The syncretic stage: religion and popular drama during the fin de siècle.

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THE SYNCRETIC STAGE:

RELIGION AND POPULAR DRAMA DURING THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE*

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the popular theatre of the late-nineteenth century and focuses on the most commercially successful and popular playwrights of the era: Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde. Looking at the major popular playwrights reveals that the commercial stage had different concerns than the avant-garde theatre of Ibsen and Shaw. Foremost among these concerns was religion, and starting with Jones's 1884 play *Saints and Sinners,* a massive change swept through the commercial stage as religious prejudice and official censorship fell by the wayside. In its place, religion started to become a topic that was once again seen as acceptable, and the *fin de siècle* stage was awash with syncretic religious views. This syncretism was aided by the publication of scripts and the religious pluralism of the day. Though publication aided the literary and religious quality of the texts, they were crafted as staged works, complete with the shared, collective experiences and emotions of the audience, a collective affect that mimics the collective emotional experience of a congregation in a church, and the stage thus became one of the largest venues for ecumenical religion during the late-Victorian era. The alacrity with which this happened challenges not only the common conception of the secularization of the late-Victorian stage, but also of the larger culture.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Most theatrical histories place playwrights like George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen and their progressive, secular concerns at the center of the revolutions taking place on the British *fin de siècle* stage. However, this project argues that their contemporaries Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde played a far more influential role in the formation of a new type of popular theater, the syncretic stage, which had far-reaching effects not only on the theater but also on the era's religious debates. Jones, Pinero, and Wilde probed religious subjects through the most visible means of their day, and the syncretic stage became one of the most vibrant venues for ecumenical religion during the *fin de siècle.* This dissertation seeks to reclaim the place of these playwrights in the canon as well as to explore their plays for their rich textual and religious significances. Jones, Pinero, and Wilde treated religion diversely and capaciously, and at the end of the 1800s, the stage was the place where dissent and orthodoxy freely comingled, and religion, religious feeling, and religious debate were thriving. Understanding the syncretic stage reveals the complex relationship popular entertainment has with religious beliefs while also rewriting theatrical history and affording a unique perspective on the evolution of religious culture as its practitioners came head-to-head with impending secular values.

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INTRODUCTION:

THEATRICAL MODERNISM AND THE GENESIS OF THE SYNCRETIC STAGE

On the early morning of May 19, 1897, one of Great Britain's most famous convicted criminals was released from prison. When Oscar Wilde exited the jail at 6:15 a.m., a man named Stewart Headlam was there to meet him. Headlam took the societal pariah to his own home and cared for him while Wilde contemplated his future. That evening, after hearing that his hoped-for sanctuary at a Jesuit monastery had been denied, Wilde sailed to Dieppe, France, never again to return to London (Pearce 364, Knight 126).

Two years earlier Headlam had performed a similar kindness to Wilde. During Wilde's second of three trials, Headlam accompanied the accused to the courthouse each morning and personally financed half of Wilde's bail, a significant sum at £1225, so that Wilde could be released on his own recognizance while he awaited judgment (Ellmann 466-467). It was oddly generous of Headlam: despite his financial and moral help to Wilde, Headlam had only briefly met him twice before and could scarcely count him as an acquaintance, much less a friend (466). And in the charged atmosphere of Wilde's notorious trial, being seen as a friend to the man accused of gross indecency was risky. Wilde's accuser, the Marquess of Queensberry, had ordered local hotel managers not to shelter Wilde, and most of his friends had abandoned him in his hour of need (Knight 126, Ellmann 466-468). Headlam's kindness did indeed cost him dearly: friends scorned him, a maid left his employ, membership in a club he had founded dropped sharply, and an enemy accused him of "wading in Gomorrah" (Knight 126, Ellmann 466-468).

Headlam, though, had a history of moral bravery and offering financial assistance to those in need, including posting bail for drunks and political agitators and offering public support to the famous atheist Charles Bradlaugh during his quarrel with the House of Commons (Knight 126). According to Frances Knight, Headlam often demonstrated a "willingness to sacrifice his own reputation in order to support people whom society despised" (126), a tendency that separated him from many of his upper class peers.

It was also a penchant that separated Headlam from his fellow Anglican ministers.

I. The Major English *fin de siècle* Playwrights

At the time of his initial arrest in 1895, Wilde was one of the most celebrated playwrights of his era. While he had previously gained fame as a novelist, poet, essayist, and the best-known proponent of the aesthetic movement, Wilde spent much of his time in the 1890s crafting plays. His four comedic hits had come in quick succession—*Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892, *A Woman of No Importance* in 1893, and *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895, just weeks ahead of his precipitous downfall. Wilde had burst spectacularly onto the theatrical scene, and he is today as much remembered for his plays as for his other works.

Though Headlam doubtless would have been familiar with Wilde's persona before he took to writing for the stage—Wilde was already an established celebrity well known in society—it seems probable that Wilde's turn as a playwright particularly appealed to the benefactor, as Headlam was a noted theatrical aficionado. Though Headlam was an "atypical" clergyman in many ways (Knight 123), the story of his life's work dovetails with the larger theatrical trends that this dissertation explores. One of Headlam's foremost missions was to "re-educate Christians about the theatre and ballet" (124). To that end, besides being a noted

Christian Socialist, founder of the newspaper the *Church Reformer,* and founder of the Guild of St. Matthews (the Christian Socialist group whose membership dropped after Headlam aided Wilde), Headlam also created the Church and Stage Guild in 1879, an organization comprised of clergy members and artists dedicated to promoting the moral salubriousness of theatre and the performing arts and lessening the church's opposition to them (Knight 123-125).

This was a dangerous argument, one that had previously resulted in Headlam losing his parish at Bethnal Green, a suburb in East London, in 1878 after the Bishop disapproved of a lecture Headlam delivered in which he praised theatre and the arts (Knight 124). Headlam, though, was living in a time of swift change: by 1898 the new Bishop had granted him permission to preach again (Day, n.p.), and by the early 1900s, the Church and Stage Guild had fizzled because "by then prejudices against the theatre had waned, and friendly relations between clergy and stage people had been established" (Knight 125). During the thirty-odd years in which Headlam was active, clerical praise for the theatre went from being a fireable offense to something that was fairly unremarkable. His interaction with Wilde came, then, at a turning point in the history of the theatre when religious prejudice towards the theatre started eroding.

This religious acceptance of the theatre is indicative of the overall tendency in late-Victorian society to become less morally and religiously hostile to the theatre, a shift that was marked by tremendous transformations in the theatre's style, audience, reception, and even technology. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, theatre was considered "the scruffy orphan of high culture" (Auerbach 3), and "most of the plays of the period only prove how unreadable a smash hit can be" (Ashley 7). It was not until the late nineteenth century that theatre became something generally regarded as worthy of serious respect and attention.

This was the century that began with Charles Lamb famously arguing that "the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever" (163)—a sentiment that has often been explained as the result of "Lamb's dissatisfaction with the theatre of his own time" and indicating that theatrical productions had little cultural value (Carlson 224)—and ended with the famous "slam heard round the world" when Ibsen's Nora left Torvald in *A Doll's House,* thereby indicating that productions had the capacity to affect the larger culture. The nineteenth century opened with Shakespearean revivals and mostly derivative melodramas ruling the British stage and ended not only with Norway's Ibsen and Sweden's Strindberg writing plays that would be studied well into the twenty-first century, but also with England producing its own contemporary plays worthy of respect and consideration. For the first time since the 1700s, English playwrights were authoring dramas that had value as art, and many works of the period—such as those written by George Bernard Shaw—are still produced today. J.L. Styan summarizes the condition of nineteenth-century British theatre: "The literary reputation of the bulk of nineteenth-century English drama is low . . . no dramatic masterpieces were written until nearly the end of the period" (302). In the minds of many scholars both past and present, the late-nineteenth century was a time of artistic rejuvenation, one that marked a clear turning point in England's theatrical history.

This theatrical advent was partially precipitated by the sheer number of plays being written, with nearly 20,000 plays composed between the years of 1850 and 1900 (Styan 302). In this crowded theatrical landscape, three playwrights' names rose to the top: Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde. These are the three men generally credited by their contemporaries with reviving the English drama, a renaissance that was largely of their own devising. While the realistic teacup-and-saucer dramas of Tom Robertson had provided an

important precursor to these three authors, the seminal nature of their work at the end of the century has long been acknowledged, most notably by critics of their own age. More surprising to modern scholars, perhaps, is that these three authors were often placed in dialogue together, both in reviews and in extant late-Victorian scholarship. In the conceptions of most current scholars, Wilde was a major figure who is frequently still studied; Pinero was an important figure in his time who is occasionally remembered though rarely studied; and Jones and his contributions have almost been entirely forgotten, and if they are remembered, it is his essays, not his plays, that are considered.

In addition, while Jones and Pinero are frequently mentioned together by modern scholars (when, indeed, they are mentioned, which is not terribly frequently unless by Victorian theatre specialists), Wilde has been left out of such discussions, primarily because he is mentioned elsewhere or is considered worthy of respect as a solitary figure. Yet these three men can—and should—be remembered as the three leading figures of the renaissance of the English stage at the close of the Victorian era. Writing in 1925, Clayton Hamilton discussed the contribution the three men made to their craft,

> Jones and Pinero, deprived of predecessors, were required, in their different ways, to create a modern English drama out of nothing. As to which of these two pioneers deserves the laurel of historical priority, opinions differ . . . . But there is credit enough to be divided between them; and, in those early days, they had no competitors for priority, excepting only Oscar Wilde, whose brief career in the theatre—his four contemporary plays were produced within three years—turned out to be little more than a brilliant flash in the plan. (*Representative Plays by Henry Arthur Jones, Volume One* xvi)

While Hamilton was incorrect about Wilde being a "flash in the pan," his linking of the three playwrights was prescient. Writing much later, in 1996, J.L. Styan also connected them, writing, "More natural speaking and acting seemed close to revolutionary when Tom Robertson made his modest attempts at writing in a more everyday vein, but it was encouraged by the development of a more sophisticated social problem play at the hands of Henry Arthur Jones, Oscar Wilde, and Arthur Wing Pinero" (309). Thematically and stylistically, these three men led the vanguard of the new type of English drama that would become the standard-bearer for the new century.

The main reason these men had the capacity to revolutionize the theatre was because they were commercially successful playwrights. To give an idea of their ubiquity, consider the London theatre between the years 1890 and 1899: On any given night, the average playgoer would have had over a 55% chance of being able to see a show written by the playwright Henry Arthur Jones and over a 67% chance of seeing a show written by Arthur Wing Pinero, remarkable facts considering that most theatres are dark part of the week. In total throughout the decade, playgoers would have had 2056 chances to see Jones performed and 2478 to see Pinero. To put that in perspective, the plays of George Bernard Shaw were only performed a total of *seventy-eight* times during those same years (Clarke 22). While future histories would make Shaw the dominant British playwright of the *fin de siècle*, the matter would have appeared quite different to someone living in those decades.[1]

The revolution they led tells us not only about the theatrical culture of late-Victorian society but also about the larger culture too. When Jones, Pinero, and Wilde were writing their plays, the stage was *the* main venue for popular culture, and thus their works reveal more about

[1] It should be noted, though, that Shaw did gain more success later, especially in the first few decades of the twentieth century, with successful plays ranging from 1905's *Major Barbara* to 1923's *Saint Joan.*

contemporary culture than has previously been acknowledged. Like television and social media in our current age, theatre was both the product *of* popular culture as well as the force that *made* popular culture. According to John Dawick, in the *fin de siècle,* the "theatre was more widely popular than it had been since William Shakespeare's day or would be again" (xix); Nina Auerbach adds that the stage was "the most widespread arena of popular culture" (4); and John Russell Stephens writes that Victorian theatre "was the closest of all art forms to the mass of the public" (2). In this sizeable arena, Jones and Pinero, and Wilde to a lesser degree, had an outsize influence both in reflecting and creating popular culture.

This dissertation seeks to reclaim the place and function of the three most popular playwrights of the late-Victorian period. While there were a plethora of popular plays and theatrical hits—1892's *Charley's Aunt* by Brandon Thomas was the singular greatest popular success with 1466 performances during its initial London run (Booth *Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre* 31)—Jones, Pinero, and again Wilde to a lesser degree were unique in creating *multiple* successes. They were not one-hit wonders; they were consistently writing and staging pieces that were popularly successful, financially fruitful, and critically lauded. Like Shaw and Ibsen, they were praised by reviewers, critics, and scholars; like Brandon Thomas, they achieved commercial success. Jones, Pinero, and Wilde then existed at a unique place in British theatrical culture where their commercial success met critical acclaim, and they left the theatre a different place than they found it.

II. Re-thinking the Secularization Thesis: The Story of *fin de siècle* Theatre

These playwrights also played a large role in changing the religious landscape of the theatre, a transformation that is illustrated through Rev. Headlam's fluctuating fortunes. Yet in

the subsequent twenty or thirty years following Headlam's dismissal, much of the religious resistance to the theatre disappeared. This swift change is particularly remarkable because the theatre and religion had had a longstanding acrimonious relationship. Since the time of the Interregnum (1649-1660), sincere religious belief had often been associated with a disavowal of, if not outright contempt for, the theatre. Oliver Cromwell and his ruling Puritan party had outlawed the theatre during the Interregnum, and though the theatres were reopened when King Charles II reclaimed the throne, the licentiousness and debauchery of the Restoration stage did little to assuage religious people's assumptions that the theatre was an immoral place. Writing in the Victorian era, historian Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote of these Restoration comedies that they were "a disgrace to our language and to our national character" since they "associate vice with those things men value most and desire most, and virtue with everything ridiculous and degrading" (qtd. in Carlson 229), a viewpoint that aligned itself with moralistic values and echoed the religious resistance to the theatre.

This hostile relationship between the church and stage persisted long after the lewdness of the Restoration stage had receded into the background, as Shakespearean revivals, melodramas, and fairy extravaganzas took the forefront of theatrical entertainments in the 1800s. As late as 1879, Matthew Arnold claimed that the theatre had been stultified by its audience which had been "long petrified in a narrow Protestantism and in a perpetual reading of the Bible," and he argued that the new popularity of French plays was "salutary" because it helped the English middle class "unlearn . . . [their] long disregard of the theatre" by showing them a model theatre in its organization and clarity of purpose. In his book-length study of the relationship between the church and the stage, Richard Foulkes points out that it was not until 1862 that the Lord Chamberlain lifted his ban against stage performances during Passion Week,

and it was not until the mid-to-late Victorian period that the assertion that the theatre was "innately evil" started being widely questioned (33-34).

Victorian religion is, of course, a widely-studied—and debated—topic, with much of the debate centering on the secularization thesis, the predominant model among most scholars and historians for understanding how religion has changed over the past two centuries. According to the secularization thesis, modernization and secularization go together, and they progress simultaneously. Callum G. Brown explains,

> Secularisation, it is traditionally argued, was the handmaiden of modernisation, pluralisation, urbanization and Enlightenment rationality. Consequently, the theory identifies the main origins of British secularisation in the industrial revolution and urban growth of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which then accelerated in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (10)

Brown also suggests that though sociologists first developed the secularization theory, it has been adopted "almost universally" by historians as well and is the prevailing explanation for understanding modern society's relative secularization (10).

This idea that secularization was a slow process begun by urbanization and industrialization that accelerated in the late 1800s is apparently supported by the literature of the time. While Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) offered a scientific reason for life that seemingly belied Creationism and a divine maker, writers like George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and John Stuart Mill famously became agnostic. In 1890, the crisis-of-doubt narrative seemed to reach a fever pitch when Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* showcased the similarity of Christian beliefs to various folk religions around the world. Frazer's ideas were both radical and quotidian, as Robert Fraser notes: "Hence in Frazer the quiet iconoclast we meet a spectacle

quite common in the late Victorian period: a Protestant-inspired exegetical honesty turning against itself" (xxvii). During the *fin de siècle*, crises of doubt were ostensibly commonplace, yet in most circles they were still cause for considerable consternation.

However, some scholars have begun rethinking just how commonplace these crises of faith actually were. In *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England,* Timothy Larsen argues that, in fact, crises of *doubt* were much more commonplace in the late-Victorian era, and he chronicles how many famous agnostics and atheists rediscovered religion, an oft-overlooked phenomenon. He cites evangelicalism—with its emphasis on a personal connection to God—as counterintuitively fuelling the supposed crises of faith (he notes how many of the most famous agnostics and atheists were from evangelical backgrounds), though many of them reconverted. Nevertheless, he finishes his study by claiming, "It is obvious that many more Victorians retained their faith than lost it" (234).

This idea that the crisis of faith has been overstated is seconded by Callum G. Brown and Hugh McLeod. McLeod largely agrees with the secularization thesis, though he thinks that in the *fin de siècle* it was largely a working-class occurrence.[2] Most notably, Brown argues that there was no large-scale British secularization until the 1960s. Like Larsen, he places the seeds of doubt in evangelicalism, which in the nineteenth century coded religion as feminine and domestic. With the rise of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, religion lost its most

[2] McLeod discusses the secularizing trend—or lack thereof—at the end of the nineteenth century in detail in chapter seven of *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1989* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997). In it, he identifies particular pockets of working-class Brits who were not secularized, foremost among them being Catholics living in England. However, he overall concludes that "the majority of working-class people were neither deeply committed church members, nor did they have strong radical or anti-religious convictions. Their religious ideas tended to be fluid, eclectic, and, from the point of view of [the] churchman or militant unbeliever, incoherent" (124).

adamant members who no longer wanted to subscribe to the feminine ideal that evangelical discourses had placed as imperative to the faith.

Notably, almost all of these scholars actually cite the *fin de siècle* as being a micro-era that witnessed the largest, or nearly the largest, church attendance on record (Morris 180). Callum G. Brown notes that the "best estimates indicate" a peak of religious adherence in England and Wales in 1904 and in Scotland in 1905 (7), facts that appears incongruous with the radical nature of the era. Frances Knight writes, "Rather than being a period of 'crisis of faith', we can see that the English *fin de siècle* was a time when Christian faith became a means for intellectual and cultural integration" (228). In other words, the end of the century was a time that was notably conducive to faith and was a micro-era of religious rejuvenation. J.N. Morris makes sense of the disparity between the high church attendance and the ubiquity of the crisis-of-faith narrative: "Despite the massive 'institutional revival' identified by some writers as one of the most important features of the religious history of Victorian England, by the 1900s a sense of failure was widespread amongst all denominations" (179). Thus an odd paradox was the norm in late-Victorian society—though more people than ever were attending church and professing belief, more people than ever were also worried about the demise of faith.

Scholars looking both to prove and disprove the religiosity of late-Victorian society look to the discourses surrounding faith. While there were prominent anti-religious voices, such as those of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant and other members of the National Secular Society, Callum G. Brown indicates that by far the majority of discourses were inextricably, undeniably Christian. In *The Death of Christian Britain,* he points to discourses as variant as dominant media (popular books, magazines, etc.), official clerical statements, and even protocols of behavior (such as saying grace before meals and going to church) to demonstrate the

prominence of Christianity in daily life, a dominance that did not erode in the surrounding discourses until the 1960s. Most notably, he cites the prominence of something that he calls the "evangelical narrative," a structure of organizing one's life events in a way that prized redemption and moral lessons (70-75). He cites the ubiquity of such narratives, and other such religiously-inflected narratives, through a variety of different mediums, including sermons, prayers, pamphlets, stories, even obituaries. He synthesizes his argument by writing, "What made Britain Christian was the way in which Christianity infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, in forming their own identities" (8). He calls the prevailing culture of late-Victorian England one that practiced "discursive Christianity" (12), a discursive practice that was soon to be enhanced by the religious discourses of the stage.

Absent from almost all discussions of religion in the *fin de siècle* is the theatre and the stage. In pointing out this absence, I am not intending to detract from other scholars' work; rather, I am trying to show the need for a critical intervention at the juncture of religion and the stage. This intervention is particularly necessary because Victorian religion, most notably in the latter part of the century, is the subject of critical debate and since the stage was the foremost purveyor of popular culture. Brown, for example, does not include theatre in his sampling of popular media, and leading religious scholars like Hugh McLeod and Timothy Larsen rarely look to the theatre. Frances Knight briefly examines the theatre in her discussion on the Rev. Stewart Headlam, though the focus of her book is wide and she does not dwell extensively on the subject. Theatrical scholars have likewise largely overlooked the connection between religion and the stage: some like Michael Booth, the preeminent Victorian theatre scholar, occasionally discuss the lessening of religious prejudice against the theatre as the century progressed, but this generally marks the extent to which religion's connection to the stage is examined. One notable

exception is Richard Foulkes's *Church and Stage in Victorian England*. Foulkes's work, though, covers the whole of the Victorian period, and thus it necessarily treats the developments in the *fin de siècle* less fully, whereas my study is more narrowly focused. In addition, Foulkes focuses more, at least in the later century, on actor-managers like Henry Irving, and I instead focus on playwrights, including the printing of their works and its effects on theatrical culture.

As the stage was in a state of tremendous change at the end of the century and since the *fin de siècle* was a micro-era of religious plurality and rejuvenation, it appears obvious that these two titans of culture would affect the other. At the end of the Victorian era, we see the erosion of religious prejudice that led to the gradual return of religious people to the theatre as audience members, and we see the return of religious subjects to the stage, when religious topics and religious themes reappeared for the first time in generations.

III. Reading, Writing, and Religion: Creating the Syncretic Stage

The *fin de siècle* was the time when the theatre transformed itself into something I call the syncretic stage, a term meant to capture the plurality of religious expression. The syncretic stage was the site of unprecedented religiosity on the stage, but this religiosity was not always orthodox or pious. On the stage, religion gained a heretofore unparalleled visibility, and religion was examined, scrutinized, and criticized in a manner previously unprecedented. This era witnessed the resurgence of English drama that was considered mature, refined, and worthy of serious consideration, and central to this artistic maturity was a reexamination of religion. After a century where religion was ignored in the theatre—or if it was portrayed, rendered saccharinely and simplistically—the *fin de siècle* stage was filled with religious subjects and religious portrayals with different denominations and belief systems being portrayed. Like the *fin de*

siècle itself, the syncretic stage was a paradox where unequalled displays of religion and religiosity met vocal opposition.

This was the age that gave birth to works as disparate as Wilson Barrett's *The Sign of the Cross,* a four-act religious historical drama that toured both the US and Britain in 1895-96 and which the actor-manager Barrett claimed was a "professed attempt to conciliate the prejudices which church members are said to have for the stage and to bring the two nearer together" ("Wilson Barrett's New Play"), and George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (written 1893, first performed 1902), a play that portrayed prostitution not as a moral problem but an economic one and served to justify the world's oldest profession. This is the syncretic stage at its most extreme—a stage in which religion and religious characters were widely portrayed, and yet a stage in which playwrights and actors finally felt free to push back against the dictates of religion and bourgeois morality.

Two very different causes led to this change: the changing status of the playwright, particularly as exemplified through the printing of plays, and the decline of the power of the censor. Prior to the *fin de siècle,* playwrights and playwriting played a secondary role in theatrical creation. Throughout the vast majority of the 1800s, the theatre had been dominated by actor-managers. Names like Henry Irving, Charles Macready, Lucia Vestris, and Sarah Siddons were the headliners, and audiences came to the theatre to see their favorite actors. These actors, in turn, delivered on their audiences' expectations by performing grandiose characters: Shakespearean villains, melodramatic heroines, oversized protagonists, et cetera. Plays were spliced and diced and plot points were expurgated to keep the focus on the star attraction—the headlining actor. In this way, plays were to serve as complements to the actor, as opposed to having the performer act in service of the play. According to Henry Arthur Jones, "The

comparative intellectual and literary degradation of the modern drama for two or three generations past is due to the fact that plays have been chiefly considered and exploited from their purely theatrical side, and as a vehicle for exhibiting the powers and peculiarities of an actor or a company" ("Preface" to *Saints and Sinners* xi). In other words, the actor, not the play, was the star attraction.

This denigration of playwriting was exacerbated by the lack of copyright protections. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, plays were not subject to copyright laws, and thus plays—particularly if they were published—were easy to steal. Indeed, many of the plays produced on the English stage were actually plays stolen from the French theatre as it was easier and less expensive to stage a bowdlerized French script than produce a new English one. Clayton Hamilton succinctly writes, "It was cheaper to steal a French play than to pay royalties to an English dramatist" (*The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Vol. I* 10). It was not until the US ratified the International Copyright Act in 1887 that plays printed in England would not forfeit their American staging rights (Dawick 176), particularly as many plays were first staged in London and then in New York or vice versa. Henry Arthur Jones underscored the importance of the bill: "Hitherto the publication of an English play would have incurred the forfeiture of the American stage-rights [sic], in many cases a very serious pecuniary loss" ("Preface" to *Saints and Sinners* v). Jones went on to become the single most influential man both in creating copyright protections and in championing publication of plays (Hamilton, *Representative Plays by Henry Arthur Jones, Vol. I* xxiii), and he was the first playwright of the Victorian era who published his plays concurrently or near-concurrently with the productions of them (Dickinson 764).

However, he was not the only beneficiary of the new laws: by allowing for the possibility of financial success, the new copyright laws encouraged talented men and women to turn to playwriting. To celebrate the passage of the Act, Arthur Wing Pinero even printed copies of his new play, *The Times* (1891), and had them given out to the opening-night audience. Afterwards, they were available for purchase at the theatre, and within a month, the original 5,000 copies had been sold and required a second printing (Dawick 177). These publications led to a new revenue stream for playwrights, and by making playwriting a career that had the possibility of being financially remunerative, the new copyright laws spurred writers to turn their attention to playwriting and subsequently publishing their plays.

As English playwrights began publishing their plays, this allowed their works to be read at leisure and studied minutely, rather than only existing in the ephemera of the theatre. In the conception of many playwrights and audience members, this publication necessarily meant that works needed to be more artistically meritorious, which led to the development of a more literary type of drama. Henry Arthur Jones himself wrote in one of his first published plays, "If, from this time forward, a playwright does not publish within a reasonable time after the theatrical production of his piece, it will be an open confession that his work was a thing of the theatre merely, needing its garish artificial light and surroundings, and not daring to face the calm air and cold daylight of print" ("Preface," *Saint and Sinners* vi). Publishing plays therefore became one of the benchmarks of the new English drama of the late nineteenth century; this is what made plays "literature" rather than just theatrical entertainment. These were plays deemed worthy not just of watching, but reading and re-reading.

This idea that these plays had a newfound literary quality runs throughout much of the discourse surrounding the new drama. Writing on Jones's play *Judah,* Joseph Knight declares

unambiguously that this play is "literature" ("Preface" vii), and he details what effect the literariness has on the reader:

> We are not, therefore, to deprive ourselves of the privilege of reading and poring over the work at our pleasure, extracting what Rabelais calls its *moelle substantifique,* and deriving a delight perpetually fresh and new from our researches. A work such as *Judah* demands no special research in order to grasp its merits and beauties. There are thousands in the world who may never have a chance of seeing it acted, and may yet profit by its perusal. (xxi, xxii)

The playwrights themselves keenly felt the need to publish and thereby display their artistic merit. In his introduction to *The Times,* Pinero wrote that publication "might dignify at once the calling of the actor, the craft of the playwright" while helping to dispel the idea that a play is the "haphazard concoction of the author" and will instead reveal whether or not the work has "intrinsic value" (viii, vii).

This new literary quality to drama, as exemplified by publishing and reading scripts, had implications for its religious reception. As a number of scholars have pointed out, in the nineteenth century, literary devotion often had a spiritual component. Regarding Shakespearean studies, for example, Charles LaPorte writes that they "provide the foremost example of the romantic and Victorian habit of conflating literary enthusiasm with genuine religious feeling" (609). In fact, during this era, "poetic inspiration" itself took on a "particularly religious resonance," and there was a simultaneous belief that some "texts can attain a sacred character . . ." (619). By publishing their scripts, the *fin de siècle* playwrights—with Jones and Pinero being foremost among them—allowed for a print-mediated form of close reading we think of alternately as literary or religious. Michael Warner notes how "literary and formal structures . . .

had implications for society and religion" (27), and that affective reading—the fusion of reading and feeling—had particular resonances for religious interpretation. Writing on the intersection of literary and religious studies, Warner writes that "taking the text to heart is a necessary activity of understanding" (31). For these playwrights, these plays were to be seen in the theatre, and then reread in the home, complete with affective reliving of the theatrical experience.

Also key to this connection between reading and religion is the Protestant, and more specifically Evangelical, push for the individual to read and examine texts, particularly the Bible, for him or herself. Callum G. Brown notes how "evangelicalism laid stress of faith in the context of the individual as a 'free moral agent'" (36), and evangelicalism became associated with personal "improvements" (37). Foremost among these improvements was education, and Sunday Schools, which were "initially perceived literally as schools on Sunday" (20), sprung up throughout the country. Unlike their Catholic predecessors, Protestants believed that everyone, not just the clergy, needed to learn to read and write and be versed in Scripture (Marsden 36). As Protestantism/Evangelicalism stressed the need for a personal connection with God, believers were encouraged to read and study the Bible individually. Thus, they published Bibles in the vernacular, and every believer was also expected to read and interpret the Bible (Robinson, "Preface" xxiv-xxv). Thus education—and reading more specifically—became associated with piety and religious devotion.

This connection between reading and religion had implications for the new drama of the late 1800s, and playwrights and their critics were quick to point to a play's supposedly *literary* qualities—a word that implies that the text is to be pored over and examined deeply. This religious recuperation of literary drama had been hinted at nearly a century before in Dean Henry Hart Milman's belief that "plays of literary distinction" could help with the "preservation, indeed

regeneration, of culture" (Foulkes 17), and it reached its climax in end-of-the-century introductions, reviews, and retrospectives that claimed that the new playwrights were writing *literature,* not just plays. In 1895, H. Hamilton Fyfe published an article on the literary nature of Pinero's plays, which he said must rise above mere "entertainment" and must instead be filled with "pages [that] glow with poetry, with imagination, with wit and fancy, with a huge knowledge of human character and human life; that they are founded upon observation at first hand, and written with a pen that only genius knows how to wield" (324). Most importantly, they must "bear the closest scrutiny, the most severely critical consideration in the study." There was therefore a concomitant exhortation for readers to study plays, and this encouragement took on a decidedly hermeneutics-like tone. In Fyfe's description, Pinero's plays of "genius" that can "bear the closest scrutiny" sound similar to Victorian constructions of Shakespeare, complete with their hermeneutics and their literary devotion bordering on religious piety.

It is perhaps no accident then that the syncretic stage often focused on religious topics and subjects. This was a seminal period for rethinking not just the role religious believers should have with the stage, but also how the stage can and should portray religion. These playwrights pushed the envelope: Jones's *Saints and Sinners* (1884) had the "distinction of shattering the hitherto inviolable rule of the licensing authorities that the Bible should not be quoted onstage" (Stephens 110)—rules that were instituted to protect the church and its authorities from possible "venal contempt" (108)—and Pinero's *Dandy Dick* featured a comic portrayal of an Anglican priest where the protagonist's profession was not incidental but rather integral to his foibles. Even Shaw and Ibsen were keen to portray religion and faith, albeit usually in unflattering portrayals, such as in Shaw's *Candida* (1894) and *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) and in Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) and *Rosmersholm* (1886). The religious portrayals by the likes of Jones, Pinero,

Shaw, and Ibsen often led these playwrights to run afoul of the official censor, even though Jones and Pinero wrote works that were largely compatible with orthodox and pious religious sentiments.

IV. The Decline of Censorship and the Rise of Religious Visibility

As implied by these examples, one of the most striking elements of the syncretic stage concerned the role of the censor, officially referred to as the "Examiner of the Stage," an employee in the Lord Chamberlain's office. The modern form of censorship (which was distinct from the type employed during the Renaissance) was instigated in 1737, and the censor had the authority to allow or prohibit works based on their moral, political, and religious content, and this had the effect of keeping "serious discussion[s]" off the stage as the dramatist could not portray the "life whole" of his subjects (Woodfield 3, 25). Though the censor only banned a few works outright—James Woodfield points out that between the years of 1852 and 1912, 19,304 plays were submitted for review and only 103 were refused a license (111)—many playwrights chose not to test the Examiner and instead often chose to self-censor their works (110).

One of the foremost topics censored, whether via the censor or the self-censoring playwright, was religion. In almost all cases, Biblical scenes or quotations were banned, and sometimes even Scriptural or religious themes were censored as well. In some cases, even phrases like "thank heaven" were expurgated from scripts that were otherwise allowed to be performed (Woodfield 110). John Russell Stephens explains that these rules were "deeply rooted in the theatrical and religious climate of the age" and that the "low character" of the theatre led to this ban as the theatre (92, 93). The theatre, with its associated immorality and licentiousness, was considered an improper medium to explore such topics. Interestingly, it was not just

Christian themes that were banned, but other ones as well, including examinations of Islam or Judaism (107-108). For the Examiners, religion was too sacred to be explored on the stage.

This censorship led playwrights to largely abandon religious themes and topics for most of the century, though near the end of the 1800s, this ban started being questioned. Starting with Jones's *Saints and Sinners,* playwrights began to increasingly try to write on Biblical themes and religious topics. For example, Oscar Wilde famously wrote *Salomé* (1891), which portrayed the events leading up to beheading of the Bible's John the Baptist. And while *Salomé* was banned, plays like Wilson Barrett's Christian melodrama *The Sign of the Cross* (1896) were allowed as they did not directly portray Biblical scenes or characters and did not contain any phrases from the Bible (Stephens 112-113). This recondite and inscrutable application of the licensing laws frustrated playwrights, and it became "increasingly difficult to understand or justify" the banning of texts with religious themes and topics (Woodfield 119). For his part, Shaw wrote a lengthy description of his troubles with official censorship in his well-known "Preface," and he concluded that the Theatrical Examiner was full of "every fallacy that can make a Censor obnoxious" (xvi). This frustration with censorship was exacerbated by the fact that most, though certainly not all, playwrights wanted to portray religion in all of its forms not to profane it, but to redefine the sacred by portraying it in its embodied, immanent form.

The playwrights' frustration was further aggravated by the haphazard, uneven way the Examiner censored works, which helped lead to censorship's decline. Though official state censorship was enshrined in the legal codes until 1968 (Nathan, n.p.), the censor started losing power during the late-Victorian era. Dominic Shellard and Steve Nicholson point out that what was censored and why varied greatly during the 231 years of official censorship. They write that there were "discrepancies of practice and attitude" that caused "confusion" for playwright and

actor-managers, and these variations were particularly notable between the years 1824 and 1901 when nineteen Lord Chamberlains and six examiners took their relative positions (13). John Russell Stephens adds that though "the general principles of Victorian censorship are reasonably clear, the absence of any more precise rules" allowed the individual examiners to "exercise a substantial degree of personal discretion" on determining what should be censored and why (17). In other words, various censors had different methods of evaluation and different reasons for banning and allowing works, and the overall effect was to "perplex and incense [sic]" playwrights (Woodfield 118). For example, works like Lawrence Housman's *Bethlehem* (1902) were refused a license, yet a revival of the medieval *Everyman* was allowed in 1901 because the text had been written prior to the start of the new censorship laws in 1737 (Woodfield 118-119).

Playwrights were understandably frustrated by the lack of transparency and the inconsistencies of the Lord Chamberlain's licensing procedures, and so in the *fin de siècle*—the era Stephens calls "one of the most troublesome periods in the history of stage censorship" (34)—playwrights and producers began employing methods to forgo examination by the censor. One of the foremost ways to do this was by producing plays through membership-only clubs. This allowed plays to be staged for a select audience and not the general public, a move that allowed producers to forgo getting approval through the censor. It was through this method that Ibsen's *Ghosts* was produced by the Independent Theatre Society in 1891 (Weiss 55), a play that the Lord Chamberlain's office certainly would have censored. Subscription groups like the Independent Theatre Society grew in importance throughout the 1890s, and leading theatrical players like critic William Archer, novelists Thomas Hardy and Henry James, playwright Arthur Wing Pinero, and critic/impresario J.T. Grein all counted themselves as members. As these

societies grew, more and more plays entered the British theatre via roundabout methods and chipped away at the power of the official censor.

Another blow to the power of the Lord Chamberlain's office came via the publication of scripts. As playwrights had often complained, staged drama was unique in that it was under the power of the Examiner. As W.H. Hudson asked in the 1 December 1889 issue of *Theatre,* "England is the country of free speech and a free Press [sic]; why is not the country of a free drama also?" (qtd. in Woodfield 112). As dramatists began increasingly to publish their plays—some of which, like many of Shaw's works, had been denied stage licenses—the public was able to read them. James Woodfield discusses the role publication played on official censorship,

> A significant result of publication was that opposition to the censorship was able to cohere around specific plays whose full texts were known to the literate public, and it became increasingly apparent that it was not the smutty, indecent play that was being suppressed, but the serious attempt to put controversial social issues onto the stage: i.e., the new drama. (117)

Shaw himself wrote in his "Preface" to his printed works, "Fortunately, though the Stage is bond, the Press is free" (xvii), and he delighted in overcoming the Censor, whom he wrote "robs, insults, and suppresses me as irresistibly as he were the Tsar of Russia and I the meanest of his subjects" (xiv). As playwrights, artists, and members of the general public read these plays in print and saw them staged by independent societies, the ability of the Lord Chamberlains' office to restrict access to censored plays waned. Not only were the laws increasingly questioned and subverted, but plays that previously would have been unacceptable, such as Henry Arthur Jones's *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896), received licenses after much "heart-searching" on the part of the Examiner (Stephens 111).

The publication of printed manuscripts and the production of plays via subscription societies affected the general public's stance towards censorship. Henry Arthur Jones believed that the theatergoers' attitude—not the official censor's refusal to grant a license—was the "real restricting influence on the English drama" (Stephens 110). As the *fin de siècle* continued, though, the "public attitudes [toward censorship] were undergoing slow reorientation" (113), and Stephens points to the touring success of *The Sign of the Cross* (1896) and *Everyman* (1901) as proof (113-114). By 1907, Pinero and Jones joined sixty-nine other authors—many of whom had previously been divided on the issue of censorship— to draft a public letter to *The Times* criticizing censorship, particularly the banning of Harley Granville-Barker's new play *Waste* (Woodfield 122). Their criticisms had enough truck that J.M. Barrie, the appointed leader of the dramatists, received a meeting with the Home Secretary, which was followed by the formation of a Parliamentary committee to determine whether or not to continue censorship (123). This marked the culmination of decades of changing perceptions on how censorship was perceived and enacted. While censorship officially continued until 1968, it was, for most practical purposes, largely ignored.

V. The *fin de siècle* and Cultural Change

Prior to Jones's groundbreaking portrayal of religion in *Saints and Sinners,* almost all religious portrayals in the nineteenth century were minor, peripheral, and rather uniformly orthodox. Religious characters were by and large morally good as well, and the endings of most plays rewarded the "good" hero and heroine. This orthodoxy was partly due to genre as well: melodrama was one of the main theatrical genres of most of the 1800s, and according to Carolyn Williams, "Poetic justice stands in for a social justice that is in grave doubt" in this popular

theatrical form (206). In works like Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan* (1829) and Tom Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave-Man* (1863) the kindly, pious characters are rewarded in the end, and karmic justice reigns. Fundamentally, though, these are not plays about religion, and their portrayals of faith are superficial and incidental, not integral.

During the time of the syncretic stage, though, this superficial engagement with religion changed, and the religious renaissance of the stage is one of the most overlooked qualities of the *fin de siècle* theatre. The new plays of the 1880s and 90s were seen as plumbing spiritual depths and exploring matters central to life. In an 1895 essay printed in *The Nineteenth Century,* Henry Arthur Jones wrote on the necessity of these staged portrayals of faith by arguing that politics and religion are the two most important things in a person's life, and among those, religion reigns supreme because politics "scarcely touch the moral or emotional nature of man at all" ("Religion and the Stage" 122). For playwrights like Jones, being free to portray religion was essential to reforming the English drama. Richard Foulkes discusses the overall change in religious portrayals in the theatre near the end of the Victorian era:

> The ban on dramatisations of the Bible was still absolute, unless they were so heavily disguised as to be, technically at least, unrecognizable, but with Henry Arthur Jones and Wilson Barett [the producer of *The Sign of the Cross*] in the vanguard the theatre secured its right to treat religious subjects, as other arts had done for centuries. This development was concurrent with the arrival in the theatre of the respectable middle classes, until recently incarcerated in the prison of Puritanism. (239)

The end of Foulkes's paragraph hints at another religious change in the *fin de siècle* theatre—not only was the stage newly awash in religious subjects and portrays, but religious *people* were finally starting to come back as audience members.

As the Victorian era continued on, the stage started becoming increasingly popular among classes and types of people for whom the theatre had long been anathema, particularly the middle and upper classes. Michael R. Booth notes how the railway was paramount in bringing the "well-off middle and fashionable class" back to the theatre (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 15), and as early as 1879, Henry Arthur Jones noted that "the great gate which formerly divided the theatre from the world had been lifted off its hinges" (qtd. in Woodfield 12). John Russell Stephens adds that "the boldest expression of the increasing public interest in religious drama" was the success of the 1901 production of *Everyman,* a triumph that "made nonsense of the official policy on religious drama" as "the censors had fallen well behind public opinion in stubbornly clinging to the belief that scriptural drama was inappropriate and unwanted in the theatre" (114). The newfound interest in placing theatre in dialogue with religion was not just relegated to the production of plays; it also extended to the people in the audience.

The changes occurring in the theatre both in the audience and on the stage were echoed in other areas of *fin de siècle* culture. The unique nature of the era was not just limited to the changes in the theatre; most scholars of the era, whether discussing science, religion, culture, or other subjects entirely, note its distinctive features. Frances Knight notes how many historians "inevitably viewed it as a decisive period of transition (7), and Holbrook Jackson writes that it was the "decade that singled itself out . . ." (qtd. in Knight 7). The *fin de siècle,* the time period from the mid-1880s to the very beginning years of the 1900s, was a time of change and upheaval: decadence and aestheticism rose to prominence; the New Woman started demanding rights for women inconceivable just a few decades prior; Freud was promoting the new field of psychology; and scientific advances made life easier for many people while also foreboding the mass destruction of weapons that were soon to be used in the world wars. Talia Schaffer writes

that the *fin de siècle* was "complex, vital, tumultuous, confusing, and exciting" (*Literature and Culture* 1), which is something of an understatement. This was an era that "was born out of volatile mixture of optimism and pessimism" (Knight 226), and the Christian religious culture was a plurality that was "sometimes Catholic and sometimes evangelical, sometimes progressive or conservative, or a mixture of these positions, and it was expressed with varying degrees of commitment and fervor" (4-5). The *fin de siècle* was an era that praised Wilde for his foppish aestheticism and then sentenced him to hard labor in jail upon the discovery that Wilde's hints towards homosexual behavior were indicative of the fact that he really *was* a homosexual; this was an era that bemoaned the death of God and yet witnessed one of the highest church attendances on record; and it was an era where new scientific advancements were announced every day and yet beliefs in magical creatures like elves and fairies were voiced by learned men like Arthur Conan Doyle. In short, the era was one of paradox and great change, and it was a time when Victorian morality clashed with the oncoming forces of Modernism.

The genesis of the syncretic stage is emblematic of these tumultuous times, and its religiosity was the result of a confluence of disparate forces: the advent of copyright laws, the new-fangled predilection for publishing theatrical scripts, the growing prominence of the playwright, the erosion of middle class prejudice against the theatre, the weakened control of the official theatrical censor, the revivalist spirit of the era as well as its backlash, and the growing religious diversity of *fin de siècle* London. All of these elements helped create the right conditions to modernize the English theatre, including the founding of the syncretic stage.

VI. Reflecting the Audience: The Plays of Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde

The reasons for my dissertation's tight focus on Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and Oscar Wilde are multiple: first, as the most popular playwrights of the late-Victorian stage, Jones, Pinero, and Wilde tell us not only about themselves and their belief systems but, more importantly, about the *audience's* belief system. This refelction is particularly true for Jones and Pinero, especially as many critics both of their own day and the present era note how Jones and Pinero frequently shared their audience's values. In contrast, Shaw resolutely states multiple times that he does *not* share his audience's belief system. Describing his early difficulty in playwriting, Shaw writes,

> But to obtain a livelihood by this insane gift [i.e. playwriting], I must have conjured so as to interest not only my own imagination, but that of at least some seventy or a hundred thousand contemporary London playgoers. To fulfil [sic] this condition was hopelessly out of my power. I had no taste for what is called popular art, no respect for popular morality, no belief in popular religion, no admiration for popular heroics. ("Preface" vii)

By Shaw's own admission, his distaste for bourgeois values inhibited his popular success.

Rather than being revolutionaries like Shaw or Ibsen, Jones and Pinero were, as George E. Wellwarth notes, "quintessentially men of their times" (19). Ian Clarke claims that "both Jones and Pinero advocated the desirability, and even the necessity, of the drama's compliance with the social and political orthodoxies of the day" (27). Writing on Pinero, Arthur Gerwitz adds, "He disdained the fringe dramatist who, he believed, avoided the hard job of interesting the major part of the theatergoing public in serious drama" (319), thus indicating that portraying

bourgeois values was central to Pinero's vision of playwriting. Pinero was a man who "personally shared" his audience's traditional values (Bratton viii), a sentiment that is often applied to Jones as well, who admitted that he was "still in favor of what is called bourgeois morality . . ." (qtd. in Cordell 89). Both men saw themselves as reflecting society's values, an assessment that was supported by their contemporaries.

While both Jones and Pinero have often been admired (or sometimes accused) of catering to bourgeois morality, thus indicating that their works reflect the larger values of contemporary society, Wilde was famously iconoclastic. He is the ultimate decadent, the quintessential aesthete who advocated "art for art's sake." In the common conception, his works do not reflect any larger bourgeois moral values because Wilde "gaily mocked" the "forces of respectability" (Dawick 229). This assessment is undoubtedly true—Wilde *did* mock the forces of respectability, particularly in his comic masterpiece *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But it is a mistake to think Wilde's works are immoral or even amoral, despite Wilde's claims in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "all art is quite useless" and that those who read too much into the "surface and symbol" of literature "do so at their peril" (17). Wilde was a master of paradox and contradiction, but as a number of scholars ranging from Jarlath Killeen to Ellis Hanson have pointed out, a noticeable moral, and indeed religious, theme runs throughout his works: beauty *as* morality, particularly as seen through a Roman Catholic lens. Talia Schaffer captures Wilde's contradictions by writing that he often "asserted that art was independent from morality," and yet some of his works, such as his fairy tales, "offered simple and poignant allegories" that appeared to be in a "very different register" (*Literature and Culture* 19).

The conflation of art, beauty, ritual, and religion did have something of a sizable minority following in the *fin de siècle,* with Roman Catholic conversion becoming a trend in certain

classes, and Wilde's comedies can be read as reflective of the values of a certain segment of society. Vincent Lloyd details how many of the era's most famous artists, including Joris-Karl Huysman, Aubrey Beardsley, and eventually even Oscar Wilde himself, converted to Catholicism (568). He describes its appeal by writing, "The pursuit of Beauty above all else expressed in and through *fin de siècle* literature deeply resonated with the pursuit of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful at the core of Christianity" (578). Ellis Hanson posits that this type of *fin de siècle* Catholicism, which he calls "Decadent Catholicism," was its own distinct response to the exigencies of the era. He writes, "Decadent Catholicism is the assertion of faith as a work of art in an age when one ought to know better" (10). Frances Knight adds, "In late nineteenth-century Britain, the boundaries between art and religion often melted away," and in some circles this collapse led Christians to "adopting aesthetic considerations as a central concern, and by turning them to the service of theology" (203). This was art and aestheticism framed as a response to reductive moralism or religious utilitarianism, and thus even Wilde's famous aestheticism did, in fact, say something about larger moral and religious considerations, at least in some circles.

One indication that Jones, Pinero, and Wilde all wrote works that reflected the larger moral and religious landscape of *fin de siècle* London is their lack of ideological dogmatism. This is important because it indicates that their works were not polemical diatribes, which often invoke hyperbole in order to make their cases. While many of their works imply that these authors were trying to influence society and its mores, there is a subtlety to them and a realism that many critics noticed. Writing on Pinero, for example, Clayton Hamilton draws a contrast with Modernist playwrights like Shaw,

> Pinero is—first and foremost—a master of technique. He believes that art should be artistic, that the drama should be dramatic, and that the theatre should be theatrical. . . . He does not understand the theatre as a platform for the eloquent delivery of personal opinions or as a medium for the propaganda of momentary projects in the extra-theatrical domain of social service. Within the circle of his own activities, he is an artist for the sake of art. (*The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Vol. I* 24)

This understanding of Pinero's work aligns him more closely with Wilde with his "art for art's sake" ethos, though he uses his aesthetics to portray how he thinks life is actually lived, whereas Wilde uses his aesthetics to portray beauty.

Though Jones was something of a polemicist in his essays who advocated for theatrical reform and a national theatre—and it is for his essays and lectures that he is more commonly remembered today—he too approached his plays with an avowedly subtle hand. In a 1923 interview, Jones said of his playwriting:

> I do not start from "ideas" or "opinions." I take the keenest interest in social matters, and I think I may claim to have studied them. But the dramatist's main business, and his great delight, is to paint men and women faithfully as he sees them—not to air his "ideas" and "opinions," but, by their actions, the dramatist must frame his characters in a story. So far as he uses the stage to exploit his "ideas" and "opinions," he is not a dramatist, but a propagandist. ("Dramatic Technique Revealed by Dramatists" 435)

Jones's desire to "paint men and women faithfully" implies that, inasmuch as his plays are religious, Jones was attempting to engage with the spiritual beliefs of real men and women and

thus portray religion in a way that approached real-world religious practices. For all three, true or beautiful representation was incompatible with dogmatism, and accordingly, their plays were frequently seen as being true imitations of life.

VII. Methodology

This dissertation focuses on the historic moment of the *fin de siècle* and the syncretic stage's investment in and portrayal of different faith traditions. While most accounts of religion and theatre draw on ritual theory and practice, particularly as explained by Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992),[3] my account is more historically situated and text based, and less theoretical. Instead, my dissertation builds on the work of scholars with a historicist bent, like Michael R. Booth, Jacky Bratton, and J.P. Wearing in theatre, who study the cultural importance and impact of nineteenth-century theatre, and Hugh McLeod, Timothy Larsen, and Callum G. Brown in religion, who study religion in concrete, historically specific terms. As for theory, my work is indebted to scholarship by the likes of Rita Felski as I examine how literature and the theatre produced meaning, particularly in its exploration of how these religious explorations foster recognition. This recognition is not just a narcissistic gazing inward, but rather a method of self-knowledge or, in my study, societal and cultural knowledge. This is particularly salient for the syncretic stage because, according to Felski in *Uses of Literature*, recognition often leads people to look beyond themselves and recognize their larger group affiliations—recognize the "we" rather than just the narcissistic "I" (35). As recognition breeds

[3] In Bell's groundbreaking book, she discusses how ritual and religion interact. Her study has had particular resonances in theatre and performance studies as she describes ritual as "both activity and the fusion of thought and activity," and ritualization involves a dichotomy between "a thinking theorist and an acting actor" that is "simultaneously affirmed and resolved" (31). In other words, ritual must be both metaphysical and embodied, and theatre and performance therefore are natural associates because theatre is necessarily an embodiment of ideas.

commonality, Felski goes on to argue that this can also advance "an ethical and political claim for acknowledgment" (36). In other words, recognition is not just about turning inward; it is also about turning outward into the world. This might also be a form of "self-extension," the reader recognizing himself in the "distant or strange" (39). Therefore, according to Felski's theories, recognition produces not only self-knowledge, but also knowledge about the larger community, which can lead to a communion of sorts between different people.

Writ broadly, that is what the syncretic stage was aiming at—to explore different faiths and traditions to discover what, if any, commonality joined the disparate religious groups and factions. While the syncretic stage primarily explored different denominations of Christianity, there were occasional other portrayals too, such as Pinero's depiction of Jewishness. While a comprehensive examination of all the depictions of religion and religious beliefs on the syncretic stage is too broad a topic for one dissertation to fully explore, this project does do a fairly comprehensive exploration with the three most popular and prolific playwrights of the *fin de siècle:* namely Jones, Pinero, and Wilde, writers who had an inordinately large impact on late-Victorian culture. They were not fringe or avant-garde dramatists, but rather those that the general public embraced. Together, they spearheaded the renaissance of the popular theatre, and at the forefront of this renaissance was the new visibility of religion and religious inquiry.

VIII. Outline of Chapters

This dissertation will start with the relatively unknown Henry Arthur Jones, the playwright whose 1884 play *Saints and Sinners* proved seminal to the syncretic stage, then discuss Arthur Wing Pinero, arguably the most syncretic and subtle of the writers examined here,

and finally end with Wilde, the most famous of the three authors whose works were also the most focused in their religious examination.

Jones's absence from the canon would perhaps surprise a *fin de siècle* theatregoer: at the turn of the twentieth century, few playwrights had a more secure reputation than Henry Arthur Jones. Since 1882, his plays had been seen on stages in London, New York, and continental Europe, and he was widely credited with writing one of the era's finest melodramas (*The Silver King),* comedies *(The Liars),* and social problem plays (*Mrs. Dane's Defence*). As Colette Lindroth writes, Jones was a "true pioneer" who became one of the "best-known dramatists of the late nineteenth century" through reforming the stage and delivering a new type of drama to the English people (238, 237). Jones's career was lengthy—spanning from the early 1880s to his death in 1929—and voluminous, and Jones's influence was felt in genres as disparate as melodrama, drama, and comedy. Throughout his career, Jones wrote nearly one hundred plays as well as various pamphlets, lectures, and essays (Doris Jones 411-424), with over fifty of his plays ultimately being produced (Lindroth 244). Richard A. Cordell perhaps best summarized his legacy in his 1932 book *Henry Arthur Jones and the Modern Drama* by claiming that Jones "found the contemporary English drama insignificant, puerile; he left it respected, flourishing, and mature" (253).

Yet few theatrical anthologies include his works, and his best plays have been lost to all but a handful of theatre specialists. Instead, Henry Arthur Jones is best known today for his role in promoting the works of George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen, even though his early career was marred by an ill-fated attempt to rewrite Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.[4] With the onset of

[4] Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman, the cowriters behind the melodramatic success *The Silver King* (1882), paired again to write *Breaking a Butterfly,* an adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House.* It was produced on March 3rd, 1884, at the Prince's Theatre. Though Jones would later

Modernism and the inclusion of literary and theatrical studies in the academic canon, Henry Arthur Jones was retroactively confined to the fringes of the very culture that he instigated. Though many of his plays now appear "dated" or "old-fashioned" (Lindroth 238, Griffin 20), he encouraged the proto-Modernism of his contemporaries, and it is for these moves that he is best remembered today.

While the Modernist interpretation of Jones's works still holds influence, a small cadre of modern scholars have begun reassessing Jones's literary merit. Peter Raby, for example, says that Jones has "patches of class and sparkle" (193), and Colette Lindroth writes that he was instrumental in forming "the vanguard of new realism and sophistication for the drama" (244). More importantly, most modern scholars now recognize the debt owed to Jones and his friend Pinero, as they were the dominant "*serious* playwrights [sic]" whose plays were "stimulants for thought" in an era that had been largely preceded by drama that lacked artistic merit (Wellwarth 30).

Jones's contributions to the syncretic stage are particularly notable because they straddle the secular, progressive concerns of his playwriting contemporaries and the popular, populist concerns of late-Victorian British society. As an artist, Jones's success was surprising because he was so resolutely middle class and thoroughly and unremittingly *British*. According to Clayton Hamilton, a near-contemporary critic and editor, Jones was "more characteristically English than any other of the leading playwrights of his time" (*Representative Works, Vol. I* xxvi), and he "is also thoroughly representative of that great middle class which is justly regarded as the backbone of the nation" (xxvii). In other words, Jones's works were much more representative of the ways average people lived, worked, and interacted with each other, a

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insist that Ibsen's plays were not influential on his own work, he did say that *Breaking a Butterfly* was "hack-work" (Doris Jones 87).

truism attested to not only by Hamilton's words but also by the popular success of his works. While some critics consider this a flaw, Michael Booth defends Jones by writing, "Yet Jones was only expressing the mores and social concerns of his day, and it is unfair to criticize him for not fearlessly rejecting them" (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 175). Colette Lindroth goes further by claiming that Jones was remarkable in "his ability to present the English middle class, particularly, as worthy of serious artistic attention" (245), a notable distinction from his now-more-famous contemporaries.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his middle class ethos, religion plays a major thematic role in most of Jones's works. Many of his plays, including *Judah* and *Michael and His Lost Angel,* directly revolve around religion and the clergy, and even in works that are less invested in the theology and practice of religion, like *The Case of Rebellious Susan* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* faith still plays a crucial role in determining character's actions and fates. For Jones's characters, religion is not an incidental component of their lives—it is a living practice that determines their beliefs and actions.

However, throughout Jones's career, his interest in religion changed, and he used his works to explore religion and faith with a good deal of theological and doctrinal flexibility. While his early plays appear today to be pious and melodramatic, they were in fact bold and daring in their ability to depict, and even criticize, religion and religious practitioners. Meanwhile, in Jones's mid-career heyday, he presented two different views of religion: both an idealistic, doomed version of faith with implicit Roman Catholic inflections, and a pragmatic, efficacious vision indebted to the increasing tolerance of Anglicanism, particularly High Church Anglicanism. Throughout these early and mid-career plays, Jones appears to search for—and

arguably even find—a balance wherein he ultimately supports and promotes religion while also seeing, and accepting, its limitations.

More importantly, Jones's religious inquiries and criticism hint not only at his own ambivalence, but also at the wider ambivalences and contradictions of the larger British society, too. Jones was, of course, noted for his middle-class values and ideas, and his plays found popular favor with the public. All of the plays studied in the Jones chapter were designed for the commercial theatre and, indeed, with only one exception, these plays *were* commercially successful.[5] Their success and popularity indicates the intense interest the play-going public had in depictions of religion on stage, and taken together as a corpus, they portray the mutability and plurality of middleclass faith. As the most middleclass and quintessentially English of the era's playwrights, Jones's works reveal how the syncretic stage freely flitted between denominational traditions, historical rituals, and modern skepticism to forge a new path towards finding something approaching universal truth.

As for Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934), his background was more sophisticated and urbane than Jones's, and his characters largely reflect the author's more upper class status. According to his biographer John Dawick, Pinero was singular in his questioning of respectability from "within" (xvii). Pinero was from an upper middleclass family of lawyers who were Anglican in religion, though of Sephardic Jewish heritage. Pinero himself trained as a lawyer like his father, though he found the life stifling. Pinero alone among the playwrights studied here had theatrical beginnings as an actor, and after writing and performing in his own original plays for an amateur elocution class, he determined to try his hand in a professional

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[5] The one commercially unsuccessful play examined in the Jones chapter was also Jones's favorite, *Michael and His Lost Angel*. Notably, though, the play was designed for the commercial stage, and there is considerable evidence that it might have been commercially successful had it been allowed to run normally. See chapter one for more details.

troupe (5-24). In 1874, Pinero joined the Theatre Royal of Edinburgh as a utility actor, the first of several troupes he would join in a performing career that would eventually see him acting opposite the great Henry Irving (24-56). It was through the connections that he made as an actor that Pinero was first invited to write plays for a paying audience, with his 1877 comedietta £*200 a Year* serving as a curtain raiser at a Globe benefit (56-57). Thus Pinero's career as a playwright was born, a career that would span well into the twentieth century and see the production of almost sixty full-length plays (xviii-xix).

Even more so than Jones, Pinero was the "major playwright" of the 1880s and 1890s (Bratton vii), and he forms something of a critical bridge between the now-obscure Jones and the still-famous Wilde. Pinero's works are still occasionally performed and staged, and recently his works have had something of a renaissance, with major productions occurring at the Royal National Theatre, the Rose Theatre, and the Donmar Warehouse, among others.

While Pinero's works still have sway today, there is no doubt that they exerted a much more tremendous influence during his own time. Indeed, the production of Pinero's 1893 play *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is often credited as being *the* genesis of the modern British drama. It elicited a "sensational" response from its audience (Gerwitz 307), and Pinero's contemporary F.S. Boas said in a reminiscence, "[P]erhaps only those of us who saw the play during its first London run can realize the thrill that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* gave to the theatrical world of forty years ago" (260). Undeniably, it is almost impossible to overstate the influence of Pinero's play. Regarding the play's critical reception, John Dawick writes, "It is doubtful whether any English play since has received overall a more rapturous press" (194). When the curtain fell on the opening night of *Tanqueray,* a new type of English theatre had been born.

This type of theatre was decidedly modern. If Jones was still occasionally stuck writing in outdated forms like melodrama, then Pinero was the supreme technician who pushed the boundaries of English theatre. With *Tanqueray,* Pinero invented a new type of play that eschewed asides and soliloquies and sought to ground a character's actions in their psychology. This theatre was self-consciously *un*melodramatic, and it was crafted precisely, with detailed stage directions specifically setting the scene. Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Clayton Hamilton more fully explains *Tanqueray's* seminal nature:

> The existence of that modern drama in the English language to which it is now possible to point with pride was established at a date which is absolutely definite. The modern English drama was ushered into being on the night of May 27th, 1893, when *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, by Arthur Wing Pinero, was acted for the first time on the stage of the St. James's Theatre in London. This ambitious and successful composition was immediately recognized as the greatest play, originally written in the English language, that had been produced on any stage in the English-speaking world since the night of May 8th, 1777—the date of the first performance of *The School for Scandal. . . .* It is now possible to assert with certainty that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* at the time of its original production, was the *only* great play that had been written in the English language for one hundred and sixteen years. ("General Introduction" in *The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Vol. 1* 3)

With *Tanqueray,* Pinero led the movement to reform the British stage and instigated changes that every successive dramatist would have to follow.

In the midst of all the other changes that *Tanqueray* started, its subtle examination of Roman Catholicism has gone largely unstudied. This is especially curious as Pinero is often critically noted for his strong women and his feminist themes, and in *Tanqueray,* this feminism is tied to Catholicism. Perhaps this is not shocking, though, as the religious explorations in all of Pinero's works have been almost entirely overlooked in favor of investigating his feminist themes—despite the fact that Pinero often infuses his feminism with various strains of Christianity. Throughout Pinero's oeuvre, he depicts feminism as being tied to Christianity, a connection that is highlighted by contrasting it with his portrayal of Judaism, which he ties to masculinity. In works ranging from the comic *The Amazons* (1893) to the serious *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), Pinero showed the stakes of faith through his female characters.

Unlike Jones and Pinero, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) almost needs no introduction—his works are still part of the canon, and his memory plays a large role in the modern public consciousness. His works, which include plays, novels, poems, short stories, and essays, are regularly staged and reprinted, and his life is a subject of fascination. Movies like *Wilde* (1997) keep his biography and fate in the collective consciousness, and plays like Moises Kaufman's *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1997) are regularly restaged.

Recently, Wilde scholarship has begun looking at the religious implications of his work, particularly as it applies to Roman Catholicism. In addition to traditional studies of performance theory, aesthetics, and of course, queer and gender studies, recent study has been flooded with religious readings of Wilde's works. According to Frederick Roden, "Approaches to Wilde studies concerning questions of Christianity have blossomed" in recent years, and specifically, scholarship has focused on the impact of Wilde's lifelong flirtation and deathbed conversion to Roman Catholicism (212). According to Vyvyan Holland, the writer's son, Wilde "had an

intense leaning towards religious mysticism and was strongly attracted to the Catholic Church" (12).

The quest to understand why Wilde, who was raised a wealthy Anglican in an upper class Irish family, would be fascinated with Catholicism has consumed many recent scholarly studies. However, most scholars studying religion do not look at Wilde's comedies and instead look at works like *De Profundis, The Picture of Dorian Gray,* and his poetry. But the theatrical society comedies serve a crucial role in laying out Wilde's investments in religion. Arguably even more so than Jones or Pinero, Wilde was at the forefront of creating the syncretic stage, and his plays have a narrower, more pointed focus. Wilde used his comedic society plays to outline and clarify his own interpretation of *fin de siècle* Christianity, and in Wilde's portrayal, sin and penance are reimagined, and the faithful sinners—all paradox intended—are rewarded both materially and spiritually. Though Wilde's ideas changed and grew, a transformation that is evidenced in the plays, he continuously endorsed a religion that promoted individualism, pleasure, and compassion while simultaneously redefining the meaning of sin and repentance. In his theatrical comedies, Wilde used the stage, the most popular medium of his day, to explore his own idiosyncratic, Catholic-inflected approach to Christianity.

The works of Jones, Pinero, and Wilde deserve to be studied together because they formed the vanguard of the *popular* new drama, a vanguard that owes part of its genesis to religious concerns and the desire to put faith into dialogue with the larger culture. On that front, these three men excelled brilliantly. Not only did they find fortune and fame on the stage, but they forever transformed the style and themes of drama. In the works of Jones, Pinero, and Wilde, serious explorations concerning faith, duty, family, and religion abound. Their portrayals of religion and the religious life range from the zany (the *deus ex machina* of the baptismal scene

in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest)* to the silly (the upright minister forced to secretly bet on a horse race to save his church's bell tower in Pinero's *Dandy Dick)* to the serious (Reverend Michael wrestling with how to reconcile love for God with illicit love in Jones's *Michael and His Lost Angel)*. Their portrayals of faith are far ranging and complex, and they do not stick with one vantage, viewpoint, or denomination.

Instead, they formed the syncretic stage. In the late-nineteenth century, Jones, Pinero, and Wilde forged a new type of theatre that combined the comedic with the serious, the high with the low, and the secular with the sacred, and this syncretic staging led to the formation of a new type of English drama that profoundly influenced Anglophone theatre throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. According to postsecular scholar Christian Smith, "Religious moral orders seem to answer certain recurrently pressing, core existential questions" (104), and Jones, Pinero, and Wilde probed these subjects through the most visible means of their day—the theatre.

IX: The Ecumenical, Enchanted Stage

Though this dissertation necessarily focuses on the printed word of the theatrical scripts, one final comment about the role these plays performed as staged, embodied texts remains to be said. By putting their works onstage, these three playwrights moved beyond the religious discussions on the page by making their queries fundamentally ecumenical. According to J.L. Styan, seeing plays is necessarily a shared, collective experience, and that separates it from reading. "Drama is a social activity," he writes (*The Dramatic Experience* 2), and "[i]n the true magic of the theatre . . . the good dramatist . . . grants his audience some common material of human life for recognition and understanding for the exercise of that unique faculty of sharing

the experience with others" (29). He goes on to compare an audience with a congregation. He continues, "The congregation in a church and the audience in a cinema may both be a mixture of all sorts of people, but their purpose in meeting together in a church for worship and in a cinema for entertainment affects everything" (15). This collective gathering leads to a shared feeling, with the best plays making the audience feel "spiritually involved; not just the jury, but the prisoner in the dock" (36). Though the plays studied in this dissertation were published and were not originally designed to be read at home, they were crafted as staged works, complete with the shared, collective experiences and emotions of the audience, a collective affect that mimics the collective emotional experience of a congregation in a church. This is ecumenism at its broadest—this is the catholic body of the audience collectively empathizing with the bodies on the stage, whether they are Catholic or Protestant, man or woman, sinner or saint.

The stage also had the capacity to make the immanent world re-enchanted in a way that simply reading could not, and many of these playwrights' explorations bridged the spiritual/material divide. According to Charles Taylor, secularization is marked not just by unbelief, but a reframing of life as having a strict division between the transcendent and the immanent, a division that disenchants the material world.[6] As a number of scholars have recently discussed, the nineteenth century was an era where the material world lost its capacity for magic, with scientific rationalism replacing older ways of viewing the world. However,

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[6] Much of Taylor's magnus opus *A Secular Age* concerns the connection between secularization and what he calls the "immanent frame." One of his most succinct definitions about the disenchantment of the immanent reads as follows: "The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained in its own terms, leaving open the questions whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the 'immanent' involved denying—or at least isolating—problematizing—any form of interpretation between the things of Nature, on one hand, and the 'supernatural' on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever" (16).

certain pieces of *fin de siècle* literature sought to re-enchant the material world—or at least question the assumption of scientific rationality that underlined the death of mystery and magic. Writing on Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* for example, Alison Milbank claims that the ending seeks to reconnect "the material and the physical with its source in Divine creation" (293), and writing on Wilde's essays, Joseph McQueen says that Wilde's aesthetics "challenged" the notion that "moral and spiritual meaning reside in human souls alone, not the external world" (872).

Perhaps it is no surprise that the two aforementioned authors both had strong ties to the theatre,[7] as theatre is necessarily embodied and immanent. However, theatre, and all of its accouterments, often transcends the merely immanent. Coleridge's idea that the audience engages in a "willing suspension of disbelief" blurs the line between the real and the unreal, and plays are supposed "to produce a sort of temporary half-faith," something resembling a "dream," where the impossible perhaps becomes reality and where the physical and the metaphysical collide (qtd. in Carlson 221). On the stage, audiences see real, embodied actors, and the performer uses "his whole body in the service of his mind," and to "speak and move to words is to create life, although on the page they may seem dead" (Styan, *The Dramatic Experience* 128). Even the space and objects surrounding the actors transcends the simply immanent, and Andrew Sofer, writing about stage props, says that these "objects accrue intertextual resonance as they absorb and embody the theatrical past," and when a prop is used in a show, "it uncannily becomes at once itself and other than itself" (2, 29). In short, the theatre—including the actors, the scenery, props, and even the audience—becomes a space where enchantment is possible, where the sublime and the mundane, the material and the spiritual, and the immanent and the transcendent, meet, collide, and divide.

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[7] Though Stoker is primarily remembered today as a novelist, his primary profession was as manager of Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre.

The syncretic stage thus worked on the theatrical, embodied level, as well as the textual, literary level. Both onstage and in print, the syncretic stage worked to enchant, frustrate, astonish, and motivate its readers and audiences. The theatre's transformation is one of the most striking examples of the changes occurring at the end of the century, and the *fin de siècle* was tumultuous, vibrant, and paradoxical. When the Rev. Stewart Headlam started the Church and Stage Guild in 1879, he had no idea that his society's mission would be rendered obsolete, a relic of the past, in just a few decades. For in the *fin de siècle,* the syncretic stage itself became one of the most vibrant venues for ecumenical religion, a phenomenon that not only challenges the common conception of the secularization of the late-Victorian stage, but also of the larger culture.

CHAPTER 1:

THEATRICAL GENRE AND STAGED CHRISTIAN VALUES:

THE PLAYS OF HENRY ARTHUR JONES

"The question of the right of dramatists to faithfully depict modern religious life is only part of the much wider and more general question of their right and duty and ability to deal faithfully with whatsoever aspect they try to depict of the huge unwieldy mass of modern human life. That larger right and duty indubitably contains the smaller; nay, cannot in any way be detached from it."

--Henry Arthur Jones, "Religion and the Stage," p. 142

If modern English drama had its inception on the opening night of Arthur Wing Pinero's 1893 play *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* then the syncretic stage likewise had a firm start date: at the premiere of Henry Arthur Jones's new play *Saints and Sinners* at the Vaudeville Theatre on September 25th, 1884. Its plot—a seduction drama—was quotidian, but its execution was novel. In *Saints and Sinners,* Jones portrayed Evangelical religion ambivalently, and he courted controversy, even censorship, with his Scriptural quotes and his confession scene set in a vestry (Jones "Preface" xx). The play's innovation and originality were recognized almost immediately, though not all appreciated Jones's work. Writing on its opening night reception at the Theatre Royal, Margate (where the play had previewed for three nights before transferring to London), Jones wrote,

> A very uproarious farce had previously been running at the London theatre where *Saints and Sinners* was announced for production on the following Thursday. The Margate audience assembled with the expectation of a repetition of the broad nonsense which such an association promised. They showed a certain amount of interest, but their chief feeling was one of puzzled and somewhat shocked *uneasiness* and *discomfort* [emphasis added]. ("Preface" *Saints and Sinners* xx).

This discomfort and uneasiness was also hinted at in the play's reviews, with *The Glasgow Herald* (26 September 1884) saying that the play was "eventually warmly" received by that night's audience despite the fact that they were "evidently disposed to be critical" ("*Saints and Sinners"),* and *The Era* (27 September 1884) writing that the play "was sure to awaken painful feelings" because even "milder examples of scriptural allusions" had previously led to "scenes of angry revolt" and that this would be "certain to check the popularity it might have enjoyed" ("*Saints and Sinners"*).

The Era's assessment was incorrect: the play was a popular and commercial success.[8] Yet this success did not assuage the ambivalence many felt about *Saints and Sinners.* For large portions of critics and audience members, Jones's equivocal portrayal of Evangelical Christianity was shocking, particularly as they were unused to *any* depictions of religion because the Lord Chamberlain's office had had a longstanding ban on the portrayal of most religious topics, and the licensing of *Saints and Sinners* was a "breach" from protocol (Woodfield 110). Though the play follows the seduction of a minister's daughter named Letty, the controversy arose out of the conflict between her father Jacob, a Dissenting pastor who is portrayed as pious, kind, and

[8] *Saints and Sinners* had an initial run of 182 nights followed by an American run in New York in 1885 and a London revival in 1892 (Doris Jones 414).

decent, and the deacon Hoggard, a mercenary and punitive hypocrite. The confession scene, wherein Jacob confesses his daughter's fall to his congregation in response to a blackmail attempt by Hoggard, highlighted the ambiguous portrayal of religion, as the virtuous Jacob and the unrighteous Hoggard face off in the church's vestry, thus visibly encapsulating the theme of the play's title by showing that the church is home to both saints and sinners.

It was this change—the depiction of religious people and religious values, in all of their complexities and contradictions—that made possible the later portrayals of the syncretic stage by playwrights and producers like Pinero, Wilde, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Wilson Barrett, among others. *Saints and Sinners* proved seminal for religion and theatre in publication as well, with Jones authoring a soon-to-be famous preface to its 1891 printing wherein he argued that a playwright should have the right to stage "a scene in which a great body of his countrymen constantly figure one day in seven and which is of the utmost significance in the general sum of English life" (xx). This idea that incorporation of religion and religious belief was necessary to portray people fully and accurately was absorbed into the *ethos* of the syncretic stage, and the production of Jones's *Saints and Sinners* became the turning point wherein religion became a subject of vital inquiry in the *fin de siècle* theatrical scene.

Jones's oeuvre also illuminates the larger issues at stake on the syncretic stage, with the change in the visibility of religion being matched by the plethora of religions portrayed. Jones's works in particular display the syncretic nature of Christian denominations of late-Victorian society, and he used various theatrical genres to explore different denominations. Jones's use of genre highlights what he saw as the various strengths and weaknesses of certain Christian denominations—for Evangelical Christianity, melodrama best suited his depiction of a religion marked by extremes of behavior; for Catholicism, drama and tragedy best fit his portrayal of a

religion that people turn to for spiritual comfort when earthly comfort is no longer possible; and for moderate orthodox religion, presumably Anglicanism, comedy was the mode that he used to explore its limited efficacy. Throughout his plays of the 1880s and 1890s, Jones used genre to explore the syncretic Victorian religious responses to the exigencies of both the secular and Christian world.

Biographical Sketch

Unlike the patrician Oscar Wilde or the genteel Arthur Wing Pinero, Jones was born into a decidedly lower-middle-class family, and his work was steeped in middleclass British concerns. Born in Buckinghamshire to a farming family of Welsh extraction, Jones attended school only from the ages of five to twelve (Doris Jones 25-30). After that he became a draper's apprentice to his uncle, a stern Baptist, and his education was entirely self-directed from this point onwards (31-33). Jones was not raised among artists, and indeed, he did not see his first play until he was eighteen when he moved to London to pursue career advancements as a warehouse worker and eventually as a commercial traveler for the textile industry (31-38).

Jones was thus differentiated from his contemporaries in upbringing and class, and his cultural *ethos* was steeped in lower-middle-class values like hard work, thrift, and piety. His call to the theatre was also entirely self-directed, and despite his lack of formal education, Jones began writing one-act plays and performing in amateur theatricals after becoming enthralled by his first theatrical experiences (31-38). In her biography of him, Jones's daughter Doris describes his hard-scrabble life during those early years and details the sacrifices her father undertook to pursue his art:

> To indulge his love of the theatre he underwent a certain amount of privation, often going without his meals to have the price of a theatre ticket, and doing without little necessaries to buy books . . . which he read during the long railway journeys. He believed that it was during these years, through scanty and insufficient meals, that he laid the foundations of the ill-health for which he suffered for so long. (38-39)

Russell Jackson summarizes the effect Jones's early life had on his art by writing, "The career of Henry Arthur Jones was a model Victorian success story. He rose from a lower-middle-class, provincial, and nonconformist family, was to a great extent self-educated and never lost the diligence and earnestness inculcated by his upbringing" (1). Like Charles Dickens before him, Jones was a man of and from the middle class. He was a man not dissimilar to millions of other young Britons born into shabby, though not abject, poverty who longed to create a better life for themselves and who rose through the ranks through employing the middle-class values of hard work, tenacity, and self-improvement, values that were promoted by the prevailing middle-class Protestant culture.

I. Evangelical Melodrama: The Plays of the 1880s

The tensions that would be overtly present in Jones's most sophisticated and popular works are partially obscured in his earliest commercial successes. When Jones started gaining prominence in the early 1880s, melodrama was the main type of original, full-length theatrical

production that was commercially successful.[9] While Shakespeare and the classics were still popular and music halls were filled with parodies, revues, and sketches, the contemporary dramatist generally had to turn to melodrama to get their works produced. For years, the stage had been dominated by spectacularly staged melodramas like Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), which focused on the marriage and attempted murder of a wealthy heiress, Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan* (1829), a nautical comedy about a sailor whose wife is falsely led to believe he is dead so that the villain can seduce her, and Tom Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863), a play about a man wrongfully accused of forgery and sent to jail. Carolyn Williams and other scholars have argued that melodrama relies on black-and-white morality with providence and chance encounters leading to a happy ending wherein the injustices of the world are fixed through a cathartic and karmic resolution on the stage (203-204).

One of Jones's main innovations to the melodramatic formula was to reframe the focus of the action from external elements to internal crises. Carolyn Williams notes that the melodramatic experience was marked by "periods of suspenseful absorption pierced by intensified moments of shock, terror, or sentiment" (194), an intensity that was often marked by spectacular pieces of stagecraft. Jones, though, eschewed spectacle and instead made emotional passages the height of his drama. In several of his works, the emotional drama coalesces around religion and religious conversion, and in his first major theatrical hit, *The Silver King* (1882), Jones makes religion one of the key focal points through his use of a morally mutable hero. Paradoxically, this mutability made religion both more important *and* something that could not necessarily be taken as a given.

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[9] Michael R. Booth writes that "the endurance of melodrama in popular favour is striking, since it remained a dominant form of theatrical entertainment for a hundred years, and is the nineteenth century's unique contribution to the English drama" (Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* 151).

In *The Silver King,* Jones portrayed something that Callum G. Brown refers to as the "evangelical narrative." Though Brown does not tie the narrative to the theatre, he discusses its prominence in Victorian discourses. According to Brown, the evangelical narrative held great sway from about 1850 and 1930, and it often focused on a dissolute husband whose pious wife and children suffered in poverty and neglect until a chance encounter or event helped lead the sinning husband to Christian conversion (105-108). This conversion made the evangelical-narrative hero different from the conventional melodramatic hero, who was generally portrayed "so earnest and dutiful that he often seems naïve" (Williams 203). Rather than being portrayed on the stage, these evangelical narratives were disseminated through journals, articles, autobiographies, obituaries, and oral reports and diary entries of life stories (Brown 108-127).

However, the stage proved an ideal medium for the evangelical narrative, and *The Silver King* made Jones's name and fortune.[10] Writing in 1925, Clayton Hamilton called it "the most famous English melodrama of the nineteenth century" (*Vol. I* xxxvi), high praise indeed for a century marked by the popular success of melodrama. *The Silver King* set the precedent for Jones's depiction of the clash between religious and secular values, with the evangelical narrative at the heart of the play. This play centers on the dissipated Wilfred Denver, a paragon of Jones's new type of morally mutable hero. The plot is a classic story of a prodigal: Denver is an alcoholic who gambles away all of his money in one ill-fated bet. Geoffrey Ware, Denver's wife Nelly's former fiancé, witnesses his abjection and tells Denver that Nelly should have

[10] The play opened on November 16th, 1882, at the Princess's Theatre with actor/manager Wilson Barrett at the helm (Doris Jones 413). The play was an immediate commercial and critical success, running for 289 nights during its initial run with a subsequent run in New York and several revivals. Additionally, Jones made a small fortune— £3000—from its initial run (Doris Jones 75, 63). It also had a long-lasting influence, and according to Jones near the end of his life, it was "always being played somewhere in the English-speaking world" (qtd. in Doris Jones 64). After opening in 1882, it was revived several times, and it was made into two movies before 1930 (75).

married him instead. In response, the inebriated Denver vows to kill Ware. Later that night Denver arrives at Ware's house, ostensibly to make good on his threat. Unbeknownst to Denver, a band of thieves, including a man named Skinner ("the Spider"), are in the process of robbing the absent Ware's house. When Denver inadvertently interrupts the bandits, Skinner chloroforms him. Skinner then shoots the returning Ware, and when Denver awakens, he presumes that it is he who killed Ware. He flees, taking all of his family's money with them. The police pursue Denver onto a train, and moments after he jumps from it to escape them, the train crashes, with Denver being presumed to be among the dead.

The second half of the play revolves around the return and redemption of the prodigal Denver. Act three opens four years after the first two acts have passed, and all of the major characters have undergone transformations: Denver has become rich in the silver mines of Nevada—hence the play's title—Skinner is now a wealthy landowner, and Nelly and their children are almost starving and living on Skinner's land (incredibly, Skinner does not know whose widow she is). Meanwhile, Denver secretly returns home. He has been in Nevada working in a silver mine, and he is now extremely rich. His newly-silver hair is an outward symbol both of his changed fortunes and his reformed morality. Gone are his days of drinking and dissipation; he is now a humbled, penitent man searching for redemption as he is still riddled with guilt over Ware's murder. His guilt is exacerbated when he discovers the living conditions of his wife and children, and he secretly enlists the help of a family friend to give his family gifts and keep them from starving.

The evangelical narrative centers on prodigality, and Denver is a quintessential version of the evangelical hero who must repent and reform. While Jones's depiction of a wrongfully-accused innocent man bears superficial resemblance to other characters portrayed on the

melodramatic stage, where *The Silver King* differed was that its hero is morally guilty as Denver actually *did* intend to murder Ware. Unlike the legally-implicated but morally-innocent heroes of plays like Tom Taylor's *The-Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863) and George R. Sim's *The Lights o' London* (1881), Denver must internally change, thus changing the conventions of the melodramatic formula.

Though there is an implicit association with faith in the evangelical narrative, Jones makes faith's role explicit in his staging. When Denver returns home at the beginning of Act III, for example, his entrance is preceded by a children's choir singing a hymn about forgiveness, and Denver's first line is, "Repentance, Pardon, Peace! The old, old message! The sweet old message! That must be for me—yes—even for me" (71). The staging and the lines work together here to cast Denver's hope and return as specifically Christian. Writing on the staging of this scene, reviewer Edward B. Aveling described in the *Progress* (1883) that "[t]he movement of the lips of the man [i.e. Denver] listening to them [i.e. the singing children], and silently joining in their hymn, is an artistic touch due to the actor that aids greatly [to] the delicacy of the fancy" (n.p.) Here Denver's silent mouthing of the hymn signals his joining of the Christian fold, a faith to which he had heretofore been unable to commit. The singing of the hymn thus signifies that religion is central to Denver's recuperation, and it shifts the focus of the play from external elements of spectacle to internal elements of contrition and conversion.

The play reaches its climax when Denver infiltrates Skinner's gang and uncovers the truth that he did not, in fact, kill Ware. When he discovers the truth, Denver cries out, "Ah! Innocent! Innocent! Thank God!" (Jones *The Silver King* 94), a linguistic appeal to the

Almighty that he only uses in cases of extreme emotional turmoil.[11] His invocation of God highlights the need for conversion, which was foreshadowed from the beginning when Denver expressed remorse for his crimes, a remorse that is often phrased as a divine appeal.[12] At the conclusion, *The Silver King* fulfills the mandates of the evangelical narrative by having justice served (Skinner is arrested for Ware's murder) and through the reestablishment of the nuclear family.

The Silver King's story of sin and redemption highlights a curious aspect of the evangelical narrative, at least as depicted in Jones's work, wherein religion is paradoxically rendered more important *and* less important. Unlike in most other evangelical narratives, religious discourses do not fill the text; instead, faith is hardly mentioned before Denver's return in Act III, an absence that denotes the minimal function it plays in the hero's life. However, even before Denver's conversion and transformation, the audience is aware that, despite his dissipation and his threats of murder, he is the hero who is fundamentally a good person, albeit one who is not letting his better angels preside. This is notable—unlike previous melodramatic heroes, Denver's innate heroism is not predated by his upright morality and ostensible piety. Viewed in a certain context, Denver's inherent goodness lessens religion's influence because, as

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[11] Besides the occasional phrases of "God bless you," the only other times Denver uses God's name are in times of emotional distress. This includes the times when he believes he has murdered Ware ("My God! I've murdered him! (36)); when he discovers he has been convicted ("God! I can bear it no longer! Have mercy upon me, and end it now" (61)); and in revealing his anguish about the murder ("Sleep-oh! God! There is no sleep like the murderer's sleep! (118)).

[12] Denver expresses regret almost immediately by claiming, "There's blood upon my hands" (54), a regret that turns religious in the second act when he cries out, "Ah, Heaven, work out some way of escape for me—not for my own sake, not to shield me from the just consequences of my crime, but for the sake of my dear wife and innocent children who have never done any wrong. Spare me till I have atonement for the evil I have done" (61). When God ostensibly grants Denver his prayer via the train crash and Denver's presumed death, he thanks the Almighty, saying, "Merciful Father, Thou hast heard my prayer and given me my life. I take it to give it back to Thee" (62).

a stock heroic figure, Denver is *already* the noble hero. Conversely, by making Denver a flawed character whose religious conversion is paramount to his redemption, Jones makes religious faith a key component in his hero's development and thus makes religion *more* important than in previous melodramas. By creating an areligious hero who must visibly reclaim his faith, Jones fused melodramatic conventions, complete with their stock characters and black-and-white morality, with the evangelical narrative, a story centered on redemption, to paradoxically portray the need for religion while also displaying its possibly superfluity. This uneasy generic blending of melodrama and evangelical narrative may have been the reason some reviewers suspected that Jones "did not subscribe *toto coelo* to articles of the ordinary creed" and who thought that there was a "startling inconsistency" in its use of "religious myth" (Aveling n.p.).

This mixing of melodramatic and evangelical conventions is explicitly displayed in Act III and in the ensuing conversion scene. Act III opens with Skinner declaring that he will turn Denver's widow and children out of their house, and despite her current sufferings, Nelly declares that Denver was "always the best of husbands" (Jones *Silver King* 70). Her assertion makes her the ideal suffering wife of the Evangelical narrative, wherein the "wife and children suffer in poverty" (Brown 106). However, her statement also points to her belief in the innate goodness of her husband. When Denver appears again, his "hair almost white and his face warn" match his "grave and subdued manner," which contrasts with the "skipping, shouting, laughing" children who sing the hymn (Jones 71). Denver's sorrow and regret is melodramatically etched into his looks and demeanor, and thus his penance has begun even before he hears the hymn. As he repeats the children's final line of the song—"repentance, pardon, peace"—the audience can visibly see that the has already performed the first third of the conversion dictum (i.e.

"repentance"), though he needs the balm of religion and conversion before he can find "pardon" and "peace."

The necessity of religion in delivering Denver pardon and peace are alluded to in language and imagery throughout the act, and Jones portrays Denver's conversion in a distinctly evangelical light. After hearing the children sing, Denver approaches his daughter Cissy—who doesn't recognize him after his long absence—and sees through her how his wife and family have suffered in poverty and neglect. Denver refers to her as an "innocent lamb," a description ripe with Christian connotations, and he bemoans how the "sins of the father are visited upon the children," which is a Biblical allusion.[13] This overtly employs the conventions of the "male-centred" evangelical narrative as its relies upon the suffering of the man's family for its emotional punch (Brown 106). Jones ends the scene with the contradictions of his generic melding of the evangelical narrative and melodrama on full display—while Cissy describes her family's poverty and suffering, Denver fulfills the requirements of the evangelical narrative by resolving to convert. However, Cissy ingenuously tells the supposed stranger that she will never believe her father was a "bad man" because then her "mother wouldn't have been so fond of him" (73), this indicating that Denver's potential for goodness and morality precedes his religious conversion.

This paradoxical rendering of religion was highlighted by Jones's[14] innovative stage techniques, which eschewed melodramatic precedents. Victorian reviewers focused on the

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[13] Exodus 34:7 in the King James Bible reads, "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."

[14] It should be noted that *The Silver King* was written in collaboration with Henry Herman. The exact amount that Herman contributed to its creation is under dispute, though most critics

play's novel use of language and character development and its uncharacteristic use of subtlety. Unlike in previous melodramas, Jones's work was not visually spectacular, and the focus was not on overwhelming and awing the senses. Surprisingly, the train crash scene—a scene tailor made for melodramas—was only verbally reported as occurring, and it was not staged. This is an overt change from the razzle-dazzle of previous melodramas, and it was one much noted by critics: an anonymous reviewer for *The Theatre,* for example, wrote that *The Silver King* was "pitched in a much higher key than the ordinary melodramas of the day . . . [it] may not be confused with the sensational panoramas which nowadays so often pass for plays" (qtd. in Jackson 5-6), and Edward B. Aveling wrote that he hoped Henry Arthur Jones would continue to write plays that would "redeem the promise" of *The Silver King.* Most important was the criticism of Matthew Arnold who wrote in the *Pall Mall Gazette,* "The critics are right, therefore, in thinking that in this work they have something new and highly praiseworthy . . . . Messrs. Jones and Herman give them *literature*" (qtd. in Doris Jones 62-63, emphasis added).

As was discussed in the introduction, this word—"literature"—is itself noteworthy and has tacit religious overtones as print-mediated reading was often described in quasi-religious terms and took on sacred meanings. By making the claim that *The Silver King* was "literary," Matthew Arnold was also implicitly claiming the play as one that could have religious significances, a claim strengthened by Arnold's own connection to religiosity and literariness.[15]

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primarily cite Jones as the main creator. Jones himself claimed that Herman was most influential in forming the plot for the end of the second act—i.e. the train crash and Denver's subsequent realization that he is presumed dead—but that Herman "never wrote a line of it" (qtd. in Doris Jones 66). Like most critics, I am attributing the majority of the creative influence to Henry Arthur Jones. For more information, see pages 66-75 of Doris Jones's biography.

[15] According to Wayne Shumaker, Arnold had a "desire to substitute literature for ethics or religion" (386), though he maintained an admiration of religion and religious figures like Cardinal Newman. More importantly, he wanted to "illuminate and improve mankind" through "affirming the value of literature," and the "link between his criticism of literature and the use he

Moreover, as Charles LaPorte has further claimed, the act of reading was often conceived of as a religious practice in the Victorian era, with literary transportation becoming associated with spiritual mysticism. LaPorte continues, "To believe that texts can attain a sacred character is to raise the stakes of literature" (619), and thus a work that has claims as *literature* can attain religious and quasi-religious significations.

The assessment of *The Silver King's* literary merits continued throughout the early twentieth century, though without the Victorian penchant for conflating a work's literary qualities with religious significances. Richard A. Cordell writes one of the most laudatory praises of *The Silver King's* literary qualities while tartly dismissing its predecessors:

> Such was the [dilapidated] English stage when Jones gave *The Silver King* to the public in 1882: melodramas of sound and fury depending for success on equestrian episodes, collapsing bridges, real waterfalls; adaptations into English and French successes, with loss of charm of language and of any original moral or social significance; sentimental comedies by Byron larded with rank puns and other species of verbal quips; boring, solemn historical plays in verse by Wills and others which vied with the volumes of printed sermons of the time in attracting customers; and resurrections of the weary declamations of Lytton, the virile but unclear pieces of Charles Reade, and the namby-pamby comedies of Robertson. . . . *The Silver King,* freshly different from the sensational melodramas with its relatively clever dialogue, its attempts at characterization, its gripping

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wanted to make of the Bible is patent" as both were conduits of self-improvement and self-fulfillment (387).

> story, could not have come at a more propitious time for its author's reputation. (10-11)

Notably, Cordell places Jones's triumph in his masterful portrayal of dialogue and character, two emphases that removed the focus from the spectacle and instead focuses on a character's religious, spiritual, and moral growth. As time has progressed, critics have continued to recognize Jones's innovation—Russell Jackson writes, for example, "The new melodrama was remarkable for lively and unforced dialogue and honest character drawing (albeit along familiar lines). . . . There was no spectacular scenery, no sensational special effects . . ." (5)—but the religious association with these new dialogue-heavy and character-revealing melodramas has been lost. While Jones's melodramas seem hackneyed today, they were innovative at the time, not least in the way that they made religion, particularly the evangelical narrative, visible.

Jones's two other most popular and successful melodramas of the 1880s were both seduction dramas, a theatrical form that was particularly useful for showing the conflict between religious and secular values. Their commercial success indicates that the general public was eager to see plays that highlighted spiritual matters, and their runs gave Jones both critical and financial security. *Saints and Sinners* (1884), the most influential of the early melodramas, had long runs both in England and abroad.[16] It was also one of the first plays of the era to be published, with Macmillan printing copies of the play to be sold to the general public in 1891 (Doris Jones 414). Indeed, this was Jones's first play to be published for the general reading public, a move aided by the recent passing of the American Copyright Law, which preserved an

[16] *Saints and Sinners* played 182 nights at the Vaudeville Theatre starting in September of 1884, a production in New York City in 1885, and a revival at the Vaudeville in London in 1892 (Doris Jones 94).

author's stage rights in the United States even if a play was previously published in the UK (Doris Jones 94).

The Middleman (1889), Jones's other preeminent melodrama of the 1880s, was also hugely commercially successful both in England and abroad.[17] Arguably of greater importance was *The Middleman's* critical success, with Clayton Hamilton writing in a 1925 retrospective, "It was the best English play of its time, and it is still deserving of historical study" (*Representative Plays Vol. I* xliii). And while Jones later showed some embarrassment at the "old-fashioned" nature of his play, he wrote before its first publication in 1907 that he hoped "some excuse" might be found for "printing a play that has so long been popular on both sides of the Atlantic" (Jones, "To E.S. Willard," *Representative Plays Vol. I* 113), thus showing the play's longevity and continued popularity.

Like *The Silver King, The Middleman* is not overtly about religion, though its plot frequently examined both the benefits and pitfalls of evangelical morality. Though *The Middleman* was written after *Saints and Sinners,* the third and final play to be considered in this section, it is thematically and religiously more similar to *The Silver King.* Hence it is being briefly examined here before turning to the seminal *Saints and Sinners.* Unlike *The Silver King,* though, it is the villain character, the treacherous Joseph Chandler, who vocally espouses religious sentiments. His is a type of cynical evangelicalism wherein there is no indication he has faith or belief, but he can perform the motions of religion when it suits his purpose. His sanctimonious canting criticizes the political way church affiliation is employed, and in *The*

[17] It opened at London's Shaftesbury Theatre in 1889 before being produced in Amsterdam at the Municipal Theatre and the Palmer's Theatre in New York City in 1890. It also had two London revivals in quick succession (the Avenue Theatre in 1891 and the Comedy Theatre in 1894) as well as a New York revival (the Knickerbocker Theatre in 1905) (Doris Jones 415).

Middleman, Jones explores the ambivalences of the Evangelical movement—how it can be a source of succor and peace for some, but also how its language, methods, and beliefs can be coopted for narrowly dogmatic and hypocritical purposes.

In *The Middleman,* Joseph Chandler is a wealthy factory owner who is planning to run for Parliament, and part of his campaign strategy revolves around enlisting the support of various Christian denominations. To garner their support, he has donated money to build a new Congregational chapel, subscribed to the Wesleyan Sunday School, and donated to the Baptists. Notably, these were all denominations that had ties to the Evangelical movement,[18] and in outward appearances, Chandler is a model Evangelical: hardworking, prosperous, and generous. He embodies the quality that Max Weber would famously call the "Protestant work ethic."[19] In his usage, though, Chandler turns Evangelicalism into something sinister. He uses his various

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[18] David Bebbington notes how, at least in Great Britain, the movement "spanned the gulf between the Established Church and Nonconformity in England and Wales and has bound together bodies north and south of the Scottish border" and is "not to be equated with any single Christian denomination" (vii, 1). Many Protestant denominations were strongly influenced by the Evangelical movement, and Bebbington notes how they mainly stressed four characteristics: conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism (i.e. Christ's sacrifice on the cross). Bebbington goes on to note how Evangelical's played an outsized role in most social movements—including abolition and the women's rights movements—and often lead the way in education. This is an assessment with which Charles Taylor largely agrees. He writes that Evangelical Christianity "powered" an "ethic of discipline and decency, freedom and benevolence . . ." (395). However, Callum G. Brown also notes that Evangelical discourses and conducts "governed virtually all aspects of self-identity and expression" and that it was often "harsh and vindictive" in its applications (200).

[19] Max Weber famously noted how many Protestant and Evangelical traditions, particularly Calvinism, valued hard work, thrift, and prosperity, and that work itself came to be valued. Calvinists believed that God gave "a special command" to every person to fulfill certain duties because "Divine Providence has placed the believer in *this* [sic] position" and endowed Christians with certain gifts and talents that they were obligated to use (Weber 93). For the first time ever, work became "an end in itself," and thus "the Puritan *wanted* [sic] to be a person with a vocational calling" (Weber 79, 157). This idea morphed into what has come to be known as the "Protestant work ethic," a term championed by Max Weber in his study of Protestant beliefs and their role in the formation of modern capitalism.

ecumenical affiliations to gain political clout and power, a fact made obvious in his conversation with his business manager, Batty Todd:

> CHANDLER: I wish there weren't quite so many sects. It gives one a very poor opinion of religion.
>
> TODD: When you've got to subscribe to them all, it does. But you can't get into Parliament without it. (Jones *The Middleman* 123)

Chandler's alleged religious faith is a ruse meant to gain material power and wealth. While he financially supports various churches, his personal Christian faith is nonexistent. What Jones shows here is that this visible support of various belief systems and denominations is a marker of his insincerity and opportunism, not a meaningful malleable and pluralistic approach to faith.

In *The Middleman,* Jones explores the benefits and perils of an explicitly Evangelical approach to religion, and he displays how Protestant Evangelicalism can be prone to corruption and hypocrisy. This tendency is highlighted by the play's focus on money and economics, with the villainous Chandler making a fortune off the business invention of Cyrus Blenkarn, his employee. By keeping Cyrus reasonably financially secure, Chandler assuages his guilt about the stolen invention, and by actively promoting good works around town, Chandler engages in the Evangelical imperative to participate in activism and social betterment. Jones thus shows how Evangelical practices were often beneficial, but he also emphasizes a certain tendency towards rapaciousness and hypocrisy, a trait that he highlights when Chandler refuses to let his son marry Cyrus Blenkarn's daughter whom he has seduced.

While *The Middleman* primarily appears to critique Evangelical conduct, Jones obscures the message by having the larger play serve as an Evangelical conversion narrative. The play

ends with Blenkarn inventing yet a new process to make porcelain works that puts Chandler out of business, and Chandler suffers in poverty. The play ends with the seduced daughter and seducer son marrying and with Cyrus forgiving Chandler and agreeing to employ him as his plant's manager. Chandler's narrative arc enacts the standard evangelical narrative by encompassing sin, suffering, conversion, and forgiveness (though it should be noted that his apologies to Cyrus have a tinge of self-servingness about them, particularly as he needs Cyrus to employ him), which show how Evangelical behavior offers the chance for revitalization. Jones portrays this as restorative and healing. However, by making Chandler's prior behavior exemplify Evangelical greed and hypocrisy at its worst, Jones used melodramatic conventions to show the possible negative effects of Evangelical behavior.

Surprisingly, Cyrus also exemplifies the extremes of Evangelical behavior, though he begins the play as the perfect melodramatic victim whose passivity and naiveté render him unable to recognize and fight back against Chandler's malevolence. His extremity is first revealed when he tells his daughter Mary that it was a "pity" that another girl—also symbolically named Mary—"didn't die" before becoming a fallen woman, to which his daughter anxiously replies, "Yes, death is far better than such disgrace, isn't it?" (158). Unbeknownst to Cyrus, his daughter Mary has also fallen, and she runs away and pretends to be dead so as to save her father grief, which of course does not work. Not only does Cyrus discover his daughter's seduction, but he also castigates himself for his harsh words and attitudes. Cyrus's evolution from melodramatic victim to Evangelical hero (who must fall before he can rise) continues as Cyrus becomes an active character hell-bent on revenge against Chandler. As he works ceaselessly to invent a new porcelain-works process, his insistence of "Let me be! Let me be! I'm not mad!" rings hollow (179), and when he successfully invents a process that puts Chandler out of

business, he at first refuses to employ his former boss. He gives voice to his vengeance by saying, "They're in my hands! Their very bread is mine to give or to refuse them! I can punish them! I can humble them to the dust!" (193). The memory of his daughter's kindness finally compels him to forgive Chandler and have that instead serve as his "revenge" (194).

This Christian mercy is threatened, though, by the return of Captain Julian Chandler, the man who seduced Cyrus's daughter, and his new wife. Cyrus temporarily relapses into rage, his potential for forgiveness stretched too far. As he says to Chandler, "What did you let him come here for if you wanted me to forgive you?" (195). It isn't until Julian's new wife is revealed to be his daughter Mary that Cyrus can at last forgive those who wronged him, and Jones's ending stage directions state that Cyrus "snatches her [Mary] into his arms and cries like a child" (195). *The Middleman* ends by restoring the nuclear family both for Chandler and Cyrus, which is standard in the Evangelical narrative. However, by making it clear that Cyrus's Christian forgiveness is partial and perhaps even nonexistent without the restoration of the family, Jones implies that the moral lessons of the Evangelical narrative cannot withstand the trauma of losing hearth and home. In Jones's play, the evangelical narrative resembles a melodrama in that moral lessons rely on good fortune.

The uneasy melding of melodrama and evangelical narrative that Jones displayed in *The Silver King* and *The Middleman* was put to the forefront in 1884's *Saints and Sinners,* a play which had an ending that emphasized the tension between correlating moral lessons and familial restoration. Sandwiched chronologically between the two plays, Jones made explicit themes and ideas that simmered in the other two melodramas. Here Jones's portrayal of Evangelicalism coalesces in multiple characters: he outlines the transformative nature of religious faith in the character of Rev. Jacob Fletcher, and he shows the way faith can be twisted and skewed in the

character of Samuel Hoggard, the deacon of Jacob's church. By staging scenes in a church's vestry and making a minister and a deacon the principal characters, Jones gave religious questions and inquiry, particularly those with an Evangelical bent, an unparalleled visibility.

The play's innovation was, of course, recognized almost immediately, with most major reviews commenting on its originality and its controversial nature. For many reviewers and audience members, the controversy surrounding *Saints and Sinners* was two-fold: not only were they offended by the confession scene in the church's vestry and the use of Scriptural phrases and allusions, but more importantly, many thought the character of Samuel Hoggard, the puritanical and hypocritical deacon, was an unfair caricature (Jones "Preface" xx). Hoggard was something of a precursor to the villainous Chandler in the later *Middleman,* and the mixed reactions to his character showcase both the surprise that religion and religious characters were now something that could be reproached and also relief that religion and religious characters in all of their complexity were again figuring into the drama. The same is true for the scene in the vestry—its inclusion visibly signaled that the church and its adherents were suitable subjects for depiction on stage, both in positive and negative ways.

This visibility was central to Jones's goal in writing *Saints and Sinners.* In a soon-to-be-famous 1891 preface to the first publication of the play, Jones defended himself by asserting that a playwright should have to the right to stage a "scene in which a great body of his [Englishmen's] countrymen constantly figure one day in seven, and which is of the utmost significance in the general sum of English life" (xx). Throughout his life and his works, Jones was on a mission to depict middle-class English life as it was really lived, and for him, the inclusion of religion was critical to this verisimilitude. This was a position Jones would defend throughout his life, and he always insisted on the centrality of religion to a person's— and a

nation's—character. It was obvious then that he had to portray not just Christianity, but a decidedly Evangelical approach to Christianity. Jones himself had been raised in an evangelical community, and this was characteristic of large swaths of the countryside as evangelicalism was "immediately popular amongst the new working classes" and gave them a sense of identity and purpose (Brown 41, 42). In Jones's middle-class British society, evangelicalism held significant moral, emotional, and spiritual power.

The controversy surrounding *Saints and Sinners* would most likely surprise a modern reader as it appears to be a conventional seduction drama filled with orthodox morality. This play is supposedly a break from Jones's melodramatic background, but for a modern audience, it reads like a prototypical maudlin melodrama with dastardly villains, helpless female victims, unmitigatedly heroic heroes, and an unrealistic ending. This play resembles works like Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) and Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) with its depiction of a dashing seducer and a tragic and doomed victim, albeit one who, like Bathsheba Everdene, begins as a flirtatious and capricious young woman. In short, this play seems almost entirely derivative despite Jones's claims for its literary and artistic merit.

That being said, though, it also contains a relatively nuanced portrayal of religion, and a discussion of *fin de siècle* religion on the stage would be incomplete without it. The play centers on Rev. Jacob Fletcher, a lower-middle-class Dissenting minister in the countryside. He and his parishioners are referred to as "chapel" folk, in contrast to the Church of England "church" folk. Through the discussion of Lydia, Jacob's servant, and Lot, a local parishioner, the audience gets a portrait of Jacob: kind, forgiving, generous to a fault. He has given up lucrative pew rents so that the local town alcoholic, Peter Greenacre, always has a place to sit, and it is implied that this is only one of many foolhardy and overly generous deeds. Jacob has been placed in charge of

investing Widow Bristow's inheritance, and he is set to sell her land to local businessman Mr. Hoggard. Lot, Hoggard's employee, warns Jacob that Mr. Crispin, the land's evaluator, has been bribed by Hoggard to give low land valuations, therefore depriving Widow Bristow of the land's rightful monetary value. To counteract this, Jacob informs Hoggard, a deacon in his church, that he will need a second evaluation of the land. Hoggard first tries to bribe Jacob to acquiesce to the land's valuation, and when that fails, he threatens him with removing his lucrative pew rent.

These actions establish Hoggard as the rapacious, hypocritical villain, character traits that he mines as he discovers that Letty, the minister's daughter, has been seduced by a disreputable man named Captain Fanshawe (however, it should be noted that a modern reader would find this more of a kidnapping and a rape rather than a seduction, and therefore would find it deeply disturbing that Letty was thereafter seen as morally impure), a seduction that Hoggard discovers via private investigator. Hoggard goes to Jacob's chapel just before the morning service and offers the minister one last ultimatum: sell the land or have his daughter's seduction revealed and lose his position. In the play's confession scene, Jacob publicly confesses all in the church's vestry and resigns his position.

For both the hero and the villain, what follows is a reversal of position, and both suffer in penury, *a lá* the evangelical narrative. Four years pass, and Jacob and Letty are living in poverty. He has lost his job and his home, and Letty has become through nursing people during an infectious outbreak (a trope that is reminiscent of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Ruth).* Hoggard is now on the run from both the police and lynch mob, since he has taken to speculating and illegally invested many people's life savings. The haggard Hoggard arrives fleeing from the lynch mob, and he unwittingly takes refuge in Jacob's house. Despite having only half a loaf of

bread, Jacob offers to share and then subsequently shields Hoggard from the lynch mob, thus showing his inherent goodness and compassion.

Shortly afterwards, a former parishioner arrives and declares that the new minister of Bethel congregation is leaving, and asks Jacob to resume his place. The sick Letty temporarily rallies, but then suddenly relapses and dies, but not before declaring, "Oh you Christians, will you never learn to forgive?," and after hearing that she has lived scandal down, she says, "They forgive me! I'm so tired, daddy—so tired—(*dies)"* (115). Like Gaskell's Ruth and Hardy's Tess and Fanny Robin before her, Letty must ultimately pay for her seduction with her life. This ending also highlights the moral ambiguity of the evangelical tradition, with the forgiveness of the congregation being undercut by its tardiness. The ubiquity of Jones's derivative ending displays that, for many artists and authors, the fate of the fallen woman was a paramount concern and that Christians were failing in their moral obligations.

Like much of the play, this melodramatic ending was controversial. Stage audiences had come to expect that moral lessons were accompanied by happy endings, and after allowing the tragic ending to play for the first several nights, Jones took the advice of critics and changed the ending to allow Letty and George, the long-suffering man who loves her, a happy reunion. No less a critic than Matthew Arnold, however, urged Jones to restore his original ending, which he did with the 1891 publication (Jones "Preface" xxxiii—xxv). With the return of the tragic ending, Jones showed that the moral lessons of the evangelical narrative were not always met with happy endings or the restoration of the nuclear family, an ending that made Jones's portrayal of the evangelical narrative even more ambivalent.

As the first play that truly started the syncretic stage, Jones's *Saints and Sinners* captured the ambivalence many contemporary people felt about late-Victorian Christianity, particularly in

its evangelical form. Through the renderings of the saint-like Jacob and the faithful Lot, it is the source of fundamental decency and goodness. And yet through the hypocrisy and opportunism of Hoggard, it is twisted into something punitive and mercenary. Letty's end hints at both of these meanings—while she ultimately finds forgiveness, it is too late, and she has been crushed under the weight of castigatory evangelical morality.

The response by audience and critics to *Saints and Sinners* highlights the syncretism of late-Victorian religious faith. The paradoxes and ambivalences of Jones's portrayal caused serious concerns with audiences and reviewers, with people alternately congratulating or reproaching Jones for his play. Take, for instance, this original review from September 1884 in *The Era:*

> It [*Saints and Sinners*] opens up the old question as to the limitations imposed upon a dramatic author in introducing representatives of religious life, and in the use of scriptural language. In these respects we hold that what Tennyson calls 'the common sense of most' should be the dramatist's guide, and the occasional outbreaks of dissent heard at the Vaudeville on Thursday evening, when texts of Scripture were passing from lip to lip and were being perpetually employed in the dialogue, proved most emphatically that the strong dislike of the playgoer to blending the religious element with dramatic scenes has by no means faded away. The antagonism to the introduction of scriptural phrases and allusions is, in fact, stronger than ever, owing to recent events and we cannot help wondering that an author of considerable experience and undoubted skill should have imperiled [sic] his piece by the whole use of so dangerous an element. We can remember no play in which it has been employed to a similar extent. As a rule, these phrases

> and suggestions passed with a groan or a gust of ironical mirth, but with a less amiable audience we have seen much milder examples of scriptural allusion lead to scenes of angry revolt. In *Saints and Sinners* these lines are so closely interwoven with the story, and even the action of the drama, that it is difficult to see how they can be omitted without entirely altering its character; but as they stand they form a serious stumbling block in the way of popular acceptance. (8)

The communal response that the audience offered to Jones's new play highlighted how shocked and upset they were to see religion portrayed ambivalently, and yet this did not curtail the play's commercial success. Though the opening night reception was "mixed," and there were intermittent boos and hisses (Doris Jones 89), the play went on to become a popular and critical success, with the earliest New York reviews calling it "the best domestic drama seen here in years" ("*Saints and Sinners* in New York" 15).

This juxtaposition—commercial success mixed with public skepticism and aversion—shows that late-Victorian audiences did not view religion monolithically. Rather, their ideas of what it should do and how it should be portrayed were fractured and disparate. The mixed reaction to *Saints and Sinners* indicates that, for many people, the characterizations hit uncomfortably close to the truth. In his preface to the printed version of *Saints and Sinners,* Jones claims that Hoggard "was censured as impossibly vile" (xxii), but Jones claimed that he had based the character on his Uncle Thomas, a shopkeeper in Ramsgate with whom we had lived for much of his adolescence and who was a Deacon in a Baptist chapel (Doris Jones 93, 31). The young Jones "loathed and hated" his uncle (31), and he saw in him the worst and most hypocritical traits of religious men. Jones did not think his uncle was an exception. Rather, he thought his uncle was, in many ways, typical. He wrote in the preface to *Saints and Sinners*,

> I think Hoggard may be claimed as a not unfair representative of a very widely spread class in narrow English religious communities. There is of course a very strong connection between the general character and conduct of a nation and its creed, but every day gives us instances of a ludicrous want of harmony, or apparently of even the most distant relation of any sort between a man's religious professions and his actions. . . . Any one who has carefully studied the curious and grotesque inconsistencies of religious profession and conduct in England will, I think, readily concede that a bitter and stubborn and blind disregard of the primary duties to one's neighbor is not at all an uncommon characteristic of religious professors in the class from which Hoggard is taken. (xxii-xxiii)

In Jones's view, many religious people *were*, in fact, wanting and hypocritical, a depiction that some found truthful and others found offensive.

Hoggard's stated hypocrisy echoes the paradox of religion both in overall late-Victorian society and on the stage pre-*Saints and Sinners:* that religion is simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible. Similar to how religion was treated on the stage for most of the 1800s—where religion and orthodoxy could be assumed but very little in terms of belief or faith could be portrayed—Hoggard as a character likewise wants religion and religious principles to be pervasive, but he does not actually want them to affect his life or actions. In *Saints and Sinners,* Jacob tells Hoggard, "We are what they call professors of religion; let us act up to what we preach—don't let us say one thing with our lips and another with our lives" (11). But Hoggard reprimands Jacob in return by saying, "I won't be preached to on week-days. Sunday is the day for preaching," thus showing that he wants his religion to be confined to a relatively small space in his life, though he wants punitive evangelical morality to be omnipresent.

The vestry scene and Jones's use of Scriptural language further displayed the paradox of religious ubiquity/invisibility. Regarding its reception, Jones claimed that "half the audience thought I was canting, and the other half thought I was blaspheming" in his use of religious scenery and language ("Preface" *Saints and Sinners* xxi), an assessment that shows the audience did not know how to respond. This confused reaction is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that people were seemingly drawn to the show because of its controversy—a rector named John Lindsey, for example, wrote to Jones in a letter that was printed in *The Sunday Times* (12 October 1884) to say that he saw *Saints and Sinners* particularly because he had heard that it was "not only irreverent, but blasphemous." For many people, particularly those who professed Christian faith, they wanted religion to stay invisible on the stage because to portray it meant that it could be examined and even criticized. Its very visibility was considered to be debasing—and yet these same audiences who considered *Saints and Sinners* potentially blasphemous wanted to see it performed.

It seems clear from the details of the play, though, that Jones was trying to move religion from being something invisibly ubiquitous into something that was visibly vital and important to contemporary British society. In *Saints and Sinners,* Jones made both an explicit and implicit argument for religion's potency by showing how thoroughly embedded it is in the lives of his heroes and heroines. His argument works both by showing the inverse of its entrenchment via Hoggard, who confines his religion to Sundays, and by displaying how religion permeates the characters of Jacob, Lot, and George to show how it affects all of their actions and leads them to be courageous and forgiving. Though Jones was censured in some corners for his portrayal of religion in *Saints and Sinners,* his aim was to show how Christian charity could enable loving

interactions, but its hypocritical misapplication could engender a secularizing separation between those considered sinners and those considered saints.

Jones himself defended this anti-secularization stance in "Religion and the Stage," an article that was published in *The Nineteenth Century* in January 1885, just months after *Saints and Sinners* opening. Jones defends himself on a number of levels, including that the "whole of the nature of man [including his religion] is sacred to the dramatist" (127), but his most compelling argument is that religion must be portrayed and kept visible at all times if it is to be a force for moral and social change. He writes,

> In every audience there is a much larger proportion of simply indifferent persons, who would be the first to disclaim any particular reverence for any doctrine or precept of religion whatsoever, yet who pay the ordinary Englishman's ear and lip reverence to the current creed. And these also feel uneasy if religion is broached on the stage, because, having conveniently dispensed with it to a great extent in regulating their everyday lives, they think it may be very well allowed to remain in its present condition of honoured and respectable superannuation, as an affair of Sundays, and Parsons, the churches, and chapels. . . . The idea of human life as being secular and one-seventh sacred keeps possession of them, and they do not wish to have this convenient fiction disturbed or examined. (125)

Despite charges that he was blaspheming, Jones's motives in writing *Saints and Sinners* were more in line with anti-secularization activism by making the claim for religion's overarching importance and by claiming that it should be a larger, not smaller, role in individual's lives.

However, it should be noted that many religious people agreed with Jones's assessment. The previously mentioned Rector John Lindsey, who wrote a letter to Jones that was published in *The Sunday Times,* went on to say that, despite accusations of blasphemy and irreverence, the play was "true to life" and "reverent and affecting." He considered it a play that should be seen by religious folks and clergy alike as it "preach[es] such powerful sermons from the stage." This was supported by *The Church Reformer* (15 October 1884), which published a glowing review that stated,

> Many a man has thanked God for a good book or a helpful sermon; but it is perhaps less usual and certainly less conventional to thank God for a noble play. Yet on leaving the Vaudeville Theatre after a performance of Mr. Henry A. Jones's *Saints and Sinners,* hundreds must have had a most religious feeling of thankfulness that a play so sound and true in conception, of so high *literary* and *artistic* merit [*emphasis added*], and of such dramatic force has been produced, and that they had been able to see it well acted and suitably mounted. (*"Saints and Sinners"*)

As these responses show, the religious response to *Saints and Sinners* ran the gamut, with many people of faith welcoming a more-than-nominal look at the beliefs and practices of people who profess Christian faith.

As both Rector Lindsay and *The Church Reformer* review indicate, many people found Jones's depiction of religious life truthful, a portrayal that they thought made religious dialogue and inquiry vital and pressing. Writing on the play's verisimilitude in a 1925 retrospective, Clayton Hamilton wrote,

> The historical fact remains that it was a remarkable play for Mr. Jones to have produced so early as 1884. What made it remarkable was that, in many incidental passages, he did manage to draw a fairly faithful picture of Non-Conformist evangelical middle-class life in a small community—the sort of life which he had actually seen about him in his childhood and early youth. (*Vol I* xxxviii)

What Hamilton found remarkable about it is that Jones portrayed religion deeply and capaciously, particularly when theatre history, societal expectations, and stage censorship all counterintuitively worked to enforce a type of secularism on the stage. Jones's examination of religion worried and disturbed many people, but it also attracted a wide audience and a vigorous defense from some members of the clergy and the faithful.

Beyond making religion more visible—thus making it open to criticism while simultaneously emphasizing its vitality and necessity—there is one other aspect of *Saints and Sinner's* exploration of religion that must be examined. As was previously mentioned, the play is concerned with a community of evangelical Dissenters, and the mainstream religion—the Church of England—barely factors. However, there is the fascinating implication that the Church of England is more tolerant and forgiving than the Dissenting religion portrayed in *Saints and Sinners*. This is shown primarily through the alcoholic character of Greenacre who says near the end that he may have to turn Anglican because they are always generous with their money and feed him. While Greenacre points to the possibility that this is a form of *quid pro quo* by stating, "Church-folks ain't stingy; there's allays [sic] plenty of coal and blankets and pea-soup for them as goes regular to Church and attends to their souls' salvation. I shall have to go to Church, I shall" (107), the most salient fact is that the Anglicans offer greater material, physical help. This is not just an economic charity, though, as Jacob himself says that the

Anglican vicar is one of the only people who has come to visit Letty and himself in their forced isolation (99). Both economically and socially, the Anglicans in the play are implied to be more tolerant than their Nonconformist counterparts. This exhibits a surprising turnaround, and even though Anglicanism is confined to the fringes of the community in *Saints and Sinners*, it is hinted as being the religion of progressive social change and true Christian charity.

Arguably, this is because of the Church of England's relative lack of evangelicalism. While evangelicalism and evangelical values permeated every major Christian denomination, with perhaps Roman Catholicism being the only exception, Anglicans were less likely to subscribe to the tenets of evangelicalism. Rather, Evangelicalism was particularly dominant in Dissenting sects, such as those who subscribed to the Methodist doctrines of John Wesley (Brown 37), and evangelicalism was "the religion of the new frontiers" and of "people on the move spatially and socially" (37, 38). Unlike Evangelical practices, Anglican beliefs were often associated with a more moderate and restrained approach to faith, particularly those Anglicans who practiced a more ritualistic, high-church faith known generally as "Anglo-Catholicism." While Jones does not give enough details about the practices of the Anglicans in *Saints and Sinners* to say with certainty whether or not it is their lack of evangelicalism that makes them more charitable, it is certain that he portrays the evangelical Dissenters with greater moral and ethical ambivalence.

Overall, this play portrays evangelical Dissenters as both the holiest *and* the most hypocritical of believers. Audience reaction was mixed precisely because Jones had struck a nerve in contemporary British society; he both showed that Christianity was not beyond reproach and that some religious adherents were Christian in name only. This portrayal ostensibly criticized religion, but he also made a compelling and visible claim for religion's necessity in all

aspects of life, which validated and supported Christian faith. This bifurcation is one of the first instances of Jones's split reception and, indeed, his split viewpoint, particularly as it concerned evangelical beliefs and practices. In *Saints and Sinners,* Jones visibly displayed a tension within evangelical Christian faith, which both aided to and detracted from competing secular values that sought to reduce religion's role in public life.

II. Tragic Catholicism: The Dramas of the 1890s

If Jones's early melodramas both hint at the need for religion as well as a growing disillusionment with its practitioners, particularly those of the evangelical bent, then Jones's next artistic phase sought to find a faith system that better allowed for human frailty. In accounts of Jones's work and life, his artistic output is frequently divided into three stages, with the first era ending with 1889's *The Middleman*, the second era encompassing 1890's *Judah* to 1900's *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* and the third taking place from the beginning of the Edwardian era to Jones's death in 1929 (Emeljanow 129). Like most scholarly works, this chapter is concerned with the first two eras—those that took place in the Victorian era. If the 1880s were marked by Jones's ascendancy in the theatrical world, then the 1890s were marked by Jones's mastery of it. In the pre-1901 time frame, Jones established and perfected the conventions that he would continue to work with until his death, and more so than in any other time of his life, the 1890s were "Jones's decade" (Cordell 72). This was when Jones was at his artistic and personal height of fame, averaging two plays a year and writing, lecturing, and speaking prolifically. As Richard Cordell states, "No man of letters was ever more rampantly a man of the world than Jones in the 'nineties" (73). Moreover, starting in 1890, Jones moved artistically away from his successful melodramatic formula to pursue two very different types of works: serious dramas, often

steeped in religious debates, and society comedies, whose ostensible lightness camouflaged serious social critiques. It was the works produced in this decade—including Jones's personally beloved *Michael and His Lost Angel* and his commercially lauded *The Liars*—that cemented Jones's influence and reputation. These were also the works that built on the religious visibility of *Saints and Sinners* to truly form the *fin de siècle's* syncretic stage.

This artistic turning point can be located in 1890 with Jones's production of *Judah,* a serious drama about an overtly religious struggle to live truthfully and purely. The three plays examined in this section all detail the believer's—often a minister's—struggle to combine compassion and mercy with truth and purity, often romantic or sexual in nature. These depict the struggles of the "man of principle" (Jackson 9), a theme Jones would return to again and again. These are weighty, serious plays that were designed to be probing, rigorous dramas. Penny Griffin claims that "metaphysical questions of good and evil" constantly troubled Jones (49), and in these plays, the audience sees him formulating his own particular brand of morality, one that searches different faith traditions for possible answers and codes of conduct.

These plays are also unabashedly literary. For Jones, being literary meant that the drama needed to have a strong intellectual quality behind it, a rigor that could withstand the scrutiny of the printed medium. In an 1892 letter published in the *New Review,* Jones stated, "It is impossible to imagine a drama of high intellectual excellence that shall not be to some extent 'literary,' as it is impossible to imagine a drama of high 'literary' excellence that shall not be a work of intellect" ("The Literary Drama" 110). These plays, then, were not designed to be melodramas with spectacular visuals or heart-racing plots. Rather, their power was to be intellectual and literary, and their emotional weight was to be correlated with their ability to make the reader or viewer think as well as feel. These were plays to be pondered over and

scrutinized, a new type of drama that was to have "no limit to its influence and scope" (Jones "The Literary Drama" 113). It should come as no surprise that Jones's new type of literary drama was religious in nature. For Jones, literature and religion both probed spiritual, moral, and ethical quandaries, and in his dramas of the 1890s, Jones moved away from the melodramatic formula in which he had earned fame and money to try to explore these serious questions with more nuance and authenticity.

The religious and literary conventions that Jones had established in *Saints and Sinners* were built on in the 1890s. Victor Emeljanow claims that, in 1890's *Judah,* Jones wrote a "manifesto" in which we can see Jones "looking forward rather than backward for the first time" (140-141). More importantly, *Judah* began a chain of serious religious investigations in the 1890s that grew to include *The Tempter* and *Michael and His Lost Angel.* In these plays, Richard F. Dietrich claims that audiences saw Jones rise above "melodramatic improbabilities" for the first time (53), designations that aided the plays' literary, moral, and religious qualities.

Surprisingly, these dramatic works of the 1890s take an unmistakably Catholic approach to the literary, moral, and religious questions posed. Unlike the melodramas of the 1880s, which were largely focused on Dissenting and/or evangelical sects, the dramas of the 1890s turn and return to Roman Catholicism to answer—or perhaps not answer—the crises of the soul. Much of the discussion of Catholicism is coded or implicit. However, this coding worked within a legible and recognizable series of *fin de siècle* discourses, which a number of critics have explored.[20]

[20] As was discussed in the introduction, one of the *fin de siècle's* most surprising facts is that many of the era's decadent artists—including Joris-Karl Huysman, Aubrey Beardsley, and Oscar Wilde, among others—converted to Roman Catholicism (Lloyd 568), and in his seminal *Decadence and Catholicism,* Ellis Hanson makes the claim that religious faith and aesthetics have a reciprocal relationship, and that during the *fin de siècle,* art acted "as an incitement to

In the *fin de siècle,* decadence and aestheticism were intertwined with Catholicism, and works pitched as one were often coded as the other.

Jones's use of Roman Catholicism, though, differs from his contemporaries' as he was not an aesthete or a decadent, and he certainly was not a Catholic convert. Instead, what he seems to be doing is looking outside of the English faith tradition to answer problems that plagued British society. Whereas the 1880s melodramas were decidedly British, perhaps even parochially so, in their focus on small rural communities, the dramas of the 1890s incorporate characters, beliefs, and outlooks from beyond the confines of England's shores. These works incorporate foreign characters and ideas, and even if most of the main characters are English, they have foreign and/or exotic interests and backgrounds. This exoticism codes itself as Catholic, and these dramas incorporate the decadent and Catholic zeitgeist of the day, though Jones stops short of advocating for conversion.

This Catholic coding of foreign decadence and exoticism is displayed in *Judah, The Tempter,* and *Michael and His Lost Angel.* On first glance, *Judah,* the first play discussed in this

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religion (19). These aesthetic and decadent artists created works whose *ethos* served as a counterpart to the increasingly progressive, scientific, and rational mainstream culture.

Building on the medievalism of their Pre-Raphaelite forebears, these *fin de siècle* decadents created works that prized beauty over moral instruction, exoticism over nativism, and opulence over puritanism (2). As Ellis Hanson and other scholars argue, these *fin de siècle* artists found a religious corollary to their work in the Roman Catholic religion, with its foreignness, its paradox, its ritualism, and its extravagance. Hanson further connects the Roman religion and decadent art:

> Catholicism is itself an elaborate paradox. The decadents merely emphasized the point within their own aesthetic of paradox. The Church is at once modern and yet medieval, ascetic and yet sumptuous, spiritual and yet sensual, chaste and yet erotic, homophobic and yet homoerotic, suspicious of aestheticism and yet an elaborate work of art. (7)

For more information, see Ellis Hanson's *Decadence and Catholicism* and see the discussion in this chapter on *Michael and His Lost Angel.*

section, is ostensibly a tale steeped in Protestant, not Catholic, faith. *Judah* centers on the mystic Judah Llewellyn, a minister of mixed Jewish and Welsh ancestry serving the Welsh Presbyterian Church who falls in love with the exotic faith healer Vashti Delthic. Judah's faith in Vashti, though, is eventually rendered false when he discovers that she has no powers and is, in fact, a fraud. As a man of principle, Judah must struggle with his conscience and his continuing love for the false Vashti, a struggle rendered with complexity and nuance. Ultimately, Judah sacrifices his ministry to wed Vashti, and the play concludes with Judah's moralizing words, "Yes, we will build our new church with our lives, and its foundation shall be the truth" (Jones *Judah* 104).

Like *The Middleman* before it, *Judah* was a commercial and critical success.[21] The *Bury and Norwich Post* (8 July 1890) claimed that *Judah* was one of the few non-French plays to rightfully deserve attention and respect because of Jones's "powerful" writing which created "one of the most original and striking plays of the day" ("*Judah* at the Shaftesbury Theatre" 3), and the *Financial Times* (1 February 1892) called its success "immediate and unequivocal" ("*Judah* at the Avenue Theatre" 3). The satirical *Punch* (31 May 1890) amusingly summed up *Judah's* critical success with its pithy non-review: "Mr. P [Mr. Punch] defers his criticism on Henry Arthur Jones's new play at the Shaftesbury . . . until he has gone through the formality of seeing it. From most accounts, it is evidently well worth a visit" ("*Punch* and *Judah"* 264). By all measures, *Judah* was a success.

[21] It premiered at the Shaftesbury Theatre on May 21, 1890, and it subsequently opened in New York at the Palmer's Theatre in December 1890 followed by a revival at the Avenue Theatre in January of 1892 (Doris Jones 415). It also toured extensively, and newspapers of the day reveal that it played in cities as far-flung as Cardiff, Wales, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Berlin, Germany (*Nineteenth Century Collections Online,* Cordell 80).

Yet it is a strange play. With dual heroes, a morally compromised heroine, and an overt sense of mysticism, *Judah* is distinguished from both the popular light Victorian farces and the maudlin melodramas with their morally clear universes, and *Judah* examines the tension between secular and Christian values with no real winner being declared. The play's ambiguities and ambivalences are furthered by the syncretism of Christian beliefs on display, and the play has decidedly *fin de siècle* Catholic resonances with its mysticism, magic, and foreignness.

The character of Judah himself epitomizes the play's coded Catholicism as well as its ambivalent moral and religious viewpoint. Judah is a mystic, a visionary in the truest sense of the word, and he is "an idealist in a doubting world" (Jenkins 144). By the account of the other characters in the play, he is a magnetic preacher whose oratory skill derives from the "voices" he hears speaking to him. He tells Jopp, the skeptical scientist sent to evaluate Vashti's supernatural powers,

> I hear them [the voices] almost every day. I have heard them since I was a child and kept my father's sheep on the hills in Wales. You know I lived almost alone until I was nearly twenty. I saw no human being, sometimes spoke to no one, from one week to another. . . . Why do you doubt me? Is the spirit-world so far from you that you don't believe in it? It's nearer to me than this earth I walk upon. (13)

Within the context of *Judah,* there is something exotic, foreign, even scary about the preacher, and the townspeople and parishioners don't quite know whether to believe him. Judah's association with mystery and exoticism is alluded to not only by the rational and scientific Jopp, but by other characters as well, such as the honest and trustworthy mayor Mr. Papworthy, who declares that he does not believe in miracles in "England in the nineteenth century" (2). As he

and Jopp agree, miracles are only possible in "a remote century or a remote country" (2). Judah, with his overt mysticism and magnetic preaching ability, has more than a touch of the primeval, fundamental, and Catholic about him.

Judah's mixed Welsh and Jewish heritage enhances his exoticism. While this racial and ethnic stereotyping is reductive, Jones uses it to show how Judah combines different faith and belief systems. As Mr. Papworthy and Jopp discuss,

> PAPWORTHY: . . . However, there's no denying the wonderful power he [Judah] has over people.
>
> JOPP: He seems to have received a good education.
>
> PAPWORTHY: He was at our training-college for some years. All our ministers are trained there. But it isn't education with Mr. Llewellyn—it's born in him!
>
> JOPP: Welsh, isn't he?
>
> PAPWORTHY: A Welsh father and Jewish mother.
>
> JOPP: Celt and Jew! Two good races! Just the man to give England a new religion, or make her believe in her old one. (3)

Jones keeps Judah's ancient lineage front and center by naming him Judah (which means Jew), by giving him an overtly Welsh surname ("Llewellyn"), and by having characters frequently refer to him as "the Welshman." This claim to Jewish and Celtic heritage is essentially a claim to antiquity, with his background reaching back beyond prevailing Anglo-Saxon roots. This heritage is ancient and exotic, and it helps Judah break beyond the rational barriers of contemporary British society and is implied to be part of the reason he hears voices.

Both Judah's heritage and his isolated upbringing separate him from the urbane, cosmopolitan Englishmen of his congregation. By racially and geographically separating Judah from his congregants, Jones makes Judah into a Romantic, Gothic hero who can hear voices and tap into a spiritual realm unknown to the ken of contemporary Englishmen. This depiction is overtly decadent, aesthetic, and mysterious, designations that had implicit Catholic resonances in the late-nineteenth century. While Judah's stated religion is, of course, Protestant, he was compared by contemporary reviewers to Joan of Arc (Knight "Preface" to *Judah* xi), the great mystical Catholic saint, which indicates that reviewers at the time understood that Judah's characterization moved beyond standard Protestant portrayals.

As Judah is the title character and hero of the play, Jones appears to be promoting primeval, antiquated Catholic-style religion, complete with its mysticism and magic. Yet the character of Jopp is a compelling counterpoint to Judah and his antiquarianism. Professor Jopp, with his "Voltaire"-like face (1), is the secondary hero of *Judah.* He is educated, skeptical, intellectual—and kind. He is not the stereotypical scientist more interested in learning than in men, and his rationalism is balanced by a healthy sense of compassion for believers and non-believers alike. Though he has made his name as a famous exposer of fraudulent spiritualists, Jopp has empathy for those who would believe in such miracles and cures. As he tells his more rabid colleague Juxon Prall, "We don't deny miracles nowadays, Mr. Prall—we explain them" (15), thus differentiating himself from his dismissive associate. Interestingly, Richard A. Cordell claims that Jones "probably put his own beliefs into the mouth of Jopp" because "Jones hated cant and was always to be found on the side of science when it conflicted with religion" (79), and Jopp's statements are reasonable and sound. Jopp's sympathetic rationality makes him an "attractive character," one that is arguably "more important than Judah" (Griffin 51).

With Jopp and Judah serving as the dual heroes of the play, Jones lays the groundwork for a practice-able belief system that moves beyond the dichotomies of religion/secularization and mystery/science. Both Judah and Jopp make compelling arguments for their point of view, and at alternate times, they are both right and both wrong. More importantly, Jones makes both likeable and persuasive. Judah is not made into an intellectually- enfeebled rube, and Jopp is not an emotionally incapacitated skeptic. Instead, they are, as Joseph Knight puts it, "faithful transcripts from real life" (*Judah* "Preface" xviii). Both are heroic and noble, and both fight a morally just cause.

Their argument, both their personal argument and their larger societal argument, rests on Vashti Dethic's claims to heal the sick. The play is put into motion when Eve Asgarby, the only surviving child of the wealthy and kindly Lord Asgarby, asks Vashti to cure her of her fatal disease (presumably tuberculosis, the same disease that killed her siblings). Her bereft father agrees despite his skepticism. The plucky Eve declares that she must have "action" (6)—she is no passive victim wanly accepting oncoming death—and as she tells her father, Vashti has made "hundreds of cures in Spain" (5). Her faith is not blind or naive, but rather an optimistic fight against the surety of fate.

Because of Vashti's fame for curing the sick—Juxon Prall's naively believing parents have just written an account of her miracles—Jopp, Lord Asgarby's old friend from Oxford, is keen to see her sort of predatory spiritualism dispelled. Vashti's claim to spiritual enlightenment builds on ancient tropes: like Catherine of Siena and other famous faith healers, Vashti claims that fasting gives her strength to heal others. She is miraculous both in her ostensible ability to survive without eating and in her ability to cure the sick. Her last name, Dethic, ostensibly

pronounced "Death-ic," highlights how she defies death despite starving herself,[22] and moreover, her Spanish heritage and her ancient Biblical name hearken to something mysterious, foreign, and ancient, associations that were, again, coded as Catholic in the *fin de siècle.* In particular, the connection to the Biblical Vashti, whose story is found in the book of Esther,[23] highlights her allure while further associating Vashti with a refusal to eat.

Vashti's exoticism, though, is not a fantastical creation of Jones's imagination. In the nineteenth century, real-life tales of fasting girls, such as those of Mollie Fancher, Sarah Jacob, Lenora Eaton, and Josephine Marie Bedard, fascinated the public. Thousands of people read their stories, and mystical accounts of fasting girls and spiritualists filled the newspapers. Richard Cordell explains, "It was topical, for at that time there was considerable interest in faith healing and 'fasting girls'" (80), thus giving urgency to Jones's topic.[24] Simultaneously, though, stories about spiritualist charlatans abounded, and public debate over the authenticity of such

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[22] This idea that her last name connects Vashti with her supposed triumph over death gains credence when her father reveals near the end of the play that the surname is fictitious, and he chose it because he thought it a "very good" name (98).

[23] In the book of Esther, Vashti is the beautiful wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus. The king summons her to appear at a feast he is hosting wearing only her crown so that he may display her beauty for all of his guests to see, but she refuses. He banishes her, and he subsequently replaces her with Esther as his queen. See the book of Esther in *The Holy Bible.*

[24] The proto-anorexia of these fasting girls has long been a subject of historical and scholarly fascination. Some historians see the tendencies and behaviors of anorexics reaching as far back as the Middle Ages, with Joan Jacobs Brumberg writing, "[W]here writings by these women survive, we see the same pervasive images of eating, drinking, and food that appear later in the thought of the contemporary anorectic who is food obsessed, constantly counts calories, and structures her life around the avoidance of food. Medieval scholarship unambiguously demonstrates that there have been moments in time, other than our own, when large numbers of women and girls refused to eat regularly or practiced extraordinary forms of appetite control" (5). However, Brumberg goes on to note that anorexia nervosa as we know it has only been understood and diagnosed since the 1870s, and she goes on to note that there are "not only changing interpretations of food-refusing behavior but also varying reasons for female control of appetite." Therefore, she thinks the term anorexia nervosa "should be used to designate on a disease of modernity" (6). This is a fairly common academic response, with many scholars comparing, but not necessarily correlating, the modern disease of anorexia with the historic compulsion of fasting.

miracles proliferated. Despite the cynicism of most people, many famous citizens, including intellectual luminaries like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, became convinced of the veracity of the claims of the spiritualists. Jones's interest in faith healing was therefore not historically incidental—it was an interest compelled by the particularities of his time.

Vashti's claims are put to the test through a simple trial: she will be locked in a room in Asgarby Castle for three weeks, and Jopp and his daughter Sophie will guard the only key. She is to receive no food until such time she breaks down and requests it, thus admitting herself a fraud that must, like all men and women, consume food. To Jopp's surprise, Vashti agrees to his terms. In lieu of payment, she secures Eve's promise that, if Eve is still alive in a year, she will build Judah a new chapel. Judah is elated for the chance to exonerate Vashti and prove that her claims are true, and Jopp reluctantly sets forth to starve the young woman, with hopes that she will admit her fraud sooner rather than later.

Throughout most of the first act, the audience is left in suspense about the true nature of Vashti's claims, an omission that makes the audience conflicted bystanders in the battle between science and faith. Near the end of the act, the faith healer admits she is a fraud in a private conversation between herself and her father. She admits that she claimed powers for the enrichment of her father, and they acknowledge that he sneaks her food during her fasts. But yet Jones does not issue his final judgment on faith healing. While Vashti and her father admit their fraud, their conversation reveals something more complex—while her powers are false, she is somehow sometimes successful in "curing" her patients:

> DETHIC: You surely won't refuse to cure the poor young lady [Eve]?
>
> VASHTI: Cure her?

DETHIC: Yes, darling. You do cure people, you know.

VASHTI: They get well—sometimes.

DETHIC: My darling, what more can any doctor in the country say of his patients?

VASHTI: It's only the ignorant and uneducated who believe in me. They think I have some mysterious power.

DETHIC: So you have. Take my word for it, my darling, there's some sort of magnetic influence about you that you don't understand yourself.

VASHTI: Sometimes I think there is, but then again I doubt myself. You're sure I have this power—it is *I* who cures them?

DETHIC: Quite sure, my darling. You couldn't have been so successful in so many scores of cases if there hadn't been something in it. (18-19)

Through unknown methods, Vashti is sometimes successful in healing her patients, even if she does not have the mystical powers she claims she has. This ambiguity further complicates Jones's portrayal of mystical faith versus secular reasoning, with Jones portraying the sham of ostensible "miracles" while also allowing room for the miraculous.

Vashti's mysterious power works on Eve, too. A year passes between acts two and three—a year in which Vashti goes through her trial and passes it, but not before Judah spies her father sneaking her food and Judah reluctantly agrees to testify in front of Jopp that he has seen no such thing—and Eve has almost miraculously recovered. She credits her recovery to Vashti's spiritual intervention (Jones *Judah* 72), and though Lord Asgarby knows he is being "duped"

(94), he is happily funding Judah's new-built church. Anthony Jenkins argues that Lord Asgarby is key to understanding Jones's ambivalences as Jones "creates sympathy for Lord Asgarby and the ways of the heart. Terrified of losing his last, adored child, he recognizes Dethic's roguery yet sees that Vashti has an extraordinary effect on the ailing Lady Eve" (144). Eve herself supports this viewpoint by recognizing the implausibility of her miraculous healing, but as she quizzically asks Jopp, who is still insisting on Vashti's fraudulence, "But what's the use? . . . Of proving all the fairy tales are false; it only makes the children unhappy" (95). For Eve and perhaps even for her father, Vashti does have real power in that she compels belief in her patients, and sometimes this hope is enough to work physical changes. Eve's willing suspension of cynicism loosely aligns her with a host of Victorians, like Dissenting pastor George MacDonald and fellow playwright Oscar Wilde, who loved and revered fairy tales for revealing "truths," even if the stories themselves were illusions and fables.

What Jones is doing then with Vashti's "miracles" is something more complex than originally meets the eye. She is a fraud, but she gives people faith, a faith that can be powerful enough to mimic a real miracle. While Jones would not have conceived of it in modern terms, his depiction is similar to that of contemporary views of faith and the mind/body connection, with modern science pointing to the limited efficacy of faith in promoting bodily healing. Currently, books, articles, and television programming all proffer circumstantial evidence pointing to the usefulness of faith and belief when confronting diseases of the body.[25]

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[25] In books like Deepak Chopra's *Magical Mind, Magical Body: Mastering the Mind/Body Connection for Perfect Health and Total Well-Being* and Dr. John E. Sarno's *The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain,* the modern connection between a healthy mind, which is often bolstered by a sense of spirituality, and a healthy body have been explored. Surprisingly, a belief in the power of spirituality to help heal the body is prevalent even in societies that are otherwise modern or generally secular. A 2008 survey, for example, found that

While Jones would not have conceived of it this way, what he suggests in *Judah* is that Vashti does not have the power to perform miracles, but she bolsters the minds and bodies of her patients. In other words, Jones is displaying the intersection, and perhaps even reconciliation, between faith and science. This search for a balance between faith and science was timely: Charles Taylor writes that, at the end of the nineteenth century, people found "new spaces for unbelief" that opposed the "unfeeling, dissociated" strands of secular intellectualism while not orthodoxly ascribing to the tenets of Christianity (401). Many people looked for a "synthesis," a way to combine "Britishness, Protestantism, law, freedom, decency, civilization . . ." (402), in a way that did nor reduce human experience and yet did not become explicitly religious. In other words, some people looked for a third way, a path that both allowed for scientific empiricism while not denying the possibility of the miraculous.

Judah is Jones's attempt to work through the conflict between science and faith, a conflict in which he shows both sides of the margin as being hardheaded and wrong. Jones's play shows that he finds faith to be naïve and, in some cases, predatory, but to live without any

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52% of Russians believed in faith healers and another 20% allowed for the possibility that faith healing might be possibility (Stark 50).

While most modern medicine is based on provable facts rather than looking to the miraculous and mysterious, modern science does point to the limited efficacy of faith in promoting bodily healing. In a 2009 five-part series on National Public Radio, it was documented that AIDS patients who lacked a faith in God lost their immune CD-4 cells, which are necessary for slowing down the disease's progression, at a rate that was 4.5 times faster than AIDS patients who believed in God, a finding that Dr. Gail Ironson, an AIDS researcher, called "extraordinary" (Hagerty). This is not an isolated finding, though, and much research has been put into studying the mind/body connection and its relationship to ostensible miracles. In 2016, for example, National Geographic TV even launched a series produced, hosted, and narrated by Morgan Freeman called *The Story of God* whose first episode was entitled "The Power of Miracles," an episode devoted to investigating miracles. Unsurprisingly, the TV series did not offer any firm conclusions, but it did proffer circumstantial evidence pointing to the usefulness of faith and belief when confronting diseases of the body.

faith is stultifying. When Jopp confronts Lord Asgarby and asks how he can allow Vashti to treat his daughter, Asgarby rejoins, "What comfort can your no-creed give me?" (7), an apt question that reveals the limits of modern medicine in the face of remorseless disease. Though Vashti's father pushes her to prey on those who are desperately ill—and this is portrayed unambiguously as predatory and mercenary—this predation is countered by the relief her intervention offers some of her patients. Thus Judah can be partially right in believing in miracles, while Jopp can still be correct in thinking that Vashti is a fraud.

This temperance creates an uneasy truce between religious faith and scientific skepticism. While the conclusion is not entirely happy—Judah and Vashti must confess their falsehood, and Judah must resign his ministry—it is one of Jones's few non-comedic plays to end without complete tragedy. At Jopp's urging, the soon-to-be newlyweds stay in their community, their love for one another shaken by her falsehood and his sacrifice, but still intact. Unlike most plays of the era in which the chastened are exiled from their community, Judah and Vashti are invited to stay because, as everyone around them recognizes, they are people of moral worth despite their falsehood.

Part of this demonstration of their moral worth revolves around their confession, which only their own guilt commands that they do. Though Jopp knows that Dethic and Vashti are frauds (however, Jopp does not know that Judah also knows of their fraud and aided their lies), he decides to hide the truth. As he tells Judah, "I find I am mistaken about Miss Dethic. . . . I have no evidence against her. I wish you and your bride a happy future" (100). Judah, though, cannot bear his guilt, and he confesses all, with a passionate speech where he says, "I've had not one moment's rest since. My food is bitter! My conscience burns me! Oh, quench this fire!" (103). Judah proves his moral worth by voluntarily confessing at the moment he and Vashti

have been absolved. Vashti, too, proves her moral worth by trying to take on Judah's guilt. As she says to Lord Asgarby, "It was his love for me that blinded him. He is worthy of your gift [of the church] and of your friendship. Give them to him, and—think no more of me" (102). By being willing to sacrifice herself for her beloved, Vashti proves that she has moral mettle greater than her prior fraudulence would suggest.

Judah and Vashti's moral worth is clearly indicated when Jopp pledges to be their "one true friend" forevermore (103), and Judah pledges in return that they will "stay here and win back the trust and the respect of those who know us" (104). Having Judah and Vashti stay in their community upends the convention of social ostracization that greets sinners in most Victorian tales, such as in Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield* where Emily is sent to Australia or Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* where Lady Carlyle must go to the continent and can only re-enter her family's life in disguise as a servant. *Judah* instead pitches its moral issues as those of individual conscience rather than social functioning. Judah and Vashti do not need to be exiled because they have found inner reserves of strength and courage, and they are no harm to the community. As Anthony Jenkins argues, "This hero's [Judah's] final stand is a matter of conscience rather than social repute" (144). Jones himself supports this assertion in the text by having Jopp commend Judah, "You have conquered yourself" (103). By not banishing Judah and Vashti and/or totally denigrating faith and the possibility for miracles, Jones tacitly argues for religion's enduring societal role, albeit one that necessitates some skepticism.

Thus Jones depicts a faith that is chastened and humbled, but not one that is destroyed. Similarly, scientific rationalism is questioned, especially when facing the extremities of life and death, but it too survives, although in a humbler form where Jopp can recognize the limits of science and rationalism, and the certitude of Prall's unbelief is dismantled and presented as

arrogant. In *Judah,* Jones depicts the man of science and the man of faith as ultimately coming together to form a more perfect society, one in which the primal religious past is not totally overrun by the secular scientific present but instead works in tandem to destroy superstition while also allowing for the mystery of miracles. As Penny Griffin says, "The focus of *Judah* is on the possibility of faith-healing, and on those people who attempt it. Jones is not prepared completely to deny the existence in some practitioners of healing-power. He merely strongly condemns its misuse, and the credulousness and gullibility of the public" (47). This conclusion—that science can temper the most credulous parts of superstition while allowing room for a faith that brings meaning and joy to life—is similar to the moral and societal conclusion that Bram Stoker would soon portray in his 1897 novel *Dracula,* and matters of faith, doubt, science, and rationalism were at the forefront of the *fin de siècle* zeitgeist.

That this nuanced message was successful in late-Victorian society is evidence both that serious religious debates and inquiries proliferated and that the stage was increasingly seen as an important contributor to such public debates and explorations. Adding to the evidence that the stage was becoming an important medium for religious inquiry was the number of clergy who saw Jones's play, with Scotland's *Evening Telegraph* (24 November 1891) claimed that *Judah* had been seen by over "3000 clergymen" ("*Judah* at Her Majesty's Theatre" 2). That clergymen now deemed it appropriate to witness the staged struggle between science and faith, particularly as portrayed through the struggles of a fellow clergyman, indicates how quickly the religious mores surrounding the theatre were changing. Penny Griffin writes that *Judah* was seen as "a very important play by the audiences and critics of 1890" (60), and with the large number of clergy and the faithful in the audience, *Judah,* and thus by extension the stage, became a valuable interlocutor in the debates between faith and science. With the play ending with marriage

between the mysterious and deceptive Vashti and the upright and mystical Judah, religion retains its mystery without succumbing to falsity and superstition. Furthermore, with the enduring friendship between Jopp and Judah, science and religion reconcile in a way that leads each discipline to complement the other in the search for truth.

While Jones continued to write prolifically, his plots shifted widely between comedy, drama, and problem plays. However, two of his succeeding plays specifically built on the mysticism and decadence of *Judah* to serve as Catholic-coded inquiries. *The Tempter* (1893) and *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896) are both invested in varying degrees with Roman Catholic theology, with *Michael and His Lost Angel,* which Jones considered his masterpiece, serving as a tentative endorsement of the Roman religion. However, few scholars, if any, have placed these plays in dialogue with one another because of their obvious plot and thematic differences. *The Tempter* is a verse drama based on medieval morality plays; *Michael and His Lost Angel* is a searing tragedy about an Anglican minister. In these plays, Jones looks to different denominational traditions to search for the reconciliation between faith and secularism in the modern world, with decadence and Catholicism being an idea and a practice which he would keep returning to again and again.

The Tempter (1893) is an artistically daring and boldly experimental play, and in it, Jones portrays Roman Catholicism, despite the misuse of its adherents, as the religion that best counteracts the dark and mysterious forces of life. *The Tempter* is self-consciously written as a medieval morality play in iambic pentameter, and it is "unquestionably a good play" that "glows freely in surprisingly powerful and varied lines" (Hamilton "Introduction" *Vol. II* xi, Griffin 34). This assessment was noted as soon as the play came out, with George Bernard Shaw praising it in a private letter as "a most amazing freak" that is a "*tour-de-force,"* a "model of speakability,"

and "a lesson to the accursed literary amateur" (qtd. in Doris Jones 152). Jones himself declared throughout his life that it was one of his best plays (Doris Jones 146).

Reviews at the time were also mainly positive, with the *Morning Post* (21 September 1893) declaring that Jones took a "loftier flight than in any previous production" that showed "great force and brilliancy." Moreover, this was complemented by the opulent staging, which was done in a "splendid manner" ("*The Tempter* at Haymarket Theatre"). *The Birmingham Daily Post* (21 September 1893) meanwhile praised the play's acting and said that Jones had composed it with "abundant courage," though its commendation was tempered by wanting the play to be "more brief" and by the fact that, despite the play's iambic pentameter and medieval setting, the words themselves were in "Victorian" English ("Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's Newest Play"). Despite these positive assessments of the work and the praise heaped on Beerbohm Tree's portrayal of the Devil, the play was a commercial flop. Though its original run of seventy nights should have assured it modest financial success, Tree, the actor-manager, had invested a great deal of money into the scenery and sets, thus making the play unprofitable, particularly when part of the set was ruined in a fire (Doris Jones 149).

It is also relatively little studied. Most assessments of Jones's work gloss over *The Tempter* if it is mentioned at all, which is unfortunate given its literary merit, its positive modern critical assessment by the few scholars who have written on it, its aims to commercial appeal (which it did have, despite being financially untenable), and its thematic originality. The play's anachronistic qualities are deliberate, with the prologue stating that it is set in "Chaucer's England" in "days when men had souls to save" (95). However, "this past . . . is but our present life," thus making overt allusions to *fin de siècle* England. Whether the past or present, though,

Jones presents a world where Catholic-style forgiveness serves as an antidote to evil forces both mundane and supernatural.

The play opens with a storm raging and threatening to sink Prince Leon's ship, a scene ripped straight out of *The Tempest.* Thinking that he is going to die, Prince Leon pledges his love and fidelity to his betrothed, a woman named Lady Avis that he has not seen since his youth. Like Shakespeare's work, a supernatural force is at work to make the ship sink; however, in this case, it's a Miltonian Devil who spews sentiments like, "Why, He [God] pronounced Creation good, and I / Pronounce Destruction good!" (100). Unlike *Paradise Lost's* Satan, though, Jones's antagonist is something of a comedian; when the sailors start calling upon God to help, the Devil cheerfully exclaims that they are already damned and that they should "drown [themselves] in drink. Die besotted. [They'll] wake sober" (102). The dramatic opening scene ends with the ship sinking and the Devil, under the guise of a sailor, rowing Prince Leon to safety, ostensibly for some nefarious means.

The plot revolves around the Devil's temptation of Prince Leon—to fall in love with Lady Avis's cousin Isobel, to seduce her, abandon her, and sow discord between the two women. This happens through a series of disguises and subterfuges both on the part of the Devil and the duplicitous Leon, too. The Devil's motive in doing so is clear: he wants to stop Leon from blithely marrying Lady Avis, which would "[t]inker a peace between these angry kings [i.e. Avis's and Leon's fathers], / Cheat me of famine, war, and pestilence" (106). The Devil is thus the progenitor of chaos, and his motivation is to cause large-scale destruction.

What separates this plot from *Paradise Lost*, though, is that the Devil himself has very limited supernatural abilities. As Clayton Hamilton intimates in the introduction, the plot would turn without the Devil just fine—he is the instigator of evil, but he is not the cause of evil. Like

Doctor Faustus's Mephistopheles, his primary method of operation is to tempt people with what they want to hear. He is the proverbial devil on the shoulder whispering his temptations into the ears of his victims with no real power to enforce them. The real action comes from the human actors who are all-too-eager to succumb to the Devil's temptations. Jones visually highlights the ubiquity of temptation as well as the frailty of the human characters by making the Devil the largest part, a character that is virtually omnipresent throughout the play,.

This is not, of course, revolutionary theology—beyond Marlowe, C.S. Lewis would also famously use a similar technique when portraying Satan's machinations in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942)—but it is designed to show the culpability and hypocrisy of contemporary British society, even in its religious practices. In Act II, for example, Isobel seeks solace in the confessional, and yet it is permission and absolution, rather than confession, that she seeks. At this point in the play, Isobel has fallen in love with Leon despite knowing that he is betrothed to her cousin. She declares to the friar (who is really the devil in disguise), that she wants "help," and she is gratified when he justifies her illicit love by saying, "Love comes from Heav'n. Therefore / It must be good. And whatsoever wars / Against thy love must needs be evil. Therefore, / Thy love is thy first duty, and thy duty / Must bend to serve thy love" (140-141). Her desire to be freed from culpability is revealed when she says, "Thou hast given me / Great comfort. My own heart led me that way" (141). With her self-serving religious justification delivered, Isobel considers herself free from moral obligations to her cousin, and she proceeds to embark on an affair with Leon. Jones's overt denigration of hypocritical religion comes straight from the Devil's mouth when he says upon Isobel's exit, "Here is a useful dress. [the white friar's robe] / Of all the shapes I take I like this best, / For I can mouth and twist the Holy Writ, / As well as any father of the Church" (143). Like many of the Devil's lines, it is amusing dialogue (Jones's

Devil is a master of ironic wit), though one unambiguously meant to comment on the frequently selfish and self-serving interpretation of religion.

Jones includes other scenes that indicate that the Church is full of hypocrites and frauds. The character of Drogo, the Earl of Rougemont's Steward, for example, joins his employer in penance by sleeping three hours a night, walking barefoot, and having his wife scourge him. However, both Drogo and his wife are drunks (104). More importantly, the Earl himself is a hypocrite; he is doing penance because "[h]e hath seized upon the estate of Carmayne in France, which by rights should go to his niece the Lady Isobel" (104-105). Most importantly, the Church itself is complicit in these hypocrisies, with Jones sometimes portraying the Church and its clergy as corrupt and venal. This is particularly true in regards to the Earl of Rougemont's usurping of his niece's estate, as the Earl "appealed to the Holy Father, who hath ruled that he shall keep all the earldom, and do penance for it to the Holy Church" (105). As portrayed through the Earl and his steward, the Church sanctions greed and corruption by offering absolution in return for shallow penance.

The Tempter, though, also offers in religion a balm to the hypocrisies of the world. Near the end, the rejected Isobel stabs Leon, who dies in torment thinking of the wrongs he has committed against Avis and Isobel. The Devil is delighted, as he wants the Prince to "die unabsolved, / And kick and pommel at heaven's door til doom" (174). Isobel stabs herself in remorse, an action that the Devil welcomes, saying, "Come both with me" (177).[26] The Devil

[26] Like most classic views of Christian theology, the characters in *The Tempter* believe that lack of absolution and lack of atonement for sins leads one to damnation. As suicide is by definition an unabsolved and unatoned sin, those who committed suicide were believed to be condemned to hell.

thus has wreaked chaos in the world by killing the soon-to-be king and sowing discord, as well as collecting a few souls for hell in the bargain.

Yet the Devil's plan is thwarted by the late arrival of Father Urban, a Roman Catholic priest, who appears on stage with a retinue of "bearers and priests" at his side (177). He has been present on the periphery throughout the play, perhaps signaling the possibility throughout for God's forgiveness, a potential that comes to fruition at the end. He comes to the aid of the dying Isobel and Leon just in time, and he spirits them away on a litter into the sanctuary of a cathedral. In response to Isobel's question of "my father, / Canst thou yet pardon us? Is there yet hope / For us beyond?," the priest answers,

> Her bosom is so wide,
>
> Her heart so bountiful, her love so deep,
>
> That doth receive you now, that she, be sure,
>
> Will ne'er cast out one soul that doth but say,
>
> "I've sinned, but I repent me." To all such
>
> Her answer is, "Enter and make your peace." (178).

With those words, Leon and Isobel are ushered into the church, and the Devil is left, quite literally, yelling in the shadows, thwarted by God's—and the Church's—forgiveness.

The last two pages are awash in Catholic imagery and aurality—the cathedral stays on stage, and the stage directions call for the lights to change as the "full spring dawn spreads over the scene," which "shows all the trees of the cloister garden in full blossom" (179). Pilgrims enter the cathedral, and Father Urban comforts the grieving Avis by declaring in the last line of

the play that "Heaven's forgiveness drowns and hides man's sin," a pronouncement which is followed by "a burst of music from the church" (180). It's a visually spectacular scene meant to evoke Roman Catholicism on a small, human scale (the priest), a medium, societal scale (the arrival of the Pilgrims), and a large, divine scale (the cathedral and cloisters). By complementing these visuals with the sounds of sacred music, the effect would have been total, and the audience would have been awash in reverent spectacle.

While it is possible to speculate that Jones's depiction of Catholicism is merely historic—*The Tempter's* medieval setting all but necessitates that Roman Catholicism be the religion portrayed—the preponderance of evidence points to an interest more profound than the merely antiquarian. As was stated earlier, the *fin de siècle* was a time when Catholics were gaining new prominence, and much of the nineteenth century's noted attention to medievalism is part and parcel of the renewed interest in Catholicism. Starting with Cardinal Newman and the Pre-Raphaelites in the 1840s, Catholicism and medievalism became an important part of English artistic life, and by the end of the century, "Catholicism [was] at the center and even at the pinnacle of the artistic and cultural life of Britain" ("The Catholic Revival and Blessed John Henry Newman"). However, these occurrences, while integral to the culture of the aesthetic elites, happened during a time of larger cultural anti-Catholicism (Chouhan 49), thus making the depiction of Catholicism and even medievalism controversial. Therefore Jones's staging of *The Tempter* can be seen as part of a politicized and polarized religious debate, and thus his decision to depict a medieval society may have been integral to a desire to depict Catholicism rather than incidental to it.

This possibility is aided by other contemporary theatrical productions' penchant for staging Catholicism. According to Anjna Chouhan, many theatrical productions of the late-

nineteenth century added in elements of Catholicism. Looking particularly at Shakespearean productions, Chouhan notices odd elements interpolated into the text—such as having an ordained Roman Catholic priest perform the marriage between Hero and Claudio in Henry Irving's *Much Ado About Nothing,* the addition of stage directions showcasing Catholic practice in Frank Benson's *Romeo and Juliet,* and the inclusion of explicit Marian imagery and the addition of Ophelia praying the rosary and Hamlet performing the sign of the crucifix in Beerbohm Tree's *Hamlet* (51-54). Especially since Tree was at the helm of the Catholic-inflected *Hamlet* and the overtly Catholic *The Tempter,* it seems likely that the explicit Catholicism of Jones's play was influenced by Tree and was part of the actor/producer's larger mission to make sacred struggles visible.

While Chouhan does not mention Jones's play in her article, she does make an argument for the larger importance on the inclusion of Catholicism in these plays. While she says that some scholars continue to point to antiquarianism as the reason for Catholicism's presence in these plays, she argues that Victorian directors and managers were self-consciously staging the Catholic elements in an effort to explore the religion, particularly in the way they often added religious elements in moments of emotional or moral crises. In Frank Benson's touring production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1898-99), for example, Romeo turns his dagger against himself in suicidal rage after killing Tybalt, to which Friar Laurence holds up his daggers "as a cross," and the contrite Romeo "crossed himself and knelt in repentance" (Chouhan 57). She writes, "Rather than using religious images and sets to tell history, the 'historical dramas' were used to teach audiences something about religion" (57). In the case of *The Tempter,* which goes to spectacular lengths to highlight the role of the Church and was staged in a time when Catholics

were gaining prominence while also facing a backlash, it seems likely that Jones was likewise trying to make a larger argument about the Romish religion.

Indeed, in *The Tempter,* Jones appears to be exploring the limitless bounds of grace while displaying that the Roman Catholic Church offers succor and hope to even the worst sinners. The Catholicism of *The Tempter* is not punitive in any way, and in its focus on the sacraments and ritual, it indicates that there is an infinite cycle of forgiveness. This infinite cycle of forgiveness is necessary because, in *The Tempter,* Jones shows how temptation is always present, and humans are bound to fail again and again. This interpretation of an all-encompassing forgiveness is complemented by the visually splendid aesthetics, and the overall affect was designed to overwhelm the audience with aural, visual, and theological sensations.

This idea that Jones was starting to promote Catholicism, or at the very least what he interpreted as a Catholic-style, all-encompassing forgiveness, gains credence with the examination of the work that he considered his masterpiece: *Michael and His Lost Angel.* Interestingly, despite their different temporal settings (*The Tempter* is set in the Middle Ages, and *Michael* in contemporary late-Victorian England) and their vastly different styles (*The Tempter* is a verse tragedy—albeit one filled with ironic comedy—and *Michael* is a realistic modern drama), Jones linked them in his own mind throughout his life. Just before he died, Jones told his daughter Doris, "If I were to have a volume of plays to go into eternity with, and if—supposing I go up that way—I see Peter, the ones I'd tell him I'd have would be *Michael and His Lost Angel, The Tempter, The Liars,* and *The Case of Rebellious Susan"* (qtd. in Doris Jones 147). In addition, Doris Jones reported that her father's two favorite characters he ever created were Michael and the Devil (147). With their overt Catholic depictions, Jones used *The Tempter*

and *Michael* to explore how Roman Catholicism helped its adherents in moments of spiritual crisis.

In *Michael,* Jones portrayed Catholicism as better equipped to handle life's emergencies, and he made religion central to its themes. Jones's daughter Doris particularly describes the work Catholicism plays in her father's text in her pithy synopsis:

> *Michael and His Lost Angel* is an epic of the age-long struggle between a man's allegiance to his religion and his love for a woman. Michael, though a stern ascetic, is swept off his feet by an overwhelming passion for Audrie Lesden, and, through a trick of fate, for a brief moment he yields to his passion. Michael insists upon their separation, and he eventually finds peace in the Roman Catholic Church. Audrie, unrepentant and always most lovable, dies in his arms in the last act. (172)

Though brief, Doris Jones's synopsis states clearly that Michael "finds peace" in the Latin religion, an ending that is foreshadowed throughout the rest of the play. Taken with other elements from the play, *Michael and His Lost Angel* can be read as a tacit, though complicated, endorsement of Roman Catholicism.

The play's first part, though, unambiguously explores Anglicanism, not Catholicism. The play centers on an Anglican minister, Michael Feversham, who is the austere, though kindly, minister of a small parish. The play opens with Michael compelling Rose, the twenty-year-old daughter of his long-time servant Andrew, to confess to giving birth out of wedlock to a baby that died soon thereafter. Andrew is bitter that Michael is forcing the confession, but Michael believes it will give her peace. His forcing of her confession is not, in the context of Michael's

beliefs, about enforcing punitive measures, but about insisting on the moral salubriousness of confession. As Mark, a fellow villager, tells the grieving Andrew, "You may be sure Mr. Feversham wouldn't have urged it unless he had felt it to be right and necessary" (Jones, *Michael* 3), thus showing that Michael is meant to be a sympathetic and well-meaning cleric.

Michael's religion is uncompromising, yet it is not intended to be cruel or unreasonable, a notable distinction in Jones's portrayal of his hero. In the play's original printed preface, Joseph Knight claims, "There is nothing in Michael Feversham of the hypocrite, little even of the Puritan" (xi). Though some modern critics have dismissed Michael as "a self-righteous prude" (Jenkins 149), this is an ungenerous assessment of Jones's creation, with Colette Lindroth instead calling Michael "an intensely spiritual, rather rigid young cleric" who acts "kindly but firmly" (242). This is closer to the contemporary reaction to the character, where Michael was perceived to be "thoroughly sincere and conscientious" (Knight xii). Michael truly believes that he is doing what is right by insisting on Rose's confession, though Jones does not make the argument one-sided as Michael's eloquence is matched by her father Andrew's grief and sound argumentation. Rather, Jones is laying the foundation for a nuanced exploration of religion in which good people can and do disagree about faith's implementation.

Michael's singular type of non-Puritanical austerity that will eventually lean towards Catholicism is foreshadowed by his interest in Eastern Studies and his translations of Arabic texts. These are what he calls his "real work" (10), and they are a subtle clue that Michael is already a type of Anglican minister interested in reclaiming Catholic-style beliefs and rituals (oftentimes referred to as "Anglo-Catholics"). Ellis Hanson writes, "Anglo-Catholicism, with its attention to ritual and vestments, acquired a certain . . . exoticism within the context of Victorian puritanism" (25). As interest in Catholicism swept across the artistic classes in the late 1800s, so

did an interest in things that were old, foreign, and bizarre. The mysteries and aestheticism of Catholicism was contrasted with Protestantism, with its concomitant lack of mystery and emphasis on aesthetic austerity. Michael's interest in Arabic and Eastern cultures is akin to Dorian Gray's explorations of aestheticism or to the Pre-Raphaelites' fascination with exotic themes of the past, and they are Jones's clue that Michael's studies tie him to decadence. Ellis Hanson explains the connection between decadence and Catholicism in his aptly titled *Decadence and Catholicism.* Hanson explains,

> I define decadence as a late-romantic movement in art and literature that raised the aesthetic dictum of "art for art's sake" to the status of a cult, especially in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Decadent style is characterized by an elaborate, highly artificial, highly ornamented, often tortuous style; it delights in strange and obscure words, sumptuous exoticism, exquisite sensations, and improbable juxtapositions; it is fraught with disruption, fragmentation, and paradox . . . [I]t has a tendency to vague and mystical language, a longing to wring from words an enigmatic symbolism or perverse irony. . . . Roman Catholicism is central to both the stylistic peculiarities and the thematic preoccupations of the decadents. (2, 5)

Michael's interest in Arabic and Eastern culture, then, is intertwined with the larger decadent and Catholic movement taking place in *fin de siècle* society, an association that Jones will make even more explicit later by mimicking language from Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

The play's setting adds to the Catholic-inflected exoticism of the piece. *Michael* takes place in the fictional village of Cleveheddon on the far southwestern coast of England in the "West Country" (1), in an area near Cornwall that was traditionally occupied by Celts. Near

Michael's vicarage are the "ruins" of Cleveheddon Minster (1), which visually shows the remains of an ancient religion left on the English landscape. Much of the play's action, though, takes place away from the village and away from the vicarage. Seminal scenes occur on the secluded islands of Saint Decuman and Saint Margaret, places whose very names evoke Roman Catholic saints[27] and whose isolation indicates their foreignness and exoticism. Even Michael's name hearkens back to the mysterious past by evoking the archangel Michael, who was reputed to have battled Satan in dragon form in the book of Revelations, and the image of Michael as a warrior was a common iconographic figure in the medieval and Renaissance eras, a time largely set before the Protestant Reformation. The world of *Michael* is thus haunted geographically, pictorially, and linguistically by the remains of Catholicism.

Michael's vicarage is also looked over by a picture of his mother, whose image suggests the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Jones's stage directions are neither sparse nor elaborate, and in his description of Michael's living room he says there is a table, some chairs, a fireplace, and two doors (1). The only other description of the vicarage that Jones provides is a rather lengthy (in light of Jones's other stage directions, that is) description of Michael's mother: "A portrait of Michael's mother hangs on [the] wall at a height of about nine feet. It is a very striking portrait of a woman about twenty-eight, very delicate and spirituelle [sic]" (1). As the only piece of art in the scene, the image of Michael's mother dominates the vicarage in a way similar to the way the image of the Virgin Mary dominates many Catholic homes.

The veneration of Michael's mother—or, as he calls her, his "good angel" (25), designations that add to the image's holiness—is enhanced by Audrie's attraction to the portrait.

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[27] Notably, Saint Decuman was a Celtic saint, and St. Margaret was a Scottish saint, thus strengthening the ties to the area's Celtic/Catholic and antiquarian heritage.

The sole child of an Australian millionaire, she is a widow who moves to town following her husband's death. Despite being a regular churchgoer, Audrie appears to delight in mocking the idealistic minister. Michael's first impression of her is negative: "I think I dislike her very much," he tells Mark. "I don't know whether she's mocking, or criticizing, or worshipping" (12). Despite his misgivings, Michael invites her to dinner in an effort to properly minister to the young widow.

The audience's first impression of her is marked both by Michael and Audrie's attention to the portrait. Her first entrance is silent and unnoticed, and she witnesses Michael kissing his mother's portrait. She wants, as she tells Michael, to talk about "my soul, your soul, and other people's souls" (17), a quest that indicates her half-uttered spiritual crisis. According to Elin Diamond, Audrie is emblematic of a particular type of woman seen on the *fin de siècle* stage, the woman who has a "double nature," one that is "sick or sexually tainted," and the other that is "well" (70-71). Unsurprisingly, given her duality, Audrie behaves capriciously, and Michael has a difficult time reconciling her actions with her beliefs.

Throughout their talk, she mocks him and his faith, and he angrily refers to her as a "bad angel" who has come to "mock, and hint, and question, and suggest" (22), words that deliberately contrast Audrie's "bad angel" with his mother's "good angel." When Audrie asks permission to kiss the portrait, Michael declines. But she begs, "I don't know whether I'm bad or good, but I know that no woman longs to be good more than I do—sometimes" (23), implying that she hopes the portrait's power will aid her in her transformation. Both Michael and Audrie think that kissing the portrait, a most intimate type of touch, will transfer the mother's goodness to them.

This shows that they both bestow the power of a holy relic to the portrait, something more in line with Roman Catholic mysticism than Protestant austerity, with the enchanted picture existing in a liminal space between the immanent and spiritual world. When he denies her permission to kiss the portrait, Michael tells Audrie that he has "a strange belief about that portrait" and that he says his prayers before it (24). Markedly, the portrait was painted in Italy, and it was sent to Michael by his mother's brother, a Catholic priest living in Italy, thus strengthening the association between the portrait, holy relics, and Catholicism. The portrait's power is directly alluded to when Audrie says, "I was full of silly wicked thoughts when I came —she has taken them away" (25). The focus remains on the relic-like power of the portrait, and Act I ends with Audrie finally kissing the portrait accompanied by the words, "Your bad angel has kissed your good angel" (29), thus leaving it ambiguous as to whether the "bad angel" Audrie will be positively influenced by the "good angel" relic or vice versa. However, by making the type of touch a kiss, Jones also hints at the transformative possibilities of sensual, or perhaps even sexual, touch. This transformative kiss of the portraits thus foreshadows the transformative power that Michael and Audrie's sexual love will later have on them.

Act II opens four months later, and in the interim, Michael and Audrie have fallen in love. Act II takes place entirely on Saint Decuman's Island, primarily in "a living room built around the shrine of the saint," which is a "fine piece of decayed Decorated Gothic now in the back wall of the room" [*sic]* (30). The inherent Catholicism of the visuals is enhanced by the presence of a *real* Catholic, namely Michael's uncle, Father Hilary, who is visiting from Italy to see the shrines on Saint Decuman's and Saint Margaret's islands. Father Hilary's presence is both a salve and an irritant to Michael, who insists to his uncle that he is "at peace" despite being in a state of obvious distraction (34). While Father Hilary's requests that Michael discuss and

confess what is bothering him exacerbate Michael's frustrations, he is calmed by his uncle's pledge to give him comfort in the future. He tells his nephew, "If you should ever need a deeper peace than you can find within or around you, come to me in Italy" (34), a foreshadowing of the end of the play. The message of the play is thus seen as early as the second act: through an as-of-yet-unspecified manner, Catholicism will offer the sinner greater solace than Protestantism.

The full symbolic meaning of the islands comes into sharp focus in the second act as Michael and Audrie seemingly give in to temptation. After his uncle leaves the island, Michael stays to clear his mind and continue his work in isolation. Audrie, having a desire to see the saints' islands, takes a boat to them for an afternoon excursion. Through a series of plot contrivances, which Michael calls a "hundred little chances" (58), Audrie is mistakenly left on the island overnight alone with Michael. They are alternately titillated and horrified by the impropriety of their situation. The irony of the situation is not lost on them, as Saint Margaret and Saint Decuman were supposedly star-crossed lovers:

> AUDRIE: Do you believe the legend about Saint Decuman and Saint Margaret?
>
> MICHAEL: That they loved each other?
>
> AUDRIE: Yes, on separate islands, and never met.
>
> MICHAEL: They denied themselves love here that they might gain heavenly happiness hereafter.
>
> AUDRIE: Now that their hearts have been dust all these hundreds of years, what good is it to them that they denied themselves love?
>
> MICHAEL: You think—

> AUDRIE: I think a little love on this earth is worth a good many paradises hereafter. It's a cold world, hereafter. (42-43)

Jones builds on the heritage of Catholic saints like the aforementioned Decuman and Margaret, or even Heloise and Abelard, by making Michael and Audrie two star-crossed lovers whose only earthly union can happen in Catholic-inflected isolation, where the physical world takes on an enchanted atmosphere and allows impossible things to become possible.

The full moral and religious ambiguity of Michael's situation—and Jones's portrayal of it—is revealed in the third act, which takes place two days later. After Michael and Audrie are left alone together on Saint Decuman's island all night long, Michael's hired boat arrives the next day to pick him up. He boards it, and then secretly rows back alone to retrieve Audrie. Jones purposely leaves it ambiguous as to whether or not they consummate their love, though Michael's intense guilt suggests that their love was physicalized.

With his own fallibility now clear to him, Michael questions the wisdom of having Rose publicly confess her scandal. He questions his faith and bemoans its rigidity:

> How men try to make their religion square with their practice! I was hard, cruelly hard, on that poor little girl of Andrew's. I was sure it was for the good of her soul that she must stand up and confess in public. But now it comes to my own self, I make excuses; I hide, and cloak, and equivocate, and lie—what a hypocrite I am! (58)

His guilt and anguish is exacerbated, though, when he learns that Andrew, the father of the fallen Rose, witnessed them rowing back to the mainland together and thus knows everything. Unlike Michael, though, Andrew sees the practice of faith as more malleable, and he calmly tells

Michael, "Your character is quite safe—her character is quite safe. They're both in my keeping" (64). Though Andrew goes on later to say that Michael, "Mete out to yourself the same measure you meted out to others" (72), he does not insist on it, which indicates that Jones is suggesting that public confession is an archaic and rigid practice.

Yet Jones does not unilaterally reject confession. Soon after Michael's private confession to Andrew, the wayward Rose returns, humbler, chaster—and more peaceful. Rose is now an Anglican nun, and she shushes Michael's attempt to apologize to her. "What should I forgive? You were right," she tells him. "You said it would bring me great peace/ And so it has—great peace" (83). But even her comforting of him is twinged with a melancholy reservation. "Yes I am happy—at least I'm peaceful, and peace is better than happiness, isn't it?," she ambiguously responds to his query about whether or not she has found happiness (83). Jones implies through the characters of Michael and Rose that confession is necessary to ease the troubled soul, but the particular manner in which it is best done, whether private or public, is left open for interpretation.

Michael's guilt is compounded by his inability to marry Audrie. Like his theatrical predecessor Judah, Michael desires to expiate his guilt through marrying his lover, but this is rendered impossible because Audrie reveals that she is not, in fact, a widow. Rather, she and her husband are separated, and he is in America, a separation brokered by her giving him large sums of money. She reveals to Michael that her husband only married her for her money, and that she married "carelessly, thoughtlessly," because "no one had ever told me[her] that love was sacred" (46). She desires to clandestinely live with Michael as his ostensible wife, a move complicated by her husband's unexpected return. But Michael exhorts her, "You are my angel. Lead me—

lead me, not back to sin—Lead me towards heaven. You can even now!" (69). Audrie agrees and leaves him with the promise that they will be together in the "hereafter."

Jones's exploration of confession and the spiritual ramifications of secrecy are not over yet. In a monologue evoking Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Michael reveals in Act IV that his unconfessed sin is weighing heavily on him. He says, "The image of my sin is a reptile, a greyish-green reptile, with spikes, and cold eyes without lids. . . . At first it came only very seldom; these last few months it has scarcely left me day or night, only at night it's deadlier and more distorted and weighs upon me more" (81). This speech ties *Michael* thematically to Wilde's novel, complete with both works' explorations of Catholicism. However, unlike Dorian, who keeps his secrets and ultimately dies for them, Michael must expiate his guilt through public confession, a verbal utterance which signals his desire to live rather than be consumed by deadly shame.

Act IV culminates in a similar sort of church confessional scene that he had used previously in *Saints and Sinners.* This scene, though, highlights the alacrity with which the syncretic stage was changing the mores of the theatre: in *Saints and Sinners,* the minister confesses his daughter's guilt in a vestry; in *Michael and His Lost Angel,* the minister confesses his own guilt, rather than his daughter's, in a sanctuary. The playwright's ability to charge a minister, instead of just a proxy, with moral guilt was emphasized by the spatial change of moving the confession to the sanctuary. From 1884's *Saints and Sinners* to 1895's *Michael and His Lost Angel,* the syncretic stage had transformed the values of the day so much that not only could a minister be portrayed as personally culpable for sin, but also he could confess his sin in a sanctuary. Though the reviewer for *The Era* (18 January 1896) called this scene "an abomination and an offense" as it featured on the stage "a church and congregation in the full

swing of a service," the play was allowed to proceed without censorship, and *The Era's* reviewer appears to be an outlier ("The London Theatres").

Though Jones stages the confession scene in a sanctuary, *Michael* continues to portray the ambivalence of public confession. At first, this ambivalence is not obvious as Michael tells Andrew prior to his confession that it is "best" for the soul to confess (75), a sentiment he repeats later to another character when he declares that his private penance has not "rooted out" his sin (81). The confession itself is staged like a sermon, with Michael following a procession and giving his confession from the altar (93). The confession ends with Michael asking the congregation to pray for him, a request they receive with a "hushed and respectful surprise" (95).

While it would initially appear that Jones is arguing for the necessity of confession, Audrie's return just prior to the confession casts doubt on what, if any, is the best course of action. As she confesses her torment throughout their months of separation—torment she has tried unsuccessfully to ease through donating large amounts of money to Michael's church—she declares that the church has "robbed" her of Michael (89), and that she is "going to be very ill after this" because of her intense heartbreak (92). Nevertheless, Michael goes through with his confession in front of his congregation, and he symbolically steps over a rose she left for him on the altar steps (93), thus symbolizing his choosing religion over earthly love.

Jones's ambivalent portrayal of public confession continues throughout the play when the subsequent scenes reveal that confession has not eased Michael's troubled soul. Act Five sees both Michael and Audrie in Italy, though he is unaware of her presence. Michael has come to the Monastery of San Salvatore in Majano to achieve penance and peace, and the dying Audrie has come to see him one last time. She arrives, however, while he is temporarily away climbing neighboring mountains. Father Hilary highlights the religious and moral ambiguity of the

situation by not sending directly for Michael, claiming that Michael is finally beginning to find peace and that to "reopen" his wounds would only cause him pain (97). But Michael's father, Sir Lyolf, disagrees, saying that she loves him and must see him. Despite the fact that theirs is a "guilty" love (98), Sir Lyolf believes that they should be reunited.

Michael soon returns, and he declares his desire to be baptized into the Catholic faith, a move that he hopes will give him "great peace" (99). The efficacy of conversion, though, is questioned since Michael soon says, "I can't forget. The past is always with me! I live in it. It's my life" (101). Thus Catholicism is arguably presented as being superior to Protestantism in its ability to offer succor and peace, but it too is incomplete and flawed. In the world of *Michael,* Catholicism better speaks to man's spiritual needs, but this comes at the cost of fulfilling man's earthly desires. This is highlighted by the play's morally and religiously ambivalent ending in which Lyolf reunites the dying Audrie with Michael. Father Hilary enters just moments after Audrie dies, and Michael cries to him in pain and despair, "Take me! I give my life, my soul, my will to you! Do what you please with me! I'll believe all, do all, suffer all—only—only persuade me that I shall meet her again!" (107).

In the end, Michael appears to side with one of Audrie's earlier arguments—that earthly happiness is not worth throwing away for divine righteousness. In the world of *Michael* (as it is in other of Jones's plays), the two are frequently at odds with one another. The overwhelming feeling is melancholic—in Jones's worldview, both spirit and the body must be fulfilled in order to find happiness, two aspects at odds with one another. And while the ending of *Michael* does not present Catholicism as a panacea, it does hint that Catholicism fuses the pain with the beauty in a way that brings a transcendent type of peace, if not exactly outright happiness. In Roman Catholicism, more so than in Protestantism, the material world at least has the possibility of

being enchanted, and the portrait and the secluded islands aid in creating a world where the immanent has a touch of the divine. This gives the pain of the material world a touch of spiritual beauty, though perhaps not enough.

This idea that there is pleasure to be found in pain is seen not only in the play's ending, but throughout it too. Michael's earlier asceticism leads him to isolate himself on the islands of St. Decuman and St. Margaret accompanied only by "a few books, and just food and drink" while he indulges in his Eastern studies (26), and after Michael and Audrie spend the night together on the island, Michael takes to fasting, praying, and wearing hair shirts (80), thus partaking in mortification of the flesh. This is a form of medieval Catholicism—fusing the pleasurable with the painful or the ascetic, a desire to experience the transcendent through leaning into the experiential suffering of the world. At the beginning of the play, Michael's father tells him that he longs for the "simple" religious principles of his youth (15), to which Michael curtly replies, "Religion is not simple—or easy-going" (16). *Michael* subtly explores the difficulty of employing religious principles, and it does not shy away from the spiritual or emotional cost thereof. By the end, Jones indicates that Michael turns to Catholicism because its mysteries and paradoxes offer the chance to blend earthly and spiritual desires more fully, though still imperfectly, than Protestantism.

This eventual turn to Catholicism is also hinted at in Michael's work and in his own particular denomination of Protestantism. Michael's translations of Arabic reveal to him ancient truths, and his published work, aptly titled *The Hidden Life,* is what first attracts Audrie to him and makes her desire to move to his parish. Michael also quite clearly belongs to the High Church movement of Anglicanism, the Anglican movement that was reinstating Catholic-style rituals back into the church. While the movement had its genesis in the conversion of Cardinal

Newman from Anglicanism to Catholicism, it had recently gained new urgency in the *fin de siècle* as "a Catholic revival" was "sweeping northern Europe" and as there was an "extraordinary migration of French and English decadents towards Rome" (Hanson 8, 14). This nod to Anglo-Catholicism is obvious through the church's descriptions, and also in the reviews as well, which clearly state that the staging was to be read as belonging to the vein of the Oxford Movement. *The Era* (18 January 1896), for example, wrote, "The High Church procession in the fourth act was certainly one of the most picturesque and artistic representations of modern religious rites ever seen on the stage" ("The London Theatres"), W. Moy Thomas wrote in *The Graphic* (25 January 1896) that Michael is a minister of the "uncompromisingly 'high' pattern," and *The Commonwealth* (1896) wrote that the church scene had a "full and imposing ritual" (*"Michael and His Lost Angel").* In almost all of the extant contemporary reviews, *Michael* was read as unambiguously High Church and Anglo-Catholic, thus indicating the commonality of the Anglican and the Catholic faith.

Perhaps unsurprising given its explicit religiosity, particularly Anglo-Catholic religiosity, *Michael's* place in the *fin de siècle* popular theatre is complicated. While most contemporary and even modern critics would call it a commercial failure, the truth is more complicated. The rehearsal process was plagued with problems—most notably, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the famous actress slated to play Audrie, caused difficulties throughout the nine-week rehearsal process (she thought parts of the play were "profane," and she kept insisting on changes to the script, something that Henry Arthur Jones was unwilling to do (Doris Jones 172-173)). Two weeks before opening, she resigned the role writing that she could not "enter right heartily into the part of Audrie" (qtd. in Doris Jones 175). Her replacement, Marion Terry, was unsuited to play Audrie, a fact on which many reviewers commented. Overall, the reviews varied wildly: they

were alternately scathing and laudatory, which indicated that *Michael* hit a sensitive nerve that warranted disparate reactions.

The play's opening at the Lyceum on January 15th, 1896, also coincided with a personal tragedy for Jones: during its eleven-night run, Jones's oldest child Philip became ill with pleurisy and double pneumonia and soon died (Doris Jones 177). Understandably, Jones was not present at the theatre for most of the run, and he was blindsided when the Lyceum's manager, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, unexpectedly announced eight days into the run that the play would be running only three more days (Doris Jones 177). At the time, the preoccupied Jones assumed that the piece was, financially at least, a "disastrous failure" (qtd. in Doris Jones 177), an assessment with which the newspapers soundly agreed. Most damningly, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (27 January 1896) declared, "New York and London are in perfect accord. A new play by Henry Arthur Jones, produced simultaneously in London and New York, has failed as flatly in one place as in another" ("New York and London are in perfect accord").

It was not until Jones himself inspected the play's gross returns sometime later that he questioned the financial wisdom of withdrawing the play so quickly.[28] Today, it appears as if

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[28] A perusal of the play's bookings reveals gains ranging from £99 to £231, which would indicate that the play was on track to be modestly financially successful. In a February letter to Forbes-Robertson, Jones questioned the manager on his decision. He wrote to him,

> You did not send me any returns [during the length of the run] . . . when you do send me the returns, I find to my astonishment that, so far from the business being bad, the houses were very considerable and gave every appearance that the piece would be a financial success. . . . I may safely affirm that no piece has ever been taken off with returns amounting to over £231 on the tenth night. Further than this, no piece of mine has made such a deep impression on those who did see it, if I may judge by the large numbers of sympathetic letters that I have received from strangers who were touched and excited by it. . . . I shall publish the play at once and leave it to speak for itself. (qtd. in Doris Jones 177-178)

Michael's explorations of faith were crucial to its commercial demise. No less a critic than George Bernard Shaw agreed with Jones's befuddlement, and he wrote to the author, "As to the real reason [it was pulled off the stage] I do not know it; and I am so afraid that, with my romantic imagination, I shall begin guessing at it in spite of myself . . ." (qtd. in Doris Jones 179). Notably, the few modern scholars who have studied *Michael* share Jones's skepticism, with Victor Emeljanow saying that the play's termination was "due to Forbes-Robertson's fainthearted reaction when confronted by the possibility of religious controversy" (148). Russell Jackson goes even further, saying that Forbes-Robertson was shortsighted as its controversy might have "kept it in good business for some time" (11).

Regardless, the whole experience—including Mrs. Patrick Campbell's departure, his son's death, the play's polarized reception, and its sudden and arguably unjust departure from the London stage—left Jones feeling jarred, and for the rest of his life, *Michael* became "his favorite play" and "the darling of his heart" (Doris Jones 180). It was the play that Jones considered his best, and even though some contemporary critics agreed with him—Shaw wrote in the *Saturday Review* that *Michael's* "art is in vital contact with the most passionate religious movement of its century [i.e. Roman Catholicism], as fully quickened art always had been. . . . [however] the melancholy truth of the matter is that the English stage got a good play, and was completely and ignominiously beaten by it" (qtd. in Doris Jones 176)—it would take later critics to vindicate Jones's belief that *Michael* was a masterpiece.

As further proof of the play's thwarted success, Jones included an author's note as a preface to the first printed edition of the play, and in it, he writes, "The receipts for the first ten nights [of *Michael and His Lost Angel*] for which it was played were more than £100 higher than the receipts for *The Middleman*, which proved so great a financial success in England and America" (*Michael and His Lost Angel* xxiii). Throughout his life, Jones never received a satisfactory explanation for why *Michael* was pulled so quickly from the stage, and he always insisted that the play would have been a popular success had it been allowed to have a normal theatrical run.

The critical reassessment of *Michael* began in 1907 when W.D. Howells published an essay declaring that many of Jones's plays, *Michael* among them, are "nearly so good as reading as those others [i.e. Ibsen and Shaw's plays] that I should be at a loss why they are not entirely so. I am not sure, on second thought, that the first [*Judah]* and the last [*Michael and His Lost Angel]* are not entirely so" (207). This assertion about *Michael's* merit was supported in 1920 with the play's first publication, a long gap in relation to Jones's other works. In the preface, Joseph Knight writes, "*Michael and His Lost Angel* is the best play Jones has given the stage and is in a full sense a masterpiece" (xxi). And in 1925's four-volume publication of Jones's best work, Clayton Hamilton wrote that *Michael* is "the highest of his dramatic achievements" that "reaches into a rarer region of spiritual exaltation than any of his other pieces" (*Volume III,* xiii). The printing of *Michael* was key to its reevaluation, with Victor Emeljanow later writing that it was "received very favorably by a literary readership" (150).

And yet there was no denying the animosity from many critics of Jones's day. *Michael's* portrayal of a righteous-yet-tormented cleric built on the exoticism of *Judah* and the controversy of *Saints and Sinners* to portray religion's, but particularly Anglicanism's, inability to provide spiritual succor. For many, it was offensive: *The Era's* (18 January 1896) critic wrote, for example, "Hearkening, we fear, to injudicious advice, he has abjured comic relief; and the story of *Michael and His Lost Angel* is certain to cause pain and annoyance to the great majority of conventionally religious people . . ." ("The London Theatres"). And in a scathing review entitled "The Fall of *Michael and His Lost Angel,"* the *Evening Telegraph* (24 January 1896) wrote, "The new dramatist, like the new actor, takes himself too seriously. He thinks he has a mission to elevate the stage, whereas they only look to him for a passing hour's amusement. . . . Let us clear away the funereal trappings of the stage, turn up the lights, and return to comedy, or at least

to the drama which enlivens or refreshes." Perhaps bearing the sting of the *Evening Telegraph's* criticism, Jones did, in fact, return his attention back to comedy, and it was in that genre in which he would make his greatest mark. However, while he moved away from the Catholicism implicit in his dramas, Jones did not entirely forsake his explorations of contemporary religion. Rather, he sublimated them and hid them under the dictums of comedy.

III: Pragmatic Religion: Jones's *fin de siècle* Comedies

Though Jones's personal favorite works were his dramas, his most famous and popular works were his comedies of the *fin de siècle*. The societal foibles he had portrayed dramatically—hypocrisy and greed foremost among them—and the action they required [i.e. confession and forgiveness] also lent themselves to comic explorations. Jones's comedic gifts were superb, though his particular brand of comedy was distinct both from contemporary farces and the urbane wit of Wilde. Writing in 1925, Clayton Hamilton gives a lengthy account of Jones's comedic gifts:

> It is in comedy alone that Henry Arthur Jones may be said, without fear of contradiction, to have surpassed all of his contemporary English fellow-dramatists; for what comedy demands above all else is humour, and Mr. Jones is easily the most humorous English playwright of the time. He is less clever than Wilde, less witty than Shaw, less brilliant than Pinero, less whimsical than Barrie; but, on the other hand, he is more humourous than any of them. Wilde is not a humourist: he is too artificial. Shaw is not a humourist: he is too belligerent. Pinero is not a humourist: he is too sardonic. And Barrie is not a humourist: he

> is too capricious. But the author of *Rebellious Susan* and *The Liars* is fundamentally and essentially a humourist, laughing *with* the very people that he laughs *at* for their frailties and foibles, and radiating by contagion a healthy, hearty, and wholly good-humoured outlook on the world. ("Introduction" *Representative Plays Vol. III* ix)

What Hamilton suggests here is that Jones's comedic success is predicated on his investment in his characters—they are not Wilde's zany caricatures or Shaw's arch creations; they strike his audience as real people. Jones looked at others with sympathy, hope, and self-implication in their flaws. In constructing real people, Jones found the lightness and brightness in the pathos and tragedy of contemporary English life, a finding that indicated his ultimately optimistic viewpoints and indicated the potential for redemption and rejuvenation.

Like his dramas of the 1890s, these *fin de siècle* comedies revolve around a man of principle. Unlike Judah Llewylln or Michael Feversham, though, these men of principle are pragmatists, not idealists. His comedic heroes are not tortured or self-sacrificial; they are cheerful, rational, and reasonable. Also gone is their Catholic-style fervor; instead, these comedic men of principle have a dispassionate, pragmatic religion that is portrayed as moderate Protestantism in origin. In plays like *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), *The Liars* (1897), and *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900), Jones offers the audience a tempered view of religion. These plays—written in the same temporal frame as *The Tempter, Michael,* et cetera—indicate that Jones was exploring different scenarios of the interactions between religious faith, character type, and action. If Catholicism was the natural religious expression of anguished spirituality, then moderate Protestantism was the natural religious expression of general sanguinity and worldly success. The heroes of these *fin de siècle* comedies offer a glimpse on how moderate

faith and religion could be practiced. Notably, these characters are all happier than their dramatic predecessors, but they also have smaller aims and hopes.

Jones's heroes in these plays are all *raisonneurs,* a term borrowed from French theatre that means, quite literally, "a person who thinks or reasons." More specifically, in the theatre, the *raisonneur* is the character that "expresses the author's message, point of view, or philosophy" ("Raisonneur"). In Jones's works, though, the *raisonneur* not only supplies the author's viewpoint but also serves as a substitute for Jones's more idealistic clergy characters, and they face the secularizing forces of the world with more equilibrium. Though more subtle and less religiously didactic than their dramatic forebears, characters like Sir Richard Kato in *The Case of Rebellious Susan,* Sir Christopher Deering in *The Liars,* and Sir Daniel Carteret in *Mrs. Dane's Defence* practice the same essential role as Jones's tortured clerical characters by serving as the plays' moral and religious fulcrums. Notably, they are also more effective in bringing about desired changes. Also interesting is that these *raisonneur* characters were all originated by the actor Charles Wyndham, which visibly indicated the common function of such characters throughout the various plays. Most importantly, by limiting the scope of their aims and the emotional effort they are willing to invest, the *raisonneurs* of Jones's *fin de siècle* comedies ultimately prove more successful in affecting others.

The comedic genre has often obscured the fact that these *raisonneurs* are Jones's extensions of his clerical men of principle. Comedy, of course, requires a happy ending, and between the first act and the last, the action must primarily be entertaining, which does not generally foster heavy-handed morality. Jones himself hinted at the difficulty of creating morally and religiously inflected comedy in his preface to the first printed edition of *The Case of Rebellious Susan.* In it, Jones ironically dedicates the play to Mrs. Grundy, that fictional

authority on British morality. Here he writes that his comedy has an "intrinsic" rather than "extrinsic" moral, which is often obscured by comedy. He writes, "For I do stoutly affirm, adorable arbitress of British morals, that there is a profound moral somewhere in this piece. Only, if I dare hint so much to you, dear lady, it is well at times not to be too ferociously moral" ("To Mrs. Grundy" ix). In Jones's opinion, these comedies had a moral, and by extension often religious, functioning.

This difficulty in ascertaining Jones's viewpoints is aided by the opaqueness and inherent conservativeness of the *raisonneur*. Unlike Jones's other heroes, who are generally young, handsome, and heroic in the classic sense, his *raisonneurs* are old, wealthy, and socially conventional. These men are too old and too average for the youthful idealism of talented men like Judah and Michael. For some critics, to endorse the words and actions of the *raisonneur* is to support the "avuncular, conservative old bachelor" who is generally "cynical and rather unlikable" (Dietrich 55). Moreover, despite the fact that Jones's *raisonneurs* are the main characters of their plays, they operate at a removed distance from the other characters. The action happens *around* them; it does not happen *to* them. In some ways, they return to the role the minister played in *Saints and Sinners,* rather than being at the epicenter of the action as in *Judah* or *Michael*. According to Russell Jackson, plays like *The Case of Rebellious Susan* highlight the difficulty playwrights of Jones's era had in writing with "comic detachment about a controversial moral and social issue" (25), but characters like the *raisonneur* make such distanciation possible. Other critics go further and claim that it is through these characters that Jones provides "his strongest and most enduring social commentary" against hypocrisy and snobbery (Lindroth 245-46), a sentiment that is undoubtedly true. Notably, though, no critics have noticed that the *raisonneurs* are Jones's updated version of the clerical man of principle

whose youthful ideals have been tempered, and crucial to this tempering is a different religious outlook. In Jones's comedies of the 1890s, the *raisonneur* is a secularized version of the dramatic clergymen, whose success and happiness is built on finding a compromise between secular and sacred values.

In *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), for example, Sir Richard Kato is the moral center of the play and arguably the lead character, though in terms of the plot and action of the play, he exists on the periphery until he brokers the final resolution. Like all of the comedies studied here, the plot revolves around feminine sexual impropriety, a leading dramatic topic of the day: The witty, quippy play (much of its dialogue is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's) concerns Sir Richard's niece, Susan Harabin, a smart, vivacious woman who discovers her husband of seven years has been having an affair. She determines to leave London with her friend Inez and "find a little romance" (Jones *The Case of Rebellious Susan* 300), so she goes to northern Africa and has an affair with a man named Lucien. She tells her husband, though, that her days are spent praying in a church, a lie rich with ironic symbolism.

When Susan returns home, her honorable uncle Sir Richard brokers a reconciliation between Susan and her husband. Despite his efforts on both of their behalfs, Sir Richard does not condone Susan's or her husband's behavior; rather, he reprimands both. This already separates him from the other older, conservative men in the play who, as might be expected, shrug off Mr. Harabin's known marital infidelity while condemning Susan's flirtation (none of the characters know whether or not she consummated her relationship with Lucien). Sir Richard's words to Mr. Harabin in particular have religious inflections in them, using words like "mercy" and "forgiveness." In the first act, he tells Harabin, "The only thing to do is to throw yourself on her mercy, and if she does forgive you, it's a thousand times more than you deserve"

(284). In a notable difference from the character of Michael in *Michael and His Lost Angel,* however, Sir Richard reprimands his niece and her husband in private.

Meanwhile, Lucien quickly marries another woman and forsakes Susan, who had still been harboring hopes that she would leave her husband and marry him. In an unsettling and generically unstable ending, Susan and her husband reluctantly reconcile, both of them dissatisfied with their life together and disillusioned with romantic love. As a comedy, *The Case of Rebellious Susan* is unsettling, particularly its melancholic and resigned ending. Likewise, its moral vantage point is unstable, too—it's hinted that marital fidelity, rooted in Christian faith, is the only true way to find happiness, and it is the religious characters—Sir Richard being the most notable—who labor to foster reconciliation. However, in Susan's world, there is no true happiness to be found, just a cynical resignation. Susan herself understands this cynical resignation, and she asks her husband at the end, "How long will your love last? For three weeks?" (362). While she ultimately concludes that she genuinely wants to be "loved" by him (362), Jones leaves doubt about whether this will happen, particularly in any meaningful, long-term way.

Yet this ostensible salvaging of Susan and Mr. Harabin's marriage, the reconciliation forged by the *raisonneur,* is the only way forward for these two characters. Sir Richard's religious function as an updated version of Jones's prior clergy characters is indicated by his role as Susan's confessor. Despite going to Cairo with her best friend Inez with the explicit intent of going to "pay him back" (276), Susan does not divulge her actual guilt to anyone—as she later tells her husband, "How are you going to make me confess when I will have my tongue cut out rather than I will confess—that is, if there were anything to confess?" (358). Most characters assume that Susan engaged in an unconsummated flirtation, a move bold enough by itself to

warrant ostracization. Her uncle ascertains Susan's guilt, though, by citing the inordinate length of the ostensible sermon she listened to on the night in question, and Susan all but admits her guilt (334). Conspicuously, though, the type of confession that Sir Richard solicits and receives is a *private* confession, not a public one. As he tells her, "Women are divided into two classes.. . . Those who have lost their reputation, and those who have kept it. I'm determined you shall keep yours" (331), a directive that necessitates secrecy. This represents a change in philosophy from Jones's other types of confession, which are public. This is, in effect, a softening of the puritanical morality into something more catholic and forgiving, and it represents a major change from the public confession seen in plays like *Saints and Sinners, Judah,* and *Michael and His Lost Angel*. Jones would keep confession private in all his comedies of the 1890s, as remorse and forgiveness move from the public sphere into the private, and guilt becomes a matter of private conscience rather than societal condemnation.

However, this softening of Puritanical codes of conduct had a downside, as it also symbolized the loss of ideals. Sir Richard's pragmatic cynicism is the result of twenty-five years of practicing law in the Divorce Court (279), and he tells Lucien that his age and experience have cured him of romantic folly. He says, "I've been twenty-five. I've had my illusions. . . . But at fifty you'll have the far greater delight of seeing through your illusions and laughing at the youngsters" (306). Sir Richard's generally cynical view of marriage is proven true not only through Susan and Mr. Harabin's matrimonial difficulties, but also through the other couples in the play, whose false ideals have led them into marriages that are all various degrees of disastrous.

Other characters share this resignation too. For example, Susan's aunt Lady Darby tells Susan at the end of the play, "We [women] must be patient and forgive the wretches [i.e. men]

till they learn constancy" (361). She thinks Susan must especially be patient, as hers is just a "respectable average case." This world-weariness is even hinted at in the beginning of the play when Inez says, "You men never will see anything but a comedy in it. So we have to dress up our tragedy as a comedy just to save ourselves from being ridiculous and boring you. But we women feel it is a tragedy all the same" (303-304). In the world of *The Case of Rebellious Susan,* the *raisonneur* Sir Richard saves the play from tragedy by advocating both sexes to embrace fidelity, forgiveness, and what he describes as God-ordained nature, but this is an incomplete, compromised happiness. Though Jones relinquishes the firebrand religiosity displayed in his earlier works, its pragmatic replacement, as epitomized by Sir Richard's philosophy, is somewhat cynical and unfulfilling.

The emotional limits of pragmatism were also explored in *The Liars.* While most of Jones's comedies were successful—*Rebellious Susan,* for example, ran for 164 nights and was successfully revived in 1901, despite some prudish comments that Susan Harabin should ultimately be proven innocent of infidelity (Doris Jones 162-167)—none were as successful as 1897's *The Liars.* This play is "generally regarded as his greatest achievement" (Emeljanow 157), and during the 1890s, it was considered to be a "brilliant comedy of manners" (Griffin 82)—arguably the decade's finest. Indeed, the play was oftentimes compared to the Restoration masterpiece *The School for Scandal* (Dietrich 56), and it was even rumored to have actually been written by Oscar Wilde, now a pariah in prison, a sentiment that amused Jones greatly (Doris Jones 186, 187).

It was also an unabashed commercial hit, playing the Criterion for 291 nights, with productions the year afterwards in New York and Melbourne (Doris Jones 186). The play's success is predicated on its sparkling, Wildean dialogue and its masterful plotting. Like many

plays of the *fin de siècle, The Liars* revolves around marital infidelity (in this case, though, infidelity that is only threatened and not realized): The play concerns Lady Jessica Nepean, whose husband, Gilbert, neglects her. Meanwhile, the noble "Puritan" Edward Falkner loves her (14), a rare moral transgression from the upright gentleman. Lady Jessica resists Falkner's advancements, but then she accidentally meets him at a club and has dinner with him, a flagrant transgression in the Victorian era. Gilbert's brother George spots them together, and reports as much to his brother. With much to-do and plot machinations, the play's *raisonneur,* Sir Christopher Deering, manages to find a way to provide Lady Jessica with an acceptable alibi for her unseemly conduct.

Sir Christopher, however, is no mere enabler. Rather, he chastises Gilbert for his neglect, and he reproves Jessica for her flirtatious foolishness. And in the end, despite Jessica and Edward's plans to run away together, Sir Christopher is able to persuade them of their folly, and the play ends with Jessica rejecting Falkner and with Gilbert promising to be a more attentive husband. The ending is happier than the one presented in *The Case of Rebellious Susan,* but it likewise is touched with cynicism.

In *The Liars,* Sir Christopher Deering's cleric-like *raisonneur* is contrasted with the dashing Edward Falkner to display how youthful idealism must fade into resigned pragmatism. Their dynamic is an upending of the heroic formula: the dashing Edward Falkner has just returned from Africa where he was involved in stopping slave traders, and he has even rescued a widowed Englishwoman to boot. He is, in Deering's own words, the "very soul of honour," and England has gone into a "panic of admiration" for the hero (Jones *The Liar* 13). He is also, like many of Jones's earlier heroes, religious. He is descended from Non-Conformist ministers, and it is implied that his devotion to helping the people of Africa, particularly the enslaved, is part of

his religiosity. He is, in the words of one of the characters, a "Puritan Don Quixote" (14). In another play—in one of Jones's own dramas, for example—Edward would be the anguished, tortured, and idealistic hero.

As this is a comedy, Falkner's idealism is contrasted with the pragmatism of Sir Christopher Deering. Deering is a rather ordinary, yet above average, "genial, handsome Englishman" (10). He is explicitly correlated and contrasted with Falkner as they are good friends of approximate ages. Moreover, they were former campaigners together in Africa, though Deering had a much less illustrious career than his friend. Like Wilde's Lord Goring, Deering is the sort of upper class everyman who oversees the plot and influences the other characters while appearing to have little at stake himself. He is "urbane and witty" (Griffin 82), as opposed to heroic and earnest like his friend Falkner.

Unlike Jones's earlier idealistic men of principle, the audience sees in Falkner that the extremity of his position leads him to justify things that were, in the mindset of most contemporary Victorians, unacceptable. The same idealism that leads him to do good in Africa also leads him to think it is acceptable to try to seduce another man's wife, as in both cases he perceives injustice. For Falkner, injustice makes him want to take action, no matter how rash:

> SIR CHRISTOPHER: I want to ask you, Ned Falkner, what the devil you mean by making love to a married woman, and what good or happiness you expect to get for yourself or her? Where does it lead? What's to be the end of it?
>
> FALKNER: I don't know—I don't care! I love her!
>
> SIR CHRISTOPHER: But, my good Ned, she's another man's wife.

> FALKNER: She's married to a man who doesn't value her, doesn't understand her, is utterly unworthy of her.
>
> SIR CHRISTOPHER: All women are married to men who are utterly unworthy of them—bless 'em! All women are undervalued by their husbands—bless 'em! All women are misunderstood—bless 'em again!
>
> . . .
>
> FALKNER: But doesn't it make that your blood boil to see a woman sacrificed for life?
>
> SIR CHRISTOPHER: It does—my blood boils a hundred times a day. But marriages are made in heaven, and if once we set to work to repair celestial mistakes and indiscretions, we shall have our hands full. (40-42)

There is a painful resignation in Sir Christopher's assessment, and Falkner's rash, ostensibly feminist idealism (which is also self-serving) is countered by the Sir Christopher's realistic pragmatism. One of the unsettling parts of this pragmatism, however, is that Sir Christopher acquiesces to sexism and gender disparities. Moreover, what makes his response particularly odd to a modern reader, is that Sir Christopher invokes religious sentiments to support bad marriages. As he says, marriages are "made in heaven," a view that sounds idealistic but in actuality is extremely pessimistic, especially for the trapped women. What is implied is that there is a recondite reason, perhaps even a divine ordinance, for Lady Jessica's marriage, and to tamper with it would go against heavenly will.

In *The Liars,* Jones invokes a nuanced morality through Sir Christopher's espousings that uneasily slip between idealism and pragmatism. Jones's assessment of Sir Christopher's beliefs

comes in the fourth act, when the *raisonneur* succeeds in convincing Lady Jessica and Falkner not to run away together. In the final scene, Sir Christopher makes the overarching point that morality must be seen in its totality, not as isolated parts, and Jones portrays his *raisonneur* as coming to a compromise between idealism and pragmatism. His argument is both practical—to run away together would ruin both of them—and idealistic: to run away together would distract Falkner from his bigger life purpose. As he declares to Falkner and Jessica in the final scene,

> I have nothing to say in the abstract against running away with another man's wife. There may be planets where it may be the highest ideal morality, but where it has the further advantage of being a practical way of carrying on society. But it has this one fatal defect in our country—it won't work! . . . If you [i.e. Lady Jessica] care for him [i.e. Falkner], don't keep him shuffling and malingering here. Send him out with me [back to Africa] to finish his work like the good, splendid fellow he is. (146)

In Sir Christopher's conception, the higher moral is the one that has a practical chance of succeeding. In this case, the pragmatic advice to avoid scandal and romantic intrigue corresponds to the moral and religious calling to return to Africa. In the world of *The Liars,* idealism in the earthly sphere cannot be matched with spiritual idealism, and so a compromise must be reached. For Lady Jessica, she must stay in her marriage "made in heaven" so that her beloved can do God's work on earth.

This mixture of religion/pragmatism/cynicism led to disparate reactions to Deering's character. While *The Times* declared that Sir Christopher Deering and *The Liars* offered little but "biting cynicism" ("The Theatres in 1897"), others recognized in his character a recalibration of the religious figure, with *Hearth and Home* declaring that his character serves a similar

function to the "*deus ex machina"* of old ("At the Play"). What Jones was doing, then, was something new—trying to display how religion could not be separated from reason and how idealism separated from pragmatism was not only bound to fail but also bound to become immoral.

This idea—that religion must be tied to the practical—was also espoused in his other great comedic *fin de siècle* hit *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900). Like many of Jones's plays (and indeed, like many other playwrights' works of the 1890s), *Mrs. Dane's Defence* centers on a woman with a past, the titular "Mrs. Dane." A mixture of high comedy, suspense, and well-made play, *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is one the best examples to highlight Jones's "deserved reputation for tight construction and storytelling" (Dietrich 55), with Act III's interrogation being "the finest scene Jones ever wrote" (Griffin 94). The *raisonneur* serves the play not only as the moral center but also as the proto-detective who is able to ascertain the truth of Mrs. Dane's identity.

The play opens soon after the arrival of the beautiful young widow Mrs. Dane to the neighborhood of Sunningwater. She has become the toast of the town, and many men are besotted with her, including Lionel Carteret, the adopted son of the famous judge Sir Daniel Carteret, and Mr. Bulsom-Porter, whose interest in her is genial and fatherly rather than romantic. Nevertheless, Mrs. Dane provokes the jealousy of Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, and when her nephew Jim Risby, who is also charmed by Mrs. Dane, innocently mentions Mrs. Dane's resemblance to a scandalous woman named Felicia Hindemarsh with whom he was once acquainted, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter pounces and publicly denounces Mrs. Dane as Miss Hindemarsh.

Jones's plotting is masterful: the audience is questioning Mrs. Dane's real identity—is she truly the maligned Mrs. Dane? Or is she the duplicitous Miss Hindemarsh?—throughout much of the play. Similarly, Mrs. Dane's biggest supporter, Lady Eastney, is also morally ambiguous and opaque. Lady Eastney's motives are mysterious as she has ample reason to denounce Mrs. Dane because her eighteen-year-old niece was engaged to Lionel Carteret, and this niece was subsequently jilted for Mrs. Dane. As Lady Eastney insinuates herself into Mrs. Dane's confidences, the audience is left in a state of suspense as to whether or not Lady Eastney is planning on revenge or legitimately wants to help Mrs. Dane. It's a morally opaque world, and the women's feminine machinations are both comedic and disturbing.

It is left to the judge Sir Daniel to ascertain the truth of Mrs. Dane's identity, and Jones's third act is masterful. In an inversion of the usual interrogation scene, Sir Daniel is convinced of Mrs. Dane's innocence and is eagerly trying to help her prove it. Little does he know, though, that his intense interrogation will actually reveal the exact opposite. It creates a strong dramatic tension—interrogation scenes usually have a clear villain, and yet here there are two heroes, however their goals are unwittingly at odds with one another. Mrs. Dane eventually makes a mistake and accidentally reveals the existence of a cousin, and thus the truth comes spilling out: "Mrs. Dane" was actually the real identity of Felicia Hindemarsh's deceased cousin, and the assumed "Mrs. Dane" is, in fact, Felicia Hindemarsh, who took her cousin's identity after she died. The scene is pitched like a detective scene of cat-and-mouse wherein both are horrified by the revelations. But once Sir Daniel learns the truth he must, like all of Jones's men of principle, act according to the dictates of conventional morality by disallowing Lionel's marriage.

More importantly, the play captures a society in the midst of great change. From *Saints and Sinners* to *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* there is a tremendous social change evident in the way

society treats fallen women. In *Saints and Sinners, The Middleman,* and even *Michael and His Lost Angel,* there is the moral and religious compulsion to uncover, confess, and eradicate sin. By the time of *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* though, the moral and religious impetus is to cover up and hide the offense not in an effort to endorse hypocrisy or sin but as a conciliatory effort that gestures towards forgiveness and tolerance. Only sixteen years passed between the staging of *Saints and Sinners* (1884) and *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900), but there is a visible change in the way society treats fallen women.

This is most clearly seen in the way all of the characters except Mrs. Bulsom-Porter desire Mrs. Dane to be exonerated. This is true both for the characters who presume her innocence, including Sir Daniel, Lionel, and even Mr. Bulsom-Porter, and for those that either suspect or, indeed even know her guilt, including Lady Eastney, her jilted niece Janet, and Jim Risby. Jim, the only character who definitively knows almost from the beginning that Mrs. Dane is Felicia Hindemarsh (after his innocent remark about their resemblance, he realized the truth of his revelation), actually goes quite far in trying to hide Mrs. Dane's real identity: he asserts many times to his aunt, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, that he was hasty in his recognition and that his memory is flawed (like other men of principle, Jim will not outright lie, though he will equivocate and obfuscate), and he even travels back from the continent to attest that his statement was hasty and flawed.

Most interestingly, members of the clergy also want Mrs. Dane to be exonerated and/or to left free from all assignations. The local Anglican minister visits with both Mrs. Bulsom-Porter and Mrs. Dane in an attempt to get them each to forgive and forget, a task that is unsuccessful. His desire, though, to let the matter drop is clear in his exchange with Lady Eastney where he wearily, and arguably lazily, discusses the escalation of the situation. He declares that he has "the

widest toleration for everybody's views in doctrine, and everybody's practices in morals," and he states that he is "very willing to be convinced" that Mrs. Dane is a "very ill-used woman" (41). His attitude, while not exactly laudatory, is far-removed from the stereotype of the censorious minister trying to rid the community of sin. Rather, he is a minister doing his utmost to tolerate and overlook such improprieties. Like Jones's comedic *raisonneurs,* there is a cynicism in portraying a minister as too lackadaisical to care about sin, and yet this is an improvement over the hypercriticism and reproving nature of the evangelical morality that Jones frequently previously criticized.

In fact, the only clergy member who is even arguably interested in stamping out sin is the local Evangelical, who is never seen or portrayed. Rather, he is only spoken of, and only in terms of his feud with the new "High Church" minister who defends Mrs. Dane "with all the fury of his flaming locks" (Jones *Mrs. Dane's Defence* 65). It is stated that this High Church Anglican clergy gets into "scrimmage[s]" with the Evangelical minister both about "Catholic practices" and about Mrs. Dane, thus further connecting High Church Anglican views with Roman Catholic ones and portraying the greater tolerance of the Anglo-Catholic church. Regardless, though, there is a natural evolution from *Michael and His Lost Angel* to *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* with High Church Anglicanism and its associated Roman Catholicism serving as a more tolerant and forgiving type of Christianity. In Jones's works, this Anglo-Catholicism works, even on the periphery, to temper evangelical morality.

While the *raisonneur* ultimately has to side with old-fashioned morality that feminine sexual indiscretion cannot be condoned, there is an evolution present in Jones's work that further details the growing societal and cultural acceptance of women who have erred. In *Saints and Sinners* and *Michael and His Lost Angel,* for example, the lead women die in the end, their

demise serving as their final repentance for their sin. In *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* however, Mrs. Dane is not only allowed to live, but both Judge Carteret and Lady Eastney promise to be her lifelong friends—she will find in them "the truest and best of friends to her and her [illegitemate] child" (122). Mrs. Dane and Lionel are not allowed to marry, but Lady Eastney and Judge Carteret conspire to have her exonerated (in the end, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter is forced to retract her statement, thus exculpating Mrs. Dane) and allow her to stay in the community. Unlike *Michael's* Audrie or *Saints and Sinners's* Letty and other the fallen women of the past, Mrs. Dane does not die, and she is not banished. While her acceptance is tentative and incomplete, it represents a massive change from the past, and it is one brought upon by the *raisonneur.*

In *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* Jones actually has *two* characters serve the function of the *raisonneur*—namely, Judge Carteret and Lady Eastney. Like her male counterparts, Lady Eastney is dispassionate, reasonable, rational, and religious. By having a women also serve as the voice of the *raisonneur,* Jones hints at a politics more progressive than first appears and he implicitly argues for women's expanded roles. Also interesting is that Lady Eastney is more forgiving than Judge Carteret *and* more religious. She fuses the pragmatism of secularism with the idealism of religiosity. She is the one who proclaims unambiguously that she "wants to save Mrs. Dane" (118) despite the fact that her niece is brokenhearted over the aborted engagement, and she is the one soliciting and enlisting the help of the local ministers, a fact which implies the religious foundations of Lady Eastney's activism. By making one of the *raisonneurs* a woman, Jones expanded the dramatic possibilities for what both women and *raisonneurs* could do onstage, and Lady Eastney is one of the most overlooked feminist characters present on the *fin de siècle* stage. Lady Eastney does not aspire to power or fight for influence—she already has

both. Because she is powerful, religious, and kind, she is instrumental in saving Mrs. Dane from tragedy.

Jones's transformation of the moral center of his plays from the young, idealistic minister to the older, wiser, and more cynical *raisonneur* (and Lady Eastney's *raisonneuse*) is rendered complete by his rewarding them with domestic happiness at the play's conclusion. In the cases of all four *raisonneurs,* they are the ones who end the play happily married. Whereas Judah's marital happiness is compromised and Michael's marital happiness is completely unfulfilled, Jones rewards the pragmatic efficacy of his *raisonneurs* with happy nuptials. Writing on *The Case of Rebellious Susan's* Sir Richard Kato, Michael Booth writes, "It is fitting that the righteous man of principle, Kato, is the only one to receive a reward: the person and fortune of a wealthy young widow" (*Prefaces* 105), a sentiment also true for Sir Christopher Deering (who ends the play with his love for a tertiary character, Beatrice, being requited) and Sir Daniel Carteret too. Indeed, in *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* the two *raisonneurs,* Judge Carteret and Lady Eastney, marry each other, thus becoming the titular heads of a new type of community that mixes faith with forgiveness and pragmatism. They are the symbolic leaders of a new type of movement that Jones ultimately endorses: one that forgives and tolerates indiscretion and impropriety, but one that is based on traditional religious and moral principles. It is also one that sets limits on tolerance; their new society is not one of radical change, but one that works slowly, incrementally, and more effectively than those led by characters whose motives are purer and more ideal. In his *fin de siècle* comedies, Jones shows a society coming to terms with its own syncretic beliefs.

CHAPTER 2:

FAITHFUL FEMININITY:

THE PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO

According to many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century critics, modern English drama had its inception in a very particular time and place: on May 27th, 1893, at the St. James Theatre in London during the performance of Arthur Wing Pinero's new play, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. In preparation for the big night, the already-famous playwright, who was best known for his series of farces at the Court Theatre, had sequestered himself in the country and had spent almost a year perfecting his new serious play (Dawick 178-179), a departure from his usual comedic fare. The play's beginnings were not auspicious: after it was completed, Pinero was dejected when most of the important actor-managers rejected the script and declined to perform it due to its controversial subject matter. Finally, he convinced George Alexander, London's youngest actor-manager, to perform it at his theatre—but only for select matinee performances (180-181). This move lessened Alexander's financial risk, but it also doomed the play to commercial and critical obscurity. Nevertheless, Pinero thanked Alexander for taking on this "encumbrance" (*Pinero's Letters* 138), a word that indicates Pinero thought his play would not be successful. After studying the script carefully, though, Alexander changed his mind and decided to put it on the evening bill with himself in the leading male role. By opening night, almost nothing of Pinero's script had been leaked to the public, and curiosity "ran high" (Dawick 191). While Pinero paced nervously outside, his new play commenced.

As is now known, Pinero's play was considered groundbreaking and epoch-making, a theatrical event not to be missed. *The Sunday Times* (17 March 1895) even dubbed it "the play of the century" ("Plays and Players"). This assessment stood for a long time, with Clayton Hamilton writing a retrospective in 1917 wherein he claimed that *Tanqueray* was "the *only* great play that had been written in the English language for one hundred and sixteen years" ("General Introduction" in *The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Vol. 1* 3). Pinero's play achieved its spectacular success by fusing English and continental conventions to create a work that was considered electrifying. It portrayed one of the most prominent British character types—the fallen woman—and made her into something more than a sacrificial scapegoat or a wicked harlot. With *Tanqueray,* Pinero took Ibsen-style psychological realism and set the action in England to show how a decidedly British society created and destroyed the title character.

Ever since then, Pinero's plays have captivated audiences, and many of his works are still produced today, oftentimes in major productions. The United Kingdom's Royal National Theatre (generally referred to simply as the National Theatre) has produced a Pinero play five times since its founding in 1963: *Trelawney of the "Wells"* in 1965, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in 1981, *The Magistrate* in 1986, *Trelawney of the "Wells"* again in 1993, and a production of *The Magistrate* starring John Lithgow in 2012. The last production, *The Magistrate,* went on to be streamed in theatres around the world as part of the National Theatre Live programming, thus increasing Pinero's audience.

It's not just the National Theatre that is keen to revive Pinero. Currently, Pinero is having something of a renaissance on the English stage. In 2012, for example, the Rose Theatre, one of the largest theatrical houses in the greater London area at 899 seats, performed a run of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* that starred the well-known West End/Broadway actress

Laura Michelle Kelly in the title role; there was a 2012 national tour of *Dandy Dick* produced by Theatre Royal Brighton Productions; 2014 witnessed a revival of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*—the first production since the play's initial 1895 run—at Jermyn Street Theatre, a London studio theatre; and the Donmar Warehouse, one of the premier off-West-End theatres in London, produced a version of *Trelawney of the 'Wells'* in 2013 that was directed by Joe Wright, the well-regarded movie director (*Atonement, Pride and Prejudice, Anna Karenina)*. This resurgence of Pinero's works has been marked both by critical and commercial success: *The Telegraph,* for example, called the recent production of *Trelawney of the 'Wells'* "wonderfully funny and touching" (Spencer), thus showing that Pinero's plays, with their careful attention to language and upper class social mores, still have the power to move and entertain audiences more than a century after their creation.

With Pinero back in the theatrical scene, several of his plays deserve critical reexamination, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* foremost among them. The critical consensus on Pinero has long held that he was a highly influential late-Victorian playwright who displayed a keen, if somewhat limited, interest in women. Writing in 1908, William H. Rideing claimed, "Mr. Pinero gives the predominant place in nearly all of his serious plays to women . . . They dominate those who surround them, and in disaster they compel our compassion though they may not evoke our approval" (38). This assessment still holds true today, with Stephen Wyatt claiming, "Women seemed to bring out Pinero's best and most spontaneous writing" (xiii). Most critics agree, and Pinero's women, much more so than the men, are the source of critical inquiry and debate.

Pinero arguably created the most well rounded and most dynamic female characters on the *fin de siècle* stage, depictions that led most contemporary and current scholars to see Pinero's

works as being inextricably intertwined with questions regarding New Women, suffrage, and women in the workplace. Most, of course, read feminist implications into Pinero's works, with Stephen Wyatt writing, "[I]t is the range and power of the female characterization that impresses most" (xiii). That was true in Pinero's own time as well, with Max Beerbohm boldly proclaiming in his published review for *His House in Order* (10 February 1906), "Mr. Pinero is a feminist. He has a real interest in the feminine soul, and can enter into it with vivid sympathy" ("Mr. Pinero's New Play").

Less acknowledged are these female characters' ties to religion and religious debates. In many of his plays of the 1880s and 90s, Pinero used his female characters to explore how different beliefs affected them, and he portrayed that women had more at stake—both to gain and lose—than men in the religious discussions and developments of the day. In the 1880s and 90s, four plays in particular stand out for their explorations of faith and their implications for feminism: *Dandy Dick: A Play in Three Acts (1887)* was one of Pinero's first plays to feature a New Woman whose ideals are put into dialogue with Christianity, with the later *The Amazons* (1893) echoing its themes and topics. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) was composed at the same time as the lighthearted *Amazons,* and it too is invested in faith and New Women politics. However, *Tanqueray* and the later *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895) go beyond the inchoate examinations of the first two plays to create a world where a sacred sisterhood has the potential to serve as a bulwark against the dehumanizing, secular male world, if only the female characters would connect with each other.

Pinero's linking of Christianity and femininity becomes even more striking when compared to his portrayal of Judaism and Jewishness. Whereas Christianity is presented as being feminine or feminizing, he portrays Judaism as masculine, which in Pinero's depiction

separates it from the sacred femininity that he presents in Christianity. By making his Jewish characters almost exclusively men,[29] Pinero indicates that he is not looking at its religious or faith practices, but is perhaps only examining it from a cultural or ethnic standpoint. Likewise, his stereotypical treatment of Jews contrasts with his sensitive handling of Christianity, particularly in *Tanqueray* and *Ebbsmith.*

In Pinero's plays, Christianity, in various denominations, plays a prominent role in materially changing women's lives, and throughout his plays of the 1880s and 90s, Pinero explored leading religious movements through his female characters. Pinero emphasizes his religious points by showing how belief (or unbelief) affects the female body, whether making it muscularly strong or weak, clothing it in fine or drab clothes, or even maiming it. He took this to the extreme in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), with the title character literally becoming mutilated before embracing religion. This is faith in its most immanent form, with the actresses' bodies becoming a visceral stage on which to examine religion's effect.

Biographical Sketch

Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934) was born in London to a lawyer father and homemaking mother. Pinero's family descended from Sephardic Jews from Portugal who had moved to England in the 1700s. According to Pinero's biographer, his family maintained a separate Jewish identity and religion until his grandfather married an English woman and presumably

[29] *The Cabinet Minister* is Pinero's sole play to arguably feature a Jewish female character. The dressmaker Mrs. Gaylustre is the sister of the Jewish character Joseph Lebanon, and Mrs. Gaylustre schemes with her brother to induce her employer to introduce them to upper class society. Mrs. Gaylustre's Jewish identity is ambivalent, though, as she is a widow, and her last name suggests she married a gentile.

converted to Christianity. John Dawick writes, "Thereafter the Pineros regarded themselves as totally English and, though acknowledging their part-Jewish descent with some pride, no longer subscribed to Jewish religious beliefs and customs" (4). As for Pinero's more immediate forebears, Pinero's father was educated and middleclass, though John Dawick writes that his business went "gently downhill," and that his son's education was therefore done "on the cheap" (5, 10). Pinero's parents were of vastly different ages—his father was fifty-four and his mother sixteen when they married—and when Mark Pinero, Arthur Wing's father, died in 1871, the sixteen-year-old son became a major contributor to his mother's income (5, 12-13).

Like his father, Pinero was trained in the law, though Pinero's formal education, which stopped when he was ten, only allowed him to rise to the level of solicitor's clerk (10-15). Pinero found the work stifling, and instead discovered his calling at a local elocution class. Through it, he began writing and performing his own plays. In 1874, he took his aspirations to the professional stage where he joined the Theatre Royal of Edinburgh as a utility actor (Dawick 5-24), a risky financial maneuver, particularly considering his financial obligations. Pinero, though, found professional success and would go on to perform professionally in many different companies, eventually becoming a frequent player opposite the famed Henry Irving (24-56). It was through the connections that he made as an actor that Pinero was first invited to write plays for a paying audience, with his 1877 comedietta £*200 a Year* serving as a curtain raiser at a Globe benefit (56-57). Thus Pinero's career as a playwright was born, a career that would span well into the twentieth century and see the production of almost sixty full-length plays (xviii-xix). During his long career, Pinero became famous not only as a playwright, but also as an exacting director who was one of the first playwrights to also direct his own work.

Pinero married the actress Myra Wood in 1883 and became stepfather to her children. In 1909, he was knighted, the second man ever (after W.S. Gilbert) to be knighted for his services to drama alone. Throughout his life, Pinero counted many fellow playwrights and leading theatrical practitioners among his friends, including Henry Arthur Jones, with whom he shared a very close friendship, William Archer, and George Bernard Shaw, with whom he shared a lively exchange of letters.

I. Muscular Women and Effeminate Men: Honoring Duality in *Dandy Dick* and *The Amazons*

While some attention has been paid to the feminist politics, and to a much lesser degree the religious leanings, of Pinero's *fin de siècle* dramas, critics have largely overlooked many of Pinero's early comedies as they appear too slight and trifling to warrant serious attention. This attitude was seemingly condoned by Pinero himself, who referred to his farce *The Amazons* as "whimsical" and who told Henry Arthur Jones that his gentle comedy *Sweet Lavender* could be adapted into German by a translator until "it is sage and onions for all [he] care[d]" (*Pinero's Letters* 139, 113). He even described the writing of his comedies as necessary respites from the hard work of writing dramas (Dietrich 42), consequently indicating that his more important works were serious rather than comedic. However, Pinero did not consistently denigrate his comedies, as evidenced by some of his later remarks. In his preface to his later play *The Times: A Comedy in Four Acts* (1891), the notoriously reticent Pinero described why comedy was arguably a superior genre for social criticism. He wrote,

> Yet, even at a time when the bent of dramatic taste is, we are assured, deliberately severe, there are some to whom the spectacle of the mimic castigation of the lighter faults of humanity may prove entertaining—nay, more, to simple minds, instructive. There may be still those who consider the follies, even the vices, of the age may be chastised as effectually by a sounding blow from the hollow bladder of the jester as by the fierce application of the knout; that a moral need not invariably be enforced with the sententiousness of the sermon or the assertiveness of the tract. To such, if they exist, the satirist need only express a hope that his satire may not be found to be too blunt, the moral of his story too trite, the exposition too trivial, the jest too stale. (ix-x)

Viewed in this context, Pinero depicted his comedies as the ideal genre to tackle serious ideas and themes, and he could subtly work on the subjects and issues that he would explicitly confront in some of his later dramas.

Some of his comedies were thus the vehicles for exploring issues that Pinero would continue to study throughout his career. Foremost among these issues were questions of New Women and feminism, and in his early comedies, Pinero portrayed characters that do not exhibit conventional masculine or feminine traits. Pinero allowed room for people who did not fit into traditional gender roles, but he also emphasized the absurdity of taking any movement to the extreme as it disparaged the beauty to be found in both the masculine and feminine experience. In some of his early comedies, Pinero puts religion into discussion with propriety and gender norms, and both *Dandy Dick* and *The Amazons* feature ministers as major characters. *Dandy Dick* portrays a minister who must learn to accept his masculine sister (while perhaps regaining

his own masculinity along the way), and *The Amazons* depicts a minister's centrality to re-humanizing a family of women who solely value the masculine experience.

Dandy Dick (1887) was the third of the farces that Pinero wrote for the Court Theatre, farces that were financially successful and pushed the Court's management into solvency. Like its predecessors *The Magistrate* (1885) and *The Schoolmistress* (1886), it was a commercially successful play,[30] and Pinero's light farce is still entertaining reading today. Though it deals with religion, gender, and hypocrisy, it is nuanced, light-hearted, and good-humored. *Dandy Dick* centers on the Reverend Augustus Jedd, the redoubtable Dean of St. Marvell's. At the start of the play, he has promised a thousand pounds to rebuild his church's spire if he can find seven donors to match his contribution. Despite his promise, Jedd does not have the thousand pounds—his extravagant daughters have spent most of his money on dresses and frivolity (Pinero uses their Christian names, Salome and Sheba, to send the audience a knowing wink that these girls have a queenly love of finery). Luckily, the Dean is almost certain that seven other donors will *not* be found. Outwardly, Jedd is a model of propriety and piety, though he is secretly more fallible than he would like to admit. To keep up appearances of respectability, he even regretfully cut off contact with his sister Georgiana, a horse racer and gambler.

On the eve of a horse race featuring the famous racing horse Dandy Dick, the Dean's recently widowed sister Georgiana returns, ostensibly penitent and chastened. Georgiana reveals to her nieces, however, that she is actually the famous jockey "George Tidd"—and that she is half-owner of Dandy Dick! Through a series of plot contrivances, the Dean is strong-armed into

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[30] *Dandy Dick* had 171 performances at the Court Theatre, followed by another 75 at Toole's Theatre after the old Court was demolished (the managers of the Court transferred it to the new theatre). It also had a provincial tour as well as American and Australian productions (Salaman, "Introductory Note," *Dandy Dick* 8-9). The play went on to have multiple revivals, including revivals in London through the 1970s and the aforementioned tour in the aughts (Gerwitz 310).

quartering Dandy Dick in his own stables, and the Dean discovers to his horror that seven matching donors have been found. Despite his moral aversion to gambling, the Dean resolves to secretly bet on Dandy Dick to raise the money for the spire. When the horse takes ill, the Dean uses his past veterinary training to administer medicine to the horse. When Jedd surreptitiously arrives at the stable in order to deliver the medicine (as the Dean, he cannot let anyone know that he has bet on the horse and that he is attempting to help it), the new constable, who does not recognize him, arrests Jedd for attempted poisoning.

The plot escalates in farcical fashion as the jealous constable falsely accuses Jedd of flirting with his wife and refuses to release him, all of which culminates in an offstage rescue scene where Georgiana and Sir Tristram Mardon, an old friend of Jedd's from Oxford, save the Dean. In the play's climax, it is revealed that Dandy Dick wins the big race—but to his horror, the Dean discovers that his servant Blore put his money on the *other* horse. The Dean's money is lost, and Georgiana is rich once again. Georgiana, though, bails out her brother by providing the thousand pounds for the church spire. She encapsulates the play's thesis after Sir Tristram tells the distraught Jedd that "there's no harm in laugher," which "George" amends by saying, "[P]rovided always, firstly, that it is folly that is laughed at and not virtue; secondly, that it is our friends who laugh at us, [to the audience] as we hope they all will, for our pains" (162). The play ends with "George" saving the day and reconciling with her pious brother, and with this ending admonishment, the audience is invited to laugh lightly and sympathetically at the foibles of a Dean trying desperately to salvage his respectability. In turn, at the end of the play, Georgiana is left wealthy, in charge, and engaged to be married. This ending—the New Woman heroine gaining freedom and self-actualization—is one that Pinero would echo in his later plays,

and in *Dandy Dick,* Pinero comically germinates the conventions that he would apply in his later dramatic works.

Like C.H. Hawtrey's 1875 play *The Private Secretary*, Pinero puts a clergyman at the center of his farce and makes him the butt of jokes. Neither *Dandy Dick* nor *The Private Secretary* is particularly heavy-handed in its criticism of the church (indeed, in *The Private Secretary* the minister's profession is hardly mentioned at all), though the conventions and expectations of the Church of England are mentioned frequently in *Dandy Dick*. *Dandy Dick's* use of an upright moral man for comic gain mirrored his use of a judge in *The Magistrate* (1885), a teacher in *The Schoolmistress* (1886), and a politician in *The Cabinet Minister* (1890). In these plays, Pinero poked gentle fun at redoubtable institutions and pious individuals without actually veering into hard-biting satire. According to Richard F. Dietrich, these plays "take upright Victorians to the very depths of disreputableness," and this "suggests some subversive intention"; however, "Pinero escaped any such suspicion by making their comic downfall purely circumstantial and accidental" (43). Moreover, all of the comedy is aimed at individuals, and "[n]o satiric comment is necessarily directed at institutions." In *Dandy Dick,* this satire is aimed at the Dean and his follies, and the ending suggests that Jedd will have to adjust his narrow thinking.

Central to the Dean's growth is his sister, Georgiana. What Pinero is doing with her is an inversion of the feminine model in the previously discussed "evangelical narrative," and her power, authority, and potential for masculine heroism are alluded to in her name and in her pronouns. Not only does she race under the assumed name of George, but her friends, including Sir Tristram, personally call her George and address her with masculine salutations like "old fellow" (*Dandy Dick* 49). While women were often presented as key figures for men's spiritual

growth in the prevailing evangelical narrative,[31] what Pinero is doing with Georgiana is something very different—she does not spur Jedd's growth through her own suffering or through overwhelming piety; instead she serves as a model of bravery and shows Jedd an example of how to act with masculine fortitude.

In *Dandy Dick,* Georgiana serves as a model for the other characters in the play, and she is the most self-actualized and fulfilled female character found in any of the texts studied in this chapter. In an unusual move for the day, she combines the best of male and female traits, including exhibiting masculine bravery and feminine love of family. Her unconventionality led some early reviewers to dislike her: the *Pall Mall Gazette* (29 January 1887) called her an "awful woman" who is both "an Eve and a serpent" and a "relict of a gentleman jockey," and *The Era* (29 January 1887, 17 September 1887) called her "coarse and vulgar" in its review at The Court Theatre and referred to her later as "a widow who is nothing if not horsey" in its review of the production at Toole's Theatre ("*Dandy Dick* at the Court," "Dandy Dick," "*Dandy Dick* at Toole's"). And when the *Dandy Dick* tour played Ireland, the *Freeman's Journal* (2 August 1887) wrote that Georgiana is a character that "can scarcely win any sympathy from a sensible audience" ("*Dandy Dick* at the Gaiety Theatre"). The character's masculinity, forthrightness, and use of slang was meant to show that this was a new type of character, one who was not the passive, suffering woman of the melodramatic stage or the evangelical narrative, but an active, purpose-driven character.

Despite their misgivings, most reviewers ended up liking "George" (the reviewer for the *Freeman's Journal* being a notable exception). Consider the *Pall Mall Gazette's* final

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[31] For a discussion of women's roles in the evangelical narrative, see chapter one on the works of Henry Arthur Jones, particularly his melodramas, and see Callum G. Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain.*

assessment of the character: "[As for] Mrs. John Wood's Mrs. Tidman it would be impossible to praise too much as a most amusing piece of fooling," the reviewer wrote. *The Era* later gave an explicit reason for why Georgiana was found to be likeable. The reviewer explained how the character showed her "woman's heart that beats warmly beneath her big-buttoned jacket." The reviewer wrote, with backhanded praise, "The way in which that heart goes out to her nieces, her genuine gratitude to her brother for his hospitality, and her warm human sympathies atone for her 'stable mind' and ultra sporting proclivities; and we accept 'George Tid' as an amiable representative of a deplorable class" ("*Dandy Dick* at Toole's"). Despite her overt masculinity, she is also, as she confesses to her lover, "dreadfully effeminate" (93). Georgiana's humanity and warm heartedness, particular the maternal way she relates to her nieces—she also financially saves the girls at the end by helping them win £50 to pay their dress bill, one of their primary obstacles throughout the play (150)—imbue her with more conventionally feminine attributes and went far in allowing audiences and reviewers to accept a character that offended their sense of propriety. By the end, the audience is supposed to join with Sir Tristram as viewing her as the type of woman who could be "a heroine in any age" (142).

What most reviewers failed to comment on, though, was that Georgiana saves her brother and the Deanery by countering his tentative, pious femininity with active masculine verve, which by the end promises to reform the Deanery. At its outset, *Dandy Dick* sets up the convention that Jedd's pious Christianity is the opposite of "George's" sporting lifestyle: the Dean and his sister are opposites in their language (her sporting slang contrasts with his reverential and ecclesiastical speech), personalities (Jedd is as meek as his sister is brash), and looks (Jedd is a "little, short, thin man, with black hair and a squint" whereas Georgiana is robust and healthy (Pinero, *Dandy Dick* 127)). In looks, actions, and speech, the two characters diverge.

The contrast between Jedd and George is highlighted by a whole series of contrasts. In *Dandy Dick,* Pinero establishes a number of oppositional binaries, therefore implying that George's overt masculinity is countered by Jedd's femininity. For example, the opening stage directions state that Salome is a "tall, handsome, dark girl," whereas Sheba is a "fair little girl" (11). These contrasts exist not only in the stage directions, but also in the language of the play, and Pinero frequently calls attention to their differences by having Jedd often refer to Sheba as "toy-child" (24), while Jedd always calls Salome "Salome." Other characters also serve as contrasts to each other, with Salome's "middle-aged, tall" suitor with a "thin face" contrasting with Sheba's suitor, who is a "mere boy" (18). Even the Dean's opening lines bring binaries to the forefront as he discusses dinner with his daughters, stating that they will have "mutton, hot" and "custards, cold" (25).

The idea that George's masculinity is countered by Jedd's femininity gains credence through the Dean's behavior and interests. Jedd is often portrayed in domestic situations, and Pinero gives him lines and stage directions that indicate his feminized position in the household, including being involved in meal planning, meal serving, and handling the household expenses (25, 27, 30). His feminized position is also alluded to in the nickname his daughters give him ("papsey" (28)) and in the fact that he rides a "thirteen-year-old pony" (36). He behaves more like a mother than a father to his daughters, an idea which becomes verbalized when he hears that his sister is coming to live with them. "A second mother to my girls," he says. "She will implant the precepts of retrenchment if their father cannot!" (34), a statement which implies that *he* is his daughter's first mother, particularly as there is virtually no mention of his long-dead wife.

Jedd's feminized position in the text becomes even clearer later as he becomes a type of damsel-in-distress who must be physically rescued from harm. When Hannah, the wife of his jailer, suggests he save himself by "jump[ing] out" and "roll[ing] clear of the wheel" as he is transferred via the jail cart (116), he responds that he cannot because he realizes "the difficulties in alighting from a vehicle in rapid motion" (117). It is subsequently up to his sister to rescue him, in a way that leads Jedd to conclude that he has been "forcibly and illegally rescued" (142). Throughout the play, Pinero juxtaposes Jedd's and Georgiana's behavior, with his femininity serving as counterpoint to her masculinity.

Yet they were not always complete opposites—in his youth at Oxford, Jedd was interested in sports and gambling, interests which he felt he had to curtail as a member of the clergy. The seriousness of his past interests is evidenced by his continuing friendship with Sir Tristram, a friend he met at Oxford. Tristram is shocked to see the tentative, pious man Jedd has grown up to be—Georgiana refers to her brother as a "skittish creature" (47)—and Tristram remarks, "I remember that you once matched a mare of your own against another of Lord Beckslade's for fifty pounds! . . . Oh Jedd, Jedd—other times, other manners. Good-bye, old boy" (46), a melancholy statement that hints that he shares Georgiana's dismay over what type of man Jedd has turned out to be.

The play follows Jedd's trials and travails, and the ending indicates that Jedd is going to have to change into a sporting Dean whose beliefs fall more in line with his sister's. Though he bemoans his lot until the end—his last line is "No, no! I forbid it! Hush!" when Georgiana and Tristram suggest that he must admit that "there's no laughing at a Sporting Dean" (162, 161)—the ending suggests that he *will* learn that there is no harm in laughter. Pinero suggests this by making Georgiana save the day, both in terms of rescuing her brother and in rescuing the

church's spire. Furthermore, by giving Georgiana the last line of the play, a quippy message that states that laughter should be directed at "folly" and not "virtue" (162), Pinero gives her the moral upper hand. From the beginning, Pinero foreshadows that Georgiana will change the Deanery, a foreshadowing made obvious in the scene where Jedd and his sister reconnect for the first time in years:

> THE DEAN: My dear Georgiana, I rejoice that you meet me in this affectionate spirit, and when—pardon me—when you have little caught the *tone* of the Deanery—
>
> GEORGIANA: Oh, I'll catch it; if I don't the Deanery will a little catch *my* tone—the same thing. (39)

By the end, Georgiana *has* changed the Deanery in ways both emotional (her relationship with her nieces) and physical (the reconstruction of the church spire), and though Jedd lags behind the other characters, his former sporting life hints that he, too, will be influenced by George and recapture the masculine vigor of his youth.

In many ways, the struggle between Jedd and George mimics religious debates that were occurring in Victorian society, namely debates between feminizing religious norms and their counterpoint, the so-called Muscular Christianity. As many scholars have noted, most religious discourses of the day were feminine. Callum G. Brown, for example, notes how around 1800 piety "dramatically" switched from being coded as masculine to feminine (58), with "British religiosity" becoming "highly feminised" on the whole (59). This feminization was heightened as evangelicalism recast piety in feminine terms and Anglo-Catholicism and Roman Catholicism became increasingly focused on aesthetics. In fact, many people at the time thought that the

culture was, on the whole, becoming more feminine as British values started focusing on the hearth and home rather than on the Empire (Putney 24-25, 74-75).

The feminizing effects of religion are particularly demonstrated in *Dandy Dick* in the scene where Sir Tristram and Jedd become reacquainted with each other. In it, Jedd keeps pointing to his position as a cleric for his turn away from sports and gambling:

> SIR TRISTRAM: . . . Come and look at Dandy Dick!
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> THE DEAN: Mardon, you don't understand. My position at St. Marvell's [the Deanery]—
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> SIR TRISTRAM: Oh, I see, Jedd. I beg your pardon. You mean that the colors you ride in on don't show up well on the hill yonder or in the stable of the "Swan" Inn.
>
> THE DEAN: You must remember—
>
> SIR TRISTRAM: I remember that in your young days you made the heaviest book on the Derby of any of your fellows. (47-48)

A couple of pages later, Pinero makes explicit that Jedd's position has made him turn away from the masculine, sporting lifestyle. When Georgiana confesses to Sir Tristram that she is secretly the half-owner of Dandy Dick, she ties her subterfuge to Jedd's religion,

> For I can't live without horseflesh, if it's only a piece of cat's meat on a skewer. But when I condescended to keep company with the Canons and the Bishop here I promised Augustin [Jedd] that I wouldn't own anything on four legs, so John sold

> you half of Dick, and I can swear I don't own a horse—and I don't—not a whole one. (50)

In *Dandy Dick,* Pinero ties Jedd's rejection of horse racing and sports, and his subsequent turn to the domestic hearth and home, explicitly with religion, thus portraying the feminizing effects of Jedd's Anglicanism.

In contrast, Muscular Christian discourses were decidedly masculine, and they advocated for the development of strong, action-oriented bodies to accompany strong, action-oriented minds. Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) is generally considered to be the founder of muscular Christianity, a lifestyle in which there is "an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself" (Hall 7). Writing in 1858, Fitzjames Stephens said that the ideal muscular Christian hero, as portrayed in novels like Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), is supposed to "display the excellence of a simple massive understanding united with the almost unconscious instinct to do good, and adorned, generally speaking with every sort of athletic accomplishment" (qtd. in Hall 8). Muscular Christians were not supposed to just think about religion; they were supposed to take immediate, practice-able action.

Muscular Christianity was aimed specifically at adult men (as opposed to women or children), and clubs like the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) started proliferating (Ladd & Mathisen 19-21). Writing specifically about Muscular Christianity and Roman Catholicism, James Eli Adams draws some corollaries. As he describes it, on the face of it, they were diametric opposites: action vs. ritual, modernity vs. medievalism, and Englishness vs. foreignness. However, he claims they both evolved out of a similarity. He writes, "What figure is more remote from Kingsley's muscular Christian than the Paterian aesthete? Yet the two

figures arise out of a common project, the reclamation of the body from the antagonisms of an orthodox, ascetic morality" (215). In *Dandy Dick,* Pinero details how Jedd and Georgiana likewise have dissimilar responses to restrictive morality (i.e. one follows it and one does not), with Jedd, as the nebbish Dean of St. Marvells, being cast as an effeminate Anglican, and Georgiana possessing attributes more in line with Muscular Christianity.

In many ways, Georgiana could serve as the hero of a novel like *Tom Brown's Schooldays:* she never hesitates for a moment in her actions, and she is exceptionally athletic. It is she who can "shape and control" the world around her, as Hall says a muscular Christian was supposed to do. She can intuit that Dandy Dick is a winning horse, save her brother in a clandestine escape from the jail, unite her nieces with their lovers, save the church spire, and win the heart of a man in the process. Unlike her effete brother, who cannot even stop his teenage daughters from spending extravagantly, "George" is a woman in control of her own destiny. According to David Rosen, "self-actualization" was the goal of this Christian "manliness" (34), and it is Georgiana—not Augustus—who fulfills this muscular Christian mandate.

Georgiana's ability to positively influence her brother is highlighted by his ambiguous position in the text. The audience is supposed to like Jedd, though they are also supposed to find him more than a bit ridiculous. He is, as Sir Tristram suggests at the end, being "laughed at" (162), but like Pinero's other farcical victim/protagonists, such as the magistrate in *The Magistrate* or the schoolmistress in *The Schoolmistress,* the audience is also supposed to empathize with him as he tries desperately to salvage his respectability. Michael Booth writes that Victorian farces feature "intense and cumulative pressure brought upon an individual who is helpless at the storm centre of domestic events entirely out of his control" (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 191), which is most certainly true for Jedd. The farcical victim is indeed laughed

at, but Jedd does not end the play in complete humiliation—Georgiana does, after all, save the church spire, thus saving him from total public humiliation. This salvaging of Jedd's respectability, at least in circles outside of his immediate family, indicates that he is not supposed to be totally destroyed by the end, which suggests that the audience's sympathies are at least partially with the Dean.

Jedd's position as someone with whom the audience is invited both to laugh at and empathize with makes the play's moral vantage point unclear, a depiction that led to differing critical opinions on the text's religious meaning. Whereas the *Pall Mall Gazette* (29 January 1887) claimed that "Mr. Pinero puts his Dean in a hole without offending the sensibilities of the most Orthodox Christian" and that "his difficulties would extort a smile even from the Archbishop of Canterbury himself" ("*Dandy Dick* at the Court"), the *Illustrated London News* (5 February 1887) bemoaned Jedd's portrayal, which reviewer Clement Scott said was "steeped in irreverence and careless of respect" (Scott "The Playhouses"). He went on to write, "A very few years ago the mere presence of a clergyman on the stage, even in the shape of a grave and reverent pastor, would have been resented by his flock, who, to use an old-fashioned phrase, 'respected his cloth.' But we have changed all that with a vengeance." In a retrospective printed in *The Times* in 1932, Pinero described how *Dandy Dick* got him censured by the censor. Though the censor did not withhold the play's license, he "deplored in strong terms my want of taste in holding a dignitary of the Church up to ridicule" ("Fifty Years: The Theatre in Transition").

However, Pinero portrays a moral and religious reason for Jedd's reversals. Walter Lazenby explains how his "re-humanization affords delights" and that, by the end, he is "considerably more human" (53). This is arguably as close as any critic has gotten to understanding what Pinero was doing with *Dandy Dick* and its portrayal of religion. In *Dandy*

Dick, Pinero makes religion less remote and more accessible. He literally takes religion out of the pulpit and puts it on the racetrack. Georgiana helps Jedd become reacquainted with his masculine, sporting side, and the Dean is supposed to learn that, as George says, "there's no harm in our laughing at a Sporting Dean" (161), an ending that provides the possibility that he will continue with his sporting. While Jedd continues objecting at the end, saying that he "forbid[s]" their laughing at him (162), Georgiana's continued presence at the Deanery suggests that Jedd will eventually become less rigid. In fact, her presence throughout the play has already inspired the Dean to go down a slippery slope of sports gambling. It is implied that this transformation might continue, particularly since Jedd was once a hearty and hale Oxford student interested in racing, animal husbandry, and athletics.

This turnabout begins through the machinations of Georgiana, who is both masculine and feminine, a combination that allows her to end the play in triumph. Her masculine love of horses and sporting leads her to find material wealth and comfort, and her feminine love of family leads her to become reacquainted with her brother and her family as well as securing her own marital happiness. For Georgiana, becoming self-actualized involves fusing the best of masculine and feminine qualities, a fusion that has the capacity to reform her clergyman brother. Making the proponent of masculinity and muscularity a woman added topicality and humor to the piece, particularly as many people in late-Victorian society saw the New Woman as incongruously masculine. By making her the conduit through which Jedd has the potential to be reformed, Pinero implies that a balance between extremes is best—while still being able to poke gentle fun at the effeminate minister and the mannish woman.

Pinero's *The Amazons: A Farcical Romance in Three Acts* (1893) likewise explored New Women, gender roles, and religion. This farce follows Lady Castlejordan and her three

daughters, whom she has raised to be men, as their suitors arrive at Overcote Park, their family home, and attempt to woo them under the watchful eye of the "Sergeant," a woman their mother has assigned to watch over them. It's a silly, slight play, complete with a break-in through the gymnasium where the weak, effeminate suitors find themselves battling climbing ropes, vaults, and pommel horses as they try to make their way to the rendezvous point. The play ends with the three girls reclaiming their identity as women and with Lady Castlejordan allowing the three men to court her daughters.

The play is striking reading today, with Pinero apparently presaging the rise of gender performativity and transgenderism. However, in the original introduction, Malcolm C. Salaman claims that Pinero "attempted no criticism of life, he sought to solve no problem of morality, sociology, or psychology; he merely permitted himself to dally with the 'mannish-woman' idea in the lightest, gentlest spirit of satire, and in a most whimsical mood of romance" ("Introductory Note," *Amazons* v-vi). Like *Dandy Dick,* this is gentle satire, and though it was "received as a commentary on the 'new woman'" (Lazenby 58), its reception was free from most of the virulence directed at other New Woman pieces. Perhaps this is because of the nuance of the piece—in *The Amazons,* Pinero never comes down fully on the side of gender performativity or gender essentialism, and as in *Dandy Dick,* he portrays a positive combination of both male and female traits.

Also as in *Dandy Dick,* a minister plays a key role in the plot, with the slight implication that religion, or at the very least the local parson, safeguards against absurdity. In the play, the Rev. Minchin, an old friend, and perhaps onetime admirer, of Lady Castlejordan is integral in convincing the mother to allow her daughters to live as they prefer, which is as women. He does it by performing the classic role of the pastor, which is to counsel and console those in hurt or

pain. In *The Amazons,* Rev. Minchin is the voice of reason throughout the play—in many ways, he is reminiscent of Jones's *raisonneurs*—and he sees how Lady Castlejordan's disappointment at not bearing sons has caused her to embrace her "eccentric" style of parenting. Lady Castlejordan's rearing of her daughters is free from feminine gender constraints, but this actually represents a rejection of femininity and a desire to mold her daughters into the son she never had. As he gently asks her, "Why despise girls? Many people like girls. Bless my heart, *I* like girls!" (8). While Lady Castlejordan's embrace of hypermasculinity might seem to emancipate her daughters from feminine conventions, in *The Amazons,* this extreme push towards muscularity and masculine strength is stifling in its own right. In the play, Rev. Minchin joins with the daughters in appealing to Lady Castlejordan to allow the girls to live as women, and he plays a significant role in their ultimate success.

This idea that pain and disappointment engendered Lady Castlejordan's mania for muscle and sport is highlighted throughout the play, with the healing counsel of Rev. Minchin necessary for the play's resolution. *The Amazons* is marked by absence—the absence of the beloved father (who has long since died) and the sought-after son. While Lady Castlejordan tries to make her daughters into sons, her daughter Wilhelmina confesses, "The misery is we're neither one thing nor the other" (161), a sentiment that captures both the limitations imposed upon women in society and her mother's unrealistic dreams of turning her daughters into sons. Lady Castlejordan declares to Minchin that her children are "fine, stalwart young fellows" (6), but Wilhelmina she tells Minchin "I've a foreboding that I shall turn out badly. . . . Oh, I'm getting worse every day, Mr. Minchin. I—I'm becoming so very effeminate" (14). This is a play where the lack of acceptance for fate and for bodily limitations physically changes the daughters' bodies, and the counsel of the pastor—and perhaps religion too by association—is integral to

freeing the daughters of their mother's overbearing dictates and allow them the freedom to be both masculine and feminine.

This idea that women should be free to adopt at least some "masculine" attributes is most clearly seen through Noeline, the eldest Castlejordan daughter. Noeline largely likes masculine attire and behavior, and she and her lover, Lord Litterly, the only one of the three suitors to be conventionally masculine, are identified with ideal British behavior. Regarding Noeline, her sister Thomasin says, "Why, he's [meaning Noeline, as their mother refers to them by masculine pronouns] the best all-around sportsman our side of the county, even *I* own that. Nice! And he's a fellow that reads books too—*I* could never open a book. He—he—well he's just my notion of what a young Englishman ought to be!" (23). Noeline is smart, strong, and capable, designations that she proves when the audience hears that she physically stopped a man from striking a woman near the top of the play (this action is only described and not seen). And Lord Litterly, who is revealed to be the Castlejordan sisters' cousin, is described as having an "extraordinary likeness" to Lady Castlejordan's deceased husband (165), a man who had been described as a paragon of strength, sports, and masculinity.

This connection with ideal British traits is highlighted by the contrast with Wilhelmina and Thomasin's suitors, Alfred, Earl of Tweenwayes, and Andre, Count of Grival. Tweenwayes's stature is the butt of jokes ("a shriveled, puny line" (21)), and the aesthetic Grival is a "very French" foreigner (40), two feminized types of men who contrast with the dashing Englishman Lord Litterly. Whereas Lady Castlejordan declares that "a Frenchman can never be a thorough sportsman" (78), Lord Litterly attends Oxford and has gained distinction as a sportsman. Throughout the play, the physical prowess, mental acuity, and moral kindness of Noeline and Lord Litterly are presented as being ideally English.

The connection between masculinity, femininity, religion, and British identity are kept in the forefront of *The Amazons* as the audience/reader keeps seeing interactions between the muscular, English bodies of the Castlejordan sisters and the weak, effeminate bodies of their suitors, interactions that are regularly interrupted by the presence of the minister. The associations of muscularity and Englishness were underscored by the fact that, according to C.J.W.L. Wee, Muscular Christianity propagated the image of "a masculine, charismatic, and authoritative Englishman who stands as a representative of a resolutely Anglo-Saxon and Protestant nation-empire" (67). While this portrayal of strength and vigor is generally positive, Pinero built in inherent critiques as well. Clifford Putney points out that Muscular Christianity was often criticized for being too masculine and too inclined to action, and this could lead to an "immoral athleticism" (19). This type of extreme masculinity was on the rise in late-nineteenth century England, and in 1888, one English author complained that "the athlete is made almost a demigod" (qtd. in Putney 19).

Lady Castlejordan falls into this sort of pattern of taking her love of muscularity and masculinity too far, and she devalues more conventionally feminine attributes. She disallows Wilhelmina from playing the guitar, saying it's "girlish" (32); she forbids her daughters from marrying and calls their suitors "insects" (28); and she charges Sergeant Shuter to train her daughters so that they do not get "flabby" (48). One of Lady Castlejordan's early speeches details the extremity of her behavior. She tells Minchin,

> Oh, by that time [when Lady Thomasin was born] Jack and I had agreed to regard anything that was born to us as a boy and to treat it accordingly, and for the rest of his life my husband taught our children—there never was another—to ride, fish, shoot, swim, fence, fight, wrestle, throw, run, jump, until they were as hardy as

> Indians and their muscles burst the sleeves of their jackets. And when Jack went, I continued their training. Of course, I—I recognise my boys' little deficiencies, but I'm making the best of the great disappointment of my life, and I—well, call me the eccentric Lady Castlejordan! What do I care? (16)

This speech indicates that Lady Castlejordan's devotion to strength and sports borders on a mania, something that was clear to the audience and reviewers. For example, the *Illustrated News of London* wrote that it was a "clever and diverting satire on the *worship* of big bone and muscle" that shows Pinero at his "whimsical best" [emphasis added] ("*The Amazons* at the Court"). The word "worship" here highlights the association between sports and religion, with Lady Castlejordan's zeal for muscularity bordering on religious devotion. However, there were many people in late-Victorian Britain who thought the love of sport had gone too far, and they wanted a religion that was "reflective of muscular Christianity's physical side, but not of its hypermasculinity" (Putney 149). Similarly, Lady Castlejordan needs to find a way to temper her love of sport and not make it all encompassing.

In *The Amazons,* Rev. Minchin is influential in this transformation, and arguably, he represents the ideal of healthy Christian physicality without machismo. He is described as a "country parson of the old school, white-haired, red-faced, hearty in manner" (*Amazons* 1), and though he gets winded by a long hike throughout Overcote Park, he can tie a fishing lure and cast a rod with the athletic sisters. He also clearly admires aspects of the Castlejordans' athleticism, with Pinero offering slight hints that he used to be in love with Lady Castlejordan. He is her constant companion throughout the play, including accompanying her to London, and in the beginning, when she asks him, "And you remember me as I was twenty years ago?," the stage directions state that he "looks at her" while saying, "I've no excuse for forgetting" (Pinero,

Amazons 7), a stage direction that emphasizes the depth of their longstanding attachment. Even his designation as a minister of the "old school" may subtly indicate muscularity because, in 1880, Thomas Hughes, author of the seminal Muscular Christian text *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), called for "a revival of the muscular Christianity of twenty-five years ago" (qtd. in Putney 19), a muscular Christianity that was less about the extreme physicality that had overtaken the movement and was more about promoting general health and wellness.

Though *The Amazons* is an ensemble play, Rev. Minchin serves as the hero of sorts as he is successfully able to advocate for the girls' freedom and the family's overall happiness. He convinces Lady Castlejordan to let her daughters live as they please, whether it is to be as a muscular New Woman like Noeline or someone more conventionally feminine like her sisters, and he persuades Lady Castlejordan to give up the disappointments of the past by acknowledging her ties of kinship with Lord Litterly (she was formerly too jealous to receive him because he is the ideal son she never had). His influence is particularly demonstrated in the last scene when Lady Castlejordan is at a loss of what to do in regards to her daughters and their suitors. Minchin says to her, "What ought you to do? Begin at once to distract your girls' thoughts from the follies of the past! Demonstrate with as little delay as possible that you can be a reasonable mother! (*Glancing towards the men.)* Ask them to dine." (186). Lady Castlejordan acquiesces, and her invitation to the suitors to join the family at dinner suggests that Lady Castlejordan will allow her daughters to live like women and marry the men.

Minchin's influence extends further, and there is even an implication that he leads Lady Castlejordan to move beyond the heartbreak of losing her husband—by choosing him. At the end, the stage directions state that "the couples are formed, and all go out [to the dining room for dinner] sedately" (167). However, there are eight people on stage at the end—the three young

couples and Lady Castlejordan and Minchin. With those stage directions, it is indicated that Lady Castlejordan and Rev. Minchin join the younger generation by forming a couple of their own, a reasonable assumption for the middle-age pair that frequently refer to one another as "old friend" (38).

The Amazons exaggerates the themes presented in *Dandy Dick* by taking the idea of a "mannish-woman" to its most extreme, but like the earlier play, it draws associations between gender roles, Muscular Christianity, New Women politics, and the clergy. *The Amazons* comically explores what happens when the "muscular" takes precedence over all else, though it ultimately declares that there is a place for women—and men—who do not fit conventional gender roles. When the play ends with the four couples adjourning for dinner, British muscularity is tempered by French aestheticism, masculinity is reconciled with femininity, and old grief gives way to new optimism. Throughout, there is the implication that too much devotional zeal, as epitomized by Lady Castlejordan, can be harmful, but the right touch of temperate religion, at least as exemplified through Rev. Minchin, can be a balm. In *The Amazons,* the extremes of any movement are damaging, and Muscular Christianity and New Women feminism don't have the language or ideals to properly value classic feminine attributes, which Pinero presents as being a loss. In *Dandy Dick* and *The Amazons,* Pinero presents that a combination of male and female attributes is best, a suggestion that has implications for the religious practices of the day.

II. Unrealized Sacred Sisterhood: Roman Catholicism and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*

If devotional zeal affects women's bodies in ways both positive and negative in Pinero's comedies, then his two most important serious works of the 1890s, namely *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,* demonstrate how religious faith, or the lack thereof, cannot just affect them, but also totally destroy women's bodies. While the male characters end the plays relatively unscathed, the bodies of women are literally broken and maimed in these plays. The women are damaged through a variety of means: the hypocritical values of secular society, the rigid implementation of religious faith, and even their tense relationships with each other. These works were designed to be shocking, and judging from the critical and commercial responses they received, the audience obliged and found them deeply troubling and alarming. More important, perhaps, is that their responses highlight the syncretism of the *fin de siècle* by demonstrating how far playwrights could push religious and moral discussions.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray revolves around Paula Ray, the soon-to-be second wife of Aubrey Tanqueray. Paula is a fallen woman with a reputation, and Aubrey chooses to marry her for her warm-blooded passion, a heat that contrasts with his first wife's cool Catholicism. Aubrey's best friend, Cayley Drummle, warns him against the marriage, but Aubrey marries Paula anyway, and they retire into the country. There Paula becomes irritable, snappish, and bored, and she longs to become accepted by Aubrey's circle. When Aubrey's adult daughter, Ellean, returns home after declining to take religious vows, the conflict springs into action as Paula desperately—and in all the wrong ways—seeks Ellean's approval. Sensing the impropriety both of Paula's presence and her actions, Aubrey sends Ellean on a trip to the continent. Ellean returns abruptly, though, when her father doesn't answer some urgent letters

(he does not answer because Paula has hidden the letters from him). Her urgent news is that she has become engaged to Hugh Ardale, a soldier who has gained renown fighting in India. To Paula's dismay, Ardale is the man who first seduced and ruined her, a fact that Ellean soon discovers. Paula is devastated by the unmasking, and Paula kills herself, realizing that marriage and respectability has not brought her happiness and that what little joy she has is compromised by Ardale's presence and Ellean's knowledge of her fallenness. According to J.S. Bratton, Paula commits suicide because "there is no possible world for her to inhabit, no acceptable way for her to behave" (xviii), and she kills herself in despair.

While the play undoubtedly centers on Paula, the play's text is haunted by the presence of the first Mrs. Tanqueray, a Catholic. Like *The Amazons, Tanqueray* is a play with a notable absence, and grief likewise drives characters' actions. This focus on the first Mrs. Tanqueray is embedded in the play's title itself, because as J.P. Wearing explains, the "title invites speculation about the *first* Mrs. Tanqueray" (Wearing, "Introduction" 19). Aubrey's best friend Cayley Drummle describes the first Mrs. Tanqueray as "one of your cold sort, you know—all marble arms and black velvet" who "kept a thermometer in her stays and always registered ten degrees below zero" (*Tanqueray* 90). Their marriage was troubled, and the first wife was unable to convince Aubrey to adopt Roman Catholicism. According to Drummle, she was "[f]rightened at her failure to stir up in him some sympathetic religious belief," so "she determined upon strong measures with regard to her child" (90). Though much ink and stage time is spent discussing the first Mrs. Tanqueray, her name is never mentioned, thus indicating that she is a de-personalized, nearly anonymous emblem of Roman Catholicism. As painted by Drummle and Aubrey, her type of faith was rigid, cold, and remote.

At the beginning of the play, Ellean too is the epitome of isolating, cold religion. After her mother's death, Ellean was subsequently educated at a convent. She is nineteen at the start of the play, and despite her father's wishes that she live with him, she stays in Ireland because, as Drummle reports, she "found her true vocation in a religious life" (91). In Drummle's words, this left her father "terribly shaken" and "alone" (91). Because of Ellean's absence, Aubrey was exceedingly lonely before he met Paula, and Ellean practices a type of Catholicism that separates her from her family and becomes a source of grief to her father. Through Ellean and her mother, Pinero portrays the adherents of Roman Catholicism as icy, remote, and unfeeling, a portrayal that is heightened when contrasted with Paula's hot-blooded impetuosity.

However, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* also displays a Roman Catholic belief system with the potential to evolve. *Tanqueray* focuses on isolation—emotional, spiritual, and even physical isolation—and has an ending moral that suggests that people must find a way to close the distance between one another and form intimate bonds. Ellean's changing Catholic practice, a faith that moves out of the cloisters and into the world, suggests a way to form intimate bonds, though Ellean's change is too tentative and too late. There is a suggestion, though, that a new type of Catholic faith has the potential to metaphorically and literally reach for the other, a reaching that is emphasized by *Tanqueray's* frequent references to distances between people. In Ellean's faith, there is the latent possibility to draw near to the other, particularly through reimagining the parent/child relationship, a relationship that both the daughter-less Paula and the orphaned Ellean desire, as a more sustainable sacred sisterhood.

The first indication that *Tanqueray* explores a fluctuating Catholicism is present in Ellean's first words in the play, words that are communicated via letter before her entrance. She writes to her father, "A great change has come over me. I believe my mother in Heaven has

spoken to me, and counseled me to turn to you in your loneliness. At any rate, your words have reached my heart . . . I am ready to take my place by you" (100). With those words, Ellean signals her willingness to live as part of the world rather than removed from it. Her emotional isolation, which is enhanced by her physical isolation in Ireland, is ending, with her religion serving as the major cause for her isolation and also, conversely, as the cause for her reunification. This sense of Catholicism as alternately aiding and lessening interpersonal intimacy is also seen through Ellean's mother. While Cayley Drummle makes it clear how the first Mrs. Tanqueray's Catholicism separated her from Aubrey, it is notable that the dead woman tells her daughter from heaven—or at the very least, Ellean believes her mother told her—to return to her father. *Tanqueray* thus becomes a generational tale of two different types of Catholicism. While the play is primarily Paula's story, it also serves as a bildungsroman for Ellean as she negotiates between the old-fashioned Catholic values of her mother, the modern secular values of her father and step-mother, and her own fluctuating values.

Ellean's change, though, is by no means instantaneous. When the audience first sees Ellean, Pinero's stage directions state that her face resembles that of the "Madonna" (104), and Paula constantly refers to Ellean as a "saint" or even "Saint Ellean" (105). On the stage, the contrast between Ellean and Paula was also signaled by their different clothes, with Paula dressed in a flamboyant dress and Ellean wearing simple clothes. In photos available through the Victoria and Albert Museum's Theatre and Performance Collection, Mrs. Patrick Campbell's Paula wears clothing that is relatively low-cut and adorned with flounces, ruffles, bows and pearls, while Maude Millett's Ellean wears a high-necked dress that is unadorned and relatively

unfashionable, and they would have appeared as visual opposites.[32] This difference in visuals was likely the directive of Pinero himself, as he directed the show. While the fashions changed for later productions, this dichotomy—the flashy, fashionable stepmother contrasted with the simple, homely stepdaughter—continued. Though this virgin/whore opposition might seem old-fashioned and overdone today, it was obviously a powerful symbol in the late-Victorian era and led Aubrey to be, in the words of the review from *The Sunday Times* (28 May 1893), "frightened of the contact between his daughter's innocence and his wife's tainted nature" ("St. James Theatre").

Despite Aubrey's misgivings, Paula and Ellean spend much of their time in close physical, though not emotional, contact. After their marriage, Aubrey and Paula retire to Aubrey's country estate, but they are as excluded from society there as they were in London. At the start of Act II, Paula describes how all of their neighbors exclude her, including the local vicar, who is ostensibly an Anglican (104). In her isolation, Ellean is Paula's only companion, and they spend "nearly all day" together, though Paula complains to Aubrey that Ellean "doesn't care" for her (105). Pinero describes Ellean in the stage directions as being "cold and distant" towards Paula (104), a reticence that is exacerbated by Paula's mercurial mood swings.

Their physicality—always in proximity to each other, but always separated—also highlights the ambiguous nature of their familial relationship. Paula, as the stepmother to the orphaned girl, is desperate to take on a maternal role, and she begs Ellean to see her as a mother. In Act II, for example, she asks, "Ellean, why don't you try to look on me as your second

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[32] While the script does not indicate what Paula wears in Acts 2-4 (in Act one, she enters in a "superb evening dress" (97)), the productions photos indicate that her flouncy, frilly clothes must be from a later act as she is in the photos with Ellean, and Ellean does not enter until the second act. T

mother? . . . I shall have no children of my own, I know that; it would be a real comfort to me if you would make me feel we belonged to each other" (107). Paula's unfulfilled maternal instincts—with her barrenness perhaps being the result of venereal disease[33]—correspond with Ellean's desire to be mothered. As she tells Paula, "When you have lost your mother it is a comfort to believe that she is dead only in this life, that she still watches over her child. I do believe that of my mother" (107). *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* puts Ellean in a position where she must choose between two types of mothers, the Catholic, distant first mother, and the fallen, warm-blooded second mother. However, the text implies that Paula and Ellean will never be able to form a proper mother/daughter relationship because, in many ways, Paula acts like a child in her caprices and whims and also because they are too close in age. As Paula tells Ellean, "Of course there are not many years between us, but I'm ever so much older than you—in experience" (107). Paula's exhortations have the opposite effect on Ellean, though, by showcasing how unsuitable Paula is in the maternal role. Though the first Mrs. Tanqueray may not have been the ideal mother, neither is Paula.

Paula's unsuitability for the maternal role is emphasized by the controlling, proprietary, and arguably even abusive way she behaves around her stepdaughter, such as when she demands that Ellean hug and kiss her. "Ellean, you seem to fear me," she says in act two. "Don't! Kiss me!" (107). The physical demands are matched by emotional demands, such as when Paula tells Ellean, "Love me" (106), to which Ellean understandably replies, "Love is not a feeling that is

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[33] This claim is speculative, but Paula is certain she will never have children, a certainty that suggests a cause more specific than general infertility. As she tells Ellean, "I shall have no children of my own; I *know* that" [emphasis added] (107). The script also goes to great lengths to suggest that Paula had a number of lovers. For example, Cayley Drummle has known her under several different aliases, including Mrs. Jarman, Mrs. Dartry, and Mrs. Ethurst (94). Later, it is also revealed that she was Hugh Ardale's mistress as well. As very few measures existed to prevent or treat venereal disease, it is reasonable to believe that Paula's barrenness could likely be the result of her past.

under one's control." Paula's behavior often veers worse, though, such as when she requests to know what the first Mrs. Tanqueray tells Ellean in her dreams, and retorts dismissively with what Ellean calls a "sneer" (107). Paula wants Ellean to love her unconditionally, but it is an unreasonable demand from a woman who barely knows her. Paula tries to force a mother/child bond between them, but in doing so, she overlooks other possibilities for intimacy, such as unforced friendship or even a type of sisterhood.

Paula's need for a friend, or perhaps even a sister, is signaled through her physical isolation throughout the play. When Paula and Aubrey marry, their friends abandon them, and they are left alone and sequestered. The only person who remains in physical proximity to them is Ellean. While most contemporary reviewers and modern critics point to Ellean's religious beliefs as being the source of her coldness towards Paula, they are missing a key element—namely, how Ellean's behavior contrasts with all of the other characters. With the exception of Cayley Drummle, Ellean is the only character that *doesn't* cut Paula. All of the other characters, including Aubrey's worldly friends from Act I and the surrounding neighbors in the countryside, ignore and isolate Paula. Ellean cannot bring herself to love Paula, and she is emotionally distant from her, but she does tolerate her. What Pinero is doing with Ellean's cold toleration is perhaps best summarized by Drummle who tells Aubrey, "[I]t is only one step from toleration to forgiveness" (111). Ellean's physical proximity suggests a potential for a correlating emotional intimacy, though it is a promise left unfulfilled.

Most of the characters in *Tanqueray* believe that Ellean's toleration is the product of ignorance, as only Ellean's ignorance of her stepmother's past would allow her to become close to Paula. However, that is incorrect—Ellean intuits what kind of woman her stepmother is, though every character in the play, including Aubrey and Paula, assumes that Ellean is ignorant

of Paula's past. As Paula says, "For all she [Ellean] knows, I'm as much a saint as she . . ." (105). Even Aubrey believes that his daughter is ignorant, which is a key reason he approves of Mrs. Cortelyon's plan to take Ellean on a trip to the continent so that Ellean may remain innocent and uninfluenced by Paula's presence. It isn't until the end of the play that Ellean reveals that she has always known what type of woman Paula was. She says to her, "I have always known what you are! . . . From the first moment I saw you I knew you were altogether unlike the good women I'd left; directly I saw you I knew what my father had done. You've wondered why I've turned from you! There—that's the reason!" (147). Taken at face value, Ellean's revelation is the sign of hard-hearted morality that was surely influenced by her Catholic upbringing. Lines like this have caused critics like Penny Griffin to view the play as being a battle between cold religion and forgiving secularism. "Strict, puritanical religious belief cannot come to terms with lack of moderation, gaiety, even affection," she writes (223).

However, when seen in contrast to the behavior of the other characters in the play, Ellean's emotionally distant toleration of her stepmother is far preferable to the complete social and emotional isolation Paula faces from the others, most of whom have no apparent religious affiliation. Moreover, Ellean's emotional distance from her stepmother is rendered intelligible to the reader by Paula's demanding, jealous behavior. Pinero is suggesting that, while Ellean's Roman Catholicism is not universally accepting, it is more forgiving and tolerant than the non-Catholicism of modern English society. At least with Ellean and Paula there is a possibility for emotional intimacy, an opportunity rendered visible by the physical proximity of the two women throughout the play.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray suggests that Ellean must find a way to connect with others if she is going to be a true Catholic, and the play follows her imperfect steps to move towards the

other. The unseen Ellean of the first act, when Aubrey discusses his impending marriage to Paula, is the personification of her dead mother's cold Catholicism that chooses the nunnery over her father, despite her father's intense loneliness. If Paula is an unsuitable mother—as Pinero portrays her to be—then so is the first Mrs. Tanqueray by encouraging separation and isolation. Pinero presents this as a false type of Catholicism, and Ellean has to find a way to bridge the divide. The Ellean of Act II is already different; she has returned to her father's home in an effort to comfort him, and she tolerates, rather than explicitly rejects, her stepmother.

Ellean's potential to become a new type of Catholic is most clearly demonstrated in Act III when she voluntarily draws near to her stepmother. After Ellean returns from Paris, she tells Paula, "I've come home—if you'll have me" (132). Shortly thereafter, she implores her stepmother, "Kiss *me,"* before adding, "I want to behave differently to you in the future" (132). Ellean and Paula briefly draw near to each other, but when Ellean reveals that she is in love, Paula's sneers at her, "We've taken you for a cold-blooded little saint. The fools you've made us! *(Bitterly.)* Saint Ellean! Saint Ellean!" (133). Again, their possibility for intimacy is aborted as Paula mocks her stepdaughter, which she does when rage and jealousy overcome her (in this case, her rage results from thinking that Ellean will marry and leave her). Despite her best intentions, Ellean cannot help but turn away from Paula yet again.

Ellean's thwarted potential to react to her stepmother's petty outbursts with empathy and love is signaled through her changing looks. When she returns from the continent, Aubrey says to her, "I thought you took after your poor mother a little, Ellean; (*looking into her face earnestly)* but there's a look on your face to-night, dear, that I never saw on hers—never, never" (130). Throughout the play, Pinero frequently calls attention to Ellean's and Paula's faces, with characters commenting on their looks. Ellean's softening facial features corresponding with an

empathetic emotional change, and Paula's aging and worn-out face corresponds with her mental and emotional decline, a fact which Pinero calls additional attention to by having Paula frequently look in a mirror (124, 138).

By Act IV, Ellean's evolution is almost complete, though not before her prior rigidity briefly returns, a recurrence that culminates in tragedy. Though Ellean knows that Hugh Ardale had led a dissolute life prior to his trials in India, she has forgiven him for it. She is shocked and hurt, then, when Paula tells Aubrey that Ellean cannot marry Hugh. Though she protests to Paula that her step-mother is disparaging Hugh on "gossip, report, hearsay" (146), Ellean suddenly realizes *how* her step-mother knows about Hugh's dissolution, which is when Ellean confesses that she has always known that her step-mother was a fallen woman, though she did not know the man responsible for her fall. Ellean's realization leads Paula to bitterly proclaim to Aubrey that Ellean's "a regular woman too. She could forgive him easily enough—but me! That's just a woman!" (148). Shortly thereafter Paula retires to her bedroom with the sad farewell to Aubrey that one day he will see her "just as your daughter does now" (150). Minutes later, Ellean comes in to the living room to tell her father that Paula has committed suicide by jumping from her bedroom window.

The ending is full of dramatic irony for Paula was wrong in her assessment of Ellean's judgment; indeed, Ellean went to Paula's room to tell her she was sorry for revealing that she always knew Paula was a fallen woman, a revelation which Paula wrongly interpreted as condemnation. As Ellean says, "I—I went to her room—to tell her I was sorry for something I had said to her. And I was sorry—I was sorry" (152). The repetition of "I was sorry" indicates that Ellean has moved beyond passive toleration of her stepmother into active understanding for

the Magdalene. However, in *Tanqueray,* this sorrowful repentance is too little, and it comes too late.

Part of the reason that Ellean gains greater empathy for her stepmother is through her newfound understanding of the world. Throughout the play, Aubrey talks about how he wants to protect her from the negative influences of the world. He tells Drummle that he feels "anxiety" about Ellean, a "terror" that leads him to often wish that his "child were safe under the ground!" (109). Drummle disagrees, saying that it is impossible for Ellean to go through life without "getting her white robe—shall we say, a little dusty at the hem" (110). Drummle goes on to suggest that, if Ellean should gain "some knowledge of the world," then it would help her to "understand" and "philosophize" about sin and sinners (109).

Drummle is largely correct in his assessment, and Ellean's entry into the wider world presages her final evolution into a kinder, gentler Catholic who seeks out physical and emotional propinquity with Paula, rather than just tolerating her stepmother. When Ellean returns to England after meeting Hugh in Paris—and discovering the truth about his past life—she actively tries to befriend Paula. The last lines of the play display Ellean's full evolution, when she acknowledges how she failed her stepmother:

> ELLEAN: I—I've seen her. It's horrible.
>
> DRUMMLE: She—she has--!

> ELLEAN: Killed—herself? (Nodding.) Yes—yes. So everybody will say. But I know—I helped to kill her. If I had only been merciful! *(She beats her breast.)*[34]
>
> *(She faints upon the ottoman. He [Drummle] pauses for a moment irresolutely—then he goes to the door R, opens it, and stands looking off).*

With those words, the curtain closes, and Ellean's exclamation of "if I had only been merciful" exhorts the audience to go home and be merciful themselves, an exhortation that gains force through her intense physical response.

The word "merciful" has overtly religious overtones, thus showing that Ellean's tolerance and forgiveness for the fallen woman is a result of her growing, rather than a lessening, Catholicism. The word choice is not coincidental, and the word is used "frequently in exclamatory phrases invoking God, heaven, etc.," and most of the earliest recorded uses of it in the English language are in religious texts ("mercy"). This signals that Ellean has ceased to follow the rigid Catholicism of her mother[35] and has instead become a new type of *fin de siècle* Catholic, one whose faith is compassionate and merciful, a change that is not only emotional but physical. Ellean's final action, to *volitionally* seek out Paula's company and apologize to her, signals a desire for friendly or even sisterly intimacy, as opposed to the forced intimacy of Paula's desired parent/child relationship.

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[34] Interestingly, this stage direction—"she beats her breast"—only appears in select editions of the text. There is no clear reason for the discrepancy.

[35] However, it should be noted that perhaps even the first Mrs. Tanqueray has relinquished her religious and moral rigidity by telling Ellean via a dream to go to her father. This interpretation has an obvious counterargument, though, in the fact that Ellean's dreams might just be a manifestation of her own desires/beliefs.

Tanqueray explores human intimacy and suggests that drawing near to the other is one of the most profound and spiritual actions a person can take. Throughout the play, physical and spiritual intimacy are sought after, and Pinero suggests that religion—in this case Catholicism—can be the conduit for gaining communion with the other, an implication that is not obvious at the start. Whereas the first Mrs. Tanqueray's faith was marked by removing herself emotionally, and this convention became externalized by her daughter's physical removal to the nunnery, Mr. Tanqueray continually seeks intimacy. He seeks this first through marriage, then through the father/daughter relationship, and then through his second marriage to Paula. While it would appear then that religion has nothing to do with intimacy—Mr. Tanqueray is ostensibly secular—it is notable that he fails almost immediately. His first marriage was disastrous; his relationship with his daughter is strained (and it only becomes less so via Ellean's decision to come home); and his second marriage is excessively difficult. He fails because he does not understand people's deeper desires. In the case of the first Mrs. Tanqueray, he did not share or understand her deeper spiritual needs, and in the case of the second Mrs. Tanqueray, he does not understand how the "well-to-do hearth and home" is not enough (Wearing "Introduction" 26), and he fails to realize how Paula declines under their "social exile" (36). Though Ellean also fails to successfully reach out to the other, there is the implication that her new type of Catholicism might have been successful in reaching out to Paula if only she had been more "merciful" earlier, a mercy that can only be engendered by going out into the world.

Ellean's spiritual awakening, an awakening predicated on knowledge of the world, is more powerful than it first appears because Ellean has to reach out to a *flawed,* rather than an idealized, fallen woman. Many of the works of the era that featured fallen women made them into pitiful sacrificial victims, such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* which had

appeared in 1891, just two years before. Paula, though, is no Tess; in a move that was "unique" for the period, Pinero portrayed a fallen woman who is "self-destructive" and whose own "caprice and shallowness contribute to her ruin" (Bratton xviii, Rowell 5). Her "central feature" is "her desperate craving for acceptance" (Dawick 196), an attribute that makes her lash out in response to slights both real and imagined. Pinero's interest "lay, as always, in psychology" (Griffin 18), and Paula is a morally and psychologically complex character. By making Paula sharp-tongued, jealous, and capricious, Pinero was making an implicit argument that the scope of forgiveness for the fallen woman should not be limited to good victims (i.e. ones that are morally, if not physically, pure). Ellean's renewed sense of Catholic duty is not brought upon by an accidental Magdalene or a Magdalene with the heart of a virgin; Paula is a fallen woman who is not pure-minded and pure-hearted, and Ellean's reluctance to draw near to her is understandable. However, by extending the scope of forgiveness to "bad" victims, Pinero makes Ellean's faith more catholic by encompassing all people.

One of the clearest ways that Pinero implies that Catholicism can be a source for religious rejuvenation is through his portrayal of English society and the English empire, which serve as a foil to the foreign and exotic religion of Roman Catholicism.[36] Pinero alludes to the

[36] In Romantic and Victorian literature, Roman Catholicism was often portrayed as something foreign, sinister, and mysterious. This was a common trope especially in Gothic literature, and works like Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) expressed outright horror at the Romish religion. According to Susan M. Griffin, British and American writers portrayed Catholicism as "foreign infiltration," as various "Irish, German, French, Italian influence" (4), with "repeated representations of sinister Italian and Spanish clerics and of the corruption of the Renaissance Papacy and the horrors of the Inquisition" (3). English society, of course, became forcibly Anglican during the reign of Henry VIII, and Catholicism became a minority religion. For years it was illegal for Catholics to hold land, vote, or serve in Parliament in the UK. It wasn't until 1829 that the Roman Catholic Relief Act was passed, which allowed Catholics to serve in Parliament. Despite this legal gain, Roman Catholicism remained a minority religion that was often viewed with suspicion, and according to Griffin, England had "had long traditions of anti-Catholicism, but specific events [including immigration, specifically Irish immigration]

foreignness and exoticism of Roman Catholicism throughout *Tanqueray,* but he does so not to posit Catholicism as a dangerous "other," but rather as a way to critique upper class English society. The relative foreignness and exoticism of Catholicism is alluded to several times in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* most notably through Ellean's association with foreign places and concepts. Ellean's entire education has occurred in Ireland, a Catholic-majority country that is physically and figuratively separated from Aubrey's privileged English society. Furthermore, Ellean has been at a convent, with her female-only society further separating her from the urbanity of mixed London society. Ellean literally comes from a different world, and she is something alien and bizarre, especially as she is a relic of Aubrey's past life with her mother.

Ellean also becomes associated with Paris during her travels, with the Catholic-majority city playing a large role in the plot, particularly as it is where she meets Hugh Ardale. The romance between Ellean and Hugh is set up as something of a star-crossed relationship where the two lovers are opposites in temperament, looks, religion, and attitude. Ellean's relative exoticism and foreignness is contrasted with Hugh's overt Britishness. Despite his travels in France and India, Hugh is a model of English behavior. He is a handsome war hero, and the newspapers tell of his bravery in India. According to J.P. Wearing, Hugh Ardale is invested with the "attributes of Empire and heroic abilities esteemed by the era" (*Tanqueray* "Introduction" 33). Though he, like Ellean, has been to foreign places and lands, he remains a paragon of the Empire. Beyond the acclaim he receives in the newspapers, Aubrey describes him as "brave as a lion" (141), and Mrs. Cortelyon says he displayed "wonderful heroism" in India where he was

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revivified them throughout the nineteenth century" (3). *Tanqueray* was written at a time when anti-Catholic sentiment was prevalent, particularly as it was often seen as contrary to classic British values.

"face to face with death for a whole week," and yet is like a "big good-natured schoolboy" (129, 141). Also, he has a gregarious nature, wherein he greets people with "a smile and a cheering word" (129), which contrasts with the reserve of the Roman Catholic characters.

The idea that Pinero is using *Tanqueray* to advocate for Catholicism gains credence through his different treatments of Ellean and Hugh. When seen in comparison with her fiancé, Pinero's preference for Ellean is obvious. Even Hugh's first entrance strikes the audience as improper, as he comes uninvited to her window and then tries to persuade her to sneak outside. Ellean implores him, "You must go away; it's not *right* for you to be here like this" (131), a request that he ignores. As he begs and pressures her, his persuasions seem slick and oleaginous. When it is later revealed that he was the man who first seduced Paula, the audience is able to understand what techniques he likely used, thus making Paula even more sympathetic and Ardale more despicable.

In many ways, Hugh Ardale is the epitome of the type of man who lived a "man's life," the type of man that Aubrey says at the end of the play ruin countless lives. He says,

> Yes, I do curse him—him and his class! Perhaps I curse myself too in doing it He has only led "a man's life"—just as I, how many of us, have done! The misery he has brought on me and mine it's likely enough we, in our time, have helped to bring on others by this leading "a man's life." But I do curse him for all that. . . . Curse him! Curse him! (151)

By explicitly tying Ardale into a larger, more pervasive problem—"him and *his class* [emphasis added]*"* being the key words—Pinero makes an overt critique of well-heeled, upper crust English society that produces and tolerates such men.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray thus serves as a broader critique of English society with Roman Catholicism pointing the way towards a different mode of conduct. Pinero's treatment of Englishness versus foreignness is different here than in his comedies, with *Tanqueray* serving as an indication that English society is too moribund to change its ways. Surprisingly, few contemporary theatrical critics or modern scholars have written about the Catholic implications of Pinero's play. While some, like Joseph Donohue, recognize that *Tanqueray* was "a reflection of contemporary society's values," and it and other pieces by Pinero "spoke to audiences in the idiom of their day about concerns central to living" (97, 101), few, if any, modern scholars have explored how the play's investment in Roman Catholicism affected its meaning.

However, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray's* religious resonance in *fin de siècle* society is proven through the contemporary response. Newspapers like *The Times* (27 December 1893) called it "epoch-making" and said that, despite the Lord Chamberlain's (i.e. the censor's) reserves about the morality of the subject matter, the "popularity of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* seems to show that the public mind was fully prepared for such a *sermon* as Mr. Pinero *preaches* [emphasis added]*"* ("The Theatres in 1893"), thereby indicating that the play had a recognized religious function. More importantly, the play elicited public debates about its religion and morality that often played out in letters to the local newspaper, sometimes with clergymen weighing in on the matter (Dawick 200). One of the most significant responses was written by an Irish priest named T.W.M. Lund, whose pamphlet "*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray:* What? And Why?," went on to have nine reprintings (Dawick 200).

The response to Pinero's play highlights the growing effect theatrical and religious culture had on each other and displays how far the syncretic stage had come in making religion a suitable topic for exploration on the stage. Lund's argument begins with a thesis that would have

been unthinkable just a decade prior: namely, that ministers and clergy have an *obligation* to see plays like *Tanqueray,* a major change in perception from the early 1880s. Discussing the obligation of the clergy to see and discuss the play, Lund wrote,

> When a notorious drama, involving momentous points of morality very likely to be misunderstood appears in a city, ought the public PULPIT to ignore it?
>
> One knows quite well, that it is seen by scores of one's own friends; critiques upon it are read in every journal; it is discussed in reviews; it deals with one of the crying evils of our day, which threatens us with some great social revolution; it is idle to pretend that the subject is one which can be hidden, and that all who take in a newspaper, are not familiar with the tenor of the piece, even if they do not go to the theatre to see it.
>
> A play which has moved Society, so that it is keenly fought over wherever two or three are gathered together, and so that the view we take of it has become the standard by which our moral solvency is assessed; such a play, I think, calls for some criticism from those of us, who are in a measure trustees of the public morality. (3-4)

By 1893, Jones and Pinero had changed the religious expectations of the theatre so much that a clergyman could now argue for the public necessity of seeing plays. This represents a massive change in perception; no longer are plays necessarily deleterious or even neutral; they can be positive. Jones, Pinero, and Lund thus conclude with the same thesis: that religion must interact with the larger culture and the larger culture must interact with religion.

The response to *Tanqueray* proved that the larger public absolutely *did* want to interact with the theatre on debates about religion and morality. Though *Tanqueray* received almost unanimous praise in the press, it sparked a debate that played out in newspapers across the United Kingdom. Birmingham's *Daily Post* printed a series of letters debating the moral merits of *Tanqueray,* with one letter writer arguing that "the moral tone of the piece tends to outrage all sense of propriety and makes one blush for our common humanity" (qtd. in Dawick 200), and the play attracted controversy in most locales where it toured, including in Liverpool, which was in the middle of a renewed purity campaign (Dawick 200). Regarding the morality of *Tanqueray, The Standard* (29 May 1893) declared, "There is doubtless a moral to be drawn from the work—several morals in fact," though it said they were difficult to ascertain because Pinero is a dramatist who endeavors "to write a drama which should awaken and sustain interest, and not to preach a sermon in the guise of a play" ("St. James's Theatre"), a direct rebuttal of *The Times'* assertion that *Tanqueray* was, in fact, a "sermon." Interestingly, *The Morning Post* (29 May 1893) refused to engage with the play's obvious controversy by writing, "We need not enter into a discourse respecting stage morals" ("St. James's Theatre"). As happened with some of Pinero's other plays, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* had a robustly *mixed* reception on matters of morality and religion, therefore showing the syncretic nature of the audience's response.

Some of the most syncretic responses came from the clergy. And yet the play's moral message gained arguably its strongest opponents and proponents in the clergy. T.W. Lund, for example, praised the play's morality by writing that its message was apt for its times and that *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was full of Christian morality. He wrote,

> You weep over a character of fiction, sinful and depraved; and you are as cold as a stone to living souls about you, who are honest and true! Don't they deserve your help as much as Mrs. Tanqueray? . . .
>
> So, my counsel to you, as individual members of Society would be this;--
>
> Be kind to all. Give your sympathy to all. Strengthen all you can for the rough battle of life. Be merciful to all, as you need mercy. Despise none, for in that scorn you may include yourself. (29-30)

While Lund's reaction was not universal, his acclaim of *Tanqueray* shows that the nine years between Jones's *Saints and Sinners* (1884) and Pinero's *Tanqueray* (1893) had been monumental in changing people's attitudes towards the depiction of religion on the stage and demonstrated that clerical antagonism to the theatre was fading.[37]

The religious reaction to *Tanqueray* bears particular notice because it was the single most important play of the late-Victorian period. Beyond its commercial success—the play had a long run of 225 performances at the St. James Theatre and had numerous tours in England and abroad (Gerwitz 312)—it was lauded as the greatest English play of its generation. *Tanqueray* even inspired Shaw, who was disgusted with Pinero's work, to write his own play about a fallen woman's tenuous hold on respectability, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (written 1893, first

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[37] Clerical response to the drama was highlighted again just a few years later when Pinero's *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899) brought about the denunciation of the Bishop of Wakefield as "the most immoral play" for its famous bedroom scene (wherein a wily manicurist hides herself in a bachelor's hotel room in order to catch him behaving dishonorably), though many others rushed to defend it, and *The Era* (15 April 1899) indignantly wrote, "An immoral play is—how often must it be repeated?—not a play in which immoral people are depicted, but one in which wickedness is encouraged and made attractive . . .". The change from clerical rejection to acceptance of the theatre was by no means completed in the *fin de siècle,* but by the time of *The Gay Lord Quex,* clerical condemnation of the theatre appears to be a minority position. ("Mr. Pinero and the Bishop").

performed in 1902). For critics and scholars both contemporary and modern, *Tanqueray* was *the* play that ushered in modern English drama. Writing about its influence, Clayton Hamilton wrote that, in *Tanqueray,* Pinero

> . . . abolished from his dialogue the soliloquy and the aside; for the first time, he built a solid structure in which every part answered to every other part; and for the first time, he attacked a serious social problem in the mood of modern tragedy. . . . [he was] a playwright of two periods—before 1893 and after 1893; and there is a wide gap between his earlier and his later work. ("Introduction" *Vol. Three* vi-vii)

For contemporary playwright and modern scholars, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was a pivotal play that signaled the end of old-fashioned Victorian drama and heralded the new form of English drama. That it ushered in the new era of modern English plays while making Catholicism central to its plot makes *Tanqueray's* performance important not just as a theatrical event, but a religious one as well.

Part of Pinero's innovation, though, was that he moved religion beyond melodrama and made it a crucial component of his psychological explorations. Making the religion Roman Catholic, a minority religion associated with foreign people, highlights its isolation from contemporary English mores. Pinero takes the separation of Roman Catholicism to portray that continued isolation, as seen through the first Mrs. Tanqueray, further divides and isolates people. However, a Roman Catholicism that reaches for the other—that seeks a spiritual and physical proximity—can serve to cut through the loneliness and seclusion of upper class English society. It is precisely because it is foreign and because it is a minority faith that Roman Catholicism has the potential to question conventional English behaviors. As Pinero portrays it, Roman

Catholicism's foreignness and exoticism can further enforce separation and loneliness, or they can be the very qualities that rock established dictates.

However, in *Tanqueray* Roman Catholicism's gesture towards the other comes too late. By depicting a latent potential in Roman Catholicism's otherness to criticize bourgeois English behaviors, Pinero portrayed religion's rejuvenating possibilities for *fin de siècle* society. However, by ultimately portraying its failure, Pinero also revealed a reluctance, at least as depicted in *Tanqueray,* to believe that Catholicism truly had the power to transform society. Perhaps this is also due to its foreign and exotic nature—Roman Catholicism can highlight the flaws in English society, but possibly it is too far removed to actually fix them. In his next play, however, Pinero would forge a new type of family divorced from the mores of bourgeois society, a sacred society where problems with English society were addressed from within.

III. Sacred Sisterhood Realized: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*

Shorty after composing *Tanqueray,* Pinero authored another serious play about religion and the fallen woman, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith: A Drama in Four Acts* (1895). Like Paula, Agnes Ebbsmith is multifaceted and complex. Unlike Paula, though, Agnes's layered portrayal and her vacillating views are actually the product of an unusual sort of moral austerity. Gertrude, one of the other main characters in the play, calls Agnes "a visionary, a moral woman living immorally" (164), a seemingly contradictory designation. The play's thematic similarities were particularly heightened as Mrs. Patrick Campbell was again featured in the title role (she was also slated to play Audrie Lesden in Jones's *Michael and His Lost Angel* before quitting midway through rehearsals), with her newest role making her "run the gauntlet of religious

susceptibilities" (Foulkes 201). The role of Mrs. Ebbsmith was well-suited to Mrs. Campbell's particular brand of mercurial acting: as Pinero's newest heroine, she had to possess religious feelings and devotions that ran the gamut from atheism to extremism, with each belief offering a temporary psychological respite.

The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith centers on the title character, an anti-marriage crusader whose polemics are informed by her own history in an abusive marriage. She finds a partner in Lucas Cleeve, who has also had an unhappy experience in matrimony. They live openly together, but when Lucas wants to resuscitate his once-promising political career, he persuades Agnes to become a more conventional type of mistress (i.e. a pretty, fashionable, shallow, kept woman), a position she had formerly balked at. Her friends, a minister and his widowed sister, try to convince her not to abnegate her own desires by becoming a kept woman and offer her sanctuary in their country house, but she throws their proffered Bible—which also contains the address of their house—into the fire. With a cry, though, she snatches it out of the flames, and she resolves to maintain her independence. A fourth act visit by Lucas's real wife to try to convince Agnes to become her husband's secret mistress so that he can have a successful political career backfires, and the play ends with Agnes determining to take up residence with her friends in the country.

When *Ebbsmith* begins, Agnes is passing herself as "Mrs. Cleeve," and Agnes's clothing and demeanor give no hint to Gertrude Thorpe, the sister of the Rev. Amos Whitefield, that she is not the real Mrs. Cleeve. Her subterfuge is aided by the fact that she and her lover are in Italy; Lucas Cleeve has fled his unhappy marriage in England, and similarly, Gertrude and Amos are traveling so that Gertrude can recover from a dual source of grief: the death of her only child and the knowledge that her marriage was abusive. The widowed Gertrude admires the

"marriage" of Mr. and "Mrs." Cleeve, and she sees their equitable partnership as an inspiring alternative to her own stifling and unequal marriage. In her opinion, "Mrs. Cleeve" is the "ideal" woman (*Ebbsmith* 9).

Pinero's religious thoughts are first hinted at when Gertrude discovers that Agnes is not, in fact, Mrs. Cleeve, but instead a mistress. Though she is shocked, Gertrude does not immediately reject Agnes but instead invites her to tell her her background. Pinero uses Agnes's revelations to show the spiritual yearning that underpins all of Agnes's vacillations. Agnes reveals that her father was a famous atheist and anti-marriage political agitator and that her home life was wretched and that she married young to escape her home. For the young Agnes, religion was a refuge. She explains to Gertrude,

> When I was nineteen I was gazing like a pet sheep into a man's eyes; and on one morning I was married, at St. Andrew's Church in Holborn, to Mr. Ebbsmith, a barrister. . . . Yes, in church—in church. In spite of father's unbelief and mother's indifference [to religion], at the time I married I was as simple—ay, in my heart as devout—as any girl in a parsonage. The other thing [the curse of an unhappy marriage] hadn't soaked into me. Whenever I could escape from our stifling rooms at home, and slam the front door behind me the air blew away uncertainty and skepticism; I seemed only to have to take a long, deep breath to be full of hope and faith. And it was like this till that man married me. (30-31)

For the young Agnes, faith was a refuge, though one that did not save her from an abusive marriage. And her repetition of "in church—in church" verbally calls attention to the change in her beliefs from the past to the present. Similar to what Pinero did in *Tanqueray,* here in *Ebbsmith* the playwright is setting up the convention that religious faith has the potential for

spiritual and physical succor, though this comfort is limited and does not fully protect against harm from society and the world. After enduring eight years of ill-treatment, Agnes's husband died, and Agnes became just like her father: an atheistic, anti-marriage political agitator.

For Agnes, marriage is a trap, and she and Lucas want to be free from its contaminating influence. Yet despite being anti-marriage crusaders, Agnes's and Lucas's partnership remarkably resembles a marriage, as they live and work together and each is dependent on the other. They met in a Roman hospital while Agnes was serving as Lucas's nurse during a bout of Roman fever, a physical disease that mirrored his emotional sickness. Previously, he had run away from an unhappy marriage and burgeoning political career, and when Agnes and Lucas fell in love, they determined to live an unmarried but devoted life together while authoring anti-marriage polemical tracts. Describing their resolve to Gertrude, Agnes asks her, "Why should men and women be so eager to grant to each other the power of wasting life? That is what marriage gives—the right to destroy years and years of life" (36).

As in *The Amazons,* Pinero here is portraying a zeal, in this case political, that borders on the religious, so completely are its practitioners devoted to it. Also like *The Amazons,* this is a zeal borne out of grief, and the devotion masks pain. In this case, it conceals the pain of a troubled marriage. One of Lucas's opening speeches says this, when he reports that he was "dying" before he met Agnes because his marriage was a "bitter, crushing disappointment" (19). Lucas's and Agnes's anti-marriage pamphlets cannot hide their past pain, and Gertrude says that reading them makes her feel "sad and sorry" for them (10). Also like Pinero's earlier work, falseness underlines the zeal—whereas in *The Amazons* Lady Castlejordan's children were still girls despite her efforts to turn them into boys, here in *Ebbsmith,* despite their anti-marriage sentiments, Agnes and Lucas's relationship *is* a marriage in all but name. In these cases, their

devotional zeal is misplaced because the characters think they can sequester themselves from the effects of the outside world; however, as he likewise portrayed in *Tanqueray,* Pinero depicts that the outside world cannot be shut out.

Agnes's folly is soon revealed to her when Lucas proposes to return to political life in England. While she bemoans that any sort of physical passion has marred their companionship (47)—she wants a partnership centered on shared work and mutual respect—Lucas wants to transform Agnes into a more typical sort of mistress: well-dressed, glamorous—and an open secret. Lucas wants to return to politics, and this necessitates that he return to his wife while keeping his mistress in the secret/not-secret way that many prominent men did in the Victorian era. Agnes is shocked and repelled at his suggestion as it goes against everything she believes in, but she confesses to Gertrude, "The dread that the moment may arrive some day when, should it be required of me, *I shan't feel myself able to give him up so easily!"* (69). As she fears, she ultimately acquiesces for love of Lucas, and her donning of a proffered beautiful dress at the end of Act II signals her downfall, as the dress symbolizes that she has been turned "into a whore" (Fisher 217).

This signal that she has been turned into a whore is emphasized by the extremity of her physical change. At the opening of the play, the stage directions call for Agnes to be dressed in her signature drab look. Like many of the ostensibly sexless and feminist New Women, Agnes is dressed in such a way as to minimize her sexuality and femininity. Her appearance is the opposite of what audiences had come to expect of a mistress or a fallen woman. Unlike Paula, who is introduced to the audience wearing a "superb evening dress" (*Tanqueray* 97), Agnes wears a dress that is "plain to the verge of coarseness," and her face has "little colour" and "is at

the first glance almost wholly unattractive" (*Ebbsmith* 14). She is a stereotypical New Woman, but like Paula, Agnes is, despite her politics, trapped by the conventions of bourgeois society.

Agnes's moral and religious vacillations are shown explicitly on her body as she slips from her puritanical clothes at the beginning of the play into the beautiful courtesan's dress at the end of act two. The courtesan's dress symbolizes that she is trying to be what Gertrude calls "an ordinary smart woman" instead of the zealous independent she first was (*Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* 133), something more akin to *Tanqueray's* Paula. Wearing it is what allows Lucas to exclaim with relief that they are now "free from the burden of that crazy plan of ours of trumpeting our relations to the world" (115), a sentiment that reveals he and Agnes were never truly partners as he did not share her zeal. Also in contrast to Agnes, Lucas remains the same both emotionally and physically throughout the play, and his equanimity is not threatened.

As in *Tanqueray,* Pinero shows that women have more at stake in religious, and by extension moral and spiritual, disputes, with their very bodies being affected. The potential of faith to offer both material and spiritual support first arises in this moment of crisis, when Agnes considers going to England as Lucas's mistress. Seeing how her friend has changed, Gertrude exhorts her, "Pull yourself out of the mud! Get up—out of the mud!" (158). However, the "mud" here is not adultery—it is Agnes's loss of independence and power as she transforms from being an independent woman into a kept mistress. Gertrude urges Agnes to leave Lucas and come live with her and her brother in the parsonage (134), an invitation she first offered, albeit in more oblique terms, in Act II. By Act III, the offer is explicit, and Gertrude's proposition implies that the Church is a more hospitable home for independent-minded women than duplicitous upper class London society.

The action reaches its zenith in the famous Bible-burning scene. When Amos and Gertrude urge Agnes to leave Lucas and come live with them in the parsonage, Agnes rebuffs them. Undeterred, Amos writes down their address on the front page of a Bible. When they leave, Agnes hurls it into the fire, watches it burn for a few moments, and then snatches it out before it is totally burned, thus maiming her hand in the process. The maimed hand is a metaphor for her broken soul, one that thinks that it does not need the Church or religion but one that cannot wholly do without them either. And Pinero's use of the Bible plays to both the possible psychological and the material benefits of religion: the Bible itself represents spiritual succor, and with the addition of the parsonage's address written on it, also physical and material sanctuary. The shelter Amos and Gertrude offer is not just metaphorical and spiritual; it is real and tangible. In Pinero's view, a Bible with no address in it—and therefore no connection with a practitioner willing to offer material, physical help—would be useless. With the addition of the address, though, the Bible offers help that reaches out into the world to offer support on both the physical and the spiritual level.

What Pinero meant with the addition of this scene became a hotly debated topic, one that emphasized the syncretic beliefs of the audience and the critics. According to *The Times* (14 March 1895), the Bible-burning scene was "electrical" and "the finest scene Mr. Pinero has yet given us" ("Garrick Theatre"), and many people were deeply moved by it. Not everyone, though, agreed, and not everyone saw feminist implications in Agnes's reclamation of the burning Bible. Writing for *The Saturday Review* (16 March 1895), a young George Bernard Shaw derided the scene,

> A clergyman appears at this crisis and offers her a Bible. She promptly pitches it into the stove; and a thrill of horror runs through the audience as they see, in

> imagination, the whole Christian Church tottering before their eyes. Suddenly, with a wild scream, she plunges her hand into the glowing stove and pulls out the Bible again. The Church is saved; and the curtain descends amid thunders of applause. In that applause I hope I need not say I did not join. ("Mr. Pinero's New Play: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith"*)

In Shaw's opinion, Pinero capitulated to the conventional demands of morality, and he limited his understanding of what Pinero was doing by solely equating the retrieval of the Bible with the "Church," as opposed to religion, faith, or spirituality. For Shaw, Agnes's spirituality and faith were beside the point; he was looking for a political stance on the institution of the Church, and he disapproved of Pinero's portrayal. It should be noted, though, that Shaw tempered his criticism with a facetious coda, writing,

> I disliked the play so much that nothing would induce me to say anything good of it. And here let me warn the reader to carefully discount my opinion in view of the fact that I write plays myself, and my school is in violent reaction against that of Mr. Pinero. But my criticism has not, I hope, any other fault than the inevitable one of extreme unfairness. ("Mr. Pinero's New Play: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith"*)

Shaw's criticism stands in stark contrast to *The Times'* praise, though with his glib afterthought, Shaw alluded to the fact that he and Pinero were attempting two very different things in the theatre. Whereas Shaw was a political agitator who used the stage to deliver thinly veiled lectures, Pinero was attempting to cut to the emotional and spiritual quick, with the majority of his audience thinking that *Ebbsmith's* Bible-burning scene was a superlative exploration of tortured psychology.

What Shaw did not mention, though, is that the Bible-burning scene precedes a political shift for Agnes, one that aligns the Christian Church and New Woman, feminist politics by creating a sacred sisterhood that bucks the bourgeois options open to women. Shortly after the famous scene, Agnes's appearance visibly changes again, a change that indicates she is trying to reclaim her New Woman-style independence. By Act IV, Agnes is back to wearing her "dowdy demagogue" clothes, which signals that she has ceased to be Lucas's whore (*Ebbsmith* 138). Pinero emphasizes Agnes's reclamation of her New Woman politics by visually contrasting her with Sybil Cleeve, Lucas's lawful wife, who comes to beg Agnes to assume her position as her husband's mistress again so that he will return home. Despite being a "handsome young woman, beautifully gowned and thickly veiled" (*Ebbsmith* 183), Sybil Cleeve is deeply unhappy, and her attire indicates that her legal status makes her little better than a whore herself, particularly as she is degraded to the point of begging another woman to accompany her husband. Sybil's finery contrasts with Agnes's "rusty, ill-fitting, black" dress (184), and her outer resplendence masks her inner anguish.

The faithful Gertrude again steps in and begs Sybil not to tempt Agnes, with Gertrude symbolically and metaphorically stepping between them and offering a third way, one that offers the companionship that Sybil so desperately seeks while still retaining the independence that Agnes wants. Gertrude's maneuvering between the women is indicated by the stage directions, which state, "*Gertrude holds out her hand to Sybil; Sybil touches it distantly"* (195). This indicates a potential for the three women to find a way forward together. The key here is recognizing their commonality, acknowledging how marriage has rendered them all miserable. For Sybil, this recognition, as well as her own complicity in the sexist system, leads her to relinquish her request by stating, "I will not accept the services of this wretched woman. I loath

myself for doing what I have done" (195). The three women of the play—Agnes, Sybil, and Gertrude—all pursue different means to try to find happiness and self-actualization, with Agnes and Sybil pursuing recognized paths. As in *Tanqueray,* though, religion and religious customs offer an alternative to the status quo, with Gertrude and her faith offering a path that closes the distance between the courtesan and the sexless New Woman.

Like *Tanqueray's* Ellean, the religious Amos and Gertrude are given a dual imperative to recognize sin but also forgive it, a difficult task. To condemn the sin of adultery would condemn unhappy people like Agnes and Sybil, but to tolerate the sin is also to tolerate misogyny as men are the sole benefactors of the kept mistress system in Pinero's works. Arguably, Pinero's moral vision in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* is best voiced by Amos when he is trying to convince the Duke of St. Olpherts to stop helping Lucas, his nephew, persuade Agnes to remain his lover. As Amos says, "I assure your Grace that I truly believe this wretched woman is at a fatal crisis in her life; I believe that if I lose her now there is every chance of her slipping back into a misery and despair out of which it will be impossible to drag her. . . . Help me and my sister! For God's sake!" (181-182). For Amos, the church is integral in helping people, and action—practical, enforceable action—must be taken. In Pinero's rendering, English society is built upon bystanders and enablers like the Duke of St. Olpherts, and Amos strikes at the complacency at the heart of English society. Though Lucas derides Amos and Gertrude as "meddling" (194), in Pinero's depiction, they are practicing a type of Christianity that moves towards the other and seeks proximity to those in need.

Ebbsmith ends with Agnes agreeing to go with Amos and Gertrude, a decision that indicates she will reclaim the faith of her youth. In the world of the play, the religious life of Amos and Gertrude is a way to find personal fulfillment, and the Anglican Church offers a

respite from the complacent misogyny of contemporary English society. While Agnes's fate might look like the prevalent social ostracization and isolation that accompanied the fallen women in other notable Victorian texts, there is an important difference here: with Amos and Gertrude, Agnes is free to pursue her own path. A life with them is not the non-marriage marriage of Agnes's earlier anti-marriage idealism, nor is it the self-denial of the courtesan's life. In *Ebbsmith's* world, the religious life is one that fosters independence and community, the dual needs that neither Agnes's nor Sybil's prior lives could provide.

Pinero's play thus has a quiet radicalism, one where a sacred sisterhood replaces conventional society. This has gone relatively unnoticed by modern scholars. Judith L. Fisher argues, for example, that *Mrs. Ebbsmith* is regressive and "manifests the subtext" which had been percolating in the plays of both Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, and that the "insistence on female purity and submission mask[ed] the deeper fear of social revolution" (205). Carolyn Tilghman agrees and says that Agnes ends up "chastened" and has to "give up her radical ideas" (350). While this is true to a certain extent—Agnes Ebbsmith is undeniably a much more socially active character than her theatrical predecessors like Paula Tanqueray and Audrie Lesden, and her ideas are ultimately impractical—scholars ignore that, for Agnes, the solution is also radical: to dispel the society of men altogether. In *Ebbsmith,* "all marriages . . . are prisons," at least for the female characters, because they lead to "impossible submission" (Fisher 216). Agnes's early idealistic radicalism for an unmarried union is actually a marriage in all but name, and the *most* radical thing is to forsake male companionship altogether, a move that is enabled by the Church. While Fisher goes on to argue that Agnes's reacceptance of religion makes her "submission complete" and that her maimed hand symbolizes the "death of her active

self" (218), it is the opposite that is true. Only in the company of Amos and Gertrude is Agnes free to become self-actualized.

In many ways, *Ebbsmith* takes *Tanqueray's* feminist ideas further, though with the help of a different religious denomination. Agnes, like Paula Tanqueray before her, is identified with the New Woman cause, with *The Times* (14 March 1895) explicitly saying that she is a "dowdy 'new woman'" that is "destitute of all feminine charms" ("Garrick Theatre"). Her portrayal is much more pointed than Paula's: her sexless clothes, political agitation, and moral zeal speak much more specifically to *fin de siècle* feminism. Both women, though, rail against the social system that keeps women in subordinate positions, with Agnes furthering Paula's inchoate ideas of justice and independence. These frustrated feminists provided the basis for later literary creations like Edith Wharton's Lily Bart,[38] and Cynthia Griffin Wolff usefully points out what was *supposed* to happen to leading ladies on the stage: "In nineteenth-century theater, heroines *did* die. If they had been virtuous, they died heroically; if they were no more than fallen women, they died trivially" (83). With *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,* Pinero changed these conventions. Though Paula dies, her death can hardly be considered "trivial," and Agnes, of course, does not die. Even her ostensible exile is far removed from the sort of exile that other fallen women, like little Emily in Dickens's *David Copperfield,* faced. Rather than being forcibly exiled from society, Agnes, Gertrude, and Amos create a different society.

The contemporary radicalism of the piece is suggested by the Lord Chamberlain's reticence to allow the production. According to *The Sunday Times* (24 March 1895), Mr. Pinero

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[38] For more information on how Edith Wharton built upon Pinero's feminine creations in her depiction of Lily Bart, see Cynthia Griffin Wolff's "Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity," *American Literary History* 6.1 (Spring 1994): 71-87. *JSTOR.* Web. 29 June 2017.

"frightened" the Lord Chamberlain into accepting the play by "sheer force of his personality and the position he has made for himself" ("Plays and Players: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*"), an assertion that indicates that the Lord Chamberlain found the material unsuitable, probably both for its relatively frank discussion of sexuality as well as for its radical solution to the problem of inequality between the genders.

This idea that *Ebbsmith* and *Tanqueray* are thematically similar is highlighted by the fact that both plays have *two* heroines, both of whom are types of New Women. According to Elin Diamond, "doubles abound" both metaphorically and physically in Pinero's works (72), and Ellean and Gertrude are counterpoints to Paula and Agnes. They serve as deuteragonists to the flawed titular protagonists. In both plays, these deuteragonists function to help the protagonists defeat their main enemy: themselves. The secondary female characters are much more interesting and much smarter than the male characters, and by proclaiming their independence from male authority and their freedom from societal expectations, Ellean and Gertrude serve as modified versions of the New Woman, with their faith acting as a buffer against the worst aspects of societal misogyny.

For both women, their faith gives them practice-able action to facilitate sexual equality. Whereas Paula's reaction to society's misogyny is pyrrhic petulance and Agnes's is quixotic idealism, Ellean and Gertrude react practically. At the end of their respective plays, both Ellean and Gertrude have forsaken romantic company,[39] with Agnes joining them in their rejection of men at the end of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.* While this might seem defeatist or as if the

[39] While Ellean overtly rejects romantic company in the form of Hugh Ardale, it is implied that Gertrude would also do so, even though the text does not explicitly give her a romantic suitor. However, her references to her disastrous first marriage, as well as her stated sympathy with Agnes's desire to forgo marriage, offer compelling evidence that she does not want, and would not accept, romantic company.

women are chastened, the opposite is true, for in Pinero's plays, marriage is a trap. Walter Lazenby writes, "Pinero presented a bleak view of marriage and used the marriage relationship as a metaphor for an individual's restriction by the will of another or by the code of society" (147). By freeing Ellean, Gertrude, and finally Agnes not only of the matrimonial bond, but also of anything that could approximate it, he freed his characters to pursue their own paths.

By harnessing the spiritual and material power of faith, Pinero provided the only socially acceptable way for women to free themselves of the power of men. Though Judith L. Fisher claims that, in *Ebbsmith,* "Pinero simply abandons his political thesis to revert to a biological imperative" (218), that isn't quite true because the exile to the country is in and of itself a political statement. Writing about the vast majority of late-Victorian and early-Edwardian dramas, Cynthia Griffin Wolff claims that women rarely had agency. "[T]hese plays rested upon the conviction that women were naturally submissive" and that "their only reality" was "in relation to a man" (78), she writes. However, in *Ebbsmith,* Pinero removes this relationship to men and makes women the arbiters of their own destiny. While the choice to remove oneself from corrupt society and build a new one in a country has echoes of the nunnery, here it is not punishment but instead freedom from the misogyny of polite English society. Fisher says that, in the plays of Jones and Pinero (and calling particular attention to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith),* there is an "absence of alternatives in the closed visions of the plays" for the heroines (220), but that argument ignores the alternatives presented by the secondary heroines, which is to live freely and unencumbered by the trap of marriage. By overtly creating more than one possibility in his dual heroines, Pinero signaled religion's potential in helping women move forward.

This potential represents an incremental change from what Pinero was doing previously. In his most overtly Christian plays, Pinero makes a leap from women behaving like men *(Dandy Dick, The Amazons)* to women reclaiming power from men (*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith).* The reason for this is because faith gives women a language and a methodology to move toward the other and to forge bonds of communion with other women. In a world dominated by patriarchal social customs and bourgeois conventions, practice-able faith offered an alternative to stifling societal mores. For Pinero, these questions of spirituality, freedom, and communion were inevitably caught up with the particular difficulties women faced, and in his plays, he displayed a feminist sensibility fused with the conviction of faith.

Pinero's portrayal of faith did not go unnoticed, and *The Sunday Times* (17 March 1895) explicitly voiced the newfound visibility of religion on the syncretic stage, with *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* serving as the pinnacle of this spiritual exploration. It declared, "It is *The Profligate,* it is *Mrs. Tanqueray,* it is *Judah* and even *The Tempter* which have made *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* possible; and almost the highest merit of *Mrs. Ebbsmith* is that she opens the way for a class of plays entirely new to our theatre" ("Plays and Players: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*"). With his contribution, Pinero joined with Jones to make a new type of theatre. During the *fin de siècle,* Pinero not only changed theatre by doing away with old-fashioned conventions, he also ushered in a subtle way to discuss and explore religion that highlighted the various approaches to Christian faith, attitudes that Pinero portrayed as changing the very bodies of the female believers. In many of his plays in the 1880s and 1890s, Pinero fused religious faith with portrayals of the New Woman to display a new type of feminism that reached forward to the future while holding on to beliefs of the past.

IV. A Counterpoint and a Coda: Pinero's Manly Jews

Though Pinero frequently portrayed Christians and Christianity with nuance and gradation and treated their faith as something worthy of serious exploration, he portrayed Jews and Judaism much more baldly. While Pinero often used stereotypes for comic effect—most of his farces used some stock character types—the Jewish characters were unique for *exclusively* being portrayed as stereotypically greedy, wealthy, and villainous. In Pinero's plays, there are no benevolent or kindly Jewish characters, though the degree to which critics today find his Jewish characters unpalatable is mixed. For example, John Dawick concludes that they are not "flattering" portrayals (261), and George E. Wellwarth claims more boldly that Pinero is outright "anti-Semitic" (43). Notably, none of Pinero's major Jewish characters are women; they are all men.

Pinero's portrayals of Jews and Judaism are especially curious as Pinero himself was of Jewish heritage, though not of religion.[40] In the minds of some critics, Pinero's Jewish heritage directly contributed to both his unflattering portrayals of Jews and his flattering portrayals of Christians. In George Bernard Shaw's opinion, Pinero's Jewishness oddly made him *more* susceptible to positively portraying Christianity. Writing on *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and the famous Bible-burning scene, Shaw had a particularly savage outburst against the then-more-successful Pinero:

> It seems to me that it is only by the frankest abandonment of himself to his real tastes and capacities that he can do anything worth doing now on the stage. But

[40] According to John Dawick, Pinero's biographer, Pinero's family immigrated to England in the early 1700s, and they "maintained their separate Jewish identity until the playwright's grandfather altered the spelling of his surname when he married into an English family and, it would appear, joined the Church of England" (4).

> he won't do that, because he is a Jew, with the Jew's passion for fame and effect and the Jew's indifference to the reality of the means by which they are produced. A man who, at Pinero's age and in his position and with his secure bank account, could bring himself to that Bible business, is hopelessly damned. You might as well try to fertilize a mule. (*Bernard Shaw Collected Letters 1874-97* 500-501)

While Shaw's outburst was racist and crude, other critics have also suggested that Pinero's Jewish heritage played a role in his favorable portrayals of Christians and his stereotypical portrayals of Jews. George E. Wellwarth, for example, writes, "Nevertheless, a man like Pinero, who felt himself English through and through and whose family had been converted would tend to show that he was more Catholic than the Pope by being overtly anti-Semitic. After all, someone who openly despises Jews can hardly be accused of having Jewish blood himself" (43).

This idea that Pinero exhibited self-loathing would not have been unheard of. Writing on other authors of the time, Todd M. Endelman notes that the "Jewish Question" (i.e. a widespread debate about the place and role of Jews in society, such as whether they should be assimilated, segregated, deported, et cetera) caused some Jews to evoke "expressions of self-hatred," with writers like Julia Frankau, Amy Levy, and Leonard Merrick creating Jewish characters that were "uneducated, narrow-minded, clannish, vulgar, materialistic, and tasteless" (170). Of course, not all Jews were self-hating, and Endelman notes how other, more moderate Jews tried to assimilate into larger society. These Anglo-Jews stressed their commonality with their fellow Englishmen and sought to narrow "the gap between Judaism and Protestantism," which was "one strategy for asserting their Englishness, their sense of identity with other Englishmen" (170). For many Jews, this was especially apt because, according to Israel Finestein, by the 1860s "most of Anglo-Jewry was native-born" (167).

Both strands of thought are arguably at play in Pinero's works, including the possible self-loathing element to which Wellwarth alludes and the stressing of shared commonality with English values that Endelman suggests. However, at least one scholar thinks that Pinero was sometimes more sympathetic to Jewish characters because of their shared ancestry. Clayton Hamilton writes that the Jewish character of Maldonado in *Iris* was drawn with an "intensity of analytic interest that was—possibly—made more empathetic by the author's own consciousness of his inheritance of Latin and of Jewish blood" (*The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Volume II* 229). For scholars old and new, Pinero's Jewish background played a significant role in his depiction of Semitic people, though they vary on how they believe this affected his portrayals.

The major issue with this assumption is that, quite simply, it is an assumption. Pinero's extant letters are almost always about business—there are hardly any mentions of his home life other than to report on the health of his wife and step-children, and even the suicide of his step-son, a massive personal event that was preceded by his step-son's capture and torture in the Balkans while serving as a war reporter, is mentioned only in the context of his wife's suffering. The little that is glimpsed of his personal life reveals no anxiety about his Jewish background or his current religious faith. To assume that he felt shame and guilt for being Jewish is speculative, especially considering that other prominent Victorian men, including the famous theatrical Beerbohm family and former prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, also had known Jewish ancestry.

The other issue with that assumption is that Pinero's works do not explore Judaism with complexity or nuance. What Pinero is doing with his Jewish characters is something different than what he is doing with his Christian characters. Whereas in works like *Tanqueray* and

Ebbsmith Christianity is treated as something that is deeply felt and transformative, in his plays that have major Jewish characters, Judaism is portrayed only as an ethnicity, and its religious elements are not explored at all. Jewish faith and belief systems are not studied or examined, and instead his focus is squarely on the supposed cultural practices of the Jewish characters.

More specifically, Pinero's focus with his Jewish characters almost directly centers on money and work. This is not terribly surprising; many fictional works about Jews center on economics. However, Pinero was writing his plays long after George Eliot published *Daniel Deronda* in 1876, a work that had plumbed new spiritual depths in its portrayal of the protagonist's burgeoning Jewish faith. But in Pinero's works, the Jewish faith is not even examined perfunctorily—it is not examined at all. The tight focus on economics leads to two disparate assessments of Pinero's Jewish characters: first, they are almost all uniformly vulgar and avaricious, and two, they are almost all uniformly hard working, a trait that separates them from their ostensibly more genteel English counterparts, though this diligence is a trait that Pinero associates positively with his gentile characters. Pinero's portrayal of Jews has anti-Semitic elements, but the qualities that are portrayed negatively in Jews are sometimes portrayed positively elsewhere, which complicates his depictions.

All told, Pinero wrote five plays in which Jews and Jewish characters are portrayed negatively: *The Cabinet Minister* (1890), *Iris* (1901), *Letty* (1904), *Mid-Channel* (1909), and *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* (1912). Of the five plays mentioned, the first three are worth looking at in greater detail as, in those plays, the Jewish characters play substantially larger parts (in *Mid-Channel,* for example, the Jewish character is only mentioned, never seen, and only in connection to a single incident), they are temporally more closely related to the other plays studied, and in *The "Mind the Paint" Girl,* Pinero recycles the trope of an unsuitable Jewish

character—in this play, the character has a farcical lisp—courting a gentile girl that he previously used in *Iris* and *Letty* (furthermore, in *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* the Jewish suitor is only one suitor among many whereas in *Iris* and *Letty* the heroines only have two suitors, one being a Jew and one a gentile).

In *The Cabinet Minister: A Farce in Four Acts* (1890), Pinero portrays a Jewish character, Joseph Lebanon, lending money to Lady Twombley, the wife of the titular cabinet minister. As a farmer's daughter, Lady Twombley is desperate to fit in among her more wellborn peers, so she spends extravagantly in order to gain their acceptance. When she becomes too immersed in her debts, it is Lebanon who again bails her out by telling her insider information for her investments. In return, Lady Twombley agrees to introduce him and his sister, Mrs. Gaylustre, to upper class society. They make fools of themselves among their new genteel acquaintances, and Pinero portrays the Jewish characters as scheming, boorish, and social climbing. When they finally get their comeuppance at the end, though, the meaning is ambiguous—after all, Joseph Lebanon and his sister behave analogously to Lady Twombley, albeit with worse manners. Lebanon, Mrs. Gaylustre, and Lady Twombley (who makes much of the fact that she was a "country-bred girl" who was "snubbed" and "sneered" at by city folks (58)) all want to rise in status and stature, and they are willing to go to great lengths to do so. While Lady Twombley ends the play emotionally unscathed and financially much wealthier, Lebanon and his sister are unmasked as social climbers and become outcasts in upper class society. The play is described as a farce, but it feels mean-spirited, particularly as Pinero rewards his ambitious gentile social climbers in most plays, including *The Cabinet Minister.*

While Pinero undoubtedly portrays the Jewish characters negatively—even the introduction of Lebanon in the stage directions states that he is a "smartly dressed, unctuous,

middle-aged person, of a most pronounced common Semitic type, with a bland manner and a contented smile" (*The Cabinet Minister* 138)—he counters it by singularly portraying them as hard-working and industrious. Lebanon has to work in an office (and his employment is mentioned several times, thus showcasing that he is a working man), and his sister works as a dressmaker. Unlike Lady Twombley and her friends, the Jewish characters are industrious, traits that Pinero praised in many of his famous plays like *Sweet Lavender* (1888) and *Trelawney of the "Wells"* (1898).

This complicated portrayal was echoed in *Iris* and *Letty* as well. In both plays, hard working, but ultimately unsuitable, Jewish suitors court gentile women. The Jewish suitors in both plays are contrasted with the titular heroines' gentile suitors, who are, notably, also unsuitable. In these plays, *no* suitors are appropriate for the heroines, and the avariciousness of the Jewish suitors is scarcely worse than the ineffectualness and laziness of the gentile suitors. In *Letty* (1904), for example, the secretary Letty is courted by a wealthy and dissipated married gentile as well as by her wealthy and boorish Jewish boss, Bernard Mandeville, a man whose very name conjures up churlish, crude capitalism by being identical to the famous Dutch economist whose 1714 book *The Fable of the Bees* gained notoriety for arguing that base behavior often resulted in positive economic growth.[41] Mandeville is a Jewish stereotype like Lebanon before him, and again, he is a working man, unlike Letty's other lover. In *Letty,* the heroine has to reject both suitors in order to find happiness, which a coda reveals she later finds—in a hard-working gentile man. Thus her ultimate choice of a husband combines the traits

[41] According to E.J. Hundert, Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* contained a "notorious thesis" that was "immediately reviled by a chorus of clergymen, journalists and philosophers." Rather than being disappointed or hurt, the provocative Mandeville was "astonished and delighted" to be a "national celebrity." For years afterwards, *The Fable of the Bees* was "the Enlightenment's epitome of immoralism."

of both of her previous suitors by being similarly industrious and a gentile, and Pinero's portrayals of Jews and Jewishness, then, is complicated and is inextricably tied up with critiques of capitalism, particularly as Mandeville's name evokes sentiments of capitalism run amok.

Pinero's most significant play concerning a Jewish character is undoubtedly *Iris* (1901), and his portrayal of Freddy Maldonado confounds rather than clarifies Pinero's depiction of Jews. Like Mandeville, Maldonado is a wealthy, hardworking, and unbefitting suitor for the gentile widow Iris. According to Clayton Hamilton, *Iris* and *Letty* are "reversal[s]" of one another (*The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, Vol. 3* 11), with the working class Letty serving as a direct foil to the wealthy Iris and the former's comedy and the latter's tragedy serving as generic counterpoints to each other.

On first read, the reversal does not appear to include the portrayal of the two Jewish suitors as they are both working class, wealthy, and Jewish. However, a deeper look reveals that they *are,* in fact, almost direct opposites. Mandeville is a boor, and Maldonado is cultured. More significantly, whereas Mandeville's interest in Letty is shallow, Maldonado's in Iris is deep. He loved her long before the play begins, and he loves her even after she consents to an engagement, subsequently tells him after the fact that she is only marrying him for his money (a confession which shocks and upsets him), then reneges on the engagement, and afterwards lives with another man. He loves her still two years later when the penniless Iris—her solicitor absconded with her money—turns to him for help, which he gladly supplies. Maldonado is no lovelorn fool; his financial help comes at the price of Iris becoming financially dependent on him and finally becoming his mistress, a move that makes him villainous. He is not one-sided, and despite having Iris at his disposal, he again offers her respectability and financial freedom through marriage. She accepts him a second time, only to try to rekindle her romance with

Lawrence when he returns from Canada. Lawrence, though, rejects Iris when he discovers that she has become Maldonado's lover in his absence, and Iris tried unsuccessfully to return to Maldonado. *Iris* ends with the enraged Maldonado turning Iris out of his flat, ostensibly to suffer and possibly die alone in poverty, a move that solidifies his position as the antagonist.

Maldonado, however, is not a stereotypical Jewish villain, and Pinero supplies him with admirable traits, foremost of which is his work ethic. Though other characters describe Maldonado's financier job as being little better than a "pawnbroker with imagination" (*Iris* 257), his work ethic—Iris says he works like a "slave," to which he replies, "Ha! What else is there in life?" (368)—separates him from Iris and her suitor, Laurence Trenwith. In *Iris,* Pinero himself seems to portray working as noble as he makes Laurence, Iris's impecunious suitor who temporarily leaves her to go to Canada, ineffectual and lazy. Trenwith's uncle, an archdeacon, has supported him throughout his life, and as an adult, he offers his nephew a position in Canada, a prospect that Iris likens to being condemned to "a sort of genteel Siberia" (243). Pinero has Laurence live off of Iris's inherited wealth until the last possible moment, until Iris is unexpectedly rendered penniless by her solicitor's theft. Only then does Trenwith resolve to make his own living, and by leaving Iris without many means while he is gone, he unexpectedly advances the tragic plot.

Iris's laziness also leads to her downfall, as she refuses to go with Trenwith. To accompany him would mean she would have to work, and she says she is not "fit to be a poor man's wife" or to "work" with her "hands" (279). For both Iris and Trenwith, their lack of work ethic seals their tragic fate. Furthermore, by aligning Maldonado's work ethic with that of a Christian archdeacon—they both assert that people must work—Pinero implicitly makes the

point that hard work is honorable and necessary and that Iris and Trenwith are foolhardy for rejecting it.

Moreover, Pinero avoids making Maldonado a stereotypical Jewish villain by giving him emotional heft. When Iris confesses near the beginning that she is only marrying him for his money, he responds in a way that humanizes him and renders Iris's confession cruel. He tells her, "Yes, you positively deceived me—the astute Freddy Maldonado! . . . I really imagined—for three mortal hours!—that it was reserved for me to escape the proverbial fate of the millionaire where the love of woman is concerned!" (271). The audience's sympathies are thus with Maldonado for much of the play, and while his behavior in the final scene seems cruel, it is, in many ways, justified. She has betrayed him multiple times, and his emotional attachment to her is contrasted with her emotional detachment from him. Arthur Gerwitz alludes to the emotional weight given to Maldonado when he declares, "There are few scenes, perhaps no scene, with that power in Edwardian drama" (322). Like Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* before him, Maldonado is both victim and abuser—according to William H. Rideing, "He is as much a captive to her as she is to him . . ." (44)—and the audience takes no satisfaction in seeing him hurt and betrayed.

The meaning behind Pinero's portrayal of Maldonado and Jewishness is further complicated because Maldonado's behavior is frequently explained as being a product of his Jewish heritage. When he tells Iris of the "passion" he feels for her, for example, he explains it as being part of his foreign heritage. He says, "Besides, you must make some small allowance for me; we Maldonados are not yet wholly English in our ways" (270, 271). This passion is the final thing the audience sees, for after he makes Iris leave, the stage directions say that he "overturns the table with a savage kick; then, raising a chair high in the air, he dashes it to the

floor and breaks it into splinters. The curtain falls finally" (423). Maldonado's overwhelming love for Iris and his violent rejection of her are portrayed as inherent to his heritage, with the implication that Englishmen (i.e. non-Jews) would have behaved more rationally from the start. This exotic passion is both what allows Maldonado to feel great love and also great hate. Moreover, by keeping the focus so squarely on Maldonado, Pinero ensures that Maldonado is a complicated character drawn with nuance and gradation.

One thing is certain about Pinero's portrayal of Jews: they are depicted as decidedly non-English. Maldonado gives explicit voice to this throughout *Iris* and declares near the end of the play, "I come of a race whose qualities are curiously blended, my dear—made up partly of passion, partly of prudence" (420). By making specific references to his "race" as an explanation for his behavior, Maldonado tacitly claims his separation from the behaviors and mores of the English people. This broadly follows a theatrical pattern where non-Englishmen were portrayed as villainous or scheming.

And Pinero unequivocally declared that his plays were *English,* a sentiment both he and critics routinely stated about many of his plays. In a personal letter about *The Magistrate,* Pinero claimed that it was a "purely English" farce (as opposed to French, the leading farceurs of the day) (*Letters* 99, 16 December 1887), and later regarding a possible New York production of *The Times,* he wrote, "Let me know whether you think *The Times* of any value for America or whether it is, in your opinion, too strictly local" (*Letters* 132, 26 November 1891). Critics have long agreed, with Penny Griffin writing that Pinero helped create a perfect type of theatre that became "one of the most living of English traditions" (7). Pinero was trying to create a uniquely English type of theatre, and in his portrayal, the Jewish culture was beyond the purview of what it meant to "English."

Pinero's emphasis on Englishness helps explain his different approaches to Jewish and Christian beliefs. While the Jewish faith was beyond the scope of his concerns, Christianity and Christian beliefs were at the heart of what he perceived to be the renaissance of the English theatre, and arguably even the larger English culture, particularly in regards to women. As depicted by Pinero, Judaism was outside the confines of English society, and thus its faith practices could be largely ignored. Christianity, though, even if it is the relatively exotic and alien Catholicism, had a place in English society, and it has the potential to transform lives. The takeaway message, then is that Pinero meant to show the possibilities for England's societal rejuvenation through Christianity, while in his depiction, Judaism possessed no such possibilities because it was fundamentally *not* English.

His genuine interest in Christianity, and his superficial interest in Judaism, is also signaled through gender. In the plays about Christians, faith is integral for the character growth of his women whereas the Jewish men have their faith ignored and it plays no apparent role in their character development. By making the Jewish characters men, Pinero indicated that he was not as interested in the psychological or emotional ramifications of Judaism as he was with Christianity. Even the preeminent Victorian theatre critic, William Archer, asserted that Pinero's interest lay primarily in women. He wrote in *Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship*, Pinero is "a character-drawer of great versatility" who "becomes a psychologist in some of his studies of feminine types—in *Iris,* in *Letty,* in the luckless heroine of *Mid-Channel"* (n.p.). By associating Christianity with women and Judaism with men, Pinero implied that he was not truly exploring Judaism as a faith, and his critique of Jewish characters was a stand-in for critiques of class and money.

This idea, that Pinero was genuinely trying to explore the possibilities in Christianity, particularly as applied to women, gains credence when looking at other plays in Pinero's oeuvre. While this chapter has only dealt with Pinero's plays that explore Christianity in depth, many other plays examine Christianity tangentially, with faith playing an integral role in the success of the heroines. Here is a limited sampling of examples: in *The Benefit of the Doubt* (1895), a bishop and his wife serve *deux ex machina* roles to exonerate a wife falsely accused of adultery; the heroine in *His House in Order* (1906) is pointedly mentioned as being the daughter of clergyman, and her faith presumably leads her to wear a "halo" and not reveal that she learns that her petted stepson is not, actually, her husband's child (*Benefit of the Doubt* 402); and in *The Thunderbolt* (1908), an illegitimate daughter is convinced to forgive her legitimate family members for trying to swindle her out of her inheritance by her own faith and her romance with a clergyman. In ways both explicit and implicit and with plot points large and small, Pinero used various facets of Christianity to explore ways to improve society and women's lives, and thus he treated Christianity as a topic worthy of significant study.

This aspect of Pinero's writings has been almost entirely overlooked. Perhaps this is because of his careful ambiguity; throughout his plays, Pinero was watchful to make sure few characters were wholly good or wholly bad, regardless of their religious affiliation. Pinero himself later said this almost explicitly. In a letter to the editor of *The Times* (4 September 1902) about his controversial comedy *The Gay Lord Quex*, he wrote, "That the comedy does not belong to the school of composition which labels each of its characters 'wolf' or 'lamb'; that it seeks to depict men and women as they are—neither wholly virtuous nor wholly evil—I am prepared to admit" (*Pinero's Letters* 186). In Pinero's works, the heroines are almost always flawed and the

villains have redeeming qualities, depictions that often kept Pinero's works from being overtly moralistic and religious.

For this reason and also because of his ultimate supplanting in the canon by George Bernard Shaw, Pinero's contributions to the religious awakening on the syncretic stage have gone unseen and unexamined. According to John Dawick and other scholars, though, Pinero may have ultimately been more influential than Shaw. He writes,

> For Pinero and Shaw, each possessing the virtues of each other's defects, were the founders of two contrasting schools of modern British drama—as G.B.S. himself recognized. Shaw's style of drama, coming as a reaction against Pinero's, proved more spectacular and intellectually stimulating, with its open, freewheeling approach and lively subversion of theatrical and social conventions. Pinero's work, by comparison, appeared more conventional, but his development of a realistic, closely observed, tightly structured drama, based on generally accepted standards of behavior, probably had a more widespread and enduring influence on later British drama. (374)

Central to Pinero's "widespread and enduring influence" is religion, which Pinero depicts as being at the heart of English social revolution. Because Pinero's plays were enormously popular and because his plays have "value as social history" (Lazenby 148), it suggests that the larger British public was grappling with the same issues that Pinero portrayed on the stage and debating about what value different religious denominations could offer society. During the *fin de siècle,* Pinero used the stage to show the potential for religion's rejuvenating effect, a revitalization made visible through the bodies of his female characters.

CHAPTER THREE:

"REPENTANCE IS QUITE OUT OF DATE":

OSCAR WILDE'S COMEDIES AND *FIN DE SIÈCLE* CATHOLICISM

Near the end of Oscar Wilde's 1892 play *Lady Windermere's Fan,* the morally upright character Lord Windermere is shocked to see the socially ambitious Mrs. Erlynne coolly enter his friend Lord Darlington's private room from an adjoining chamber, an entrance that insinuates that Mrs. Erlynne and Darlington have been caught *in flagrante delicto.* Windermere, who had been helping the disgraced Mrs. Erlynne regain her footing in respectable society after learning that she is secretly his wife's mother, is disgusted by her behavior. The next day, when Mrs. Erlynne stops by to return Lady Windermere's fan—more on that later—Lord Windermere confronts her. "You fill me with horror—with absolute horror," he says (154). Much to his surprise, Mrs. Erlynne is unfazed and unrepentant. She says to Lord Windermere, "I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent, or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels.. . . . No—what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date" (154). With those words, Wilde signaled to the savvy theatregoer that *Lady Windermere's Fan* was eschewing conventional narrative arcs of sin and repentance, and this fallen woman would not do something so orthodox as to retire into penury and penitence.

By the time *Lady Windermere's Fan's* premiered, many in the audience may have expected Wilde's unorthodox approach to morality. After all, Wilde was the artist who had first gained famed as an aesthete and a decadent, and his 1891 essay "The Critic as Artist" had

provocatively stated, "All art is immoral" ("The Critic as Artist" 1136). Additionally, his 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had been reprinted in 1891 with an infamous preface that had baldly declared, "No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style" (*Dorian Gray* 17*).* Wilde was a known *provocateur,* and despite reviewers recognizing *Lady Windermere's Fan's* similarities to existing works,[42] Wilde's play "shocked conservative critics of the time" (Sloan 107).

Conversely, modern critics generally view *Lady Windermere's Fan* as being more conventional and less provocative than Wilde's other work. Part of this is due to the explicitly religious nature of the work, with God, sin, and forgiveness being mentioned throughout the work. Today, many scholars see *Lady Windermere's Fan* as being full of "moderate and orthodox morality" (Eltis 56), since it is "forcefully didactic in its condemnation of moral hypocrisy and its call for a return to the practice of Christianity" (Cohen 182). As the fallen Mrs. Erlynne regains her moral and social position, critics see Wilde as calling for a replacement of hypocritical "Old Testament vindictiveness" with the practice of "Christian mercy" (181), with his views thus falling squarely within the existing paradigm of Christian forgiveness and mercy. Moreover, though Wilde's play was influenced by his friend Lillie Langtry's own history in giving up a child (Ellmann 113), Wilde's play bears superficial similarities to other *fin de siècle* plays about repentant mothers who try to forge relationships with the children they left behind, namely the always-popular *East Lynne,* Arthur Shirley's *Saved; Or, a Wife's Peril,* and Victorien Sardou's *Odette* (Powell 18-20).

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[42] The original review in *The Sunday Times* (21 February 1892) said that, while *Lady Windermere's Fan* was "brilliantly written," it was "by no means a perfect or unconventional play" ("St. James's Theatre"), therefore indicating that the play had a predictable plot. *The Times* (22 February 1892) echoed this by declaring that the play was of that "simple and ingenuous class of which *The Wife's Secret* is a prominent example" ("St. James's Theatre").

Oscar Wilde, though, did not condone such an orthodox reading of his play, as his play did not focus on the sinning mother's ceaseless sorrow. Speaking at a meeting of the Royal General Theatrical Fund in 1892, Wilde said, "Those of who have seen *Lady Windermere's Fan* will see that if there is one particular doctrine contained in it, it is that of sheer individualism. It is not for anyone to censure what anyone else does, and everyone should go his own way, to whatever place he chooses, in exactly the way that he chooses" (qtd. in Eltis 58). This statement implies that *Lady Windermere's Fan* is much more than Wilde's exhortation to embrace a kinder, more forgiving Christianity. Some critics have tentatively agreed, with Richard Ellmann concluding, "*Lady Windermere's Fan* is a more radical play than it appears" (363), though he in no way connects the play's radical nature to religion.

As Wilde's comments state, *Lady Windermere's Fan* is about individualism, which Wilde puts into dialogue with more familiar religious issues like sin and reconciliation. Rather than being an orthodox Christian work, *Lady Windermere's Fan* explores a syncretic and paradoxical Christianity, one particularly indebted to Wilde's own idiosyncratic approach to *fin de siècle* Catholicism. In his theatrical comedies, of which *Lady Windermere's Fan* is the first, Wilde looks to the beliefs of the past and the present to forge a fantastical new reality where sin begets flourishing, usually in both the metaphysical and material sense. Moreover, Wilde reenchants the material world through the bond between parent and child, a bond that mimics the connection between God and man. In his comedies, Wilde rewards the sinner with health and happiness, a fusion of secular and Christian values to display that, in his depiction of religion, "repentance is quite out of date."

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This chapter builds on existing Wilde scholarship regarding religion and applies ideas generally invoked in scholarship regarding his poems or essays and applies these ideas to his theatrical comedies. Wilde's attraction to religion, Catholicism in particular, has been the subject of many recent scholarly studies. As is well known, Wilde was raised as an Anglican, but was attracted to Catholicism throughout his life and eventually converted on his deathbed.[43] Ellis Hanson's 1998 *Decadence and Catholicism* credits the conversion of Wilde and other aesthetes to the Church's ritual and artistic expressions; Joseph Pearce's 2000 biography *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde* places Wilde's conversion as a response to his isolation and loneliness; and Jarlath Killeen's 2005 *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde* roots Wilde's Catholicism in his Irish heritage and in latent feelings of Irish nationalism. These works offer plausible explanations for Wilde's conversion to Catholicism, and they stand as a testament to the surging interest in Wilde's religious views.

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[43] Many aspects of this conversion narrative have long been under scrutiny, and Chris Mounsey points out that for many scholars the question is whether or not Wilde was in a ""terminal delirium" when he converted (12). However, in his authoritative biography, Richard Ellmann claims that some scholars even doubt whether Wilde did convert to Catholicism. Though he himself believes that Wilde did convert on his deathbed, he questions the sincerity of Wilde's lifelong interest in Catholicism (19). Though Wilde's attraction to Catholicism began when he was a student at Oxford, Ellmann dismisses this early interest as resulting from his anguish over contracting a case of syphilis while at Oxford. He writes, "Wilde came as close now to becoming Catholic as he ever would until his deathbed," and he concludes that Wilde later "adopted mercury rather than religion as the specific for his dreadful disease" (93, 95).

Whether Ellmann is correct about Wilde contracting syphilis is itself a matter of contention. Ellmann writes, "My belief that Wilde had syphilis stems from statements made by Reginald Turner and Robert Ross, Wilde's close friends present at his death, from the certificate of the doctor in charge at that time (see page 582), and from the fact that the 1912 edition of Ransome's book on Wilde and Harris's 1916 life (both of which Ross oversaw) give syphilis as the cause of death. Opinion on the subject is, however, divided, and some authorities do not share my view of Wilde's medical history" (92).

However, there are many scholars who dismiss the idea of a Catholic Wilde. Because of his iconoclasm, it is hard for many readers to reconcile Wilde's independence (including his homosexuality) with his embrace of organized religion. When Jarlath Killeen told his classmates that his dissertation explored Wilde's Catholicism, for example, he discovered that "I had not then realised [sic] the investment many of my peers had in Wilde as, precisely, an areligious, if not anti- religious thinker" (ix). This view has been aided by critics such as Richard Ellmann, who take a generally dismissive view towards Wilde's religion, particularly as gay studies/queer theory often dominates the popular conception of Wilde. According to Richard A. Kaye, the "Gay Wilde" has "dominated popular and scholarly concern" (191), and Alan Sinfield adds that, for many people, Wilde is "the dominant image of the male homosexual" (137). While certainly not all queer studies scholars ignore Wilde's religious beliefs—Chris Mounsey and John Schad being notable exceptions—many of them do, and others similarly adopt Ellmann's glib attitude.[44]

What runs through both views of Oscar Wilde—whether scholars see him as religious or irreligious—is the sense of friction. For scholars who see Wilde as religious, he is a flawed and tortured man who uses his art to suggest a more perfect way of living than he himself was capable of following; for scholars who see Wilde as non-religious, he is a rebel trying to break free of Victorian conformity who eventually succumbed to conventionality. While both of these views have merit, they also form a false dichotomy. Wilde's syncretic Christian beliefs did not necessarily lead him to believe that self-abnegation and self-denial were purer ways to live, nor was his indulgence in forbidden activities evidence that he longed to throw away the religious

[44] In contrast to biographers like Joseph Pearce, Richard Ellmann spends comparatively little time exploring the depth and nuances of Oscar Wilde's religious leanings in his nearly six-hundred-page biography. Regarding his deathbed conversion, Ellmann sides with the critics who see it as a type of terminal delirium, and he concludes, "The application of sacred oils to his hands and feet may have been a ritualized pardon for his omissions or commissions, or may have been like putting a green carnation in his buttonhole" (584).

yoke. Wilde's writings, which are astonishing both in their embrace of religion and faith and in their display of pleasure and decadence, hint that Wilde did not see sin as an unconquerable impediment to salvation.

Indeed, Wilde confessed in *De Profundis* that he was an "antinomian" (47). This word—"antinomian"—is revealing and illuminating. For the antinomian Oscar Wilde, sin was something quite different from the normal Christian conception of sin. He writes, "Morality does not help me. I am a born antinomian. I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws. But while I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong in what one becomes. It is well to have learned that" (*De Profundis* 47). As he portrays in his comedies, the worst thing for a person to become is one that denies their sinful, fallen selves, and his individualized conception of morality—i.e. antinomianism—plays a crucial role in clarifying what Wilde meant by "sheer individualism" and in understanding Wilde's *fin de siècle* Christianity, a Christianity that is rife with decadent Catholicism. [45]

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[45] Wilde's use of the word "antinomian" has deeper ramifications than this short paragraph suggests. Wilde, who had a lifelong interest in Church history, would have been fully aware of the role antinomianism played in early theological debates, especially its part in the Reformation when Luther's student Johannes Agricola transformed Luther's idea of *sola fide* (Latin for "by faith alone") into antinomianism (Mullet 80, 187, Kolb 20, 54).

While the initial fury surrounding antinomianism eventually dissipated, its theology infiltrated other Christian religions. Later reformist movements, such as Calvinism and Quakerism, as well as traditional Catholic orders of priests, most notably the Jesuits, were all accused of antinomianism at various times ("Antinomianism," *theopedia.com*). Most pertinent to this dissertation is that antinomian beliefs resurged in the nineteenth century when Oxford University became the new center of antinomian thought. Cardinal Newman, one of the key founders of the Oxford Movement, began preaching a theology that was moderately antinomian. While he "stressed the necessity of good works as an issue of faith," an anti-antinomian sentiment, he also recognized that "the grace of God as the beginning and the accompaniment of the road to heaven," which echoes antinomian philosophies (Chadwick 40).

Soon, the University of Oxford became a bastion of Catholic conversion, and many of these students were also profoundly influenced by antinomianism, particularly as expressed by

While Wilde's faith has been analyzed and debated in numerous biographies, scholars have largely ignored Wilde's stated antinomianism. In addition, scholars who study Wilde's religious views have confined themselves to a small group of texts: *De Profundis, Salome, The Picture of Dorian Gray,* and assorted poems, fairy tales, and articles. His society comedies are notable for their absence in studies of Wilde's religion, particularly in its more decadent, Catholic, and syncretic forms. However, these plays of society—*Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance, An Ideal Husband,* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*—complicate and nuance Wilde's approach to religion. Whereas many of Wilde's works identify the author with Christ and appear to renounce material flourishing,[46] the comedies reimagine a spiritual space where sin and fallenness are the prerequisites for both metaphysical and physical prosperity.

Arguably even more so than Jones or Pinero, Wilde was at the forefront of creating the syncretic stage. While Jones and Pinero were more popular and certainly had longer commercial success in the *fin de siècle*—according to John Dawick, "Oscar Wilde had shone brilliantly but briefly in the Victorian twilight before his career had been snuffed out savagely by the forces of respectability he had gaily mocked" (228-29)—Wilde's work was pointed in its religious explorations and ultimately achieved a longer-lasting impact. Although his poems, novel, and essays have received the majority of religious criticism, Wilde uses his comedic society plays to

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Walter Pater. For a more detailed discussion of how Pater influenced the Oxford set, see Denis Donoghue's discussion in the main text. Additionally, for a more detailed discussion about Catholic conversion at Oxford during the nineteenth century, see the main text.

[46] Joseph McQueen explicitly lays out this argument. According to McQueen, Wilde and his Ritualist, decadent aesthetics represented a "subversive" attack on a materialist secularism that was pervading society (866). He writes, "Wilde revels in paradox, and to these paradoxes we now add that of the seemingly amoral aesthete whose Catholicism challenges the immanence and disenchantment that, according to [Charles] Taylor, define secularity" (867).

craft societies full of antinomian and syncretic morality. This chapter explores his four theatrical comedies and places them into extant scholarly conversations about his portrayals of faith. As the last works that were completed before his spectacular downfall, the theatrical comedies offer an imaginative glimpse into a make-believe world where the biggest sin is to deny your own true self and where Christian faith is met with secular reward.

I. *Lady Windermere's Fan* and Salubrious Sin

Lady Windermere's Fan premiered in 1892, and it became Wilde's first major theatrical hit, receiving both critical and commercial success (Eltis 55-56). A departure from Wilde's previous works, which were primarily essays and poetry, both in terms of genre and style, the play captured Wilde's own light, bright wittiness and was one of his first forays into work that was unambiguously comedic. At the center of *Lady Windermere's Fan,* though, was an idealistic, moralistic type of young woman who would likely be the moral center in another playwright's work, particularly as she resembles Arthur Wing Pinero's serious and devoted young women.

At the beginning of the play, Wilde appears to follow convention, and Lady Windermere is presented as the play's spiritual and moral heart, particularly as she requests that Lord Darlington, an admirer of hers, stop paying her compliments now that she is married. Her opening lines declare her ingenuous purity and her religious affiliation. She says to Lord Darlington,

> You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere

> child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's elder sister, you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me what the world is forgetting, the difference between what is right and what is wrong. *She* allowed of no compromise. *I* allow of none. (102)

Lady Windermere's self-confessed Puritanism indicates that she is Wilde's embodiment of "the innocently idealistic young woman, [who will be] forced to confront the sordid realities of political and social life" (Jackson 166). Her portrayal on the page was aided by her depiction on the stage, with *The Financial Times* (24 February 1892) praising Lily Hanbury's performance of Lady Windermere. It concluded by saying that "her manner is perhaps a little hard at times" ("*Lady Windermere's Fan"),* which perhaps added to her portrayal as a "Puritan." Like Hester Worsley and Lady Chiltern of Wilde's later plays, Lady Windermere will have to recognize her own fallibility before the play ends. Lady Windermere's redemption from moral priggishness is contingent on the recognition that she, too, has the capacity to sin, and in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* virtue is portrayed as being intertwined with sin.

Lady Windermere's character arc is a precursor to the description of an antinomian that Wilde would later write in *De Profundis*: she is one who is made for exceptions, not for laws. For Lady Windermere, *breaking* moral laws leads her to become a better version of herself, a sentiment that is both indebted to classic antinomian thought while being embedded in the *fin de siècle*. In classic antinomian thought, a saved person can sin with impunity without fear of being lost because grace is the result of faith and faith alone, i.e. *sola fide* (Latin for "by faith alone"). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines antinomianism as the belief that "moral law is not binding upon Christians, under the 'law of grace'" ("Antinomianism), and Wilde's play shows the uselessness of most moral laws.

In Wilde's portrayal, though, antinomianism moves beyond moral neutrality and is transformed into something morally efficacious. This belief in sin's ability to be morally salubrious may have been the result of the particular historical and cultural milieu in which Wilde found himself, a time when interest in religion and art proliferated among the educated set, particularly those with ties to Oxford. As is well known, starting in the 1830s students and teachers of Oxford University, where Wilde had attended, had led the Oxford Movement, a drive to reconnect the Anglican Church with its medieval and Catholic Church. According to Christopher Dawson, "The fundamental note of the Oxford Movement was its anti-modernism," and its adherents were against the modernizing and liberalizing trends overtaking the Church of England (134). This interest in antiquarianism helped fuel interest not only in Anglo-Catholicism, but also in Roman Catholicism, with Cardinal Newman becoming one of the most famous converts.

By the time of the *fin de siècle,* large numbers of artistic Oxford students, who formed a sizeable minority of the era's artists, became interested in Catholicism and art, as well as concomitant questions of sin, grace, and representation. According to Frances Knight, "Roman Catholicism proved most compelling to aesthetes in search of religious conversion" (117). Artists attracted to Roman Catholic practice included Aubrey Beardsley, Joris-Karl Huysmans, John Gray, Ernest Dowson, and Lionel Johnson, and according to Dawson, these were artists "who looked to poetry for something more than aesthetic enjoyment, and to religion for something more than pious sentiment" (Dawson 23). For many *fin de siècle* artists, religion and art were intertwined approaches to experiencing passion and pleasure, and scholars such as Ellis Hanson, Christopher Dawson, and Frances Knight have written on the connection between art and religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, in the late nineteenth century.

Walter Pater, the famed Oxford professor who taught many of the above artists, explicitly tied together art, pleasure, and antinomianism. In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance,* he wrote

> One of the strongest characteristics of that outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of the assertion of the liberty of the heart in the middle age, which I have termed a medieval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the age. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the primitive Christian ideal; and their love became a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. (16)

This antinomianism was a prominent feature of decadent Catholicism, and Wilde himself knew Pater when he studied at Oxford. According to Richard Ellmann, Wilde "came under the spell" of Pater, and he had much of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* memorized by heart (47). Indeed, Wilde even referred to it as his "golden book" (qtd. in Ellmann 47).

Homosexuality also knitted together these artists. While not all *fin de siècle* Catholic artists were homosexual (Beardsley is a notable exception), many of them were. According to Denis Donoghue, antinomianism, homosexuality, and Catholicism went hand-in-hand for the students at Oxford. He explains,

> But homoerotic inclination was merely one aspect of an antinomian character Pater, Hopkins, and Wilde shared. 'Antinomian' is Pater's word: in *Studies in the History of Renaissance* he uses it to mean not opposition to orthodoxy but a

> quiet declaration of independence, a determination to stand apart from official values. . . . in Pater's Oxford the path to Rome was taken by people of antinomian intention . . . (112-113)

By the late 1800s, though, this antinomianism had been transformed from its historical meaning to an updated one that posited that there could be something salubrious in sinning, and Camille Cauti writes that there is a "decadent Catholic idea that sin is necessary for salvation" (39). Wilde explored and took up these ideas in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* and he shows that sin can be a conduit for freedom through recognizing the whole gamut of human experience, including fallibility.

Lady Windermere's Fan follows Lady Windermere on her journey away from moral priggishness through a series of events that show her own shortcomings. The play begins with Lady Windermere learning that her husband has been paying secret visits and giving money to a woman named Mrs. Erlynne, and Lady Windermere suspects an affair between them. What Lady Windermere does not know is that Mrs. Erlynne is actually her mother, who deserted the family years ago, and that she is now blackmailing Lord Windermere. That evening at a party, Lady Windermere is distressed to find that her husband has invited Mrs. Erlynne, and Lord Darlington begs Lady Windermere to run away with him. She temporarily refuses, but then rethinks and follows him after writing a note to her husband on her departure. Mrs. Erlynne finds the note, and resolves to save Lady Windermere—her secret daughter—from the scandal.

Lady Windermere goes to Lord Darlington's private apartments and finds him gone. She waits for him inside, and Mrs. Erlynne enters and tries to convince her to go back to her husband, especially as they have a child. Mrs. Erlynne is on the verge of succeeding when Lord Darlington arrives in the company of Lord Windermere and other gentlemen. The women

quickly hide, with Lady Windermere hiding behind a curtain. One of the men discovers the fan, and shows it to the others, laughing about how "Darlington has got a woman here in his rooms" (145). The shocked Lord Windermere recognizes his wife's fan, and threatens to search the room. Just as he notices the curtain moving and is about to discover his wife's hiding spot, Mrs. Erlynne comes out from the door behind them, apologizes for accidentally taking his wife's fan, which is a lie, and leaves, thus allowing Lady Windermere to secretly slip away during the distraction (145-146).

The next day Mrs. Erlynne comes to the Windermere residence to return the fan, and during alternate private meetings with the husband and wife, Mrs. Erlynne convinces Lady Windermere to not confess her adulterous plans to her husband, and she convinces Lord Windermere to keep safe the secret of Lady Windermere's parentage. She exits, and Lady Windermere is left humbler and wiser. She forsakes her Puritan strictness, and recognizes her commonality with Mrs. Erlynne, claiming, "I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad as though they were two separate races or creations" (149). Lady Windermere recognizes that even good women like herself "have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin" (149), a fallibility that aligns her with women she formerly considered "bad." Critic Sos Eltis writes,

> She [Lady Windermere] ends the play having learnt that judgment must be tempered by charity, for even the strictly virtuous like herself have a hidden capacity for sin. Lady Windermere has learnt to pity and forgive the poor sinner, to understand the weakness in others by recognizing the weakness in herself. (56)

This recognition and subsequent progression, though, is engendered by sin. As portrayed in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* a touch of sin is beneficial.

This complex relationship between sin, redemption, and antinomianism extends to Lord Windermere in an entirely different manner. At the start of the play, Lord Windermere epitomizes Christian benevolence and kindness. When Mrs. Erlynne blackmails him by threatening to expose that she is Lady Windermere's mother, he responds with surprising compassion and empathy. Not only does he agree to provide her with the required money, but he also determines to help his wife's mother regain her footing in society. Though it is possible that he is just saving his own, and his wife's, reputation by guarding them against the shame of illicit parentage, the vehemence of his words suggests otherwise. As he tells the indignant Lady Windermere, who is appalled that her husband is helping a disreputable woman, "Margaret, you could save this woman. She wants to get back into society, and she wants you to help her. . . . do this for my sake; it is her last chance" (112-113). His compassion for Mrs. Erlynne is also suggested in his pointed query that Lady Windermere, rather than himself, invite Mrs. Erlynne to the party, a request she refuses (112-113). As the play continues, the virtuous Lord Windermere reverses from being a model of Christian charity to a quintessential Puritan, thus exchanging roles with his wife.

Unlike Lady Windermere, Lord Windermere never succumbs to sin or temptation, and that is why he becomes increasingly intolerant as the play progresses. Without the humility and chastening that accompany sin, Lord Windermere becomes a moral prig. When he falsely believes that Mrs. Erlynne engaged in sexual relations with Lord Darlington (instead, it was his wife who was planning to do so, though their relationship was not consummated), he thoroughly and ruthlessly castigates her. As he declares, "I have every right to look upon you as what you are—a worthless woman. . . . You fill me with horror—with absolute horror" (152-154). Just as

Lady Windermere threatens in the first act to slap Mrs. Erlynne with the titular fan, Lord Windermere verbally slaps Mrs. Erlynne in the fourth act with his severe condemnation.

Surprisingly, Lord Windermere's reversal has gone largely unnoticed by critics. Most critics focus primarily on Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne, and occasionally on Lord Darlington as well, and they largely ignore the reversal of Lord Windermere's character. By examining the regression and progression of Lord and Lady Windermere's characters respectively, though, Wilde's exploration of *fin de siècle* antinomianism in *Lady Windermere's Fan* comes into focus. Just as Wilde demonstrates the importance of sin in the development of Lady Windermere's character, he displays the harmful effects of *not* sinning in the deterioration of Lord Windermere's character. For antinomian, decadent-leaning Christians of *fin de siècle* England, the right touch of sin could have a salubrious effect.

It is Mrs. Erlynne, though, who most embodies the complicated relationship between sin, redemption, and end-of-the-century antinomianism. While Wilde appears to praise sin in his characterizations of Lord and Lady Windermere, he shows its damage in his portrayal of Mrs. Erlynne. The transgressions of her youth—the abandoning of her husband and child for her lover—are presented as being tragic and truly regrettable. The tragedy arises, though, from two very different types of punishment. The first punishment is dealt by an unforgiving and unjust society, and it is a punishment meted out not for transgressing the laws of morality, but for disobeying the laws of a hypocritical society. As Mrs. Erlynne says to Lady Windermere, who is repeating Mrs. Erlynne's mistakes,

> You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! To find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous ways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from

> one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don't know what it is. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that. (137)

Mrs. Erlynne's humiliation and ostracization is the result of society's treatment of her, not her own internalized feelings of guilt or familial betrayal. While it's unclear what Wilde thinks about Mrs. Erlynne's sexual transgressions, it is obvious that he believes society deals too harshly with individuals who break the boundaries of Victorian sexual propriety. This was not terribly unusual—Jones, Pinero, and other playwrights portrayed this onstage in the *fin de siècle*, and novelists like Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell had portrayed this in works nearly half a century prior—but Wilde gave the fallen woman an unusually eloquent voice.

However, it is through Mrs. Erlynne's second punishment that Wilde outlines an idea that would frequently arise in his works: that to deny parental responsibility is an abdication of both duty and self. Rather than being inflicted by a cruel and unjust society, Mrs. Erlynne's primary punishment is internal: it is her continuing guilt over abandoning her daughter, the unsuspecting Lady Windermere. What she feels is a type of penitence, the internal feeling of remorse, which is separate from penance, an action that indicates remorse. By displaying that Mrs. Erlynne's chief punishment is her enduring guilt and shame, rather than the judgment of society, Wilde promotes the idea that child abandonment is something truly harmful, at least in the world of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Mrs. Erlynne's guilt and anguish is revealed in her vehement protestations to Lady Windermere that she must return to her son. As she says,

> You have a child, Lady Windermere. Go back to that child who even now, in pain or in joy, may be calling to you. . . . God gave you that child. He will require

> from you that you make his life fine, that you watch over him. What answer will you make to God if his life is ruined through you? Back to your house, Lady Windermere—your husband loves you! He has never swerved for a moment from the love he bears you. But even if he had a thousand loves, you must stay with your child. If he was harsh to you, you must stay with your child. If he ill-treated you, you must stay with your child. If he abandoned you, your place is with your child. (137-138)

As Mrs. Erlynne exhorts Lady Windermere to return home, her argument radically shifts. Rather than focusing on societal repercussions, Mrs. Erlynne makes a claim on the fundamental nature of Lady Windermere's actions. The repetition of the word "must" serves as a moral imperative, and the references to God illuminates that, for Mrs. Erlynne, the mother/child bond is a holy one ordained by God, and for Lady Windermere to relinquish it is to deny her very self as the mother and child are inextricably joined together because. As she says, Lady Windermere's "place" is with her child, and "God gave [her] that child."

This idea that parenthood is God-ordained and that parents and children are as one flesh and one person would occur throughout Wilde's work. In many of his texts, "the orphan is a recurrent motif" (Raby 151), and Wilde's harshest judgments are reserved for parents who abandon their children. This idea that parent and child are inseparable physically and spiritually would become prominent, tragically so, in Wilde's later works. Unhappily for Wilde, several years after writing *Lady Windermere's Fan,* he personally experienced the loss of his children when his boys were forcibly taken from him. Wilde's personal anguish was acute. He writes, "My two children are taken away from me by legal procedure. That is, and always will remain to me a source of infinite distress, of infinite pain, of grief without end or limit" (*De Profundis*

43). Later in *De Profundis,* he associates caring for a child to caring for God, a sentiment that expands on Mrs. Erlynne's speech to Lady Windermere. He writes,

> I had lost my name, my position, my happiness, my freedom, my wealth. I was a prisoner and a pauper. But I still had my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, "The body of a child is the body of the Lord: I am not worthy of either. (59)

Here Wilde's treatment of parenthood connects it to the Eucharist ("the body of the Lord"), and the bodily connection—the intertwinedness—of the parent and child echoes the merging of Jesus' body and the communicants' as the Eucharist is ingested. For Oscar Wilde, caring for a child is almost a holy requirement because parent and child are of one flesh and one body, in a relationship that is cosmically ordained. Also in *De Profundis,* Wilde wrote, "Sins of the flesh are nothing. They are maladies for physicians to cure, if they should be cured. Sins of the soul alone are shameful" (30). In *Lady Windermere's Fan,* child abandonment is not a sin of the flesh; it is a sin of the soul because it cuts asunder a God-ordained relationship.

As expected, Mrs. Erlynne's sin of child abandonment requires expiation. Though she is planning to marry Lord Augustus and return to respectable society, Mrs. Erlynne covers for Lady Windermere and emerges from the other room as Lord Darlington's supposed lover in front of the shocked group of men, including Lord Windermere, Lord Darlington, and Lord Augustus, the man Mrs. Erlynne has hopes of marrying. By pretending to be Lord Darlington's secret lover, she jettisons her hopes of becoming Lord Augustus's wife and atones for her sin through sacrifice. Moreover, she both symbolically and physically reconnects herself to her daughter by bodily taking her place. This physical connection is emphasized when Mrs. Erlynne takes Lady

Windermere's fan with her as she exits, and thus the physical manifestation of Lady Windermere's separation from her mother—she had previously threatened to slap Mrs. Erlynne with the fan—becomes the symbol that mother and daughter are reconnected both emotionally and physically.

This heartwarming ending—the mother and daughter reconciled, even if Lady Windermere is still ignorant of their true relationship—was not how Wilde chose to end the play, and he goes beyond what his contemporary authors were doing in that he allows his fallen woman to triumph, in secular, material terms, at the end. While it is a "commonly accepted interpretation" that Mrs. Erlynne "sacrifices herself for her daughter, and thus redeems herself from her state of sin" (Eltis 66), Wilde's play does not end with Mrs. Erlynne's continuing atonement. In the final act of the play, it is revealed that Mrs. Erlynne has persuaded Lord Augustus to marry her. By telling him a series of half-truths about her reasons for being in Lord Darlington's room, she erases his suspicions about her and Lord Darlington while still protecting the innocence of Lady Windermere. By ending the play with Mrs. Erlynne's marital triumph, Wilde "subverted theatrical conventions by rewarding his fallen woman with the ultimate prize of a husband" (Eltis 79), and Mrs. Erlynne's initial sacrifice gives way to victory.

As hinted at earlier, this surprise ending has led critics like Sos Eltis and Francesca Coppa to claim that Wilde, rather than endorsing the Christian view of atonement through sacrifice, is doing just as Wilde claimed: promoting "sheer individualism" and non-judgment by showing that "everyone should go his own way, to whatever place he chooses, in exactly the way that he chooses." However, Wilde's ending is nuanced and complex, and neither group of critics—neither those that see *Lady Windermere's Fan* as conventionally Christian nor those that see it as amoralistic and modern—are entirely right.

Instead, Wilde is rejecting the idea of penance and promoting a fuller type of grace, an idea born from Mrs. Erlynne's words. When she tells Lord Windermere that she wants "pleasure," and that she will not do what he wants, which she says is to "retire into a convent, or becomes a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels" (154), she is arguing for full and complete forgiveness. According to Philip Cohen, Mrs. Erlynne "reject[s] a life of penitence and privation" because "such an image would yield only a socially satisfactory image" (192). While Lord Windermere puritanically cling to the idea of sacrificial penance—as he says, "A mother's love means devotion, unselfishness, sacrifice. What could you know of such things?" (155)—Mrs. Erlynne embraces joy, pleasure, even ecstasy. She intimates to Lord Windermere that she loves her daughter ("If I said to you that I care for her, perhaps loved her even—you would sneer at me, wouldn't you?" (155)), but she does not believe that her love requires ceaseless sacrifice. Instead, she boldly declares to Lord Windermere, "Repentance is quite out of date" (154).

What actually matters is private contrition, and almost every critic has missed Mrs. Erlynne's sincere regret for abandoning her daughter. As she says later to Lord Windermere, "I regret my bad actions. You regret your good ones—that is the difference between us," a statement that reveals her contrition (155). By not continuing to do penance, Mrs. Erlynne frees herself to truly accept forgiveness and grace. In *Lady Windermere's Fan,* Wilde suggests that reclaiming happiness and pleasure is a religious act, an idea he later made explicit in *De Profundis.* He writes,

> I feel that not to be ashamed of having been punished is one of the first points I must attain to, for the sake of my own perfection, and because I am so imperfect.

> Then I must learn how to be happy. . . .I knew the Church condemned *accidia* [sloth], but the whole idea seemed to me quite fantastic, just the sort of sin, I fancied, a priest who knew nothing about the real life would invent. Nor could I understand how Dante, who says that "sorrow re-marries us to God," could have been so harsh to those who were enamoured of melancholy, if any such there really were. I had no idea that some day this would become to me one of the greatest temptations of my life.
>
> When I was in Wandsworth Prison I longed to die. It was my one desire. . . . Now I feel quite differently. I see it would be both ungrateful and unkind of me to pull so long a face that when my friends came to see me they would have to make their faces still longer in order to show their sympathy; or, if I desired to entertain them, to invite them to sit down silently to bitter herbs and funeral baked meats. I must learn how to be cheerful and happy. (50-51)

For the imprisoned Oscar Wilde, finding happiness and pleasure is nothing short of a religious quest that honors the gift of life. So while Mrs. Erlynne's desire to reclaim pleasure and happiness is outside the orthodox Victorian Christian understanding of penitence, it is within Wilde's antinomian *fin de siècle* Catholic conception of penitence. For the disgraced Wilde and the sorrowful Mrs. Erlynne, outward sorrow and sacrifice do not serve a larger purpose. Instead, penitence should be felt in the heart, and then life should be lived joyfully and happily.

There is one other important aspect of sin, redemption, and antinomianism that should to be examined, especially as it relates to Mrs. Erlynne's marital triumph through her union with Lord Augustus. In an interesting coda, Mrs. Erlynne's happy marriage is directly related to her fall many years earlier since it is the ambiguous nature of her history that first attracts Lord

Augustus. As he tells his friends, "I prefer women with a past. They're always so demmed [sic] amusing to talk to" (140). Especially since it's implied that this woman with a past will lead Lord Augustus into the "paths of virtue," the route to happiness and integrity is not conventionally linear (142).

This ending—gaining the reward of a financially and emotionally satisfying marriage—also upends conventions regarding fallen women. Rather than retreat to a life of isolation or a life at the nunnery, or even die like many other fallen women, Wilde allowed his fallen woman to flourish in multiple ways. In the case of Mrs. Erlynne, her ultimate material reward—her advantageous marriage—is matched by her spiritual rejuvenation as she is reconnected to her daughter. Though Joseph McQueen notes how Wilde critiqued immanence and materialism in his essays, in Wilde's comedies he does something different, and he depicts a world where metaphysical and material flourishing exist in tandem.[47]

However, Wilde is careful not to make this process linear, clear cut, or moralistic. Rather, it is implied that Mrs. Erlynne's marital triumph is linked with her earlier fall, and similarly, Lady Windermere's newfound Christian charity is the product of sin, just as Lord Windermere's intolerance is the product of virtue. In *Lady Windermere's Fan,* Wilde presents a religious and moral viewpoint that is not moralistic, and he crafts a world where sin can be morally edifying. However, he still shows that there are some sins that harm the soul. In short,

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[47] As Joseph McQueen notes, in Wilde's dialogues "The Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist," Wilde "reject[s]" the "notion that nature and human life bear an immanent order and thus require nothing beyond themselves to retain meaning" (868). To build his argument, McQueen turns to philosopher Charles Taylor's idea of the immanent frame, which posits that secularity yielded a view of human flourishing primarily within a material means. He writes that Taylor construes "secularization not as the death of religion, but rather as the rise, over the past 500 years, of the ability to conceive of human flourishing in purely immanent and materialist terms" (866).

Lady Windermere's Fan is an unconventional, unorthodox, and antinomian work that lays the groundwork for understanding Wilde's *fin de siècle* religious beliefs.

II. *A Woman of No Importance* and Comforting Confession

Wilde's next play, *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), is also about a fallen woman who eventually triumphs. Despite its similarities to *Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance* is less critically acclaimed than Wilde's previous work. According to Kerry Powell, most scholars find it to be "the least successful" of Wilde's society plays (55), a sentiment with which Richard Ellmann agrees (378). Sos Eltis confirms that many critics believe its "only originality is to plead for greater leniency for repentant fallen women and harsher punishment for fallen men;" unfortunately, by 1893, there was "nothing particularly remarkable about such a message" (95). In spite of its ostensible conformity—or perhaps because of it—*A Woman of No Importance* was Wilde's most financially successful play during his lifetime (Small 104). Despite its commercial success, "comparatively little" has been written on *A Woman of No Importance* (Powell 55). Those critics who do write about it generally focus only on its melodramatic elements, and according to Philip Cohen, few of them note that it is "Wilde's most explicitly religious play" (203). Furthermore, few note that this religiosity is profoundly influenced by Catholicism, particularly in its depiction of confession.

As many scholars know, Wilde had an intense interest in confession, as displayed in works as diverse as his little-known play *The Duchess of Padua, The Picture of Dorian Gray, De Profundis,* and his short stories. Sentiments like this one at the end of *Dorian Gray* are common: "Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement. There

was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin" (228). While critics frequently study the treatment of confession in *Dorian Gray, De Profundis,* et cetera and analyze it for implications of Wilde's decadent Catholicism, the use of confession within *A Woman of No Importance* has been almost entirely ignored. Ellis Hanson notes, for example, that scenes from *A Woman of No Importance* "brought together some of his signature themes—confession, flirtation, and masquerade" (279), which he then uses to facilitate a discussion of *Dorian Gray.* However, in *A Woman of No Importance,* unlike in *Dorian Gray,* Wilde shows the *successful* implementation of confession, which he uses to argue that confession is necessary for happiness. This builds on the religious depiction of *Lady Windermere's Fan,* wherein Mrs. Erlynne implies that faith allows for joy, with the latter play indicating confession's role in cultivating contentment.

In the beginning of the play, Wilde shows its inverse: that the failure to confess causes unhappiness, even active destruction. *A Woman of No Importance* centers on the relationship between Mrs. Arbuthnot and her son Gerald, who are relative nobodies in society. However, Gerald is in love with the wealthy, religious American Hester Worsley, so when the wealthy Lord Illingworth offers him a chance to raise his station by serving as his secretary, he accepts it so that he may court Hester. Much to his surprise, his mother is against the plan. Unbeknownst to Gerald, Lord Illingworth is his father who abandoned him as a child. He is the man, as Mrs. Arbuthnot later tells her son, who "ruined" a woman (Mrs. Arbuthnot does not yet confess that she was the woman). She later says, "[H]er life was ruined, and her soul was ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also" (216). Despite the intensity of her feelings, Mrs. Arbuthnot's stated objections at the time of her son's appointment are weak and ineffective,

and she can merely tell her son, "I do not think you would be suitable as a private secretary to Lord Illingworth. You have no qualifications" (201). When Gerald presses her for a more substantial objection, she meekly answers, "I have no other reason" (201). Left without a compelling argument, Gerald happily joins Lord Illingworth's employ.

Without confessing the truth about her past and Gerald's parentage, Mrs. Arbuthnot cannot save her beloved son from the corrupting influence of Lord Illingworth, a process that begins immediately. After taking his new position, Gerald feels dissatisfied with his humble lifestyle and longs to emulate Lord Illingworth's ostentatious habits and cynical philosophies. He says to Lord Illingworth (whose very name is meant to indicate his moral deficiencies), "I feel an awful duffer when I am with you, Lord Illingworth. Of course, I have had so few advantages. I have not been to Eton or Oxford like other chaps" (196). Fostering Gerald's discontent is the first step in Lord Illingworth's plan to transform Gerald into his own image, a plan revealed by his axiom, "Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or nation" (199). Though Mrs. Arbuthnot angrily confronts Lord Illingworth and declares that Gerald "was not discontented till he met you," she is rendered powerless to sway her son away from Illingworth without confessing the truth of her history (199), and she spends much of the first three acts in unvoiced anguish. By the third act, Gerald even tells his mother, "Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth" (214). For Mrs. Arbuthnot, having her son turn out "just like" his father is the worst possible punishment she could endure.

This depiction of punishment for unconfessed sins is a common literary trope, of course, with *The Scarlet Letter* and *Crime and Punishment* being two of the most famous examples. For many fictional characters, peace and forgiveness only come after the sinner has confessed his or

her crime. Peter Brooks, author of *Troubling Confessions,* argues that the perceived necessity of confession has permeated Western culture and that it is central to our conceptions of justice and forgiveness. As he writes, "Confession of wrongdoing is considered fundamental to morality because it forms the basis for rehabilitation. . . . To refuse confession is to be obdurate, hard of heart, resistant to amendment" (2). In other words, a sinner can only move forward once they have confessed their misdeeds.

Despite the prominence of confession in the laws and morals of Western culture and religion, it is particularly associated with Roman Catholicism (it is part of the sacrament of reconciliation, which has three components: conversion, confession, and celebration). The association between Roman Catholicism and confession was especially strong in Victorian England where, Ellis Hanson writes, auricular confession served as a "challenge to Victorian norms of sexual propriety" (282). While Protestants were often preoccupied with confession's supposedly prurient nature,[48] Catholics took a different view. For Roman Catholics, confession is not simply a way to be reconciled with God through the forgiveness of sins; it also unburdens the troubled soul from the weight of sin and provides succor and relief. This theory is explained by Father Francis Randolph who writes, "Confession, believe it or not, is about happiness. It is about how to get rid of all those nagging feelings of guilt, how to be relaxed and at peace, knowing that God loves us" (8). In the Catholic system of belief, happiness and relief follows confession, just as anxiety and sorrow stems from the inability to confess.

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[48] Hanson goes on to note that auricular confession became a matter of "public, even parliamentary, outrage" in 1870 with the publication of *The Priest in Absolution,* a "training manual for Anglican confessors." The book brought about the condemnation of the public, and ninety-six peers denounced it in the House of Lord (282). Perhaps because of the prurient way Victorians viewed confession, decadent writers often delighted in portraying it. Hanson writes, "In decadent literature, however, it is precisely the religious context that gives the spoken sin its splendor, rendering the confessional a stage for exquisite shame" (281).

As expected, Mrs. Arbuthnot is troubled by her unconfessed sin. Her torment over her secret is revealed when she says, "She [referring to herself in the third person] will always suffer. For her, there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper" (216). Though she has successfully hidden her son's illegitimacy by posing as widow, she is tormented by shame and guilt. Rather than living openly and joyfully, she closes herself off from the pleasures of the world. She discloses to Gerald, "You made many friends and went into their houses and were glad with them, and I, knowing my secret, did not dare to follow, but stayed at home and closed the door, shut out the sun and sat in darkness" (225). In Mrs. Arbuthnot's view, there is inauthenticity in harboring a secret, and it deeply troubles and isolates her. Lord Illingworth cuts her to the quick by speaking about how her secret would be received:

> What excuse can you give to him for making him decline such an offer as mine? I won't tell him in what relations I stand to him, I need hardly say. But you daren't tell him. You know that. Look how you have brought him up. . . . You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, unjust judge he will be to you. Don't be deceived, Rachel. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them. (199-200)

His words—"children begin by loving their parents"—indicate that she should have confessed to her son much earlier, particularly as she has "educated him to be [her] judge," an education that would have been thwarted through prior confession. This amplifies her pain. Later, in *De Profundis,* Wilde explicitly stated this view when he wrote, "To speak the truth is a painful thing.

To be forced to tell lies is much worse" (81). Though Mrs. Arbuthnot is successful in hiding her secret, her guilt and her inauthenticity destroy her happiness.

The burden of her secret is finally relieved in a dramatic scene when Gerald attacks Lord Illingworth for "insulting" the virtuous Hester Worsley, Gerald's love interest, by forcibly kissing her. As Gerald yells, "Don't hold me, mother. Don't hold me—I'll kill him," Mrs. Arbuthnot stops her son's attack by confessing, "Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father" (217). The shame and the burden of guilt is revealed in Wilde's stage directions, which state that Mrs. Arbuthnot "*sinks slowly on the ground in shame*" (217). However, as Catholic theology foretells, immediate consolation is granted for the confession: Wilde's stage directions state, *"Gerald raises his mother up, puts his arm round her, and leads her from the room"* (217). Rather than reviling her for her past sins—as Lord Illingworth sneeringly predicted Gerald would do when he told Mrs. Arbuthnot that she had "educated him [Gerald] to be your judge if he ever finds you out" (199)—Gerald instead comforts her. Moreover, he immediately resolves to remove himself from Lord Illingworth's service, saying, "Lord Illingworth's views of life and mine are too different" (220). Through the act of confession, Mrs. Arbuthnot releases herself from the burden of secrecy and shame and saves Gerald from the perverting influence of Lord Illingworth. As Catholic theology teaches, auricular confession in *A Woman of No Importance* results in consolation, peace, and happiness.

Surprisingly, despite her confession, Mrs. Arbuthnot does not repent her sin. As in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* the love of a child supersedes and cancels out regret. Similarly, *A Woman of No Importance* also suggests that sin can have glorious effects and be, in some cases, the cause for moral and spiritual rejuvenation. Though she has suffered for years for her youthful indiscretion, she tells Gerald, "I have never repented of my sin. How could I repent of my sin

when you, my love, were its fruit?" (225). This lack of remorse surprised viewers of the time, with the *Illustrated London News* (29 April 1893) saying it went beyond "scrupulous decorum" and *The Sunday Times* (23 April 1893) saying that the character was "glorying in her shame" ("*A Woman of No Importance,"* "Plays and Players).[49] Though this lack of remorse is contrary to orthodox Catholic theology, this decadent idea of the morality, sometimes even necessity, of sin is one that Wilde would portray in all of his comedies. Furthermore, James Joyce, writing specifically about Wilde, stated that Wilde shows "the truth inherent in the soul of Catholicism: that man cannot reach the divine except through that sense of separation and loss called sin" (qtd. in Killeen *Faiths* 17). In *A Woman of No Importance,* Mrs. Arbuthnot's sin gives her Gerald, the "pearl of price" (224). Through her love of Gerald, Mrs. Arbuthnot touches the divine. Like God in his love for humanity, Mrs. Arbuthnot knows that "No office is too mean, no care too lowly for the thing we women love—and oh! How *I* loved *you.* Not Hannah, Samuel more" (224). By referencing Biblical characters,[50] Mrs. Arbuthnot catapults her love to the holy sphere, and shows that it is through her sin that she has also experienced a love that echoes the all-encompassing love of God for His children.

Her sin also leads her to live a holy life through her charitable work. Gerald describes her work with the poor as a "mission," and Mrs. Arbuthnot explains that "the sick do not ask if the hand that smooths their pillow is pure, nor the dying care if the lips that touch their brow have known the kiss of sin" (225). She goes on to say, "And you thought I spent too much of my

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[49] It should be noted, though, that *The Sunday Times* was appreciative of Wilde's portrayal of Mrs. Arbuthnot and called it "fresh, bold, and interesting," sentiments with which *The Illustrated London News* did not agree.

[50] According to the Bible, Hannah was a pious woman who was barren for years, a source of pain and humiliation for her. She promised God that she would give her son to his service if He would cure her of her barrenness, and she subsequently gave birth to the prophet Samuel. See Samuel 1:2-2:21.

time in going to Church, and in Church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome, and you were always in my heart, Gerald, too much in my heart" (225). It is because of her sin that Mrs. Arbuthnot diligently works for the poor and the Church. Though this charitable work is not a form of penance in the usual understanding of the word, it is crucial that her charitable deeds are associated with her prior sin, which implies that her sinfulness gave rise to her to holiness. Lord Illingworth's glib maxim that "the only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future" becomes a theological truism in *A Woman of No Importance* because Mrs. Arbuthnot's saintly present is predicated on her sinful past (207).

This antinomian morality extends to Hester Worsley as well. The "Puritan" ingénue of *A Woman of No Importance,* Hester serves as Gerald's love interest, and like Lady Windermere of Wilde's earlier play, she must change her conceptions about right and wrong. Though she begins the play by proclaiming that all sinning men and women should be "punished" (190), she ends by convincing Gerald to forswear his plans for matrimony between his mother and Lord Illingworth. To marry Lord Illingworth, she says, would be the "real disgrace" of Mrs. Arbuthnot's life (225). Instead, she proposes that Mrs. Arbuthnot and Gerald should come with her to America where they shall "somewhere find green valleys and fresh waters . . ." (226). Her newfound attitude about sin is demonstrated not only through this request, but also her immediate entreaty that Mrs. Arbuthnot "come out with us [she and Gerald] to the garden," both invitations which resonate with Biblical imagery (227). Through the act of confession, Mrs. Arbuthnot has already redeemed herself of her sin, and in Hester's newfound views, punishment and penance are not demanded. Hester resembles Pinero's Ellean Tanqueray, but she takes her toleration further and becomes a radical character. The revolutionary nature of these views is

expressed by Lord Illingworth when he demands Mrs. Arbuthnot answer "What *fin de siècle* person?" has convinced Gerald to drop his demand for their marriage (232). He is, of course, shocked to learn that this modern "*fin de siècle*" person is the former "Puritan" Hester Worsley.

Hester and Mrs. Arbuthnot's moral bravery is rewarded with the forging of new family bonds. The orphaned Hester gains a mother, Mrs. Arbuthnot regains her son, Gerald and Hester find a spouse, and Gerald realizes that Mrs. Arbuthnot is father and mother "all in one" (226). Though both Hester and Gerald began the play thinking that morality was fixed, they end the play realizing that the only law that matters is the one that binds parents to children. Lord Illingworth cannot join their family because he thinks familial bonds are mutable. He says in the final scene, "I don't admit that it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely" (230). His refusal to marry Mrs. Arbuthnot left their son legally fatherless, and rendered him a bastard. That word—bastard—is so offensive that Mrs. Arbuthnot literally strikes Lord Illingworth across the face with her glove to stop him from uttering it in the final scene (232). In *A Woman of No Importance,* parent/child bonds are so holy that once they are torn asunder, they can never be stitched back together again.

The sacredness of the familial bond is displayed right afterwards, when Gerald and Hester discover Mrs. Arbuthnot crying on the sofa:

> GERALD: . . . Mother, you have not been crying? *(Kneels down beside her.)*
>
> MRS. ARBUTHNOT: My boy! My boy! My boy! *(Running her fingers through his hair.)*
>
> HESTER *(coming over):* But you have two children now. Will you let me be your daughter?

> MRS. ARBUTHNOT *(looking up)*: Would you choose me for a mother?
>
> HESTER: You of all women I have ever known.
>
> *They move toward the door leading into [the] garden with their hands around each other's waist.* (233)

When Mrs. Arbuthnot joins Gerald and Hester in the garden after this final exchange with Lord Illingworth, Wilde symbolizes that they have become a sort of holy family who deserve to live in paradise together because they see the sacred nature of the bonds between them. Mrs. Arbuthnot ends the play with her family not just intact, but also strengthened and grown. This was precipitated by her confession, which allowed her to finally live truthfully. And by living truthfully, she finally is able to experience Hester's *fin de siècle* axiom that "God's law is only love" (227).

III. *An Ideal Husband* and Immanent Flourishing

Like *A Woman of No Importance, An Ideal Husband* (1895) also emphasizes the importance of confession, though here he clarifies that confession should be private rather than public, and he emphasizes that penitence is not required. The plot revolves around Mrs. Cheveley's blackmail of Sir Robert Chiltern after she discovers that his successful political career began by selling state secrets. Sir Robert, fearing the demise of his career and marriage, agrees to her demands and prepares to further compromise his moral integrity. However, his friend Lord Goring implores him to resist Lady Cheveley's blackmail, confess everything to his wife, and live a life of renewed honesty. Additionally, Wilde uses his third society comedy to further redefine what constitutes sin. In *An Ideal Husband,* Wilde also expands the holy nature

of the bonds between parent and child while also, somewhat troublingly and paradoxically, marking this expansion by curtailing feminine independence. Wilde's third comedy becomes a fantasy where sin is met with reward and where love becomes unconditional under the crucible of conflict.

In *An Ideal Husband,* Sir Robert is ostensibly posited as the "ideal husband," but at the end of the play, those words are said in relation to Lord Goring.[51] And indeed, Lord Goring, with his dandified manners, aristocratic pedigree, and marked sense of compassion, is an ideal; Sos Eltis even argues that Lord Goring is Wilde's "idealized version of himself before the fall" (162). Arguably, Lord Goring is also an ideal *fin de siècle* Catholic, as he advocates for the practices that Wilde had previously laid out in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance.* Unsurprisingly, he unambiguously declares that Sir Robert must confess everything to his wife. As Lord Goring says, "You should have told your wife the whole thing. . . . You must begin by telling your wife the whole story" (268, 273). Lord Goring's implication is that the Chilterns' marriage should be built on honesty rather than on secrecy and lies. However, there is another reason Lord Goring insists that Robert confess: because, as Roman Catholicism suggests, confession and the recognition of sins exist in tandem.

When Sir Robert resists Lord Goring's advice to confess, he also refuses to show remorse for his offenses. Instead, he defends his actions, which brought him enormous wealth and financed the start of his political career, by saying, "Every man of ambition has to fight his century with its own weapons. What this century worships is wealth. The God of this century is

[51] The Earl of Caversham says to his son, Lord Goring, "And if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off without a shilling." To which Mabel Chiltern, his fiancée, replies, "An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world" (332). The ending impression left to the audience is that there is no such thing as an "ideal husband," though if there were, Lord Goring would be it.

wealth. To succeed one must have wealth. At all costs one must have wealth" (270). Sir Robert was born into a "well-born and poor" family, the type of family likely to have a taste for fine things, yet unable to provide them (269). This is the type of upbringing that Sir Robert calls a "double misfortune (269), and so Sir Robert justifies and defends his corrupt actions because he believes the ends justify the means. Lord Goring sees through his spurious justification and asks him more forcefully, "Robert, how could you have sold yourself for money?," to which Sir Robert answers him, "I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price. That is all" (270), a response that reveals his lack of repentance.

Sir Robert's desire for material wealth and influence, i.e. living within the immanent frame, also indicates his secular, rather than spiritual, outlook. In *A Secular Age,* Charles Taylor notes how Christianity has always conceived of human flourishing in at least partly material forms (14-20, 44), though secularity is marked by evaluating human flourishing as being almost *exclusively* through material means (14-20). According to Joseph McQueen, one of the main ways Wilde indicates his Catholic aesthetics was through challenging pervasive Victorian mores that view human flourishing primarily through an immanent frame (867-868). He writes, "Art [in this case, Wilde's art] subverts a morality that aims to discipline and organize human subjects for the sake of a labor that leads to immanent flourishing" (875). In *An Ideal Husband,* it appears as if Wilde is again poised to critique the desire for material wealth and flourishing. However, Wilde critiques materialism only if it is a character's sole aim, and he depicts a world where immanent and metaphysical prosperity are both possible. While these ideas of flourishing in ways both spiritual and material are implicit in the earlier comedies' depictions of joy and pleasure, they come to the forefront in this later play.

First, Sir Robert must attend to his spiritual needs, which he does through confession. It is not until Robert confesses that he is able to recognize and admit that this action was wrong, an admission that he does unwillingly at best. Indeed, Sir Robert's confession often goes unnoticed, perhaps because Mrs. Cheveley exposes Sir Robert's behavior to his wife. However, Robert ultimately chooses his own confession since Lady Chiltern resists Mrs. Cheveley's claims. As Lady Chiltern implores, "Lie to me! Tell me it is not true," to which he responds, "What this woman said is quite true. But, Gertrude, listen to me. . . . Let me tell you the whole thing" (291). Even though his confession is largely forced by Mrs. Cheveley's accusations, Wilde portrays the act of confessing as transformative in and of itself, as if the spoken words unleash hidden emotional truths.

This emotional change now leads Robert to call his former actions a "sin" (292). While he initially remains defensive after his confession—he tells his wife, "You have made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses" (292)—his confession is the first step towards recognition of wrongdoing and eventually even genuine remorse. By the next act, he is able to fully acknowledge his moral culpability to Lord Goring by admitting,

> And the woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty, that I built my life upon sands of shame—that I sold, like a common huckster, the secret that had been intrusted [sic] to me as a man of honour. I thank heaven poor Lord Radley died without knowing I betrayed him. I would to God I had died before I had been so horribly tempted, or had fallen so low. (301)

The religious element to this confession is hinted at with words like "heaven," "God," and even "tempted." These words are not incidental, but rather point to the profound way faith necessitates honesty.

Notably, it is the act of confession that allows Sir Robert to recognize his guilt and repent his sin. While he began the play indignantly telling Mrs. Cheveley that she "seem[s] unable to realise" that she is "talking to an Englishman"—a declaration that suggests that he, as an Englishman, is beyond reproach, despite his knowledge that he has previously been corrupted—he ends the play acknowledging his failings. For scholars who claim that *An Ideal Husband* shows "the inadequacy of a black and white sense of right and wrong" (T. Brown 353), this passage strongly suggests that some things are morally wrong and that there is a limit to antinomianism, a belief that Wilde also indicated in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. As Robert freely admits now, his actions were wrong, and his acknowledgement is infused with moral and religious guilt, as suggested by the religiously evocative language. As discussed in the section on *A Woman of No Importance*, in Roman Catholicism, confession and recognition are inextricably connected, and thus Sir Robert's confession is the catalyst that leads him to recognize his own culpability and moral failings.

In *An Ideal Husband,* the best confession is portrayed as one that does not interfere with material flourishing. While this was also suggested in the earlier plays, here it is made explicit. While Lord Goring unambiguously advocates for Robert to confess to his wife, he does not believe Robert should confess to the public because of the damage it would do to Sir Robert's career. As he says, "Robert, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so, is . . . awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean break of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. . . . A confession would be of no use. It would ruin you" (273). It

is this apparent lack of morality and this ostensible denial of the importance of confession that has led some contemporary critics to call *An Ideal Husband* "the most thoroughly secular" of Wilde's first three society comedies (Cohen 203).

Similarly, early reviewers also thought *An Ideal Husband* advocated values incompatible with religion. Writing in 1895, A.B. Walkley claimed, "The great thing is not to be found out; indeed, the whole play is designed to fill us with joy over the escape of a sinner from the penalty of his sin through a trick with a diamond bracelet" (qtd. in Eltis 131-132). *The Era* (5 January 1895) echoed this by writing, "[I]t is arranged—and this without any indication of sly underlying irony—that Chiltern shall, as a Cabinet Minister, enjoy his ill-gotten gains, and the respect and admiration of the world" ("*An Ideal Husband"*). For many critics, *An Ideal Husband* is a play about the benefits of concealment and secrecy, and confession is something to be avoided.

However, Lord Goring's sentiments do not reflect the irrelevance of confession or morality so much as the importance of *fin de siècle* Catholic antinomianism. In the views of Oscar Wilde, public confession does not serve a morally edifying purpose; rather, it sacrifices the individual to the public's need for reparation and atonement. Just like the fallen women in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance,* Lord Goring believes that Robert should not be unduly punished for his sin, and public confession would only serve to punish Sir Robert by ending his career. Therefore, it is to be avoided. As Lord Goring says later, the loss of Robert's career would "thrust him into the mire" (328). While Lord Goring wants Robert to recognize his sin and feel remorse for it—this is clear through Lord Goring's tone of moral righteousness and his unambiguous assertions that Robert's acts were wrong—he does not believe Robert should go through the act of public confession and penance because they serve merely punitive purposes. As in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *An Ideal Husband* details the difference between

penitence and penance, and it concludes by saying that penance is not necessary. Consequently, many critics have misinterpreted the view of morality in *An Ideal Husband* by conflating Sir Chiltern's lack of punishment with an endorsement of immorality.

Moreover, *An Ideal Husband* furthers the idea that true sin (i.e. the limit of antinomianism) is a crime against one's own self. Almost all of Lord Goring's statements on Sir Robert's crime have to do with the wrong Robert inflicted on himself. This is explicitly stated when Sir Robert asks, "And, after all, whom did I wrong by what I did? No one," and Lord Goring steadily answers, "Except yourself, Robert" (269). What Sir Robert did was what Wilde referred to in *De Profundis* as a "sin of the soul" because he betrayed his own values (30). This association is also highlighted by Sir Robert's previously mentioned rebuttal of "I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price," a statement that evokes prostitution (270). Prostitution is, of course, a crime in which the prostituted perpetrator is also the victim of his/her own degradation. Though Wilde himself visited male prostitutes, he revealed to his friend Robert Ross that he thought it caused moral damage. As he said, "How evil it is to buy love, and how evil it is to sell it!" (qtd. in Pearce *Unmasking* 378). In a variety of texts, Wilde portrays that, in his antinomian Catholic conception of sin, sin is a crime that violates one's own self.

Central to the violation of one's own self is Wilde's elevation of the parent-child relationship. As Wilde displayed in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, to deny one's role as a parent is to go against one's own nature. He expands this idea in *An Ideal Husband* to include children's roles. One of the primary reasons why Robert's early corruption is portrayed as a sin against himself is because it violated the relationship between him and his pseudo-father, Lord Radley. Unlike Lord Goring, whose father, Lord Caversham, plays a large role in the play, Chiltern's father is never mentioned, and he can be reasonably presumed to be

an orphan. In place of his father, Lord Radley was the one who gave Robert a position in society by making him his secretary, a position that he would soon betray. Robert's betrayal came at the bequest of the late Baron Arnheim, a Mephistophelean character who corrupted Robert and later became Mrs. Cheveley's lover. Robert's temptation is painted in lurid terms,

> One night after dinner at Lord Radley's the Baron began talking about success in modern life as something that one could reduce to an absolutely definite science. With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of power, preached to us the most marvellous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he had produced on me, for some days afterwards he wrote and asked me to come and see him. He was living then in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcomb has now. I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale, curved lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the strange loveliness of the luxury in which he lived; and then told me that luxury was nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men, power over the world, was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure worth knowing, the one joy one never tired of, and that in our century only the rich possessed it. (270-271)

After this introduction, Baron Arnheim played an increasingly important role in Robert's life, and his devilish bad "father" supplanted Lord Radley in the paternal role. The Baron, with his emphasis solely on the immanent frame and material flourishing, hearkens back to classic views of the devil where material pleasures are bought at the price of the spirit. More importantly for

this study, though, is that by portraying the Baron as a Satan-like figure, Wilde emphasizes his theology of how the parent-child relationship echoes the relationship between the divine and man.

This focus on the parent-child bond remains throughout the play. Not only does Robert Chiltern have two parental figures lurking in the proverbial background and Lord Goring has an actual father who keeps turning up at inconvenient times and who fails to understand his son (including his son's ethics and morals, which far surpass his father's), even tertiary characters comment on the breakdown of parent and child relationships. Though tinged with irony and voiced by Lady Markby, a silly woman, this speech keeps the play's investments in familial relations—including its religious associations—at the forefront:

> The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a well-brought-up girl, too, has actually become engaged to be married to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad indeed. I can't understand this modern mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told that nowadays country society is quite honeycombed with them. I think it most irreligious. And then the eldest son has quarrelled with his father, and it is said that when they meet at the club Lord Brancaster always hides himself behind the money article in *The Times*. However, I believe that is quite a common occurrence nowadays and that they have to take in extra copies of *The Times* at all the clubs in St. James's Street; there are so many sons who won't have anything to do with their fathers,

> and so many fathers who won't speak to their sons. I think myself, it is very much to be regretted. (287)

This speech highlights the breakdown of the parent-child relationship, and even not so subtly associates religion with the topic. As portrayed in *An Ideal Husband,* Wilde indicates that such breakdowns are a dereliction of one's own personhood, and throughout the play, he keeps circling around the topic of families, parents, and children.

This idea—that the bond between parent and child echoes the relationship between God and man and to violate it is to do self-harm—becomes especially pertinent when looking at one of *An Ideal Husband's* most unsavory aspects: the explicit sexism of the piece, particularly its ending. Though *Husband* ends with Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern reconciling—an explicitly happy ending—the modern reader would be struck by the obvious sexual *in*equality between men and women. Though Lady Chiltern begins as a type of New Woman who urges other women to have "some serious purpose in life" (239), she is repeatedly lectured by Lord Goring to change her attitudes and views. One of his prominent admonishments reads,

> A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. Don't make any terrible mistakes, Lady Chiltern. A woman who can keep a man's love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them. (328)

By the end of the play, Lady Chiltern adopts Lord Goring's position and echoes this speech to her husband while relinquishing most of the feminist views she held at the beginning of the play.

This change is especially notable as Wilde was once a famous supporter of women's rights. However, by the time Wilde wrote his third society comedy, he had rejected the position that women should be empowered politically, a stance he had supported while the editor of *Woman's World* (Powell 106). Moreover, he "prepared to embrace the Victorian idea of women as creatures of vast feeling, but scant intellect, properly confined to the domestic sphere and the expression of womanly love which bonds marriages and families" (Powell 106-107). Sos Eltis goes on to suggest that this sexism might be the result of a "bitter personal experience" (163),[52] though that of course is speculative.

One of the reasons for this turnabout may be that Wilde portrays marriage, particularly the marriage between Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, as imitating the holy bonds between parent and child where it is a moral violation to tear such unions apart. In an unusual move for the Victorian era, though, Wilde portrays Lady Chiltern as occupying the withholding parental space and Robert the needing child's, and her unwillingness to love Robert unconditionally is depicted as an abdication of duty (perhaps even more so because she is a woman). In Wilde's portrayal of their marriage, Sir Robert repeatedly voices his unconditional love for his wife, a statement that is frequently met with her assertion that her love is conditional. Like a disapproving parent, she tells him that he must deserve her love. As she says in Act One, it would "kill" her love to discover that he is "unworthy, stained, dishonoured" (265), and she ends the act by unironically saying to him, "I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love" (266).

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[52] Sos Eltis writes, "The validation which the stage direction gives to Lord Goring's speech could be the result of bitter personal experience breeding the wish for a perfect and unconditionally charitable wife" (163). While Oscar Wilde was writing *An Ideal Husband,* his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas necessitated more time spent away from Constance, his distressed wife. While Constance did not suspect her husband and Douglas were having an affair, she was very unhappy with Oscar's repeated absences.

As if to underline the fact that such conditions are an abdication of parental duty, Wilde makes explicit that their marriage stands in for and even replaces the parent-child relationship. This is voiced through Sir Robert who tells Lord Goring,

> She stands apart as good women do—pitiless in her perfection—cold and stern and without mercy. But I do love her, Arthur. We are childless, and I have no one else to love, no one else to love me. Perhaps if God had sent us children she might have been kinder to me. But God has given us a lonely house. And she has cut my heart in two. (303)

In the absence of children (and in the absence of any mentioned parents for either of them), their relationship needs to provide the entire emotional support and security of the nuclear family. And just as a good God never abandons an erring child, Wilde portrays that a good human parent (or a good stand-in parent, like a wife) should never abandon *their* erring child. So by the end of the play, when Sir Robert asks his wife if it is "pity" or "love" she feels for him, and she responds that it is "[l]ove, and only love" (332), it's a full emotional turnabout. While this change comes at the expense of Lady Chiltern's feminist ideals, Wilde frames this as a recapturing of the holy parent-child bond, which he does through the socially legible discourses of husband and wife.

It should be noted, though, that Lady Chiltern's change also corresponds with a particularly Catholic idea of feminism, and there was often a marked cultural difference in how the two religions (i.e. Protestantism and Catholicism) approached female leadership and the role of women outside of the church. In the nineteenth century, most feminists were active Christians, and specifically, these feminists were usually *Protestant* Christians (Taylor 103). As Barbara Taylor explains, "[E]vangelicals [i.e. Protestants] began explicitly linking doctrines of

female moral leadership to demands for practical improvements in women's own political and legal status" (105). For English women in the Protestant Church, socially engaged activism that advocated feminism and voting rights was common. Maria Liddy clarifies, "Social activism through philanthropic endeavor was to lead many Protestant women to the cause of suffrage, and into those societies which sought legislative solutions for social problems" (9). Conversely, though, "Catholic women are notable for their absence from these relatively radical organisations" (Liddy 9). As Lady Chiltern is a "childless feminist, agitator for the votes for women, and member of the Women's Liberal Association" (Powell 105), she espouses the causes of liberal Protestants and is implicitly linked to the Protestant church.

If Lady Chiltern's feminist views are indicative of Protestant sentiments, Lord Goring's opinions on the different roles of men and women echo the beliefs of many *fin de siècle* Roman Catholics. Even as late as 1906, when the English Catholic Women's League was founded, Catherine Hardy, an influential member of the group, advocated for the separate roles of men and women and decried progressive "false feminism." She writes, "Judged by the principles of that Church there is a true and a false Feminism, the true making for the development of woman according to the revealed designs of her Creator, the false ignoring and running counter to those designs" (qtd. in Kane 334). For Hardy and many other turn-of-the-century Catholics, the ideal woman embodied "sympathy, unselfishness and simplicity" (Hardy qtd. in Kane 334), qualities that are suggestive of Lord Goring's ideal woman. When Lady Chiltern reverses her position and echoes Lord Goring's sentiment that "a man's life is of more value than a woman's" (Wilde 329), her repudiation works on two different, and perhaps complementary levels. She thus can be read as a Hardy-esque Catholic feminist whose feminism runs contrary to contemporary

activist ideals *and* as a loving parent/wife whose love for her dependent supersedes their shortcomings.

Wilde's treatment of gender in *An Ideal Husband* also bears the hallmarks of the ambivalences of the aesthetic movement. Though most of the famous aesthetes were men like Oscar Wilde, women also played an important role in the movement, and the nature of their work has often been conflated into the work of New Women, who by and large were more politically active. In *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England,* Talia Schaffer writes on how many female aesthetes expressed beliefs that were politically tenuous. She writes,

> [T]he female aesthetes positioned themselves as alternative to both New Women and traditional Angels in the House, not only by rebelling against these roles but, more profoundly, by incorporating selected aspects of these identities into their own self-images. Female aesthetes usually were single women who supported themselves through their writing, wrote daring literature, and participated in a controversial literary movement. At the same time, many idealized a more old-fashioned model of femininity. They may have lived like New Women, but they dressed like Pre-Raphaelite maidens; if their careerism anticipated the twentieth century, their demeanor alluded to the semi-mythical Middle Ages (17).

The women in *An Ideal Husband* embody this ambivalence, with Mabel Chiltern—not Lady Chiltern—being positioned as the ideal wife. Mabel is opinionated—the stage directions state she has "the courage of innocence" (240)—but she is acquiescent and supportive of her beloved, the hero Lord Goring. In the final scene, Mabel displays her "common sense" by declaring that her version of an ideal husband "can be what he chooses. All I want is to be . . . to be . . . oh! a

real wife to him" (332), an attitude that her sister-in-law must also adopt. As Mabel is described in the stage directions as "a perfect example of the English type of prettiness. . . . like a Tanagra statuette [a Greek statuette]" (240-41), she is associated with ideal femininity both past and present, and her ideas are vindicated in her forthcoming marriage to Lord Goring and in the adoption of her ideas by Lady Chiltern.

If Wilde advances his previously emergent ideas about gender roles and the holiness of the parent-child bond, then he likewise expands inchoate ideas from his previous comedies about what it means to flourish. Whereas both *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance* portray that sin does not demand unmitigated atonement and that pleasure and joy are compatible with faith, then in *An Ideal Husband* he depicts that immanent and material flourishing are similarly compatible with true remorse and religious belief, though he clarifies that they cannot be a character's sole aim. In this third play, the sinning character does no type of formal penance, either public or private. Furthermore, when Lady Chiltern demands that her husband resign from his public office—and thus, be self-punished—Lord Goring reprimands her,

> Mrs. Cheveley made an attempt to ruin your husband. Either to drive him from public life, or to make him adopt a dishonourable position. From the latter tragedy you saved him. The former you are now thrusting on him. Why should you do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley tried to do and failed? (327)

In Wilde's portrayal, for Sir Robert to admit his failings to his wife has led him to be "punished enough" (328), and Robert is allowed to continue flourishing in the material sense.

This continued prosperity, though, masks what a profound emotional change has been wrought. As expected in decadent Catholicism, Robert's sin and subsequent confession has led

to a renewed sense of integrity, both in his marriage and in his political career. As Wilde explained in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," a man "may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through his sin his true perfection" (1180). Likewise, for Sir Robert, his sin has led him into the "true perfection" of a wonderful marriage and an admirable career. As Sos Eltis writes, "Sir Robert is transformed from an uninteresting modern criminal who simply steals for money into a true individualist . . ." (139). By using his sin to propel him to individualism, Sir Robert becomes, like Lord Goring, a model *fin de siècle* Catholic.

The relationship between individualism and religion is, of course, a common theme in many of Wilde's texts. In "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," for example, he writes, "What Jesus meant was this. He said to man, 'You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself" (1180). And in *De Profundis,* Wilde writes, "Christ was not merely the supreme individualist, but he was the first individualist in history" (59). Just like Mrs. Erlynne, Lady Windermere, and Mrs. Arbuthnot, Sir Robert becomes a true individualist, a word that for Wilde is infused with religious meaning.

While this aspect of Wilde's idiosyncratic religious beliefs—the individualist being rewarded spiritually and materially—displays an obvious sort of wish-fulfillment desire for sin and vice to be unconditionally forgiven and even rewarded. This is especially evident near the end, when Sir Robert denies Lord Goring the right to marry his sister, Mabel, because he believes Lord Goring had an affair with Mrs. Cheveley. In response, Lady Chiltern must confess that she wrote the letter to Lord Goring calling for a meeting, and that *she,* not Mrs. Cheveley, was the woman Goring expected. Her fears about confessing are immediately allayed, however, when Sir Robert accepts her reason and even replies, "What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes that you thought that even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude,

Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you" (331). By the end of the play, immediate absolution is granted to almost all sins.

An Ideal Husband also advances more conventional messages of forgiveness, tolerance, and love. Performed at a time when Wilde's personal and professional life was unraveling,[53] his third theatrical comedy serves as Wilde's plea for penitence over penance and forgiveness over retribution. Wilde's vision is both freeing and confining, self-serving and selfless. In *An Ideal Husband,* Wilde's archetypal paradoxes—and the paradoxes of his religious beliefs—are on full display.

IV. *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the Antinomian Triumph

The Importance of Being Earnest, first produced on 14 February 1895 at the St. James's Theatre under the title *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People,* is Wilde's undeniable masterpiece. For more than one hundred years, *Earnest's* delightful triviality has entertained audiences, and it is an effervescent piece of "superficial brilliance" that "soars to comedic heights" (Krauss XXII). However, *Earnest's* triviality belies what was happening in Wilde's personal life: the play's opening barely preceded Wilde's disastrous libel suit against the Marquess of Queensberry, his lover Lord Alfred Douglas's father, and he wrote it under a cloud of harassment from the Marquess (Ellmann 430). Like *An Ideal Husband,* which opened just weeks before *Earnest,* it too was a commercial and critical success that had its author's name stripped from its billboard and prematurely closed as Wilde's life descended into

[53] *An Ideal Husband's* theatrical run in early 1895 coincided with Oscar Wilde's trials. Though the piece was a hit, Wilde's name was removed from the billboard, and soon after the play was cancelled (Ellmann 458).

scandal (Ellmann 458). Nevertheless, Wilde blithely stated that the theme of his last play was that "we should treat all trivial things very seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality" (qtd. in Ellmann 422), an interpretation that has been accepted by most, though certainly not all, critics.[54]

In fact, at least one critic believes *The Importance of Being Earnest* affirms Wilde's interest in religion. According to Jarlath Killeen, "previous interpretations of *The Importance of Being Earnest* (while important) have ultimately failed to comprehend its relation to a 'theatrical' faction within the Anglican Church in the nineteenth century—the Ritualist movement" (138). In *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde,* Killeen argues that Wilde disguises theological debates that stemmed from the Oxford Movement and the subsequent Ritualism of the Anglo-Catholic into the plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Indeed, he writes that "the entire play is an attempt to re-enact the themes of the Anglo-Catholic controversy" (157). His argument relies on the implied Anglo-Catholicism of Rev. Canon Chasuble (a chasuble is a ritualistic vestment favored by High Church Anglo-Catholics), Jack and Algernon's enactment of ritualized courtship by Gwendolyn and Cecily, the two resurrections of Ernest (by the arrival of Algernon and later by the conversion of Jack into Ernest), and the text's emphasis on baptism. Killeen concludes, "Far from demonstrating that Wilde had moved far away from his early interest in the Church, as seen in his Catholic sonnets, for example, he was finding new and more subtle ways of codifying his continued interests, infiltrating his audience the better, and perfecting the means

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[54] Interestingly, Ellmann himself disagrees with Wilde's assessment of *Earnest.* He writes, "In *The Importance [of Being Earnest],* sins accursed in *Salomé* and unnamable in *Dorian Gray* are transposed into a different key and appear as Algernon's inordinate and selfish craving for—cucumber sandwiches. . . . *The Importance of Being Earnest* constructs its wonderful parapet over the abyss of the author's disquietude and apprehension. . . . Wilde masked his cares with the play's insouciance, by a miracle of control" (422-423).

of recusancy" (161). If Killeen is to be believed, *The Importance of Being Earnest* covertly exhibits Wilde's interest in *fin de siècle* Catholicism.

While I agree with Killeen that implicit Catholicism exists within *Earnest,* I would like to spin his theory in a different direction: the triumph of the antinomian protagonists. While all of Wilde's comedies display the triumph of the antinomian, none do it to the degree which *Earnest* does it. With two antinomian protagonists whose multiple lies and fabrications result in material wealth and happy marriages, *The Importance of Being Earnest* spins a web of fantastical wish fulfillment. Written during a time when the consequences of Wilde's real-life behavior were threatening to destroy his marriage and career, *The Importance of Being Earnest* exonerates and rewards the antinomian with immanent flourishing as well as emotional and marital sustenance.

The protagonists of *The Importance of Being Earnest* are Jack and Algernon, two men who have centered their lives on a series of lies. As they blithely "Bunbury" between the country and city on visits to fabricated friends and family members, they come into contact with Gwendolen and Cecily, their respective love interests. Gwendolen believes she has met a man named Ernest Worthing (in reality it is Jack Worthing), the name he falsely goes by while in town, and she promptly falls in love with him, primarily because his name is Ernest. In similar fashion, Cecily meets Algernon while he is pretending to be Jack's younger brother (also named Ernest), and her attraction to him is also based on his false name and the fact that, as her guardian's younger brother, he is rumored to be a very "bad young man" (391). For both Algernon and Jack, then, their success as suitors is based upon their mendacity. Without the assumption of a false name, neither Jack nor Algernon would have procured the interest of Gwendolen or Cecily, and thus fabrications lead to romantic success. Even when it is later revealed that neither man is named Ernest and that Algernon is not Jack's wicked brother, they

do not feel any shame or receive retribution. Instead, Gwendolen and Cecily decide that their lovers' lies are of little consequence. As Gwendolen says after Jack's admission that he is not, in fact, Ernest, "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing" (406). For the protagonists of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* lies are not crimes that endanger their triumphs. Conversely, they are the very things on which success is predicated.

This topsy-turvy world without moral repercussions is displayed throughout. Despite Algernon's apparent gluttony (he spends the majority of the play eating cucumber sandwiches and muffins, and when he is "Bunburying" he "eats suppers for six or eight people every night of the week" (389)),[55] Algernon remains trim and attractive enough to capture the attention of the beautiful eighteen-year-old Cecily. And even though Algernon is a spendthrift who is threatened with jail time for non-payment of debts, he is fortuitously relieved by Jack's payment of the debt, and he is further encouraged to continue his profligacy with his marriage to the wealthy Cecily. For Algernon, extravagance does not result in repercussions. Instead, bad behavior is rewarded, and the world of cause-and-effect morality is largely erased. As Kenneth Krauss says, "If what happens on the stage is supposed to mirror what happens in the world, the image thrown back by *Earnest* is distorted" (XXVIII). For the characters in *Earnest,* conventional morality and laws have no power. Rather, Algernon and Jack succeed by breaking conventions, and their lies and peccadillos bolster their continued success.

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[55] It should be noted that I am quoting from the four-act version of *Earnest* rather than the more commonly performed three-act version. According to E.H. Mikhail, Wilde originally conceived of it as a four-act play, but George Alexander, the original producer, had Wilde cut it down to three acts, most likely to save on a salary for an actor who only appeared in one scene, the actor playing the solicitor Gribsby (263). I chose the four-act version because this dissertation is not beholden to the economics of the stage and also because the four-act version appears in a number of seminal anthologies, including *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (ed. Merlin Holland).

However, there is an important distinction that must be made here. While Jack and Algernon do not follow the dictates of conventional morality, neither are they cruel characters. Unlike Lord Darlington, Lord Illingworth, or Mrs. Cheveley, they do not take pleasure in the pain they cause others. This distinction is important because it follows the moral rules that Wilde followed in his own life. Though Wilde did not follow conventional moral dictates, he had his own antinomian moral system that decried cruelty, which he followed in his personal life. After his release from Reading Gaol, for example, he wrote letters to the *Daily Chronicle* that described his experiences in prison and condemned the systematic cruelty of the English prison system while advocating for practical reforms ("Two Letters to the Daily Chronicle" 1060-1070). Furthermore, even before his disastrous downfall, Wilde had a reputation for generosity and compassion. As Richard Ellmann writes, Wilde was "the kindest of men" (xv). Thus, even though Algernon and Jack break society's moral laws, they do not break Wilde's personal moral laws. According to Philip K. Cohen, their exploits are "humorous, inconsequential" (219). Instead of actually being wicked, they *play* at wickedness.

Jack and Algernon's triumph extends to the end of the play when their system of duplicities is validated. When Jack discovers that he has inadvertently been telling the truth the whole time, he asks his fiancée, "Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?" (418). When she answers, "I can. For I feel that you are sure to change" (418), she endorses Jack's world of fabrications and deceptions. Like Algernon and Cecily, who merely have to say that something is real for it to become true (Cecily, for example, writes about her love affair with "Ernest" in her diary, and then *voilà*, an "Ernest" of sorts appears at her estate), Jack and Gwendolen live in a

farcical world of fantasy. By behaving as they choose, the lovers become "unlikely embodiments of Wilde's philosophy of perfect individualism" (Eltis 200).

Despite their individualism—which Wilde usually links in most texts to Christianity, such as in the aforementioned plays or essays like "The Soul of Man Under Socialism"—ambivalence towards religion runs through *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Unlike his previous plays, religious themes of repentance and confession do not play major plot points for the protagonists (though, of course, Miss Prism, Jack, and Algernon do enact a type of confession, though their confessions do not contain the hallmarks of agitation, shame, or guilt;[56] therefore, their confessions do not have the emotional consequences of previously depicted confessions). More important, Wilde portrays his minister, Rev. Chasuble, as being a somewhat ridiculous character. The Rev. Canon Chasuble frequently mentions the inconsequential and irrelevant practices of the "Primitive Church," states silly aphorisms, and delivers absurd sermons that "can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing" (381). As a minister, Rev. Chasuble is ludicrously out-of-touch, and most of what he says is inapposite nonsense.

However, he is also kind. He encourages Miss Prism to temper her puritanical outbursts, encourages reconciliation between Jack and Algernon, and delivers charitable sentiments, such as "The Church rejects no babe, Miss Prism. In every child, there is the making of a saint" (382). His kindness serves to bring a touch of humanity to Wilde's other characters.

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[56] An example of how Wilde transforms the agitation, shame, and guilt into something absurd is demonstrated at the top of the fourth act, when Gwendolen and Cecily spy on Jack and Algernon to see if they feel sorrow for lying to them about being named Ernest:

> GWENDOLEN: The fact that they did not follow us at once into the garden, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.
> CECILY: They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance. (405).

Furthermore, he fulfills a necessary function in the play—he can baptize Jack and give him the new name of Ernest, which Jack calls an act of "practical value" (85). Therefore, paradox surrounds Rev. Chasuble: he is both necessary and a fool.

Another feature of *Earnest's* religious ambivalence is the aforementioned use of baptism. Baptism promises redemption through the form of a new Christian name throughout *Earnest,* which is necessary for Jack and Gwendolen's marital success. But by reducing the baptismal redemption to such an absurdity, it also undermines the Christian conception of baptism. Gone is the profundity and sacred nature of baptism; instead it becomes a means to a trivial and narcissistic end. When Gwendolen asks Jack, for example, if he really intends to be christened Ernest, she makes it about herself, asking, "For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?" (406). Jack must, of course, go through with the baptism to win Gwendolen's hand, but it now reduced to an absurdity, and its sacred and profound nature is eliminated.

While Jack discovers he does not need the baptism—he discovers that his name is already Ernest and that he has a brother—the Church offers him a type of escape, a possible lifeline as it were. This clinging to vestiges affects Wilde's portrayal of family too. If the three prior comedies all displayed the parent/child relationship as something holy, then here in *Earnest* only its vestiges remain. Jack is an orphan, having been found in a handbag at the cloakroom of the Victoria Station. He is hardly the worse for wear for it, though, and there is little of the emotional handwringing about abandoning children that occurs in the earlier plays. Here, Jack's status as an orphan becomes an opportunity for comedy, with the disapproving Lady Bracknell, the mother of Jack's beloved Gwendolen, telling him, "To lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. . . . to lose both seems like carelessness" (369). In *Earnest,* the bond between parent and children is no longer holy; it is the stuff of comedy.

Here, the lack of parent/child attachments signals that this is a fully antinomian world, with nothing—not even child abandonment—being a cause for consternation. However, Wilde is not fully ready to dispose of all familial ties, and at the end, Jack is discovered to be Algernon's long-lost older brother. For a moment, the play affects seriousness, and Jack tells Miss Prism (whom he momentarily mistakes for his long-lost mother), "But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one that has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you" (415). Miss Prism's "indignant" response, however, brings the play back to absurdity, especially as Miss Prism apologizes to Jack by saying, "Any inconvenience I may have caused you in your infancy through placing you inadvertently in this handbag I sincerely apologize for" (415). In *Earnest,* child abandonment is no longer a sin; it is an "inconvenience."

Yet Wilde kept a familial lifeline for Jack by giving him a brother, a vestige of the holy familial succor that he portrayed in his earlier plays. As Ellmann suggests in his reading of *Earnest,* the horrors of the world are rendered powerless and absurd, as are the sources of comfort and joy. As the last of Wilde's comedies, *The Importance of Being Earnest* marks the end of Wilde's carefree life. Famously, Wilde was arrested and convicted for gross indecency just after *Earnest* opened, and he was sentenced to two years of hard labor in prison (Ellmann 456-458). After his arrest, his last two major works were *De Profundis* and *The Ballad of Reading Goal*, both of which are meditations on sin, guilt, and redemption. *The Importance of Being Earnest's* blithe effervescence denies the importance of conventional morality and reduces the church and its strictures to an absurdity, yet the Church is never quite dismissed. When Jack needs help, the Church and its baptism are there to offer him deliverance. It is almost as if Wilde is suggesting that there is something sacred and meaningful—perhaps even "earnest"—in Jack's

joyful insouciance. Similarly, after Wilde's imprisonment, the Catholic Church offered the distraught Wilde potential, though perhaps unrealized, succor, and he crafted some of his most explicitly religious work. For both Wilde's fictional protagonists and for himself in real life, the Church was frequently in the background, with the possibility of offering relief and comfort. So even though Wilde trivialized the Church in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, he also never fully dismissed it in either his life or his art.

Throughout his plays, Wilde was exploring the concepts of his own syncretic beliefs, from using *Lady Windermere's Fan's* to set the foundation for antinomian views, all the way to *Earnest's* tentative investigation of a world with the Church in the background. It is a testament both to Oscar Wilde's encompassing vision and the plurality of the *fin de siècle* religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, that most of the men closely involved with Wilde either remained Catholic or converted to Catholicism, including his son Vyvyan and his lover Lord Alfred Douglas (Pearce 388-389; Ellmann 587). For Oscar Wilde, being unconventional and being religious were not mutually exclusive. Instead, Wilde used his plays to explore how *fin de siècle* religious beliefs could be the foundation for a new antinomian morality that combined faith with compassion, individualism, and pleasure.

More significant for the field of literary studies, though, is that "the study of Wildean religion can help reshape how the discipline of religion and literature has been constructed" by engaging disparate disciplines, such as gay, gender, and queer studies, into dialogue with it (Roden 215). Perhaps Wilde's most important legacy is that his life and art have fostered understanding between disparate groups and enlarged conceptions about what it means to be a homosexual, an artist, and a person of faith. For Oscar Wilde, there is no paradox in being a

sinner and a Christian because, in the *fin de siècle,* he portrayed that antinomians believed that "God's law is only love" (*A Woman of No Importance* 227).

CONCLUSION

Looking at the works of the popular playwrights of the late-Victorian era changes the depiction of the *fin de siècle* stage. Ibsen, Shaw, and to a lesser degree, Strindberg and Wilde have dominated the discussion, and in the view of most scholars, Victorian drama was a "Sleeping Beauty" who needed to be awakened from her "century's slumber" (Rowell 1), with the aforementioned playwrights serving as theatre's Prince Charming. This dissertation does not seek to undercut that opinion—the Victorian drama did indeed undergo a momentous change near the end of the century, and the likes of Ibsen and Shaw were integral to those changes—but to spin it in a new direction and show how very different forces than have usually been studied also shaped and forged the modern drama. Playwrights like Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero also played pivotal roles in modernizing the theatre, though their works largely spoke to more middle class, more conventional concerns. Their works were popular and commercially successful, and their renderings of an updated, modernized take on bourgeois morality served as a precursor to the likes of Noël Coward, Philip Barry (*The Philadelphia Story),* and Kaufman and Hart (*You Can't Take It With You),* where traditional morals were challenged and criticized before ultimately being reinstated, albeit in a reformed manner.

Central to their depiction of bourgeois morality was religion. For Jones, different denominations affected Christianity beliefs and practices in various ways, with the evangelicalism of his youth serving as the impetus for portrayals evangelicals as exhibiting both the holiest and the most hypocritical behavior, and the tempered Anglicanism of his aging *raisonneurs* becoming a pragmatic, though incomplete, response to the exigencies of the *fin de siècle*. For Pinero, religious questions were inextricable from the feminine experience, and the

stakes of belief played out in dramatic fashion on his female characters' bodies, with a sacred sisterhood serving as a potential bulwark against the injustices of the patriarchal world. For Wilde, his antinomian, Catholic-inflected Christianity was a rebuttal of conventional morality, with his veneration of the parent-child relationship serving as its own moral code. For all three, questions of how to live and behave were the purview of the stage, and nothing so affected the beliefs and actions of characters so much as religion.

To my knowledge, the particular phenomenon of the stage suddenly becoming invested in questions of religion and faith at the end of the nineteenth century, the phenomenon that I call the syncretic stage, is an almost completely unexplored topic. There are papers, books, and articles that touch—almost always briefly—on individual plays' use of religion, and there are long-ranging studies, such as Richard Foulkes's *Church and Stage,* that detail the changing relationship between religion and the theatre over the long nineteenth century, but I know of no book-length study that focuses on the relationship between *fin de siècle* religious culture and the stage. This is an unexplored area well worth studying because of the syncretic stage's singularity in asking religious questions, questions that helped revolutionize and modernize the theatre. As almost every scholar of dramatic literature knows, the end of the nineteenth century was tremendously important in shaping the dramatic and theatrical ethos of the twentieth-century theatre, and to leave its explorations of religion unexamined is an academic omission well worth rectifying.

The omission is so total that this dissertation topic was largely an accident, the result of a fortuitous accident. I took an independent study course with Claire Sponsler that focused on less-known theatrical texts, and for it I chose several Victorian texts, including *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* Reading it, I was struck both by the quality of its composition and its overt portrayal

of Roman Catholicism. The lengthy descriptions of the first Mrs. Tanqueray, Ellean's background, and the final line—"If only I had been more merciful!"—are filled with religious meaning, and I could barely believe that its depiction of Catholicism was not the source of greater critical attention. This feeling of stumbling into an untapped source of material continued as I read other plays from the era, and I soon realized that I was looking at a larger phenomenon.

This phenomenon goes well beyond the scope presented here in this dissertation. Because of the sheer extent of material, the focus had to be narrowed. This dissertation has concentrated on the three most popular and commercially successful playwrights of the era because of their resonances both in their own day and in their lasting influence on later playwrights. Almost all accounts of late-Victorian theatre place them as the three most influential authors of the day, and they stand as obvious counterpoints to Shaw and Ibsen and their more avant-garde concerns. The specific time I concentrate on—the *fin de siècle*—was also chosen for its lasting influence and for its vibrancy. The end of the century was a time of tremendous change, and the theatre of 1880 bore little resemblance to the theatre of 1900. Even marking the change in a single playwright's work is striking; the Henry Arthur Jones of 1884's *Saints and Sinners* is a far cry from the playwright of 1900's *Mrs. Dane's Defence,* and the era's changes can be clearly seen in the oeuvre of individual playwrights.

Because a dissertation has to be rather narrowly focused, there is still much work left to be done on the topic of the syncretic stage. This project has been primarily concerned with the London stage, and yet there were shows, most notably Wilson Barrett's *The Sign of the Cross* (1896), that toured throughout the provinces and even the United States. Incorporating explorations of dramas that played in locales other than London would give an even fuller

picture of the connection between religion and the stage. It would be a worthwhile project to determine if the West End's preoccupations with religion—particularly in all of its syncretic forms—existed on the provincial stage as well. The findings would be particularly notable because many people considered cities like London to be places of relative secularism, though an obvious counterpoint would be that the plurality of religions in the city could have aided the syncretism of the stage.

Another potential avenue for future research would be exploring the avant-garde or non-commercial theatre's relationship with religion. Works like Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* obviously belong in this category, as would the early plays of W.B. Yeats and perhaps even the closet dramas of Michael Field (the pen name of Katharine Bradley and her niece Emma Cooper). These works never enjoyed the popularity of the works explored here, but they form a fringe, perhaps even extreme corollary, to the relatively bourgeois, middle-class plays studied here. In short, this dissertation is the beginning exploration of a rich minefield of texts, and there is more work to be done on the syncretic stage.

Most importantly, looking at the popular drama of the late-nineteenth century gives a more accurate vision of what the average theatregoer of the time would have experienced and would have valued. It's the scholarly blind eye to these popular theatricals that this dissertation seeks to remedy, giving us tools to see the cultural work that made these plays consistently appealing to crowds of late-Victorian London spectators. Jones, Pinero, and Wilde made theatre that was undoubtedly modern, and yet it was concerned with religious questions and looked to faith and spirituality to help answer the "big" questions. How popular playwrights like Jones, Pinero, and Wilde portrayed faith sheds light on the religious elements of the British *fin de siècle*

theatrical scene while also revealing how the larger Victorian culture perceived and enacted faith.

This project, though, is not just antiquarian or historicist in focus: looking from the vantage point of 2018, it is difficult to imagine why the English stage censored religious discussions, and yet many of the issues the *fin de siècle* theatre explored—including sacredness, profanity, and censorship—are still matters of debate around the world. For example, Thomas King writes that many Muslim communities have a "well-publicized, persistent, and virulent opposition to performance" (112), and there are still many places where the sacred cannot be portrayed or depicted on the stage—or perhaps even portrayed at all in *any* medium. What is remarkable is not that England deemed religion unsuitable for depiction on the stage, but that these conventions changed so quickly and so thoroughly.

This sort of societal change is still evident even in Western, or more traditionally Christian, nations: in celebration of Easter in 2018, the NBC network broadcast a "live" production of Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar.* When the musical premiered in 1970, it attracted controversy, including a variety of syncretic religious responses. Some people thought it portrayed Judas too sympathetically and others thought it treated Jesus too much as a cultural, rather than religious, leader. Noel Murray reports, "[T]he musical raised eyebrows and ire with its decidedly nontraditional spin on Christ's last day" ("Review: In 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' an Old Story for (Yet Another) New Millennium"). The Vatican, though, supposedly approved of the play, and when I went to a private Catholic school in the late 1980s and early 1990s, my religion teacher played it every year. Responses to portrayals of faith—in its broadest form—vary widely, and reactions to such portrayals are mutable.

During the *fin de siècle,* these mutable responses were integral to making the theatre modern. As this dissertation has revealed, a variety of factors led to the loosening of strictures regarding portrayals of religion, and this led the stage to become much more interested in the sacred, at least in London's West End. Henry Arthur Jones said, "The whole of the nature of man is sacred to the dramatist" ("Religion and the Stage" 127), and for Jones and other *fin de siècle* playwrights, questions of religion and faith were central to depicting the "whole of the nature of man." Understanding the syncretic stage reveals the complex relationship popular entertainment has with religious beliefs while affording a bird's-eye perspective on the evolution of religious culture as its practitioners came head-to-head with different religious beliefs, their own feelings of faith and doubt, and impending secular values.

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