is most certainly aesthetic” (1.165). 290

288 Notebook 22, “1933/ Sept: to Nov 25./ Pisa = Flor,” Vernon Lee Collection, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine. She also finds it in book that sounds like an exemplary instance of what I have been calling fantastic scholarship, with its coherentist, text-as-code style and fabulous “eroto-religious” subject matter that recalls *The Golden Bough*. The book, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei* by Luigi Valli, claims, in Lee’s words, that early Italian poetry is a “cypher” coding heresies against the Catholic Church that come out of “Persian eroto-religious mysticism.” It even involves Templars and troubadors (staples of fantastic scholarship and scholarly fantasy from *From Ritual to Romance* to *The Da Vinci Code*). Lee attests that this account “fascinated” her “as very dull ones sometimes do.” It even moves her by “the connexions of the book’s subject with a little secret & fantastic episodes of the life of my own fancy,” suggesting a personal affinity with its outré subject matter. In this ambivalent account, in which she records her fascination by a “very dull” book, Lee admits that she enjoys the book despite somehow knowing better—that it entertains her, even compels her, despite her knowing that it is “dull”—which at the time could mean stupid rather than merely boring. The apparently paradoxical appeal of this “dull” book suggests the mix of boring diction with bizarre subject matter that fosters a readerly experience of a marvelous reality, as in Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*, Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, and Haggard’s *She*, which encourage credulity in strange tales by framing them in sober scholarly language. Moreover, this is a notably idiosyncratic experience for Lee: the book connects with “a little secret & fantastic episodes of the life of my own fancy.”

289 Systematic thinkers are too apt to lose sight of reality in the building of abstract theories, and their theories ultimately become prisons for their ideas and even themselves—a “grim[…] edifice wherein systematic thinkers enclose themselves and their readers” (2.89).

290 Lee seems to understand the “satisfactory emotion” they encourage so well because of her own susceptibility to it. She admits to some ambivalence about “vital lies,” feeling “mixed and warring admiration
But while Lee admires the aesthetic effect of such writing, she faults its methods and assumptions. She criticizes Tyrell in particular for using a standard of religious coherence rather than logical coherence to make his argument in favor of Catholic modernism. In logical coherence, or “contemplative synthetic analysis,” one creates a whole via “analysis and synthesis” from “previous separateness” (1.207). But in religious coherence, one perceives a whole “not because we co-ordinate its parts, but because we do not perceive or conceive them” (1.107). We perceive instead a “homogenous chaos […] undifferentiated in itself,” like the symphony felt by an “unmusical hearer” (1.207, 208). While its authors present such perceptions of coherence as conclusions reached by argument, Lee reveals that they use a different strategy. Criticizing an argument of William James’s, she observes that “this testimony has consisted mainly of inferences, and of inferences which there is no reason why anyone except the mystic should either make or accept” (1.103). Similarly, writing of Crawley’s “anthropological apologetics,” she criticizes his thesis for looking like an argument without actually being one: his “whole thesis is never clearly organized, but diffluent, putting ideas in contact rather than in connection” (2.13). The acceptance of such arguments involves not logical assent, but a feeling akin to “mystical revelation,” constituting an “overwhelming satisfactory emotion” (1.208). As Lee sees it, truth for “‘Will-to-Believe’ Pragmatism” is what creates such a “satisfactory emotion.”

Lee was especially outraged that “vital liars” relied on the standard of the “hypothesis that works best” that we saw especially active in Frazer and in Weston. Lee and aversion for their most mixed and warring ideas” (1.3). Indeed, her sustained criticism of “vital lies” comes out of a feeling that their approach and standards hit close to home: James’s approach, she writes, has “distorted views which are mine, or which resemble my own: utilitarianism, relativism, and the idea vaguely roughed out in the saying that Man is the Measure of All Things” (2.186). But she is vigilant against her attraction to the aesthetic satisfaction of theories and historical narratives. For example, in her private notebook, when she feels that her own philosophy is becoming too coherent, she pathologizes that feeling, ascribing it to “heart trouble and hot head.” Notebook 27, “1934=35/ Nov: Dec: Jan;,” Vernon Lee Collection, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.
objects to this principle as it is articulated by Williams James: “On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true” (James, “Pragmatism,” 299, qtd in Lee V/L I.25). For Lee, it is dangerous to apply standards of what “works” best to truth, to “pass[…] off as true what may be merely useful or inspiring delusions” (1.vii, 1.9). Thus Lee’s main problem with “vital lies” is that they are lies presented as truths, hypotheses or wishes presented as facts. She sees them as a fraud akin to the popular Spiritualism that had come into prominence during her youth, and which still found support and enthusiastic reception in certain corners. Strengthening this association, when writing of “‘Will-to-Believe’ Pragmatism,” Lee repeatedly uses similes and metaphors of Spiritualism, noting its “Sludge-the-Medium gesture[s],” calling its practitioners “philosophical conjurors,” and describing its methods as “sleight of hand” (1.165, 37, 37). She further points out that “vital lies” are not merely mediumistic in form, but also in content. Specifically, she accuses James’s “‘Will-to-Believe’ pragmatism” of concerning itself with “the tenets of optimistic theism and the hypotheses of mediumistic spiritualism” but not with chemistry, physics, or biology (1.35). That is, “vital liars” only seem to be interested in truth when it is “the truth of some variety of theology; or, in default of such, or perhaps in addition thereunto, of the truth of some mediumistic kind of ‘spiritualism’” (1.48). Thus such pragmatism is additionally dishonest by presenting itself as a universal method, while it is really concerned only certain subjects, e.g., religion or the supernatural.

Spiritualists of the period such as Arthur Conan Doyle often presented themselves as open-minded adventurers, bravely defying traditional ideas about science and religion. Lee sees this stance as taken in bad faith: such men present their work as a masculine spectacle of “bold and dashing” “adventure” that “shame[s] the poor rationalist who won’t join in it” (1.40). Through this pose, “vital liars” are both deluding themselves and others. She also
finds this pose in the work of writers who refute traditional religious belief while employing a religious style. She accuses “professional prophets […] like Nietzsche and Tolstoi,” of thinking that “they are manfully facing the whole truth because they are pinning their attention to some aspect of Reality which inflicts pain on themselves, and through them, on their neighbors” (2.205). Rather, they are seduced by this image of heroically suffering masculinity—familiar as the attitude George Levine finds valorized among late Victorian scholars in *Dying to Know*, which Lee’s sometime critic and admirer Virginia Woolf depicted in *Mr. Ramsay*—into a narrow, illusory view in which the scientific seeker is aggrandized.  

Lee finds fault not only with the modern “prophet,” but also with the Man of Letters as a variety of professional writer dependent on market forces. Because of commercial demands to be entertaining, the writers of “vital lies” emphasize spectacle over a more ordinary pursuit of truth. As she laments, “mankind, especially Man-of-Letters-kind is, by a legitimate fear of boring people, debarred from calling attention to what everyone already knows” and suffering from a “terror of the Obvious” (2.152). This terror leads him to “neglect […] the every-day, humdrum, taken for granted, paramount importance of vital truths” (2.151). She sees such writers as pandering, dryly criticizing even “Professor James’s rather commercial phrase of recommendation” in which truth is “exactly what was required” (1.31). This “terror of the Obvious” and consequent overlooking of “vital truths” ultimately fosters an impoverished view of reality, in which reality is always inferior to myth and marked by “perfunctoriness, fraud, and corruption” (2.112). The reality implied by “vital liars” is always “unsatisfactory” (2.113).

In celebrating more humble approaches to knowledge, Lee accuses “vital liars” of elitism. She criticizes their self-delusion in terms that resonate with Weston’s later

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endorsement of an esoteric enchanted scholarship. Where Weston claims to be traveling the “King’s Highway” to “truth,” and not a “by-path” that leads to mere “fairy-tales,” Lee sees such an itinerary as an arrogant mistake. For Lee, there are no “royal roads” in the pursuit of “Truth,” “[f]or royal roads are those along which, our wishes magically turn into horses, we beggars are wont to ride” (2.114). Moreover, such travelers would deny or destroy other routes: they are “opposed to the multiplicity and complexity of reality” (2.116). In Lee’s view, it is better to stick to by-paths. One must accept that “multiplicity and complexity,” and respond with modest optimism rather than totalizing ambition, doing the little bit one can in light of there being so much to do (2.115).

Lee connects her anti-royal-road argument explicitly to questions of politics and class, in addition to gender. She finds affinities between “vital lies” and anti-democratic political ideology, decrying modern anti-rationalism as “an intellectual tendency parallel to the neo-monarchic and neo-aristocratic arraignments of the shams and drawbacks of democracy” (Lee V/L 1.201). The writers of “vital lies” are elitist in substance and style: they credit themselves with greater understanding than the masses of people, and aim to deceive others for the sake of furthering aims that they believe only they are clear-eyed enough see. For example, Lee accuses the anthropologist Ernest Crawley of patronizing “Real Believers”—most of whom are among “the lower classes,” and thus, in his social-Darwinist system, constituting “the weaker and less successful members” of society—by making them only “objects,” and never part of the audience, of his theories (2.54). Even the pose of such writers is elitist: it “bestows a pleasing sense of high breeding (or at least gentility) whenever

293 In this she anticipates Vincent Pecora’s warning regarding Harrison’s enthusiasm for group emotion: “What is astonishing, however, despite the refusal of all scriptural ‘authority’ in her discussion and among the Heretics, is how quickly and easily Harrison turns near her conclusion to ideas that, in the wake of Nazism, fascism, and Soviet Communism, have a religiously authoritarian resonance Harrison surely did not intend and perhaps could not have imagined” (Pecora 118). As we see, Lee could and did imagine some of this resonance.
294 See Crawley 279, quoted in Lee V/L 2.57.
we assert the deficiencies and limitations of Reason. Our thought, whatever it is, shall never be guilty of being crass! I employ that word because its squalid connotations bring home our intention of being on the contrary, select, initiate, esoteric” (2.150). Lee regards these writers as engaged in a form of priestcraft, misleading the populace for the sake of an elite vision. In Lee’s view, the enchanting and enchanted writings of “vital liars” recreate the worst effects of the pre-modern delusions that the intellectual tradition of rationalism and historicism had tried to dissipate. By practicing coherentist, even paranoid, modes of interpretation they reduce artistic creations to their value as artifacts, succumb to faulty reasoning, and promote elitist, undemocratic politics.

**Lee’s sophisticated amateur**

Lee’s linking of “vital lies” to Spiritualism points to an important focal point of her critique of and alternative to studied enchantment: the relation of the supernatural to the artistic imagination. Lee regarded the Spiritualist view of the supernatural, shared by those “highly reasoning men of semi-science” of Society for Psychical Research (including William James), as reductive: its purportedly real ghosts are “flat, stale, and unprofitable” (*Hauntings* 38). In opposition to the accounts of the SPR, Lee offered her own modern ghost stories in *Hauntings* (1890), in which the ghosts are explicitly those “spurious” ones that haunt minds, not drafty passage ways (40). Lee anticipates her endorsement of spurious ghosts in her essay on “The Supernatural in Art” (1880), where she contrasts purely imagined ghosts with purportedly real ones:

> We none of us believe in ghosts as logical possibilities, but we most of us conceive them as imaginative probabilities; we can still feel the ghostly, and thence it is that a ghost is the only thing which can in any respect replace for us the divinities of old,
and enable us to understand, if only for a minute, the imaginative power which they possessed, and of which they were despoiled not only by logic, but by art. By ghost we do not mean the vulgar apparition which is seen or heard in told or written tales; we mean the ghost which slowly rises up in our mind, the haunter not of corridors and staircases, but of our fancies. (Belcaro 93)

The spurious ghost evokes a real feeling of the ghostly— even “if only for a minute”— and this is the closest Lee’s moderns can get to an experience of “the divinities of old.” Rather than art being a replacement for religion— in the sense of something that, as in Arnold’s famous formulation, evokes the same feelings of sweetness and light and the same humanist moral imperatives— it is the ghostly, in the sense of something that evokes a pleasurable feeling of awe, transcendence, and mystery, not to mention just a bit of unease— that is the more accurate “replace[ment]” for religion. Moreover, for Lee, the ghostly evokes the power of art, which too is valuable in so far as it produces feelings and thoughts in its audience (and creators). Artificial ghosts, like art more generally, are valuable because they generate real thoughts and feelings.

Lee’s engagement with the fantastic in her essays and fiction offers a crucial site for exploring her theory of art and its implications for the development of her sophisticated amateur scholarly practice.295 Her theory of the fantastic built on the ideas of Pater and had

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295 Lee’s engagement with the fantastic had two main phases: one in which she theorized it as a literary and artistic genre (in her 1880 discussion of “The Supernatural in Art”), and another that began later in the 1880s as she began to publish the fantastic short stories that would be collected in Hauntings (1890). “Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art,” was first published in Cornhill Magazine 42 (1880), and then reprinted in Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions (W. Satchell, 1881), and most recently, in Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales, eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham [1890] (Broadview, 2006). In addition to Hauntings, Lee’s other collections of fantastic fiction include Pope Jacynth and Other Fantastic Tales [1904] (John Lane, 1907), and For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories, (John Lane, 1927). These collections reprint stories that first appeared in The Yellow Book and other journals. “Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art” (1880), Lee distinguishes between two kinds of supernatural: one which belongs to “scientific speculation” based on false premises and another, the “real supernatural, born of the imagination and its surrounding” (Belcaro 76). While the scientific supernatural returns as an object of criticism for Lee in later writings, in 1880 she dismisses it from her discussion to focus on the distinctions between art and this imaginative, “real supernatural.” The
much in common with those of Harrison and Weston. But in her fantastic writing, she used the genre’s conventions to very different ends than Pater, Frazer, Haggard, Weston, or Harrison. Where these writers often used fantastic conventions to foster belief in a marvelous reality, Lee ultimately used fantastic aesthetics to suggest that there is no marvelous reality behind artistic creations, and instead that certain artistic creations are themselves marvels of humanity’s creativity.

According to Lee, art is, or should be, honest about its artificiality—like a spurious ghost. In this it is superior to religion, which claims an ontological reality beyond human experience. Art, like religion, is valuable to people because it “deals with a life continuous with our own beyond our own life’s real limits,” but it “makes it, […] not discovers it” (1.108-109). In contrast to the claims of the Spiritualist readers of *She* and their ilk, Lee asserts that “Art does not bring us a message from or about something already existing independent of ourselves”; rather, it creates a world beyond ourselves because one does not already exist.

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296 For Lee, the supernatural legend looks like the vital material that Pater claims was created in the first stage of myth-making and available to the artist for shaping in the second and third stages. It is naive, belonging to childhood in the individual, and a stage akin to childhood in mankind’s intellectual and artistic development, according to Pater’s stadial thinking. Like Pater’s myths, which constitute “that mixed and floating mass,” “a mere fluctuating tradition,” which art “selecting and combining, at will, […] blend[s] […] into a shape, substantial and firmly set […] that might retain a permanent place in men’s imaginations” (*Greek Studies* 53-54), Lee’s supernatural “fills the fancy, it oscillates and transforms itself; the artist may see it, attempt to seize and embody it for evermore in a definite and enduring shape, but it vanishes out of his grasp” (*Belcaro* 71).

In her early critical discussion of the fantastic, Lee opposes art and the supernatural (as it appears in legends, rather than modern art), granting more vitality—more power to affect its audience—to the latter. For Lee, art reduces the power of the supernatural; art is both an engine and product of a process of disenchantment. Humankind’s desire “to fix its visions of wonder” in art yields more durable, perhaps, but less wonderful visions (80). Lee evokes the “charm” of the “flickering,” “fantastic” legend in contrast to the “complete and limited satisfaction” of the work of art (71). Here, she sounds like Harrison, with her preference for the “darker and older shapes” “behind” the modern art or ritual, or Weston, who favors the “genuine” tradition behind “mere literature” (*RSL* 87; *FRR* 91, 30). Moreover, Lee anticipates Harrison in arguing for the secularizing power of art. Art, like “the logical,” reduces the supernatural so that it “becomes the natural” (*Belcaro* 74, 75). In this view, art, like rationalism, functions as a secularizing and disenchanting force. Lee even anticipates Harrison’s argument about the secularization of the Olympic gods, which became “non-religious” as they became more artistic (*Themis* xi). According to Lee, for the Greek and Roman gods, “art had been a worse enemy than skepticism” by making them “too like anything definite” (*Belcaro* 84, 80).
(1.109). In her view, art seems somehow more sacred than religion itself—perhaps because of its lack of pretense. As Lee wrote in one of her notebooks, “I ask myself for the hundredth time whether art is not itself a more wonder-working, nay, a more spiritual, divinity than those for which it fetched and carried to gain a living among carnal and superstitious men.”\(^{297}\) Though art has historically served religion, Lee finds art superior to religion, not only by the standards of intellectual honesty, but as something “more wonder-working” and “more spiritual”—as better than religion itself at what religion was supposed to effect.\(^{298}\)

By claiming that art is “more spiritual” than religion, Lee refers to its power to foster contemplation. For Lee, contemplation is a “spiritual” activity, “as distinguished from the utilitarian or merely personally emotional, essence of all high religions,” and “does not imply belief” (Lee \(\text{VL}\) 1.244, 1.245). Contemplation allows for a sense of the artificiality of art or religious phenomena, where belief does not. Through such contemplation, “We can see the moral good of these [religious] symbols while knowing that they are made solely by ourselves” (1.245). Indeed, this kind of contemplation yields creations that are beyond belief in the sense that they “are outside reality, and hence yon side of true and untrue” (1.245). Thus, to present such creations as true, in the way religion does, is not only a misrepresentation, but a result of a fundamental misunderstanding of their nature. They cannot be evaluated as true or untrue. We see here how Lee’s own thoughts are indeed close to what she maligned as “Will-to-Believe Pragmatism,” but also how she takes them farther: she does not redefine truth to suit art or contemplation, but refuses the category of truth for


\(^{298}\) In this Lee agrees with Harrison, who argues “that Art is not the handmaid of Religion, but that Art in some sense springs out of Religion”—that it is its descendant, and evolutionary superior (Harrison RSL 87).
artistic creation altogether. Art, as existing in the realm of the spiritual, is “yon side of true and untrue,” in a space of contemplation and creation, and not ontology.

Lee’s “spiritual” realm maps onto what sociologist Mark A. Schneider calls the “edifying” register, in which claims are made for heuristic but not ontological knowledge.299 This register is also that of the Victorian sage or, later, the public intellectual, who is invested more in prescriptive than descriptive contributions to knowledge. Lee’s scholarly writing operates mainly in this register, especially when she makes creative, or primarily interpretive, use of as yet unproven or even largely discredited scientific paradigms.300 She is explicit about this approach in the introduction to her major study, written with Clementina (Kit) Anstruther-Thomson, Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics. There, she explains that they are bringing to the study of aesthetics two fields of study that are as yet emerging disciplines—on the one hand, “psychology,” which “has only lately detached itself from general philosophy,” and on the other, “the various sciences dealing with the comparison, the origin and the evolution of artistic form, and which are still dependent on ethnography and anthropology […], on archaeology and what is called connoissuership” (2). Moreover, the book rests on an innovative methodology of embodied investigation: its data consists largely of Lee’s observations of Anstruther-Thompson’s bodily responses while viewing sculptures. With all this, Lee asserts that she is offering a work of speculation rather than a conclusive statement: the ideas in the book will both “afford to more thorough scientific investigators real or imaginary facts for their fruitful examination” as well as “give satisfaction to the legitimate craving for philosophical speculation” (viii). This is not only because of the newness of the fields she is investigating within, but because of her

humanistic methods, which entail provisionality: “My aesthetics will always be those of the
gallery and the studio, not of the laboratory. They will never achieve scientific certainty. They
will be based on observation rather than on experiment; and they will remain, for that
reason, conjectural and suggestive” (viii).

But this lack of “scientific certainty” is not a weakness in Lee’s world. Indeed, it maps
onto Lee’s sense of reality. In Vital Lies, Lee’s criticism of modern enchantments clears the
ground for a presentation of her own scholarly practice and theory. In contrast to her “vital
liars,” Lee embraces caution and provisionality, emphasizing the “rough[ness]” of her ideas,
as opposed to the too smooth systems she has just finished discrediting. She offers not a
complete system or narrative, but “trains of thought converging towards a rough philosophy
of my own, or at least showing me the gap which some philosophy, at once natural and
practical, must some day fill up” (2.119). Her philosophy is purposefully fragmented, in
order to correspond to what she sees as the fragmentary nature of reality as it appears to
humans: it is “discontinuous, discrete, because attention is intermittent, and positions, points
of view are various” (2.176). A better means to the truth allows for fragmentary visions, and
such an approach must thus be “rough” rather than coherent.

Lee’s fragmentary scholarly aesthetics is scientific in its commitment to rationality and
empiricism, but it is anti-systematic. Her style in this section of Vital Lies is similar to that in
Beauty & Ugliness, which was published the same year—a book which its own co-author
objected to for its jargon. In it Lee’s prose is similarly marked by operational definitions,
italicized key terms, and frequent quotations from sources. It is an earnest performance of

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301 “Feeling that her lively notions were deadened and betrayed by Lee’s pedantry she [Anstruther-Thompson]
advised a friend against reading “Beauty & Ugliness” in full.” Diana Maltz, “Engaging ‘Delicate Brains’: From
Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-
Thompson’s Psychological Aesthetics” in Women and British Aesthetics, eds. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis
sound scholarship that is meant both to show a superior alternative to the confusion and falsehood of “vital lies,” and to pedantic scholarship that did not engage with the big questions of the nature of life and its implications for artistic and ethical practice. And indeed, while sometimes Lee’s rough philosophy sounds like a parody of German scholarship, other times it features innovations including unfinished forms such as sentence fragments. It pushes toward a new scholarly aesthetics, even if it often falls short in a manner that would surprise readers of her vivid short stories, landing instead as a more familiar pedantry.

In this edifying mode of *Beauty & Ugliness*, then, Lee’s and Anstruther-Thomson’s statements are essentially provisional. Lee vividly evokes the uncertainty of their study using an archeological metaphor: “we two have noticed odd, enigmatic, half-hidden vestiges, which might be (and might also not be!) walls, terraces, and roadways” (viii). In this depiction of their study as a strange and contested cityscape uncovered on an archeological dig, Lee links their scholarly writing to the realm of the fantastic, where the past resurfaces, oddities and enigmas abound, and things “might be” “and might also not be!” Schneider has shown how writing that makes heuristic or edifying use of scientific paradigms can be seen

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302 Sometimes, it sounds like Ruskin’s parody of German scholarship. Compare Lee’s to Ruskin below: Lee: “Subjective phenomena, these philosophers tell us, are also and equally part of our experience. Of course; but only when considered objectively. And it is only thus objectively regarded that subjective phenomena become legitimate parts of ideas and amenable to the distinction of being true or false” (2.162-3); and Ruskin’s parody: “In fact (for I may as well, for once, meet our German friends in their own style), all that has been objected to us on the subject seems subject to this great objection; that the subjection of all things (subject to no exceptions) to senses which are, in us, both subject and object, and objects of perpetual contempt, cannot but make it our ultimate object to subject ourselves to the senses, and to remove whatever objections existed to such subjection. So that, finally, that which is the subject of examination or object of attention, uniting thus in itself the characters of subness and obness (so that, that which has no obness in it should be called sub-subjective, or a sub-subject, and that which has no subness in it should be called upper or ober-objective, or an ob-object); and we also, who suppose ourselves the objects of every arrangement, and are certainly the subjects of every sensual impression, thus uniting in ourselves, in an obverse or adverse manner, the characters of obness and subness, must both become metaphysically dejected or rejected, nothing remaining in us objective, but subjectivity, and the very objectivity of the object being lost in the abyss of this subjectivity of the Human. There is, however, some meaning in the above sentence, if the reader cares to make it out; but in a pure German sentence of the highest style there is often none whatever.” (John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, [Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904], footnote pp. 203-204.) I thank Max Sater for the reference.
as structurally fantastic: ambiguity between edifying and naturalistic registers acts like ambiguity between the figurative and the literal in fantastic fiction. *Beauty & Ugliness* highlights the fantastic sense of this ambiguous register by playing with such gothic imagery. But in its playful control of these registers, it does not ultimately activate the fantastic mode in the way that Frazer, Harrison, and Weston do. Unlike these scholars, Lee is not claiming to have uncovered hidden meanings of myths and rituals; she is not turning art into artifacts. In this way, her archeological model of scholarship is anything but suspicious or even coherent. Rather, it enchants not through promising to decode mysterious phenomena, but by promising glimpses of exciting ideas that may or may not prove valid.

Lee’s commitment to uncertainty here also contrasts with the archeological modes of Frazer, Harrison, and Weston. While they were similarly excited about the possibilities suggested by the instability of knowledge in their moment, and also used terms of provisionality, they came closer to expressing certainty about their theories, often citing the accumulation of evidence (Frazer, Weston) or feelings of conviction (Harrison). In contrast, Lee more readily acknowledged the uncertainty of her theories. This ease with uncertainty in her own work informed her distinct persona: she was more comfortable than either Harrison or Weston distinguishing her provisional ontological claims from her more certain heuristic or edificatory ones, and thus more comfortable with a persona that grounded its authority more in moral insight and aesthetic feeling than in scholarly expertise. Lee’s exploration of scholarship in the context of fantastic fiction further illustrates her investment in moral and affective authority, and not only the authority of the subject matter expert.
Lee's amateur poetics: *Hauntings* and *Louis Norbert*

In *Hauntings* and her later writings, Lee plays with the conventions of amateurism. Ultimately, in the epistolary novel *Louis Norbert: A Two-Fold Romance* (1914), she comes to construct and write through a persona of an amateur who is, crucially, an amateur by choice: one who embraces amateurism not because she is insufficiently trained or knowledgeable to write as one of the newfangled scientific specialists or “vital liars,” but because she believes her approach is superior to theirs. This purposefully amateur practice is distinct from both that of what Lee calls “Man-of-Letters-kind” and of Spiritualistic women writers: it comes out of critiques of these approaches and of various modes of expert or professional practice. This critique is visible in the four stories that constitute *Hauntings*. In them, Lee warns of the dangers of both conventional professional (often pedantic) scholarship and its opposite, irresponsible amateur historical or artistic enthusiasm. Instead, the stories indicate a third way of artistic and scholarly practice preferable to both of these. This third way is exemplified by Lee’s own authorial persona, who shows in the preface that she knows better than either the professionals or old-fashioned amateurs whose (mis)adventures the stories in *Hauntings* chronicle. In three of these four stories, male experts try to produce a great work of art or of history, and are foiled (twice fatally) by the uncanny women they involve in their projects. Tellingly, they involve these women as muses or models, not as fellow creators or collaborators, reinforcing a gendered division familiar, and arguably becoming more vivid in response to social change, in the period when these stories were published.

303 In the fourth story, “A Wicked Voice,” the uncanny muse is a male, but an effeminate one: a castrati, an eighteenth-century singer whose soprano voice was preserved into adulthood by castration.

Christina Zorn is right that the two stories that feature scholar-narrators specifically reveal the inadequacies of male professional scholarship. But they do not stop there. Indeed, the male characters begin with a sense of these inadequacies: they undertake their projects in part out of a desire for a more satisfying encounter with the past than their professional practices offer. And each time the world of the story provides the encounter they desire through an uncanny and dangerous woman. These stories move beyond showing the limits of professional scholarship to show the power—and dangers—of the desires of the amateur for a more intimate encounter with history than professional practice seems to allow. Out of these flawed approaches, Lee’s own method, articulated in the preface as a literary, non-scientific, yet modern approach, emerges as the superior option.

In the preface, Lee sets herself in a tradition of great artists who treat the supernatural, from Shakespeare and Marlowe to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Moreover, her opening, in which she recalls telling ghostly tales of an evening with friends, invokes the story behind the composition of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, an association affirmed by the closing of the preface, when she reveals that she and her friends have been spinning tales at a house next-door to the last abode of Percy Shelley. Lee thus sets herself in a lineage of first-rate literary treatments of the supernatural, incorporating great literary art into her new amateur practice and thus marking her amateurism as a sophisticated creative choice.

*Hauntings* “Dionea” goes furthest in delineating this sophisticated amateur practice. In the story, the title character, a mysterious foundling, washes up out of the sea and unsettles a Mediterranean coastal village with her “heathen” appearance and ways. By the time she is a young woman, she is known as a witch and shunned except by those seeking her powerful love potions. A sculptor and his wife arrive in the village, and he uses Dionea as a model, rhapsodizing over her “mere shape,” explicitly seeing her as only a form and not something
“human” (98). The scholarly narrator watches over this latest development in Dionea’s career while investigating the historical validity of Heine’s account of the pagan gods in exile, narrating his observations in letters to a correspondent. Toward the end of the story, the narrator has determined, like a good scholar but also to his disappointment, that such stories of gods in exile have no historical basis: he concludes “that poetry is only the invention of the poets,” and that “Heinrich Heine is entirely responsible for the existence of Dieux en Exil” (102). Seeing a light at the sculptor’s studio after recording this “discovery,” the scholar imagines an ordinary domestic scene there, in keeping with his current mundane sense of the world. But the next day it is revealed that the light he saw preceded a fire that was part of a ritual sacrifice to Venus: the sculptor had sacrificed his own wife on an altar before the site of his statue of Dionea; he himself is found at the bottom of a cliff, and Dionea has disappeared, only to be seen once more at sea where she appears as Venus herself. The implication is clear: here was a Goddess in exile under the scholar-narrator’s nose the entire time.

The scholar-narrator of “Dionea” shares Lee’s conviction that all wonders are man-made, but with a different attitude. By feeling disappointed “that poetry is only the invention of the poets,” the narrator misses the point (102, emphasis added). Poetry is indeed no more than this, but in Lee’s view this is something to celebrate, not bemoan. It is marvelous that Heine created Dieux en Exil, whether or not the gods had been in exile in the historical sense the narrator desires. Moreover, the story almost reads as a morality tale of the be-careful-what-you-wish-for variety: if art is not enough for you, the author warns, the extraordinary reality you wish for might be a horrifying rather than a wonderful one. As in “Amour Dure,”

in which the Victorian scholar-narrator summons up a Renaissance femme fatale only to be stabbed in the heart by her, an amateur desire for a direct encounter with the past is rewarded, but in such a way that it ends in violence and death. A marvelous reality is again revealed to be a fearsome thing. In these ways, these stories show not only the limits of professional scholarship or artistic practice, but also the dangers of their apparent opposites: of explicitly and fervently amateur practices and desires. Instead, they endorse a position and practice that regards artistic creation, or an imaginative encounter with the past, as wonder enough, without needing a real, or somehow scientifically verifiable, supernatural phenomenon to make it worthwhile. This position is inhabited by Lee herself: as neither a Victorian man of letters nor a modern professional scholar nor a foolish amateur, she can avoid the pressures of the marketplace and the pitfalls of dying-to-know heroism to write haunting stories that claim to be no more than works of the human imagination. Her stories offer stimuli for aesthetic receptivity and space for contemplation, rather than ontologic claims. This modest persona is implied in Hauntings, but given more shape in Lee’s later writings, especially in Louis Norbert.

The correspondents making up the novel are the “Young Archeologist,” one of the “systematic excavators of our own day,” and a woman amateur, Lady Venetia Hammond, who is recognizable as an affectionate self-parody of Lee. The novel, which strikingly anticipates A.S. Byatt’s Possession, tells the story of these two modern-day researchers, who correspond (and flirt) while conducting a historical investigation into some mysteries surrounding a seventeenth-century figure associated with Lady Venetia’s family. They reconstruct the marvelous, conspiracy- and coincidence-laden history of that figure through letters and transcribed documents (sometimes interrupted by third-person narration), all the while playfully but earnestly debating various methods of historiography.
As Kristy Martin has observed, the novel calls attention to themes of performance and personae by opening with a list of “dramatis personae,” a “cast-list minus the actors” which gives “the sense of characters playing themselves.”\(^{306}\) Within this cast, the novel, like Romola, features a variety of scholarly types. Of the “personages of the twentieth century,” four of the five are scholars of various kinds: our main character, the amateur historian, Lady Venetia Hammond; the verbosely pedantic antiquarian the Old Marchese, rather in the style of Waverley's Baron of Bradwardine; the “hereditary antiquarian,” “born archaeologist,” and “detective,” The Marchese’s Daughter; and finally, the Young Archaeologist, our sole professional scholar, and Lady Venetia’s correspondent (235). Most critics have seen the novel as an allegory in which the characters stand in for their methods. In this view, Lady Venetia represents stereotypically feminine emotional and social knowledge practices, and the Young Archaeologist, or “YA,” the typically masculine and rather dry practices of the professional, academic specialist.\(^{307}\) Where Vinetta Colby sees the novel as depicting an “ideal balance” between Lady Venetia’s amateur and the Young Archaeologist’s specialist methodologies (Martin 58, citing Colby 93-4), Martin sees their collaboration leading to “less an ideal than an impasse” (Martin 59). Similarly, Zorn sees their collaboration leading not to a better method, but revealing the hopelessness of any method in light of the fact that “history is ‘invention,’ and so, paradoxically, the concept of objectivity is a ‘fiction’” (Zorn 65).

But reading Louis Norbert in the context of Lee’s other writings of the 1910s helps us see that Lee does not rest with conflating fiction and history. This conflation, I argue, is

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\(^{306}\) Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford UP, 2013): 63. This sense is reinforced by the main characters’ own sense of how they are animating the historical figures they research, even using metaphors of performance: “Now […] that, thanks to you, the puppets into whom we put perhaps a little of our own life have come to so tragic and beautiful and appropriate an end” (Lee *Louis* 301).

\(^{307}\) See Colby 93-4, *Zorn V/L* xxiv.
itself, as it is in *Vital Lies*, the central object of investigation in *Louis Norbert*. Moreover, the apparent allegory of scholarly approaches is complicated by the way both the YA and Lady Venetia exceed the familiar categories of professional scholar and old-fashioned amateur, and by how Lady Venetia especially comes to embody a new form of the amateur, the sophisticated amateur — the amateur who knows the conventions of amateurism.

All of which is to say that Lee does indeed use her characters to explore the advantages and limitations of amateur and specialist historical scholarship, and to explore the distinctions between historical scholarship and fiction, discovery and invention, but she does so through parody, not, as other critics have claimed, allegory — or rather, at times, a parody of allegory. As Carolyn Williams has shown, parody simultaneously modernizes and creates a historical account of genres and “social types.” In *Louis Norbert*, Lee parodies the “social types” of the professional male specialist and the enthusiastic female amateur, helping to cement each as a stereotype while formulating a new type of the sophisticated amateur. The “modernizing” effect of parody that Williams identifies is especially consistent with Lee’s interest in always writing and thinking at the cutting edge. Accordingly, the new, sophisticated amateur type she creates in her novelistic parody of scholarly figures emerges as the most modern model of the scholar, superseding those listed in the “*dramatis personae*."

*Louis Norbert* signals its parody of these types in part by having Lady Venetia and the Young Archaeologist (who is called only by his roles — e.g., “Professor” — and never by a personal name) reflect on their stereotypical scholarly personae, and tease each other about them — and then reflect on and tease each other about how they are just the opposite of their personae as well. The Young Archaeologist aligns himself with “us professional critics” and identifies himself as a “poor plodding historian” and a “skeptical pedant,” only to have

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the narrator reveal early on, that he “after all, was secretly a poet” (*Louis* 58, 154, 155, 22). He even admits to putting on a “pedantic manner” in front of Lady Venetia (23).

Lady Venetia, in turn, manifests all the signs of the amateur, from being susceptible to historical “impressions” to penning exclamation-ridden historical narratives to using the London Library (10). At the same time, she mocks her own amateurism, teasing the Young Archaeologist about her naive sense of his expertise, her “innocence of what professorship means” (99, 20). She plays up the conventions of amateurism in her letters to him, as in her account of a particular historical episode related to their inquiry:

Don’t you think that M.M.’s extraordinary flight from Rome (you remember how she and her sister Hortense drove to Civita Vecchia—or was it Fiumizino?—after audibly giving the order ‘to Frascati’ […]]; and then the meeting of the boat ruffians—I was once on the Tiber with two totally drunken boatmen and had to take an oar so I know what it feels like—and the blackmailing and the escape from Barbary pirates—well, don’t you think it probable that […] (172-3)

Here, she manages to include a disregard for exact details (e.g., of place), and references to personal experience and touristic travel as source of historical knowledge—markers of women’s amateur historical writing. Elsewhere, she is nearly hilarious in her enthusiasm, ending letters with exclamations such as “How dreadfully exciting!”, “Just think how splendid!”, and “Just think how I felt!” (70, 73, 84).

The novel makes particular fun of the gendered nature of the roles of amateur and professional scholar. The Young Archaeologist’s male gaze is prominent form the first page, when he manifests egotistic and erotic delight in Lady Venetia’s attention to his scholarly

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account of some architectural sites, and then “chill” disappointment when she turns her attention elsewhere (9). Later, Lady Venetia explicitly connects amateur historians and femininity when she accuses the Young Archaeologist of seeing her only “as a foolish woman with a hopeless tendency to romancing about everything, what you call a born poet or novelist” (168). The novel even mocks the idea that a better method comes from the synthesis of these gendered methods, that what the apparently pedantic Young Archaeologist needs is the enthusiastic amateurism of Lady Venetia, and vice versa, by setting up a romance plot between the male and female protagonists only to have it fail. The flirtation fizzles out when Lady Venetia, at the very end of the novel, writes to the YA of her impending marriage. The relationship is only consummated in their shared delight over the YA’s fantastic memoir of Louis Norbert’s beloved. Indeed, a happy synthesis of method is not the lesson of the novel, as Colby had it, but a parody version of Lee’s own exploration of this theme in Hauntings. While in those stories, the male professional is driven by the constraints of his professional practice to pursue a too-emotional, hyper-amateur, and ultimately fatal relation with history and its feminine embodiment, here the apparently pedantic male scholar is from the beginning “secretly a poet,” and the flamboyant amateur woman is a stickler for historical truth in the face of “romancing.”

The novel further mocks the conventions of amateurism by associating Lady Venetia’s historical practice with occultism and Spiritualism, signs of a feminine amateurism that Lady Venetia herself disavows and associates rather with her “silly Scotch cousins” who “imagine themselves to have” second sight (131). But the YA imagines Lady Venetia to have Spiritualistic sympathies. He does not rest with accusing Lady Venetia of amateur “romancing,” but further connects such a practice with the even more discreditable realm of the occult. When Lady Venetia recounts to him a historical vision, he accuses her of being
“less of a disbeliever in occultism than you boast yourself” (154). The YA ends his teasing letter by playfully leaving open the possibility that documents—legitimate historical evidence—will bear out both their competing historical accounts, invoking the convention of fantastic literature of two contradictory solutions to one mystery (154-5). The YA thus treats Lady Venetia’s historical work as literature, and specifically as fantastic literature, marked by occultism and paradox, in a way that makes clear his sense that Lady Venetia’s historical theories are too infused with her fancies.

The novel itself treats Lady Venetia’s historical practice in a similar way, placing occult practices in proximity to her historical research. For example, while reading a book on seventeenth-century history, she has a vision that she believes uncovers the truth of Louis Norbert’s identity—that he is the legitimate son of Louis XIV, who himself was secretly married to his childhood sweetheart Marie Manzini. Just after looking through book on the topic, Lady Venetia, as she writes to the YA, “suddenly […] had a sort of vision,” which she goes on to describe vividly (145). She experiences the vision as uncanny: “I did really seem to see it much as crystal gazers say they do,” and as transporting: “I assure you I saw the place as if I were in it” (148, 146). At the same time, she denies it is a vision strictly speaking—rather, she was “thinking it all, not really seeing” (148). So, in the same letter she attests that she “did really see” but yet was “not really seeing.” She gives legitimacy both to her conviction—“I assure you I saw the place”—and to her reflection that it was not really seeing, but thinking. Here, we have not ghosts, but the “ghostly,” as Lee categorizes them in her discussion of the fantastic. Whether seeing or thinking, Lady Venetia affirms that because of this experience, she now knows the truth. In her reflexivity, Lady Venetia

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310 Lady Venetia’s experience is both akin to Foucault’s “fantasia of the library” (see Introduction) and to book divination, especially as Lady Venetia claims to have been rooting around in the book she was holding at random.
separates herself from the extreme credulity of, for example, her more spiritualistic historical contemporaries Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, known as “the Ladies of Versailles.” These two Englishwomen, principal and vice-principal respectively of St. Hugh’s College, Oxford, claimed to have actually time-traveled to the Versailles of Marie Antoinette, or at least entered into the memories of Marie Antoinette, while touring the present-day site. While Lady Venetia does not claim such literal time travel, she maintained, as they did, that her uncanny experience led to real knowledge of the past. Her vision links her with such fantastic scholars—only, thanks to her protestations about the occult and her reflections on “thinking” rather than “seeing,” she is presented as not quite so naïve as they are.

The YA further connects Lady Venetia to such amateur practices by treating her historiographical practices as literary rather than scholarly. In response to her account of her historical vision, the YA exclaims, “What a poet and novelist you are!” (151). Indeed, he refutes the vision’s historical value entirely, gently asserting that “your delightful notion does not, alas, hold historical water,” citing evidence from books and his own interpretation of probabilities (152). Moreover, persevering in his distinction between his historical work and Lady Venetia’s poetic and novelistic work, he tells her not to let his refutation of the history undermine the exclusively romantic value of her vision—“Do not let it diminish in your eyes (it could never in mind) the value of your wonderful vision” (154). In this encouragement, he is building on his earlier recommendation to Lady Venetia that she should “invent!” Louis Norbert (101). He equivocates between historical and imaginative work, assuring Lady Venetia that “invent” is “but another form of the Latin word which means to discover” (101). He even claims she is already far along on this route: “Believe me

you have begun already, long, long ago, when you first saw his portrait in your childhood. Why not continue? After all, are not all the persons in whom we take the most vivid interest just, to that extent, creations of our own? And what is loving except making them up to please one’s heart’s desire? (102). In the YA’s attempt to persuade Lady Venetia to adopt this other mode of writing history, the YA destabilizes all knowledge, presenting it all equally as “creations of our own.” In particular, he suggests implications for interpersonal relations for such a view of the instability of knowledge. Even, or especially, in love, one does not know the beloved, but only makes him or her up to “please one’s heart’s desire” (102). In a flourish, the YA undermines historical research and romantic love as anything other than delusional wish-fulfillment.

Lady Venetia vehemently rejects this conflation, or at least its desirability. She responds not only by reaffirming the legitimacy of her historical vision, but by accusing the YA of being the one too susceptible to his imagination. She agrees that the delusions he describes may creep into interpersonal relations—and accuses him specifically of suffering from them in relation to herself. She writes to him that he has been corresponding not with herself, but with a persona based on herself that he has created: “And all the time it is you, my dear young learned friend, who have been inventing, inventing a me utterly unlike the reality. It is really pitiable” (169). And indeed, this strikes the YA as true: “He became aware that he had made her up during the past seven or eight months” of their correspondence (182). Lady Venetia succeeds in turning the tables, and showing the professional scholar that his critical acumen is the one subject to the incursions of fantasy—even without him realizing it.

But there is a final twist: while the YA comes to realize “his” Lady Venetia is a mere invention, he finds upon visiting her again after their correspondence that though she is
indeed different from his invention, this is not a cause for disappointment; rather, she is “much more beautiful” than his invention, with “an intellectual prestige he had never before guessed” (182, 190, 191). Instead of leading to death or disenchantment as in Hauntings, Louis Norbert has the male expert’s ideal female creation simply evanesc when a real woman points out her constructed nature, and then has the real woman outshine the false ideal version.

Tellingly, the actual woman manifests a more complicated femininity than either the stereotyped version that the YA invents or that Lady Venetia herself plays up in her stylized amateur letters. When the YA takes in the real Lady Venetia again at last, he notices in particular her masculine hands: “strong hands, almost like very exquisite man’s hands” (198). Moreover, in a key moment, when he goes from being afraid of facing the real Lady Venetia to appreciating her, he experiences his interaction with her as marked by a wide range of feelings, with the notable exception eroticism, the one that would define their relation most narrowly in sexualized and gendered terms. In this moment, as he perceives it, Lady Venetia “smiled [...] so simply, humorously, maternally, divinely, friendly” (196). Here, Lady Venetia performs nothing so much as the alternative femininity of Jane Harrison’s archaic goddesses, who are maternal, divine, and companionate, in contrast to the sexualized roles of the later Olympian goddesses familiar from Greek myth.

But rather than as Jane Harrison or her archaic goddesses, Lady Venetia is most recognizable as a parodic version of the glamorous, masculine Vernon Lee. Her opinions are largely those of Lee, only she expresses them in a heightened style. She shares Lee’s derision for the ghosts of interest to “dreadful Psychical Researchers,” as well as her fascination with more figurative historical hauntings, such as her pleasurable, uncanny haunting by Louis Norbert, about whom she has had dreams since her childhood (62). Moreover, Lady
Venetia’s haunting by Louis Norbert illustrates Lee’s theory of the proper place of the supernatural in literature—in the imagination of the writer, reader, and, in this case, protagonist. To place it anywhere else would be to produce something akin to a “vital lie.”

Lady Venetia too is emphatically concerned with avoiding such misplacements. She is particularly outraged when the YA encourages her to mix in romance with her history without acknowledging the distinctions between the modes. This outrage is part of her shared persona with Lee, and of Lee’s long project—pursued with particular energy in the years leading up to and into the Great War—of exploring the interrelations of fiction and history, invention and discovery, and the proper definition and confines of truth. Lady Venetia’s anger at the Young Archaeologist’s apparently willful disregard for the status of historical truth chimes with Lee’s own arguments from the period, in which she excoriates those who “pass[…] off as true what may be merely useful or inspiriting delusions, merely practically serviceable, emotionally satisfying, or morally commendable figments” (VL 9).

In response to the YA urging her to “invent” Louis Norbert’s history, Lady Venetia responds with great annoyance at his lack of distinction between romance and history:

I hate you, and your ‘inventions.’ Can’t you tell the difference between a creative making up, absurdities about Hermanns and Isabellas [i.e., Lee’s example of playful romances] and a woman taking quite an inconceivable trouble—hours and days in the Muniment Room [housing the family archives]—about a real historical personage, almost a member of her own family, in whom she has been deeply interested all her life? It is really disappointing; I mean you are! [...] never have I felt less inclined to make up [...] For this very day I have come into his real presence, the first time since, as a small girl, I discovered his portrait; and really, I don’t think I have had such another emotion between that time and this! (Louis 104)
Lady Venetia, like Lee, brings in the standard of real experience, and specifically, real emotion, to attest to the authenticity of her subject matter. That Lady Venetia has the same unusual emotional response to the portrait of Louis Norbert when a child as to a letter of Louis Norbert when an adult attests to the unique stimulus responsible for such a feeling. The real emotion implies the “real presence” of Louis Norbert, with a play on Christian terminology— “real” in the sense of “spurious ghosts,” of course. As we have seen, the real divine for Lee is known to be artificial, “man-made,” and belonging to the mind rather than an outer reality. Importantly, it belongs to the mind stimulated by an aesthetic or historical object.312

In contrast to her essays, the novel Louis Norbert offers scope for Lee to explore her attraction to “Will-to-Believe’ Pragmatism.” Where in the polemical Vital Lies Lee comes down hard against Will-to-Believe narratives as bad enchantments, in the playful, fictional Louis Norbert Lee explores the pleasures of these enchantments, while raising questions about both their potential dangers and values. The novel associates Lady Venetia with the sort of “Will-to-Believe” methodology that Lee decries in Vital Lies. Though for Lady Venetia, crucially, her position differs from that of certain, elitist “vital liars”: she is in earnest, believing herself what she seeks to convince others of, so that there is no intellectual dishonesty, though her methods and assumptions are otherwise similar. Moreover, she narrates in a lateral relation to her reader: she is writing as a correspondence in a relationship of affection and cooperation, not as a highfalutin expert. We have looked at such an earnest version of “Will-to-Believe” methodology and style most closely in the studied enchantment

312 Lee anticipates contemporary interest in objects as agentive. For Lee, as for Pater, aesthetic objects act on their audience. Moreover, Lee figures the audience too in an active, often collaborative relationship with the aesthetic object: the viewer of a work of art is engaged in “a combination of higher activities, second in complexity and intensity only to that of the artist himself” and must meet artist’s efforts “more than half-way.” Lee, The Beautiful; A Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics, (Cambridge UP, 1913): 128, 133.
of Jessie Weston’s scholarship. Anticipating Weston, Lady Venetia presents traditional scholarly work—“facts and dates”—as secondary to her own conviction reached by other methods (169). But also like Weston, she traffics in such “facts and dates” explicitly for the sake of her professional interlocutor, who, she knows, will accept no other proofs. As she writes to the YA, “I know every detail […] But before telling you, and your dreadful historical mind, I will have a go at those books again […] and work it all out, dates and all” (150).

And, like Weston, when Lady Venetia does present her “facts and dates” to the YA, they reveal themselves to consist largely of conjecture and negative evidence (e.g., we don’t have proof that X didn’t happen) mixed with her feelings of certainty and psychological probability, which she calls her “common sense” (167). She invokes this source of authority to assert the key contested fact of Louis XIV’s and Marie Manzini’s relationship: “But this is certain, married they were. No one says so, but it must have happened” (161). Lady Venetia is so sure that she criticizes both the seventeenth-century conspirators and modern researchers for failing to “put […] two and two together” as she has done (165). In further defending her historical reconstruction, she cites the precedent of the “great historians” of the early nineteenth century: Jules Michelet and Thomas Carlyle (also objects of Lee’s admiration). Lady Venetia writes that “great historians like Michelet and Carlyle […] aren’t tied by bogus documents” (171). In contrast, professional pedants of today would, she writes, mocking their jargon, “point out (that’s the form isn’t it) that there is absolutely no mention of either a marriage or a child in the memoirs which Marie M. herself published,” for which of course Lady Venetia has an explanation grounded in her sense of probability (171). And indeed, Lady Venetia’s account is convincing in the context of the novel, which seems to affirm this amateur, anti-elitist, enchanted approach.
But the novel does not give Lady Venetia and her Will-to-Believe historical scholarship the last word. Instead, Lee expresses her ambivalence about this enthusiastic approach in the voice of the YA. The YA, unsurprisingly, objects to this Michelet- and Carlyle-inspired reasoning, as he attests in a response which he never sends: “But, dear Lady Venetia, don’t you see that what you call consulting the facts is merely referring the whole matter to your own fervid fancy, interpreting everything in the light of the little romance yourself have made up, and sweeping aside as ‘bogus’ whatever evidence goes against your own wishes…?” (175).

The YA sounds like a more affectionate version of the skeptics who question the similar historical work of Weston and Harrison. He even uses that marker word, “ingenious,” so often applied by critics to the theories of Harrison and Weston, in the letter he does eventually send (178). For him, such “ingenious hypothes[es]” are easy to identify: they are too much like romance—they tell too good, too coherent a story. As he writes to Lady Venetia eventually, “All that you say is very plausible, splendidly thought out. Almost too plausible, for actual fact usually presents a less tidy appearance” (178). And as Lee does in her own criticism of such work, the YA invokes (in the unsent letter) the “Will to Believe” explicitly, accusing her of being the “Will in this case” (176). The YA knows this is “ingenious,” not sound, historical reasoning, and closer to romance than history—and in this, sounds much like Lee herself in the recently published *Vital Lies*.

But then the novel criticizes this criticism: After expressing frustration with Lady Venetia’s apparently naive approach to historical scholarship, the YA wonders, after all, if he is the naive one, and only falling for Lady Venetia’s too sophisticated play with romance. Invoking the parlor game in which one spins stories—about, as Lady Venetia does, the couple Hermann and Isabella—as if they were true while never letting not that they are merely being improvised in the moment, he apostrophizes her, asking if she is “merely
playing at Hermann and Isabella […] It is a rule of that game to pretend that you aren’t, and is it my silly pedantry and lack of worldly experience which makes me fail to play up to you?” (176). He laments that he feels “so utterly lost, such a hopeless, owlish, priggish duffer” and wishes only to know whether Lady Venetia is in earnest or not (176). If she is, he wants to be careful not to hurt her feelings; if she isn’t, he wants to play too, and indeed reveals here that he thinks he would be quite good at such a game: “I am afraid to think how well I could invent, forge documents and all!” (176). But if he plays at romance, he wants to do it knowingly, not naively— only with a playful naïveté, as in the game of Hermann and Isabella. But while he entertains uncertainty, the YA comes down eventually on the side of believing in Lady Venetia’s naive earnestness, though his thought process leads him to imagine the persona of a playfully naive amateur as an aspirational role.

I contend that the novel’s own last word is the construction of this playful, purposefully naive persona. In contrast to readings of the novel that find either a resolution in a synthesis of Lady Venetia’s and the YA’s approaches to historical scholarship, or a lesson that literary invention triumphs over historical discovery because they are really the same, I find a celebration of such a playfully naive historian. The novel ends with the YA sending Lady Venetia what he claims is a translation of the “Memoir” of Louis Norbert’s love interest, the poet, scholar, and musician Artemesia. He frames it in the manner of a fantastic novel, presenting the MS as being of mysterious provenance and something for which he, Faust-like, has sold his soul to “the Evil One” (266). Lady Venetia is deeply moved by the Memoir, and responds to it by playing the role of the hesitating reader of the fantastic: “I really do not know (and the more I think it over the less I can decide!) whether I believe you to be a dealer in stolen goods or a poet!” (301). The Memoir resolves the story of Louis Norbert and Artemesia in what Lady Venetia calls a “tragic and beautiful and
appropriate [...] end”: the young man is killed trying to reach his lover (301). Instead of raging against “invention” as she did earlier in the novel, here Lady Venetia welcomes the fantastic memoir that may be a stolen document or newly created historical fiction—though, as with most fantastic novels, the undecidability lists in a particular direction, here towards fiction. But the playful undecidability is important too: the YA shows he has figured out how to play the game of “Hermann and Isabella” by engaging in the recognizably literary act of presenting Lady Venetia with the Memoir as a fantastic tale. And she accepts it, and delights in it, as such a playful, but also deeply affective, gesture. In this way, the novel resolves in a celebration of fiction as fiction, as fabricated, and as actively evoking feeling (Lady Venetia cries “like a baby over” the Memoir) (Lee Louis 300-301). Moreover, the two protagonists have found their proper roles: collaborators on a fantastic narrative in which they each experience the pleasures not only of scholarly research and artistic creation, but of adopting the persona of a sophisticated amateur who is equally at home among professional scholarship, fantastic fiction, and a playful correspondence that encompasses all of these practices.

**Conclusion: The sophisticated amateur and anti-interpretive reading**

In the preceding chapters, we have examined texts that invited our interpretation—especially, our scholarly interpretation, both suspicious and receptive. We were meant to follow along with the author as he or she traced clues, opened herself up to feelings, and discovered deeper meanings according to recognizably scholarly methods. We were being trained in certain interpretive methods and systems. But in these texts by Lee, we encounter something different: they play with this expectation, built up over reading all this enchanted literature, and mock and resist it. In her essays, Lee is so obsessed with clarity, in opposition
to the obscure aesthetics of “vital lies,” that she ironicallyconfuses the reader with her overabundance of caution. In her fantastic fiction, she frames the stories with a certain anti-interpretive mode: the ghosts are “spurious”—don’t look too deep. And in *Louis Norbert*, where interpretation is itself a major activity in the plot, she has the characters interpret themselves and each other in ways that anticipate and thus block the reader’s own interpretations. Martin sees *Louis Norbert* as throwing up “barriers to readerly intimacy,” as “actively discourag[ing] the reader’s sympathy” in ways that “seem[…] designed to disrupt the reader’s engagement with the novel” (Martin 63, 68). But this is not the anti-immersion of *Romola* that discourages historical identification, or even the playful skepticism of *She* that pulls the reader out of the tale and into the frame only to re-launch her more fully into the central story, but a specific obstruction of interpretation, rather than of identification or immersion. Even though *Louis Norbert* itself is about discovery and epistemology, its reader is meant to read and enjoy the novel, as Lady Venetia and the YA enjoy the possible fictive memoir, rather than seek a “key to the universe.” This is not to say that there is not a lesson for Lee’s readers in her novel: indeed, the novel trains its readers in a certain reading practice of appreciation. This is not appreciation in the Paterian sense of comprehending an art object among all its historical relations, but appreciation as practice of sophisticated amateurs in which one experiences an art object, a narrative, or an idea, as a creation of humankind whose value resides not in what it tells us about things other than artistic creation, but in how it attests to what such creation can achieve in the realm of experience. Lee is ultimately less interested in what an aesthetic object—in Pater’s wide sense—might mean than in the effect it has on the one that encounters it—on the viewer’s body in the sculpture gallery, on the reader’s feelings and thoughts in front of the book. Indeed, for Lee, the audience of a work is its co-creator. In her active engagement with the aesthetic object,
the viewer, reader, or listening is necessarily acting the amateur, forgoing critical distance in favor of a more intimate, even collaborative, relation.
Coda: The Afterlives of Studied Enchantment

In the introduction to this dissertation, and in the six chapters on George Eliot, Walter Pater, J. G. Frazer, H. Rider Haggard, Jessie Weston, Jane Harrison, and Vernon Lee, we saw how writers used scholarly conventions variously to deepen and interrupt the reader’s immersion in stories, whether those stories were a historical epic, “a mere boy’s tale of adventure,” an expansive theory of humanity’s mental or spiritual evolution, the transmission of a secret tradition, or an archival love affair. At the same time, we saw how these authors also depended on conventions of fiction, and the mode of fiction itself, even when ostensibly writing scholarly history, in order to develop their theories. And beginning with the scholarly romances of Haggard and Frazer, but most prominently in the writing of Weston and Harrison, we saw how such hybrids of fiction and nonfiction, with their dynamics of distancing and immersion, could lead the reader to an experience of studied enchantment—a pleasurable feeling of satisfaction in encountering the world as they would in reading a well told tale. Finally, in the oeuvre of Vernon Lee, we encountered a critique of studied enchantment that implicated this scholarly and literary practice in the irrationalist politics preceding the Great War.

While Vernon Lee defined herself against Harrison, she shared with Harrison, as well as with Pater and Weston, an investment in creating a new scholarly practice that would involve an intimate, even a loving, relationship with her objects of study. This practice would supersede the most advanced Victorian scientific approaches, while recuperating the best of past methodologies associated with pre-professional or amateur scholars. In this endeavor, these writers developed new methods that reworked the traditional associations among femininity, naïveté, irrationality, religious belief, embodied knowledge, and amateur
scholarship. Their literary scholarship and scholarly literature not only focused on religion; they made scholarship itself a spiritual as well as a literary practice that addressed ethical and moral as well as intellectual questions. Their innovative scholarly practices also promised, and sometimes delivered, ecstatic affects associated with mystical religious experience.

The writers considered in this dissertation were working at a time when the standards for humanistic scholarship were in a remarkable state of flux. Weston, Harrison, and Lee, who lived from the 1850s through the second decade of the twentieth century were especially aware of these shifting standards. But by the end of their lifetimes, the standards for legitimate humanistic scholarship had begun to solidify, in some cases into those we abide by today. Three instances of the evaluation of scholarly manuscripts from 1929-1931 help illustrate this codification of standards, which marked the end of the heyday of studied enchantment. In the first instance, on 31 October, 1931, Vernon Lee’s manuscript *Hearers and Listeners* was and was not rejected by Oxford University Press. Writing to Irene Cooper-Willis, who was acting as agent for the book, the Press in the person of W.D. Hogarth explained that “our adviser’s report will not allow us to make an offer of publication, since he informs us that the general method of treatment followed by Miss Paget is not likely to be accepted by other students of aesthetics, who are for the most part working along other lines.” But he continued: “At the same time, we have all recognized the literary distinction of the work contained in this book, and we should like to be associated with its publication.” The catch, which was a fairly common one at both Oxford and Cambridge University Presses for books deemed worthy but not expected to sell, was that Lee would have had to contribute “the whole” of the charges of publication, which, for a print run of 1000 copies would have been between £300 and £400. The book would be published, he assured her, on

the “usual commission terms.” While Lee apparently rejected this plan for vanity publication—the book was published a year later as *Music and Its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* by G. Allen & Unwin of London—Oxford University Press’s combined rejection and offer illustrates the unstable standards for scholarly writing at the time. Hogarth invokes two standards: one for its scientific value (its use to other “students of aesthetics”), and another for the book’s aesthetic value (its “literary distinction”). Lee’s manuscript does not meet the scientific standard, but does meet the literary one—and this enough for the Clarendon Press, the prestigious scholarly imprint of Oxford University Press, to wish to be “associated” with the book, though not to underwrite it. This suggests, unsurprisingly, that the Clarendon Press saw the publication of scientifically valuable texts as central to its mission, and, more unexpectedly, that it saw scholarly texts of “literary distinction,” even exclusive of scientific value, worth publishing, too—if not worth paying for. No longer are scientific and literary value conflated, but neither are they fully disentangled.

In 1929, Cambridge University Press had offered a similar deal to Jessie L. Weston’s literary executor, who submitted the MS of her study of the medieval romance *Perlesvaus*. After commissioning two reader’s reports, the Press accepted the MS on half-profits—but only if someone contributed £150 toward its publication. The Secretary had “an interview” with the executor, Miss Malcolm-Wood, who declined to pay it, but she left the MS with the Press in case they decided eventually to offer more “favourable” terms.\(^{314}\) They never did; indeed, Weston’s niece checked on the status of the MS in 1954, at which point the Press

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\(^{314}\) Entry in Press Syndicate Minutes Book, 19 July 1929, UA/Pr.V.80, p. 404, item #19, Cambridge University Archives, Archives of Cambridge University Press, CUP.
gave her permission to shop it around elsewhere, but warned her she was unlikely to find a publisher.\footnote{\textit{Letter to Miss G. E. Malcolm-Wood, 8 Feb 1955, Temporary reference: Press Author File 2120, Cambridge University Archives, Archives of Cambridge University Press, CUP.}}

Finally, an evaluation from the same period of another Cambridge University Press author sheds further light on the shift in standards behind these ambivalent offers. J.C. Lawson, who had published the book \textit{Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals} with Cambridge in 1910, in the same series as \textit{From Ritual to Romance}, submitted another manuscript, a “commentary” on Aeschylus’s \textit{Agamemnon}, in 1930. This time, the readers were skeptical. One reviewer, A.S.F. Gow, cited Lawson’s over-enthusiastic textual emendations as operating on “a most perilous principle,” namely that a first-rate text can easily be emended because its original, accurate, and ideal form are one and the same.\footnote{\textit{Mr. A. S. F Gow to Mr. Roberts, 19 Nov 1920, PrA L.159, pp. 5i-5iii, Cambridge University Archives, Archives of Cambridge University Press, CUP.}} He warned the Press that reviewers, especially those in Germany, would find “its scholarship […] amateurish,” and “that it shows an extreme levity in alteration, and that many of its suggestions are in the highest degree improbable.” Moreover, he predicts, “Derisive attention will also be drawn to the principles of criticism which I have mentioned. And these criticisms will be well-founded.” Despite all this, Gow found some value in the book: it had “some considerable merits,” particularly in Lawson’s “real desire to know what Aeschylus wrote” and in his sensitive readings of the text, and he thinks it should be published, just not by Cambridge. Tellingly, Gow finds value in Lawson’s “real desire,” a historical passion increasingly aligned with amateurs, not professional scholars. The Press evidently too found something compelling in either Lawson or the manuscript: it appears to have commissioned two other readers’ reports after Gow’s. Both object to the manuscript, but one suggests that there is some pressure to publish it anyway, and indeed it appeared from Cambridge in 1932.
While some flux in the standards for humanistic scholarship is still apparent in these cases from 1929-1931—after all, each of these manuscripts is accepted under certain conditions by Oxford or Cambridge, despite the reviewers’ concerns about their amateur or otherwise off-pace scholarship—they are beginning to give way to a sense that certain formerly acceptable principles had become “perilous.” This appears to have been a turning point, after which increasing professionalization among academics consigned the work of Harrison, Weston, Lee, and fellow-workers such as Lawson, to illegitimacy. The story of Weston’s discrediting recounted in Chapter Four is the most vivid, thanks to the way the initial embrace and subsequent disavowal of her work by her academic colleagues was magnified by T.S. Eliot’s use of it in The Waste Land and subsequent distancing of himself from it in his 1950s essays. The case of the folklorist and Egyptologist Margaret A. Murray (1863-1963), author of The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), also exemplifies this trajectory particularly vividly. In her book, Murray rejected the hysteria hypothesis of the early modern witch craze to read the trial transcripts as records of a pre-Christian fertility cult. The study was controversial but widely influential from the first, but was soon discredited as at best shoddy work and at worst featuring intentionally misleading presentations of evidence. Frazer’s and Harrison’s work underwent similar shifts in evaluation, except that Frazer’s moved more swiftly from being valued as a work of anthropology to being discredited as a work of anthropology to being studied as a work of literature. Frazer also maintained his place as a major figure in intellectual history, while Harrison, Murray, and Weston were pushed out of academic discourse more comprehensively. Gender played a role in this: while Frazer was wrong, he was deemed to

have been wrong grandly and in good faith. Harrison and her female peers, in contrast, were not only seen as mistaken, but as foolish, crazy, and even manipulative.318

Gender has also played a key role in the afterlives of these works of enchanted scholarship. They have informed feminist literature from Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) to Marion Zimmer Bradley’s bestselling feminist retelling of the legend of King Arthur, *The Mists of Avalon* (1980).319 In *A Room*, Harrison appears both as a haunting presence, “the famous scholar […] J— H— herself” at the fictionalized woman’s college Fernham, and alongside Vernon Lee as one of several woman expanding the scope of women’s writing beyond fiction: “There are Jane Harrison’s books on Greek archeology; Vernon Lee’s books on aesthetics; Gertrude Bell’s books on Persia. There are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman would have touched” (17, 79). In *Mists*, Bradley cautiously cites Margaret A. Murray’s history of the “witch cult” in her author’s note as an inspiration for the story she tells of goddess-worshipping Ancient Britain transforming into a Christian country. In another vein, these discredited scholars have informed anti-feminist parodies from Dr. Rose Lorimer in Angus Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), whose theory of a historical conspiracy “was something beside which Dr Murray’s Dianic cult and Divine Victims paled into childish insignificance” (20), to Sybil Maiden in David Lodge’s *Small World* (1984), a former student of Weston’s and, as an assertive and yet old

318 Weston, for example, was accused of having a “Gawain Complex” in print. See J.D. Bruce, “Miss Weston’s Gawain Complex” in *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to the Year 1300* (1923). Even into the twenty-first century, sexist language dogged Weston in academia, as Norris Lacey notes regarding the responses by scholars to queries about Weston on the medievalist listerv “Arthurnet,” which “dismiss[…] Weston as an occultist, a crackpot, or a ‘hobbyist’” (Lacy 339). See Norris J. Lacy in *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Honor of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Scriptorium Press, 2001). Murray was specifically accused of manipulating her source material; folklorists and historians of their field Juliet Murray and Caroline Oates have shown how Murray’s methodology, while incommensurate with today’s standards, was fully in keeping with those of the era in which she published her controversial study of witchcraft.

319 Even before *A Room*, such scholarship has informed Sylvia Townsend Warner’s “feminist fable,” *Lolly Willowes* (1927).
fashioned spinster obsessed with the hidden meaning of sex and fertility in everything, a version of Weston herself that echoed mockeries she endured in her own lifetime.\(^{320}\)

Most remarkably, and suggestively, this enchanted scholarship has played a major role in the emergence of New Age and Neopagan religions in the twentieth century, especially in what is often termed the “feminist spirituality” movement. Beginning in the 1950s, cheap paperback publishers such as Anchor began to make the work of Frazer, Harrison, Weston, Murray, and similar writers more accessible, and these books contributed to the 1950s renaissance of interest in so-called mystery religions that then informed transatlantic 1960s counter-culture, and are cited by writers on feminist spirituality of the 1960s-1980s. While *The Golden Bough* may have been the “student’s Bible” of the 1960s, by that time the mostly discredited scholarship of Harrison, Weston, and Murray had come to inform new religious movements in Britain and the United States.\(^{321}\) Their accounts of ancient goddess worship, matriarchal societies, and vivid depictions of woman-centered rituals profoundly influenced feminist theologians of the 1970s and 1980s. Mary Daly drew on Harrison’s and Murray’s work in her radical feminist theology.\(^{322}\) Writers on goddess spirituality considered Harrison a “main source” (Budapest Acknowledgments).\(^{323}\)

\(^{320}\) In a striking episode, Weston was lent a copy of one of her own books that had been annotated by a Robert Steele. Among other skeptical marginalia, he wrote next to her analysis of a love scene in a medieval romance, “Perhaps Miss Jessie is not an expert in these matters.” Weston added her own note, “I know the real article from the sham – that’s all.” I thank Helen Brookman for sharing her transcriptions of these notes, made for an article in progress. Grayson also mentions the episode in her biographical essay. The annotated book is available at the British Library: Jessie L. Weston, *The Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac* (David Nutt, 1901), British Library, Cup.401.d.25, “MS notes [some by the author] ...with an autograph letter inserted.”

\(^{321}\) At present, my evidence for this designation of *The Golden Bough* is largely anecdotal.

\(^{322}\) Mary Daly cites Harrison as an important early contributor to the matriarchy theory (*Gyn/Ecology* 94), and uses Harrison’s interpretations of Olympian myths as evidence of a triumph of the patriarchy over the matriarchy to explore the associations of the masculine and feminine with Apollo and Dionysus (*Beyond* 1978, p.69). Daly accepts Murray’s theory as historically accurate (*Beyond* 147-8), and takes inspiration from her witches as martyr figures that “threaten […] the christian fathers” (*Gyn/Ecology* 220).

\(^{323}\) Harrison is cited as such by Z Budapest, and also appears in writing by Carol P. Christ and Charlene Spretnak. Hutton has discussed Harrison’s, Weston’s, and Murray’s work as inspirations to New Age and goddess spirituality and Neopagan religions as part of the larger story of the development of Neopaganism, tracing the direct influence of Harrison on the Goddess spirituality of Budapest and Starhawk.
Witch-cult became the founding text of Wicca, and Weston is claimed by contemporary Neopagans are part of the canon (Hutton 287-308). In the twenty-first century, these books continue to circulate not only in cheap paperback editions, but via free on-line editions. Most of these are hosted on sites outside of academia and often within the Neopagan community.

Notably, enchanted scholarship throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first flourishes in spaces apart from but engaged with academic discourse—spaces we might best characterize as academically askew. For many decades after the discrediting of their work, Harrison and Weston were largely invisible in academia; but at the same time, their work, while it was taken up outside academia, was not truly “popular.” While it had some influence on significant pop cultural artifacts (e.g., Apocalypse Now, The DaVinci Code, and multiple bestsellers of the 1980s), their books seem too obscure to be considered as belonging to popular culture. Where they are most visible is on the margins of academia—in extra reading for units on The Waste Land in university classes, on websites that explicitly endorse scholarship and scholarly study but which are unaffiliated with any scholarly institution or professional scholar, and in religions that adopt tenets from scholarly works as well as more spontaneously created practices. In some ways, this academically askew position reflects the position of Harrison, Weston, and also Lee, in their own lifetimes: even while some of their peers awarded them honorary degrees or lauded their university press publications, they were often still regarded as amateur interlopers into professional

324 Perhaps the most prominent of these is the Internet Sacred Text Archive, which hosts these and similar texts, often with brief introductions written by the late site creator, J. B. Hare. Hare notes of Murray’s work that it is “ground zero for the modern pagan revival.” See ISTA (Internet Sacred Text Archive) at sacred-texts.com. Notably, Hare’s note to From Ritual to Romance seems to situate it in the alternative literary history that Cyril Connolly’s 1941 essay in the Horizon similarly evokes. Hare cites the book’s association with Eliot’s The Waste Land, but brings this up as almost an afterthought (“It is also claimed that T.S. Eliot’s [sic] The Wasteland was based on this book, although this has been questioned”). By misspelling “Eliot,” and presents the connection between the poem and book as more tenuous than it is, he transforms Eliot’s text into the unsubstantiated (and even misrepresented) footnote— a position more often reserved for Weston’s.
scholarship. While asserting their scholarly authority, these writers also embraced this fraught status to push the boundaries of what might be considered legitimate scholarship, bringing in practices considered amateurish or outmoded to expand the kinds of evidence allowed into humanistic scholarship and to create new methodologies grounded in affective experience as well as observation.

What might this account of the academically askew positioning of studied enchantment offer to those working within academia today? One primary lesson is that a scholarly text is a literary text, and one that works in the same ways—through the interactions among form, content, and readerly engagement (whether that engagement is marked by a receptive or a distancing approach). A related lesson is that scholarly texts are not necessarily disenchanting: studied enchantment was a historically significant genre that has enchanted enthusiastic readers since the advent of the modern university in Britain. These lessons can be seen as contributing to recent efforts to shape “postcritical” methodologies within the humanities. The writers of studied enchantment considered in this dissertation were skeptical of the narrowing of what counted as legitimate knowledge during a time of increasing professionalization and specialization, and attempted to expand the repertoire of acceptable scholarly practices and theories. In this, they felt at the advent of the modern university the need that Rita Felski has recently articulated in *The Limits of Critique*:

Notwithstanding Felski’s qualifications about her chosen term, “postcritical” implies a history in which literary scholarship reached maturity under the influence of Marx and

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325 Perhaps this askew position has particular relevance to academia today, with the increasing precarity of academic labor: from the rising numbers of adjuncts to the disappearance of tenure, more and more scholars are working proximately to rather than assuredly within academia.
Freud. Literary scholarship has long been guided by the assumption that texts always mean more than they say, and that what they mean has something to do with historical materialism, or sex. My literary history of studied enchantment shows that at the same time as this materialist hermeneutics of suspicion was taking shape, the interpretive methodology evident in Pater, Frazer, Weston, and Harrison was also emerging. This approach was predicated on the same recognition that our texts mean more than they say, but differed regarding what they meant: rather than the text’s deeper meaning being reducible to historical materialism or to sex, it is grounded in the theory that what originally constituted both the aesthetic and the religious was ritual. In a sense, this makes Harrison and her peers just as suspicious and reductive as Marx or Freud, but to a different end. In effect, they believe in the literal basis for literary texts. For these enchanted scholars, a literary text always reflects a ritual that, to quote Weston, “actually happened,” whether this ritual actually happened in the most distant past (Frazer, Harrison) or on the astral plane (Weston).

Thus modern interpretive practices do not have their origins only in Felski’s implied history of the materialist hermeneutics of suspicion, but also in the credulous, enthusiastic, and sympathetic practices of enchanted scholarship that were invested in finding room for religion in modernity. And it is to this history of enchanted scholarship we can go to find precedents to help us “forge a language of attachment as robust and refined as our rhetoric of detachment” (180). Indeed, this history reminds us that we do not need to create new scholarly approaches from scratch or by turning to other disciplines, such as those in the social sciences, for models, but can look into the wider history of literary studies, where we find the enchanted approaches of Pater, Frazer, Weston, Harrison, and the less enchanted but markedly “attached” approaches of Vernon Lee.
In its attention to texts that engage with religion, *Studied Enchantment* brings together the emerging conversations around “postcritical” and “postsecular” studies. “Postsecular” like postcritical is a catch-all term; it refers broadly to approaches to humanistic study that query the conventional ideas of what constitutes religion and secularity. By calling attention to the central role religion as an object of study has played in the shaping of humanistic, especially literary, methodologies, this dissertation suggests that postsecular approaches to literary studies might be necessary to develop any postcritical approach. The explicitly disenchanted scholarship that Felski finds dominant in Anglo-American humanistic study is grounded in practices that formed themselves around religion as a primary object of suspicion. In contrast, most of the writers considered here did not set out to unmask religion; rather, they were reluctant unbelievers engaged in trying to find, preserve, or remake religion for their modern world. In these efforts, they turned to scholarly and imaginative writing practices, whether they were writing essays, encyclopedic studies, novels, short stories, or self-consciously hybrid forms of the nonfiction and fiction. Ultimately, their work was shockingly successful: even though it was discredited as scholarship, it informed—even launched—new religious movements that continue to flourish into the twenty-first century.

More generous and creative ways of engaging with religious themes, practices, and claims are necessary for fully accounting for studied enchantment’s remarkable history. Accordingly, working on this project has led me to develop, if not yet fully formulate, my own “postcritical”—or, to better reflect both its temporality and its entanglement with

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327 Branch too sees potential for expanding our scholarly repertoire by considering together postcritical and postsecular interpretative practices: “Though she does not articulate it as such,” Branch sees Felski’s “expansion of our academic notions of selfhood” as featuring attachments, not just detachments, “as productively postsecular” (97).

328 As Michael Warner has argued, secularity may be “understudied” because “one of its key features is the consolidation of ‘religion’ as an object of social-scientific knowledge in a way that takes for granted the secular character of explanation itself” (qtd in Branch 2016; Warner “Secularism,” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, [NYU P, 2007]: 209-213: 210).
critique, alt-critical—approach. In my analysis of the reading practices encouraged by studied enchantment, I have practiced a form of studied enchantment myself in which I shift between the compulsions of belief and of critical reflection. In this approach, I both make myself susceptible to the (not always benign) enchantments of such writing and provide myself with the established tools of critique to pull myself away in order to describe and explain how such enchantments work. Instead of reading the work of these writers exclusively or even primarily as a suspicious critic, I came to them as an enthusiastic reader. But I stopped short of crediting them as history, knowing from my research both the empirically disproven elements of their studies and the anecdotally proven power of their scholarly form to encourage such credulity. This is also the method through which I wrote my introduction: using the scholarly aesthetics I had identified as active in fantastic scholarship and fantastic fiction, I experimented with deploying them myself to similar effect. In the view of conventionally critical scholarship, in these efforts I veered dangerously close to my subject matter. I could be seen as being too sympathetic, even credulous, regarding discredited and, as Lee claimed, pernicious, histories. I could also be seen as sharing too closely in the aims of my discredited scholars. After all, like Eliot, Pater, Harrison, Weston, and Lee, I too have recounted a history of scholarship that queries what value we still might find in outmoded, discredited approaches. And, indeed, I have found myself agreeing with them that sometimes conventions of amateurism that allow affection for and pleasure in one’s subject matter not only do more justice to that subject matter than a more distanced approach, but teach us lessons we might otherwise miss. Indeed, to approach the texts analyzed in these chapters in an exclusively suspicious way would yield only a history that would reinscribe them on the margins of a disenchanted literary history. By coming to them open to their enchantments, while still making use of the tools and
training of my discipline, I instead offer a literary history that illuminates studied enchantment as a genre that flourished alongside the modern Anglo-American university and created a potent, often pleasurable, sometimes threatening, mode of reading and experiencing compelling narratives of unprovable histories.
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