Dialogic Faiths: Multi-Genre Expression in Religious Narrative

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DIALOGIC FAITHS:
MULTI-GENRE EXPRESSION IN RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE

by

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Rosemary Demos

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ABSTRACT

Dialogic faiths:

*Multi-genre expression in religious narrative*

by

Rosemary Demos

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As persuasive or expository texts, religious conversion narratives tend towards monologic language, and texts that advocate one particular creed or institution often reflect the unity of faith through linguistically totalizing methods. This study, however, examines the dialogic interactions found in certain religious narratives. The texts included in this analysis recount unusual conversion outcomes: not to formally established church institutions, but rather to a heightened religious experience and in some cases a call to leadership in establishing new social orders. In these texts, the dynamic between personal and communal religious experience is tense, sometimes precarious; the difficulties of engaging in social institutions while maintaining religious or spiritual integrity is a consistent preoccupation.

This study examines selections of the *History of Joseph Smith*; Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*; George Eliot’s *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*; and Antonio Fogazzaro’s *Malombra* and *Il Santo*. These writers come from vastly different backgrounds, from the American frontier, to Danish Romanticism, to Victorian realism, to Italian Decadence. While some direct links and common influences can be traced between the writers, what ties them into this study is their shifts in style, or changes in modes of expression, within their approach toward the expression of faith. All show significant changes in their choice of stylistic modes. In the narratives of Joseph Smith, these changes can be seen over multiple versions and edits of a single
story. In Søren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, the stylistic shifts are deliberate, as Kierkegaard makes direct reference to contrasting literary genre conventions that set his narrative in opposition with itself. Both the novelists George Eliot and Antonio Fogazzaro change the extent and nature of their incorporation of aestheticism and historical symbolism, making significant shifts in their construction of narrative as they shift their focus on the value and nature of the numinous.

With all four writers in this study, we see an intensification of a dialogical principle: the universal with the particular, the narrative structure of fiction with the raw internal experience, the social with the isolated. Through these writers, I hope to trace the varieties of religious narrative experience, and to demonstrate the vitality of the religious question in both fiction and non-fiction texts.
For my family, with love and gratitude.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1 A dialogue of genres in Joseph Smith’s First Vision narrative ............................................ 6

1.1 The First Vision Narrative: its context and content ................................................................. 8
1.2 Review of relevant scholarship on the JSH’s literary genre classification ............................... 12
1.3 Multiple modes of discourse in the First Vision narrative ....................................................... 21

Framing Devices ................................................................................................................................ 22
Quotations, Allusions .......................................................................................................................... 30
1.4 Implications of dialogism in the Joseph Smith History ......................................................... 41

Chapter 2 Fear and Trembling: Defining Genre, Defining Faith ...................................................... 44

2.1 Kierkegaard’s religious, philosophical, and literary background .......................................... 47
2.2 Examination of text: The Concept of Irony lays the groundwork ....................................... 57
2.3 Examination of text: Fear and Trembling, defining genre, defining faith ............................ 64

Defining the philosophical dialectic in Fear and Trembling ....................................................... 67
Demonstrating the lyric in Fear and Trembling ............................................................................. 70
2.4 The implications of dialogic genres in Fear and Trembling’s development of faith .......... 77

Chapter 3 Romola and Daniel Deronda: The divine in society ....................................................... 87

3.1 Eliot’s history of religious affiliation ....................................................................................... 89
3.2 An overview of Eliot’s novels .................................................................................................. 93
3.3 Sign systems in Romola and Daniel Deronda ....................................................................... 97

Romola ........................................................................................................................................... 98
Daniel Deronda ............................................................................................................................... 104
3.4 Visual imagery as a language of the numinous in Romola and Daniel Deronda .............. 110
3.5 Music as a sympathetic language of the numinous .............................................................. 114
3.6 Assigning literary genre to Romola and Daniel Deronda ..................................................... 124

Chapter 4 Malombra and Il Santo: Aesthetic and Rational Conversions ......................................... 129

4.1 Fogazzaro’s scientific, religious, and literary Background .................................................... 132

European literary influences ........................................................................................................... 137
Scientific influences ....................................................................................................................... 143
4.2 Summaries: Malombra and Il Santo ..................................................................................... 145
4.3 Fogazzaro’s construction of mysticism, conversion, and religious self-identity ................ 148

Aestheticism: artistic and textual mediators to the numinous .................................................... 150
The centrality of text in Malombra and Il Santo ......................................................................... 155
4.4 Shifts in narrative genre: symbolic history and contemporary commentaries ................ 167
4.5 The experience of conversion in Malombra and Il Santo .................................................... 173
4.6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 179

Conclusion: implications of dialogic style in the development of religious narrative ............. 181

Appendix .......................................................................................................................................... 185

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................... 193
Introduction

A text that can be classified as religious may seem at odds with the heteroglossic dialogism formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. If religion seeks authority that is reliable and indisputable, it might instead be likely to seek out or construct texts that are monologic; that is, linguistically uniform in its expression. Religious apologists or defenders of the faith often fall under this category, using reason and logical systems, (monologic linguistic systems), to prove the correctness of their theology. Thus a religious text that is persuasive in its purpose, urging its readers to believe in or adhere to one particular institution or creed, would bring its readers to both a doctrinal and linguistic unity of faith. A monologizing text such as this might downplay the linguistic nature of its existence and essentialize the hermeneutical process required of the reader.

But religious conversion narratives offer an interesting complication to the monologizing tendencies of religious texts. Within the conversion narrative, highly individualized personal experiences are brought into interaction with authoritative systems and collective ideologies. Thus although conversion narratives may convey a personal or idiosyncratic experience of religion, they also often play a supporting role as persuasive text for particular religious belief systems. They provide structured parameters to religious experience not only by prescribing appropriate behavior for believers, but also by excluding or debunking non-legitimate experiences (like hysteria, or false spirituality), thus bringing their readers into a greater unity of purpose. Generally, conversion narratives are crafted with a particular end: they bring their
narrator from the experience of isolated individualism to a position within a religious community, persuasively leading their readers along a parallel path. This kind of narrative occupies an uneasy space between two concepts of what narrative should be: what Hayden White identifies as the opposing ideals of the historical and the mythic.

Dialogism describes the constant exchange of meanings that necessarily occurs in a world of multiple modes of discourse. When this dialogism is re-constructed within a narrative, its heteroglossia takes absolute authority away from single voices or ideologies. It instead situates these voices in dialogue with other competitively authoritative ideologues. Bakhtin asserts that dialogism is deliberately fostered within the genre conventions of the novel. His theory asserts, however, that this novelistic dialogism is a realistic parallel to dialogic processes manifest in the world at large, existing on a variety of levels: in the development of individual consciousness, in societal dynamics, and in the formation of the texts that arise out of a social reality. This dialogic structure therefore cannot be characterized as mere choice of style but as a demonstration of reality. This dialogic process is also crucial to the interpretive side of texts, as expressed both by Bakhtin and the theories of Hans Georg Gadamer. According to these theories, texts are realized in conversation with the reader and are understood through the fusion of horizons of understanding. These textual conversations foreground the linguistic nature of the text and do not claim purely essential qualities, and with the participation of readers construct undogmatic processes of idea and identity development.

This study examines the first section of the Joseph Smith History; Soren Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling; George Eliot’s Romola and Daniel Deronda; and Antonio Fogazzaro’s Malombra and Il Santo. The works considered in this study depart from the traditionally one-directional progress of many conversion narratives. While the tendency in many religious
narratives is to show this progression as teleological, ending in a settled sense of institutional
dogma, these texts all demonstrate a destabilization of narrative through breaks in the continuity
of this teleological progression. All demonstrate a literary experiment in defining and
demonstrating personal conversion. The narrators and main characters of these texts establish
religious identities not only with formally established church institutions, but also to a
heightened religious experience, and in some cases a call to leadership in establishing new social
orders. An important aspect of these texts is the irony and self-reflection manifest through
multiple shifts from one aspect of religious experience to another and back again. They manifest
this need through a variety of ways: retelling and republication of multiple versions, adding
multiple narrators or heteroglossic voices, adding sequels, and creating interactions of genre
conventions within their texts. They engage the reader in a hermeneutical process that is likewise
dialogical. The questions that these style shifts invoke are deeply ontological: What is the
relation of the numinous to the realm of human sociality? What are the signs and causes of a
moral awakening, and how do these interact with moments of spiritual epiphany? Are the moral
and the spiritual necessarily separate realms of human experience? These questions highlight a
tension between rationality and the mystical aspects of religious experience itself, and between
the individual and collective religious experience.

Dialogism plays a crucial role in each of the four chapters as each writer sets up a clash
or contrast between modes of expression, whether hyper-consciously (as in the case of
Kierkegaard) or naïvely (in the case of Smith). The reason for this focus on linguistic and genre
diversity has conceptual and theoretical implications and is not simply a shift in choice of
expression, and it is this same reasoning that links these four writers. That is, all four
stylistically demonstrate an inherent tension between the subjective and the collective religious
experience. Rather than providing a monologic expository text that explains this tension in rational discourse, the construction of dialogism between varied expressive modes performs or enacts this dynamic relationship. There is an implication in this literary performance that the fundamental tension within the experience of faith cannot be clearly represented through expository discourse. In this sense it is ineffable. There is also an implication that all of these writers are nevertheless searching for a deeper kind of realism in religious expression and that their works demonstrate that the deepest reality of faith requires a multi-voiced or multi-genre expression. This is again based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, as he asserts that linguistic dialogism is a kind of synecdoche for larger human social processes of meaning and identity.

One crucial question that I hope to address is how the process of religious conversion is implicitly defined in each writer's work. Of particular interest is the idea of a kind of religious conversion (whether that means the acquisition of faith, the recognition of a holy calling, etc.) that is enabled by dialogic processes and the question of whether the conversion process is also more aptly expressed through the interaction of contrasting expressive modes. This question is in fact very difficult to extricate from the question of what constitutes a religious history or how religious history might be distinguishable from secular historical theories and formulas. With the diversity of language at work in these texts, religious identity and secular identity become two sides of the same conversation. The numinous or mystical is always situated within a linguistic or historical context of secular systems or understanding. The question of religious conversion, in this study, therefore becomes a more heightened (or deepened) question of personal identity on various levels, one that seeks to account for as broad a range of experience as possible. These writers’ textual struggle with the expression of the divine and of society is both epistemological and ontological. The question of the numinous or mystical and its interactions with the secular
can be seen as an interaction between moral and spiritual awakening. Through these writers, I hope to trace the varieties of religious narrative experience, and to demonstrate the vitality of the religious question in both fiction and nonfiction texts.
Chapter 1 – *A dialogue of genres in Joseph Smith’s First Vision narrative*

The question of genre is a problematic one in any analysis of the personal narrative of Joseph Smith. A relatively obscure and arguably unsophisticated text, it has been read by the small population of Mormon believers since the mid-1800s as a sacred history. Its development as a text, however, presents an interesting case study of heteroglossia and mixed genres. In the following analysis, I will examine some of the mixed registers or levels of narrative discourse in the text. What arises out of these heteroglossic aspects is a variety of possible genre classifications of the text. This variety of genre implies a variety of interpretative modes, in that genre is defined not just by diction or style, but by the readerly and writerly expectations embedded within the structure of the text. Through a comparison of the juxtapositions of genre within this text and over the course of its development, varied approaches toward religious identity and the experience of faith emerge. The interactive dialogue of the text’s varied modes of expression itself becomes an expression of the dialogic nature of religious experience.

It is not unusual to discover within literary works, (especially the kind of extensive narrative forms found in novels), a deft mixing of genre conventions. For, at the outset of any endeavor of literary expression, all writers are confronted with a choice of literary models, conventions, and inter-texts that shape the arc of their own narrative and the style and mode of their own written text. Their adherence to or innovation away from these conventions in many instances helps define their literary merit, as narratives have been granted elevated status in the canon of literature for their adept handling of generic form alone. The Joseph Smith First Vision
narrative is not one that enjoys such an elevated literary or aesthetic status, yet its intense interplay of diverse modes of discourse makes it a worthwhile case for narrative analysis. The fact that it is not primarily considered an aesthetic text but a historical or devotional one sets the precedent for my analytical focus. The Joseph Smith narrative is written as truth, declaring the seriousness of its intention and begging its readers to approach with similar earnestness. As a religious text, the question of truthful expression becomes a necessary one, yet the narrative’s development through multiple versions demonstrates its struggle to find appropriate modes of discourse to validate the material of its own text in response to this question. In an effort to speak truly, the developing texts shift between sets of conventions that respond to the varied aspects of their communicative goals and the social actions that influence these goals. Joseph Smith thus offers a unique angle on the writerly dilemmas of truth expression, in part because he is both distanced from and also inevitably connected to the western canon of literary tradition. In his personal narrative, in particular the initial section known as the First Vision text, the structure of the narrative is foregrounded not by any meta-literary intention of “play” or ironic discourse, but by a genuinely experimental process of narrative expression.

In short, Joseph Smith’s narrative is ideological and historical, not purely literary, and as such it has eluded analysis of its style. But to quote the opening line of Bakhtin’s essay, “Discourse in the Novel,” “the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract ‘formal’ approach and an equally abstract ‘ideological approach.’ Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the
furthest reaches of abstract meaning” (259). The Joseph Smith History (JSH) invites an ideological reading, but the content itself depends in part on the stylistic genre expectations that it demonstrates.

In the following analysis, I will first summarize the historical and cultural context of Joseph Smith’s writing career and the content of his narrative. I will then very briefly set forth some of the literary scholarship that has examined his narrative’s place within literary genre studies. Next, I move on to my own examination of the heteroglossic aspects of his text and their implications for the text’s positioning within established genre conventions, giving some close attention to the multiple versions written by Smith that were not published or widely distributed during his day. My conclusions address the implications of genre consideration in the process of writing ideological narrative. I end with a discussion of the questions inherent in defining narrative as truth, as well as an examination of the concept of conversion through religious experience as constructed by varied narrative styles.

1.1 The First Vision Narrative: its context and content.

*Joseph Smith’s life and cultural influence.*

Joseph Smith was born in Sharon, Vermont on December 23, 1805. With little formal education and no wealth to speak of, he nonetheless became, in a relatively short period of time, an intellectual and cultural leader. His life and writings have had a significant impact on the development of American religious thought and practice.

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1 Ann Taves echoes this Bakhtinian viewpoint in her study on the expression of religious experience in the United States of the 19th century. “The usual course, as I have indicated, has been to divorce explanation and experience, on the one hand, and intellectual abstraction (theory) and cultural embeddedness (practice), on the other. Upon close scrutiny, these dichotomies break down. Narratives of experience cannot avoid implicit theoretical and explanatory commitments. Theories of experience, while abstracted from the practices they are objectifying, are not abstracted from practice in general. It is more accurate, in other words, to assume that narratives of experience contain theoretical and explanatory commitments, however rudimentary, and that theories of experience, however abstract, are nonetheless constituted within their own (e.g. academic or intellectual) traditions of discourse and practice.” (Taves 9-10)
the leader of a significant religious movement: Mormonism. By age 24, he had published The Book of Mormon, established a church in upstate New York, and sent proselytizing missionaries across the northeastern United States. By the time of his death, only fourteen years later, he had become the leader of roughly 20,000 followers, founded one of the largest cities on the American frontier, run for President of the United States, published dozens of purported revelations, and was considered a prophet by Mormon congregations. His religion was (and is) vast in its claims: proclaiming a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Smith’s followers worked to establish a Zion society in preparation for a millennial era of peace. Joseph Smith’s religious calling is said to begin with what is commonly called the First Vision, an experience occurring in 1820, when he was in his mid-teens. In the now standard narrative, Smith writes in the first person, first describing his boyhood confusion about the competing denominations of his day and his strong desire for religious illumination. The narrative continues to describe how young Joseph, motivated by biblical promises of enlightenment through prayer, offered up a prayer while alone in the woods neighboring his home. What follows is an account of a divine visitation by God himself: The divine visitor speaks to Joseph by name, and in course of their dialogue he tells Joseph not to join with any of the religious denominations of his day. Although Joseph Smith did not formally establish an official church until a decade later, this initial visionary experience is integrated into the history of the church and generally interpreted as a call to spiritual enlightenment and leadership.

*Historical role of the First Vision narrative*

The role of the First Vision narrative is unique in the variety of functions it has served throughout its reception history. The narrative that has become the standard today was originally published as the introduction and first section of the History of the Church, begun by Joseph
Smith with the substantial contribution of scribes and editors in 1838 and continued over the course of several years. After Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, this history was continued without his authorship, but mainly these early portions were distributed widely, taught in Sunday School classes, and recounted over the pulpit or in proselytizing efforts. In 1851, the First Vision narrative was included in a collection of documents titled *The Pearl of Great Price*. Since 1880, this collection has been considered part of the “standard works” of the church: in other words, canonized scripture (*Pearl of Great Price Introductory Note*).  

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the narrative’s simple brevity, this text has long been considered foundational to the doctrines and authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is frequently published and preached as a stand-alone narrative, separate from the continuation of Joseph Smith’s personal history and the institutional history of the church. With this story as a theological exemplum, Mormons preach doctrines such as anti-Trinitarianism and the corporeality of God; this narrative also sets a precedent for personal revelation, the efficacy of prayer, and the loving personal attention of God toward the individual, among other principles and tenets.  

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2 In the *Pearl of Great Price*, the first vision narrative is contained in verses 1-26. Later visions from 1823 through 1829 are included as verses 27-75, with a brief addendum paragraph containing a short narrative by Oliver Cowdery.  

3 James Allen has published several articles on the role of the First Vision in Mormon doctrine and culture. He points out the development of this narrative’s reception from limited distribution to widespread incorporation into the broader culture of Mormonism, including depictions in visual art and hymns. The predominance of its influence as a narrative grew especially after the death of Joseph Smith and amongst church membership that did not have direct personal contact with the prophet. Allen, James B. “‘First Vision’ in Mormon Thought” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. 1 no. 1, (1966) 29-45; Allen, James B. “Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Thought.” *The Journal of Mormon History* vol. 7 1980 (43-61).
Introduction to the text and its precedent versions

Of the multiple versions of this narrative, the text I focus on is found in the standard Joseph Smith History, (which I refer to as JSH), also found in the canonized Pearl of Great Price. This is the only text with any consistent publication history and is the one that figures prominently in the theology and religious culture of Mormonism. However, three other narrative versions written by Joseph Smith or with his collaboration to describe this same experience are relevant in that they demonstrate with greater clarity the variety of genres and voices at work in the more closely edited and refined JSH. These three other texts contribute to the understanding of its narrative methods and will also be referenced in this study. These multiple versions have been the source of intense controversy because of their variation in reported historical detail (Joseph’s age at the time of the vision, for example), but while those differences of factual detail have some minor relevance to the stylistic analysis of this study, they are not the focus. These multiple versions, referenced in this study, are the following: First is an 1832 “Life of Joseph Smith.” Joseph Smith’s only holograph personal history, this manuscript is also written partially in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams as scribe and collaborator. This text was not widely

4 This narrative, which eventually grew into the History of the Church was started in 1838; that is, the text itself refers to the present year as 1838. The existing manuscript of this history, however, is dated June 11, 1839. Its beginning chapters are therefore probably a copy of an earlier text. Joseph Smith collaborated/dictated this history from then until his death 1844, recording events from his birth in 1805 up to 1838. Subsequent to his death in 1844, various historians continued the work until its completion in 1856. (Histories Introduction).

distributed at its composition and was left unfinished and unedited. Second is a narrative written in a journal entry of 1835. This journal was recorded under the direction of Joseph Smith by Warren Parrish, a hired scribe and Mormon disciple. Finally is a narrative commonly called the Wentworth letter, originally written to the editor of the Chicago Democrat but published in 1842 in the Nauvoo city newspaper Times and Seasons while the writing of the JSH was already underway. This text is introduced as a history of the church, but begins (like JSH) with a first person history of visions and spiritual experiences and finishes with a statement of beliefs called the Thirteen Articles of Faith. My references to the Joseph Smith History come from The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, Vol. 1 (1832-1844) and include editorial markings, as well as from the standard Pearl of Great Price. My citations of the other three texts also include editorial markings, (cross-outs, insertions, and so forth).

1.2 Review of relevant scholarship on the JSH’s literary genre classification

The primary studies of the First Vision narrative have been historical or theological, rather than literary. But these two interpretative approaches themselves arise from certain assumptions on narrative genre and suggest certain modes of discourse. History writing avoids classification as literature, likewise avoiding analysis of its narrative development. As a work of narrative history, the JSH has therefore eluded a thorough genre analysis in that much of the focus has been on the factual accuracy of the narrative itself. But the very identification of the


text as narrative history is overly simplistic. Rather, the Joseph Smith History is a hybrid narrative: it straddles modes of discourse and demands a close interpretation.

Hayden White’s theories on historical modes of expression both clarify and problematize the question of genre and provide insights relevant to a study of Smith’s narrative. In the essay, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” Hayden White seeks to answer questions about the “forms of historical representation (395),” asserting that “one of the marks of a good professional historian is the consistency with which he reminds his readers of the purely provisional nature of his characterizations of events, agents, and agencies found in the always incomplete historical record (396).” According to his description, historical writing recognizes its own inadequacy to duplicate a historical event or circumstance for its reader – in other words, historical accuracy, or the truth of the record, comes from a text’s subordinating itself to the real life event. When it adheres to this standard, the historical record becomes a mere instrument, pointing as directly as possible to events and circumstances. White identifies the ideals of historical writing to be objectivity, with a concentration on “found data” as opposed to constructed argument or narrative with a strong authorial presence (396). Described as such, historical writing posits itself a champion not of particular causes or ideals but of its own neutrality.

But some possible narrative elements complicate this matter, and several of these can be found in the Joseph Smith First Vision Narrative. One is the consideration of a first-person historical text, whether autobiographical or witness-narrative. Autobiographical history presents significant difficulties toward the ideal historical narrative in that it often prioritizes memory over the evaluation of documents, artifacts, or even a collective pool of witnesses. The second is the insertion of God as an agent in the story, which at the very least raises the stakes for the claims of the writer. The representation of God as a character in any narrative raises necessary
epistemological questions that arise from controversies in expression and interpretation of theology or mystical experience. The subjectivity of autobiography raises the question: Can a mystical or visionary experience ever qualify as “found data” when it can’t be verified by the experiences of others? Even setting aside the question of the first-person point of view, is objective narrative possible when dealing with the encounters of others with the numinous?

To push against the ideal of pure objectivity, Hayden White posits an analysis of myth writing. Drawing from Northrop Frye’s discussion in *Fables of Identity*, White defines myth as narrative that fulfills not only a representational role but also an aesthetic one. While Hayden White recognizes the clash between the ideal standard of historical texts and the conventions of poetic or literary works, he sees in historical writing the unavoidable necessity of going beyond “found data” through the use of “emplotment.” Thus histories are literary narratives. That is, they necessarily construct (rather than simply represent) patterns out of historical events. Always only partially mimetic; history writing also consists of “metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings. Viewed in a purely formal way, a historical narrative is not only a reproduction of the events reported in it, but also a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in our literary tradition” (400). This complex of symbols is what constitutes the myth aspects of historical writing. White’s deconstruction of the genre assumptions of historical writing can be applied to the First Vision narrative, a text that has been primarily considered as

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8 In *Fables of Identity*, Northrop Frye formulates a range of ‘historical myths’, i.e. stories that construct a story around a set of core goals and principles. Frye criticizes what he sees as an unprofessional mix of fact and fiction, asserting that history should not impose patterns but work strictly with ‘found’ data, not poetic constructions (White 396).
history and as such is often taught as a chronology of inflexibly factual events. However, its myth narrative aspects also figure importantly in its textual reality, opening up the possibility of its being read as the “complex of symbols” identified by White. Through a reading of alternative versions of the narrative, the process of arranging this complex of symbols becomes potentially clearer.

Where to situate Joseph Smith’s narrative within the tension between history and myth becomes a significant challenge. While history documentation plays an important role in Mormon culture, there have been some key analyses of this particular narrative that try to evaluate it more in White’s myth-making terms.

First, record-keeping and historical writing as a genre holds a position of importance in Mormon culture. The earliest historical narrative in Mormon culture is, of course, The Book of Mormon, published in 1830. Not only does this narrative contain examples of both personal and collective history, but its multiple narrators themselves preach the importance of keeping historical records as well. This importance goes beyond the ideal of “found data,” as the multiple narrators each identify their own record-keeping role as a sacred duty, one that has a distinctly pedagogical role. Referring to sacred historical documents, one of these narrators says in Alma 37.8 “for behold, they have enlarged the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.” History, then, for early Mormons, was not a secular or even necessarily an objective activity. The role of historian in fact merited the receiving of divine revelation, as seen in the appointment of John Whitmer as church historian in 1831. Whitmer requested a revelation, or prophetic pronouncement, before he would accept his tasks as scribe and historian.

9 In 1831, John Whitmer “initially hesitated when he was asked to serve as the Church historian
What is not specified in the divine mandates to write history is how to record that history. There is no handbook, nor is there given a precise purpose for the record, (only that it is divinely appointed.)\textsuperscript{10} The early Mormons lived during an explosion of religious narrative, however, and were confronted (like all writers) with a vast array of modes of discourse to choose from in emplotting their historical narratives. This tension between the documentary impulse and the dilemma of emplotment is applied to 19th century religious and psychological experiences in Ann Taves’ study, \textit{Fits, Trances, and Visions}. In her book she examines the expression of religious “enthusiasm” in the American mid-1800s, noting that while the raw experiences of visions and other forms of spirituality showed remarkable similarity, how that spirituality was expressed was crucial in defining the religious affiliation itself. Though she does not use White’s term, the varied “emplotment” of individuals’ objectively similar encounters with the numinous is the subject of her study. Asserting that the 19th century was an era of experimentation and vast variety in these modes of expression, Taves catalogues a range of faiths and semi-scientific movements from Methodism to Mesmerism to Christian Scientists. In describing the varied expressions of these groups, she showcases language registers that range from the enthusiastic to the scientific to the moralistic. She concludes that the narration of these experiences aligned

\begin{center}
\textit{and recorder, replacing Oliver Cowdery. He wrote, ‘I would rather not do it but observed that the will of the Lord be done, and if he desires it, I desire that he would manifest it through Joseph the Seer.’}” John Whitmer accepted this new appointment only after Joseph Smith confirmed that his new role was appointed by prophetic revelation. (\textit{Doctrine & Covenants} Section 47 heading)
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{10} Mormon, commenting on his role as editor of the Book of Mormon writes, “Wherefore, I chose these things, to finish my record upon them, which remainder of my record I shall take from the plates of Nephi; and I cannot write the hundredth part of the things of my people. . . . And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.” Words of Mormon 1.5,7
itself linguistically with particular academic fields, religious institutions, or moral philosophies. While Taves rather unexpectedly does not include Mormon experience, the breadth of her study makes clear the varied possibilities of expressive models on hand during the era that Joseph Smith was narrating his own experiences. The JSH and its precedent versions demonstrate some of these various modes of emplotment, reflecting the diversity of religious expression in the American cultural milieu described by Ann Taves. But the narrative also highlights more fundamental writerly dilemmas that would arise in a broad range of cultural milieux and reflect the basic tension between found data and emplotment asserted by Hayden White. This tension might also be described as one between the individual and a collective sense of society and religion.

Although much of the scholarship on the First Vision has a historical or theological focus, there are a few studies that specifically examine the literary genre conventions demonstrated by Joseph Smith’s narrative. In one such study, Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft describe an evolution of Smith’s literary style in a chronological study of the different versions of the First Vision narrative, starting with the unpublished 1832 version, progressing to the 1835 journal, and concluding with the standard JSH. They characterize style shifts in these multiple versions as Joseph Smith’s progression from an immature writer, one who was naively influenced by his surrounding literary context, to a mature authorial figure in his own right. They assert three genre identifications in their analysis: conversion narrative, institutional history, and myth narrative. Focusing on the progression of style, they claim that the first narrative (of 1832) is imitative and derivative of contemporaneous Christian texts, citing Jacob Knapp, Eleazer

Sherman, Abel Thornton among others as conversion narrators whose interiorized point of view and emotional or “florid” language are similarly seen in Joseph Smith’s narrative. They also examine the thematic narratology of contemporary conversion narratives and cite plot elements that are consistent with those of Smith’s early narrative. These narratives center on a cleansing of sin, which is made manifest through highly emotional and often visionary experiences.12

According to Lambert and Cracroft’s analysis, the early adherence to Christian convention changes with the transition to the standard JSH. Praising this latter narrative as having achieved a maturity of style that reflects the maturity of Smith’s religious leadership, they point out this later version’s markedly “restrained” language, its straightforward objectivity, and its specific applicability for Mormon adherents as an institutional history rather than a purely personal conversion narrative (33-37). In their concluding remarks they mention one more genre classification, citing Mercea Eliade’s myth criteria, particularly those of the performative reader reception of the JSH as well as its function as the “creation” story of Mormonism itself. "The 1838 version thus becomes at once a paradigm of the religious experience by which one may confirm the reality of the new dispensation, and a religious experience itself. The proper telling and hearing of the narrative allow one, in a sense, to ‘relive’ for himself the sacred ‘origins of his faith’” (40).13

12 The sinner . . . becomes intensely aware of his wickedness [and] enters into a period of self-detestation; miserable, he turns for solace to prayer and study of the Holy Writ but generally encounters some kind of satanic opposition; after . . . sincere prayer, however, often in a woods or other secluded spot, he enjoys a supernatural epiphany during which he sees or senses the presence of Christ, obtains forgiveness for his sins, and undergoes a marvelous spiritual change; this experience awakens in him a sensitivity for the presence of God not only in himself but in all outward nature; he is then led to proclaim to others his conversion and his new-found witness for Christ; and, though he still falters from time to time, his ministry begins. (Lambert 33-34)

13 Lambert and Cracroft cite Eliade’s Myth and Reality in their article: “In general it can be said that myth... (1) constitutes the History of the acts of the Supernaturals; (2) that this History is
While Lambert and Cracroft’s study helped me lay the groundwork for my own analysis, I tried to avoid some of their premises in my own analysis. One is the decided prioritization of the final standard narrative, as well as their claim that the borrowed genre conventions identified in early version are discarded in this final narrative. With the standard 1838 version seen as a perfected version, they refer to these other versions as stylistically inadequate. While I agree that the standard JSH has without doubt been polished through more extensive editing and has a much more involved reception history in the culture of Mormonism, it is difficult for me to divorce it as completely from the modal and thematic narratology of the previous versions. In fact, my analysis asserts the inclusion of elements of previous styles, rather than a progression away from these other versions. Those previous versions show tensions of interior to exterior, of collective to individual, of personal to institutional and so on that are also evidenced in the structurally eclectic and inclusive standard version. I find in the standard Joseph Smith History enough traces and evidences of the genre considerations of these earlier drafts to assert its strong dialogic process of narrative construction.

A more recent study by literary scholar Richard Brodhead points out a genre classification that brings Smith’s narrative beyond the scope of both Christian conversion

considered to be absolutely true (because it is concerned with realities) and sacred (because it is the work of the Supernaturals); (3) that myth is always related to a "creation," it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established;... (4) that by knowing the myth one [possesses] a knowledge that one "experiences" ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the ritual for which it is the justification. [In the case of the Joseph Smith Story, going out by oneself into the woods and expecting answers to prayer]; (5) that in one way or another one "lives" the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or reenacted.” (Lambert and Cracroft 40).
narrative and institutional history.\textsuperscript{14} By comparing Smith’s personal history with that of Nat Turner, leader of the notable slave rebellion and Smith’s contemporary, Brodhead demonstrates a culture of American prophetism in the early-mid 1800s. He explains, “The genre of The Confessions of Nat Turner is prophetic autobiography. This is the story, not of a person’s life, but of those parts of a life that give him a special identity as one divinely chosen for a holy work” (13). This genre revolves around the construction of a personal identity: “In the prehistory of any act of prophetic identification, a person must have access to some concept of ‘the prophet,’ an image that circulates in the cultural repertoire of identities as one idea of what a self can be. When people ‘become’ prophets, they identify with some concept of the prophetic self, project themselves into this concept, and use it to tell themselves and others who they are” (18).

Brodhead traces the concept of prophet back to that which is conveyed through narrative. He formulates a thematic narratology shared by Turner and Smith’s narratives, which he asserts qualify them as prophetic autobiography in keeping with the concept of prophet in 19th century America. Some of the other 19th century “prophets” cited by Brodhead, like Joseph Smith, are religious enthusiasts or founders of religious sects in the frontier of the antebellum United States, such as Jemima Wilkinson, Joseph Dylks, and Bernhard Müller. But other figures referenced fall outside the boundary of theological innovation. Nat Turner himself, though assuming divine authority, applies this same authority to the political and secular problem of slavery. Ralph

Waldo Emerson and John Brown also are included in Brodhead’s list: personalities that blur the line between secular activism and religious authority (Brodhead 19-23).\textsuperscript{15}

Brodhead’s focus on narrative as a vehicle for identity formation is particularly relevant to this study. In the analysis that follows, the persona or subject of Joseph becomes a focal point, as the question of religious truth in an autobiographical text necessarily comes back to the process of constructing individual identity. This construction of individual character depends on the structure of the narrative as well as the structure of the world reality that narrative seeks to portray.

1.3 Multiple modes of discourse in the First Vision narrative

The First Vision narrative demonstrates genre interactions that reflect the tensions of history and myth writing described by Hayden White. The multiple versions of this narrative offer both subtle and significant variations in the portrayal of personal religious experience and the construction of a personal religious identity. In examining the precedent versions written in 1832 and 1835, we find that Joseph Smith’s narrative presents stylistic elements of contemporary Christian conversion narratives, prophetic autobiography, institutional history, court testimony (affidavits), and millenarian prophecy. While the interaction of these genre conventions can be seen on some level in the early narratives, the variety of them can be seen in the 1838 standard version. In order to demonstrate the interaction of these genre conventions, I will focus on narrative framing devices in these texts, as framing devices are essentially the meeting points of

\textsuperscript{15} Several of the elements of prophetism found by Brodhead are only identified in the later events of the Joseph Smith History, those that extend beyond the First Vision narrative: The fact that both Turner and Smith cite important visions as occurring on the 21st of the month, an aspect that Brodhead asserts would have possible occult horoscopal significance for both men (15), and the fact that the call to prophecy also included a call to baptism(16).
diverse modes of narration. Analysis of these frames leads to both a thematic and modal narratology of the JSH. In addition, I will analyze the documentary and intertextual quotations used in the multiple versions of these texts. Through an analysis of quotes and allusions, I will again demonstrate the tensions inherent in dual goals of history and myth writing. The formation of self-identity through this process is also demonstrated to be a dialogic interaction of multiple modes of linguistic contextualization. In this way, the relationship between the self as individual and the collective history of institutions or peoples is foregrounded in this analysis.

*Analysis of framing devices separating personal history and institutional/collective emplotment.*

One of the most obvious tensions between different modes of narration in the First Vision narrative is found between the requirements of a personal interiorized history and that of a history of the church. In early Mormon history projects, the concept of a church history is one of necessary divine direction, fitting into a millenarian vision in which the church is the fulfillment of the creation of the earth and is seen as the kingdom of God on earth. As such, this church history claims a divine authorship. But this perspective might be seen to conflict with a first person point of view, in that the individual voice runs the risk of being subsumed in this divine sense of collective history. The idea of a narrative in which God is the main character leads us to certain inevitable questions: What is the role of an autobiographical voice within the context of a cosmic history? Does personal history have relevance to millenarian narratives or to any collective history? If the narrative voice claims an oracular or prophetic authority, can it still claim to be a first person narrative? The First Vision narrative is written in the first person singular point of view but presents narrative tensions and compromises in that it simultaneously
constructs an institutional history. The succession of framing devices in the various version of this narrative are a locus of this narrative tension.

In the 1832 First Vision narrative, the earliest narrative by Joseph Smith himself, the introductory framing text contrasts starkly with the main narrative and highlights this tension. It begins with an overall summary of Joseph Smith’s spiritual experiences over the course of a decade, referring to Smith in the third person and offering an interpretation of his visionary experiences as a progressive development of religious authority. The First Vision is described as “receiving the testimony [sic] from on high,” while the final episode in Joseph’s spiritual career in this summary is described as Smith’s receiving “Kees [keys] of the Kingdom of God,” to indicate his call as leader of a new church or new dispensation. In this summary the focus is the establishment of a church or the “Kingdom of God,” not the personal experience of Joseph himself (Histories 10). Only after this introduction, the autobiographical section begins, “I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] . . .”(10). This autobiographical beginning is marked by a switch to first person narration and a purely personal perspective, one with no continuation of the claims to “keys” or any other priestly or prophetic type of authority. Joseph instead describes his preoccupation with “the welfare of my immortal Soul,” and his conclusion after reading the scriptures that “there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament.” The young Joseph’s narrative depicts a startling isolation from human society, which is only a reminder to him of sin and corruption. This is replaced by a rapturous appreciation of the natural world, which is described lyrically,

I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their majesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intiligence in governing the things which are so exceeding great and [p. 2] marvelous even in the likeness of him who created <them>
and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said the fool saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power a being who maketh Laws and decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity (12).

It is this communion with nature that prompts an emotional search for forgiveness of sins, and the resultant vision of deity is similar in tone to the description of Joseph’s interaction with the natural world. Notably, it does not insist on linking itself to the context of an institutional narrative. Joseph recounts the outcome of this vision with no indication of its historical significance: “my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the heavenly vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart” (13). Joseph portrays himself as a solitary convert, one at unity with God and nature but destined to mourn for the corruption of human society. Juxtaposed with such a lyrical and personalized narrative, the informative but unpoetic introductory remarks serve as a necessary bridge toward collective narrative in this self-labeled history of a collective church.

What makes this early narrative precedent to the standard JSH especially striking is that these multiple voices and shift in perspective are not only rhetorical; that is, in the original manuscript, Frederick G. Williams’s handwriting is identified as the author of the frame introduction while Smith’s hand takes over for the entire account of his first vision. This manuscript is in fact the only holograph copy of Smith’s First Vision narrative. Williams, as introductory narrator, speaks for the collective, while Smith is left to speak from his own individual experience.

This split between framing device and story content essentially introduces two forms of discourse, evidenced by a genuine, non-parodic heteroglossia, or mixed register: These forms of discourse describe the personal and institutional. The personal history is lyrical—even poetic—
and interiorized while the institutional history is expository and unemotional as it traces a broader history. As referenced earlier, Lambert and Cracroft assert that the 1832 narrative is interiorized, emotional, and highly descriptive. I agree with this. In its lyrical and intimate style, Joseph Smith’s voice is a personal witness. It informs the reader of the young Joseph’s inner emotions but does not instruct or seek to point out specific relevance to the reader’s own experience. However, this voice is framed by the voice of the secretary, Frederick G. Williams, a devout follower of Smith and one dedicated to the collective cause of his church. As such, it expresses the collective identity of the church and presents a register that, while also narrative, is expository, detached, and potentially institutional. What is more important to note is that the presence of this third person frame highlights the interpretive process that occurs in any transition from personal experience to conclusions of generalized truth. The individual experience requires significant hermeneutical mediation in order to make it accessible to a collective group.

Among Smith’s narratives this early one is perhaps the most explicit in establishing a necessary connection between Joseph Smith’s personal history and the history of the church. According to Frederick G. Williams’s expository frame, Joseph Smith cannot be experiencing a religious epiphany for his own sake alone, but in order to prepare him to be the crucial conduit of divine authority. Thus, Joseph’s personal experiences (visions and angelic visitations) are depicted as not for his own personal benefit, (as he himself describes his search as one motivated by a personal need for divine mercy), but as leading the way toward the establishment of a community of “saints” or willing disciples. This framing device, highlighting the contrast between the two voices, clearly renders the gaps in such an institutional or communal history. As an impersonal commentary, detached from the personal story recounted by Joseph Smith, this
introductory framing device opens the door for two kinds of emplotment, or two genres of literary text. Lambert and Cracroft offer significant justification for matching the first person narrative with both thematic and modal narrative structure of Christian conversion stories. But the Williams frame turns that defining experience into just one stepping-stone on the way to a larger Church history. This kind of frame is also seen in the Wentworth letter, published in 1842. Here, the narrative first person of Joseph Smith offers his own introductory frame, identifying the text as a “sketch of the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter-day Saints, of which I have the honor, under God, of being the founder” (*Histories* 492), followed by the familiar singular first person, “I was born in Sharon.” The chronology of this account continues well beyond the 1820 vision and traces the progress of the church into the 1830s. Its coda declares the supremacy and divinity of the church cause and sets forth thirteen articles of faith, a Mormon credo of sorts. The Wentworth letter finishes with the sense of divine emplotment that Frederick G. Williams’ hand introduces in the 1832 narrative, and Joseph Smith’s individual experience is firmly set within a context of cosmic history planned by God, with the coda containing the thirteen articles of faith and doing its part to define an institutional identity of belief.

The later standard JSH both retains and alleviates this tension in an interesting compromise. Maintaining the form of an autobiographical or personal narrative with consistent first person perspective throughout, this first person is, however, less intimate and emotional in style. But it also offers less of an explicit framing of Joseph’s individual experience within a larger historical narrative. The revised explanatory introduction itself gives no indication of how the young Joseph’s first vision fits within a cosmic or divine history, instead only suggesting its cosmic significance through a few framing asides. For example, one footnote in the standard
Joseph Smith History (Addenda, Note B) inserts the idea of a cosmic rather than personal struggle between good and evil into the history. “. . . — It seems as though the adversary was aware at a very early period of my life that I was destined to prove a disturber & an annoyer of his kingdom, or else why should the powers of Darkness combine against me. why the oppression & persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?” [now included as verse 20 of the Joseph Smith History]. The standard 1838 text gives suggestions of the kind of divine emplotment framing device demonstrated by the 1832 version, but refrains from explicit declarations.

From this early 1832 frame and its later vestiges in the standard 1838 version we can see the formulation of a cosmic history out of personal individual experience. However, this sense of divine history is not the only sense of collective narrative present in the standard 1838 version. Another textual genre informs this analysis of the JSH, especially evidenced in the introductory frames of the standard 1838 itself, as well as the Wentworth Letter of 1842. Like the now standard JSH, the Wentworth letter also presents the history of the church in autobiographical form, with Joseph Smith’s experiences recounted in the first person. Again in this narrative, the frame presents the personal narrative as a necessary step toward a collective history. But its frame does not describe a divinely orchestrated history. Rather, its frame declares its purpose to set the record straight for its readers, requesting that the narrative not be distorted by any subsequent publications and misrepresentations.16 This narrative reflects another genre of

16 “March 1, 1842.—At the request of Mr. John Wentworth, editor and proprietor of the Chicago Democrat, I have written the following sketch of the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter-day Saints, of which I have the honor, under God, of being the founder. Mr. Wentworth says that he wishes to furnish Mr. Bastow [Barstow], a friend of his, who is writing the history of New Hampshire, with this document. As Mr. Bastow has taken the proper steps to obtain correct information, all that I shall ask at his hands is that he publish the account entire, ungarnished, and without misrepresentation.” (Histories 429)
Mormon writing of this era. Like the Wentworth letter, the JSH was written during a period of time when Joseph Smith was strongly urging his followers to produce a record of their own experiences for one very practical reason: legal redress of wrongs. It was in this period that a Mormon delegation was organized and sent to Washington D.C. to ask for protection for the Mormon settlers from mob violence. In a letter sent from jail and published in Nauvoo’s *Times and Seasons* newspaper Joseph Smith urged his followers to document their grievances: “We would suggest for your concideration [sic] the propriety of all the saints gathering up a knowledge [sic] of all the facts and suffering and abuses put upon them by the people of this state and also the names of all persons that have had a hand in their oppressions as far as they can get hold of them and find them out” (quoted in *Histories* Introduction xxiv). The JSH first vision narrative’s language revisions can be seen as directed toward this end: its language has become more clear and straightforward, secular or scientific in its appeal to fact or “found data.” The first paragraph states the purpose of the narrative,

Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil disposed and designing persons in relation to the rise and progress of the Church of <Jesus Christ of> Latter day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a church, and its progress in the world; I have been induced to write this history so as to disabuse the publick mind, and put all enquirers after truth into possession of the facts as they have transpired in relation both to myself and the Church as far as I have such facts in possession.

17 Joseph’s letter continues with colorful exhortations, “And perhaps a committe can be appointed to find out these things and to take statements and affidafets and also to gether up the libilous publications that are afloat and all that are in the magazines and in the Insiclopedias and all the libilious histories that are published and that are writing and by whom and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practised upon this people that we may not only publish to all the world but present them to the heads of the government in all there dark and hellish hue [hue] as the last effort which is injoined on us by our heavenly Father” (quoted in *Histories* Introduction xxiv).
This introduction is a defense both against personal attacks against Joseph Smith’s character and the physical and ideological attacks on the rising sect of believers. According to this preface, this narrative is not primarily intended as inspirational literature or lyric expression of conversion, but to set the record straight, to clear the good name of its author and the church he founded. Joseph Smith uses the first person both in this frame and in the actual narrative of his subsequent history, but like the format of the 1832 narrative, this frame introduces a rhetorical purpose that allows for collective access to a personal experience. Instead of explicitly declaring the divine plan demonstrated through Joseph Smith’s experience, however, its claims are those of strict documentary purpose. Seeking to prove the neutrality or harmlessness of the church as a body, it adopts genre conventions that likewise tend toward the neutrality of historical discourse. Truth in the 1838 version is not introduced with God as its author, but as based in human experience. It offers proof of innocence in a rhetorical frame that would be accessible to a non-religious readership and to collective ideals of ethical behavior.

The conglomerate of framing narratives—or the meeting points of multiple registers of language—which remain evident in the final standardized JSH reflect the diversity of intended audiences that can be identified in this one text. Both framing methods give themselves the task of translating a personal experience into collective history. Two kinds of collective history emerge from these constructions, however. The first is a millenarian history: the story of Mormonism’s origins and development within the cosmic history of a divine plan. Joseph Smith’s religious identity in this history is established as being God’s mouthpiece. The second is a secular history: the story of Mormonism’s interactions with its American context. Smith’s identity here is instead as a representative for his religious followers. In the final 1838 JSH, these two collective histories compete in dialogue with each other, pushing and pulling in their turn
against the raw individual experience of the 1820 vision. The introduction is couched in secular terms, while inserted asides make reference to the divine position of Joseph Smith within a cosmic history. In the larger context, although readers often navigate between these genre expectations without consciously tracking our shifts in interpretation, I believe that the variety in these genre conventions lays the groundwork for a breadth of interpretive possibilities for this text. This in turn forges flexible definitions of truth, definitions that depend in part on the willed interpretive stance of the reader. As Carolyn Miller asserts, genre is defined by the “action it is used to accomplish” (151). But with blended genres, these actions can be multiple. In the case of this text, the action can be interpreted as proselytizing or preaching a divine narrative; it can also be seen as exonerating Joseph Smith and his followers from wrongdoing by appealing to the authority of a secular system of ethics. Religious history, in this case, acknowledges both historical constructions as valid and authoritative.

**Analysis of the narrative’s intertextual heteroglossia through quotation and allusion**

The heteroglossia identified in Bakhtin’s theoretical works calls for a multiplicity of voices and/or modes of discourse, layered upon or juxtaposed against each other. While Bakhtin identifies “hybrid utterance” as a deliberate narrative method on the part of a novel’s author, he also identifies it as a more realistic representation of our world. This would imply that naïve or nonliterary texts and utterances might involve a similar mixture of diverse linguistic modes. The First Vision narrative is just such a hybrid: it incorporates multiple registers and modes of linguistic expression without showing artful consciousness of that fact. While Bakhtin’s novelistic examples achieve this through the parodic imitation of varied styles of expression, the integration of direct quotation traceable to actual sources also creates heteroglossia within a
narrative. One of the characteristics of the JSH is its use of both direct quotation and embedded/indirect quotation and allusion. Like the framing devices analyzed previously, which juxtapose varied genre conventions and narrative audiences, the JSH usage of quotation and allusion also create a dialogue between varied cultural assumptions. Intertextuality is seen here in its broadest definition, as this text makes reference to both informal oral traditions and formal written texts.

The First Vision narrative contains several kinds of quoted discourse. First, it cites dialogue, or voiced quotations, directly from the personal experience of the narrator, Joseph Smith. As an eye- (and ear) witness to his own life, Smith recreates through dialogue the interactions of his lived experience. Added to this mundane dialogue, Smith quotes heavily from biblical texts, thereby setting up a heteroglossic dialogue between the language of the American frontier in the 1820s – 1840s and that of the King James Version of the Bible. In addition to the direct and indirect quotation taken purportedly from Smith’s lived experience, I identify three modes of intertextual quotation and allusion in the Joseph Smith History that find their basis in biblical language: One follows oral patterns of extemporaneous American sermons, while a second follows scholarly citation conventions. These oral citations are performative in nature, while the second type of citation borrows from philosophical or rational systems. Finally, the amalgamation of this variety of quotation and allusion creates a third typological narrative, one that seeks to bridge gaps between modern experience and ancient biblical history.

First, the narrative of Joseph Smith is set within the context of his contemporaries, presenting a story that includes dialogue from life—direct and indirect quotation in plain contemporary American English. The earliest narrative version (1832) is an exception in that it employs lyrical description in place of dialogue as the young Joseph communes more with nature.
than he associates with friends or family. However, the standard narrative and other versions all externalize the plot by recording events in part through conversation. This is especially evident in the 1835 narrative, which is written as a journal entry. Among the events recorded of a particular day, Joseph Smith engages in a religious dialogue with one “Joshua the Jewish Minister,” an eccentric itinerate preacher who had achieved local notoriety for having been accused of murder and who was otherwise known as Robert Matthews (Journals 86). After describing this man’s appearance and the circumstances of their encounter, Smith records that “we soon commenced talking upon the subject of religion and after I had made some remarks concerning the bible I commenced giving him a relation of the circumstances connected with the coming forth of the book of Mormon.” (Journals 87) His story that follows is in fact itself quotation of his own oral account of the first vision: his visit to the woods, his prayer for enlightenment, and his subsequent heavenly vision. This is followed by a narrative of further angelic visitations and the eventual publication of the Book of Mormon, which publication Smith attributes to “the gift and power of God and have been preaching it ever since.” Smith concludes this with an account of Joshua the Jewish minister’s response, “While I was relating this brief history of the establishment of the Church of Christ in these last days, Joshua seemed to be highly entertained”(92). The journal continues the record with Robert Matthews’ reply, which describes his own theological position, also recorded as first person quotation. The verbal

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18 “while setting in my house between the hours of nine (ten) & 10 (11) this morning a man came in, and introduced himself to me, calling (himself) self (by the name of) Joshua the Jewish minister, his appearance was some what (thing) singular, having a beard about 3 inches in length which is quite grey, also his hair is long and considerably silvered with age I should think he is about 50 or 55 years old, tall and strait slender built of thin visage blue eyes, and fair complexion, he wears a sea green frock coat, & pantaloons of the same, black fur hat with narrow brim, and while speaking frequently shuts his eyes with a scowl on his countinance” (Journals 87)
portrait of this itinerate preacher, with his unusual physical aspect and checkered past, add a matter-of-fact homespun quality to the narrative. What is recounted can be characterized as a simple exchange between two religious enthusiasts. According to the journal account, Robert Matthews is turned out after what had been a friendly two-day visit: “after breckfast I told him, that my God told me that his God is the Devil, and I could not keep him any longer”(95). But even considering this bold denunciation, the narrative stands in high contrast to the collective framing commentary of other narratives. Instead of summary expounding on the significance of certain events and insisting on the personal authority of Joseph Smith, we find simple dialogue and factual description of the physical and social context of this oral exchange. The (purportedly) verbatim ideas of each speaker are recorded with little commentary. Joseph’s narrative identifies his own religious role as preacher, his text being the Book of Mormon and his own personal visions, (no mention of being a holder of the “Kees to the Kingdom,”), and indeed, his dialogue with Joshua is a demonstration in itself of this very role. The focus on physical description, social interaction through dialogue, and homely details of everyday life turn this narrative into something remarkably closer to Hayden White’s concept of “found data.” Particular details are the focus rather than a collective narrative arc. The church as an institution does not enter into this short history, either in its cosmic or social context. “Emplotment” is less overt in a text that does not seek to explain itself. It does not seem coincidental that an account that focuses with such detail on the record of verbatim dialogue would identify Smith’s spiritual role as preacher. This first vision narrative makes little reference to the social structure required by the formation of a church. However, it does center on a very social activity: the interactions inherent in language itself. This journal entry focuses on dialogue in its record of ‘found data,’ but the
activity of recording, remembering, preaching, and hearing the word becomes a spiritual activity that is self-sufficient. Joseph Smith needs no other identity than that of preacher.

While this 1835 journal is unique in its near absence of commentary on its own narrative, vestiges of this same style are retained in the content of the standard 1838 narrative. Unmediated dialogue is present in the remarkably matter-of-fact conversation of young Joseph with his mother after his remarkable vision.\textsuperscript{19} His confrontational dialogue with the Methodist minister in the area might also be viewed in this light. Matter-of-fact dialogue transcription without embellishing commentary becomes more prevalent than lyrical internalized narrative in the 1838 narrative. Joseph shifts from soulfully communing with nature to socializing with his contemporary frontiersmen in his new calling as preacher, not relying on priestly ordination but on his own direct experiences.

Between the lines of this sometimes dramatic and often drily journalistic use of quotation, Joseph Smith makes heavy use of quotes and allusions from the Bible, often referencing biblical language without attributing its source. As for much of 19th century literature, while his diction assumes in readers a thorough familiarity with biblical language, this familiarity should not be seen as necessarily scholarly or textual in nature.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, these borrowings from the Bible may at times be only loosely linked with the written text, perhaps expressed without an explicit acknowledgement of the specific context or significance of the original source of this language,

\textsuperscript{19} And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, “Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off.” I then said to my mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.” (JSH 1.20)

\textsuperscript{20} Unlike early Puritan sermons which were formatted with careful citations of biblical references, the 2nd Great Awakening brought with it trends of extemporaneous preaching, especially amongst Methodist preachers. (American Sermons). Joseph Smith’s upbringing in upstate New York brought him into contact with such itinerate preachers; he names Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in his History.
instead cobbling together words and phrases from familiar biblical passages without direct
reference to the literary context of these passages. This kind of borrowed language may serve to
fill in gaps of memory from the details of historical-actual experience. It also seems to convey a
religious register that would be familiar to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries. In short, some
biblical quotations found in the JSH may be seen as originating in the broader linguistic context
of Smith’s day. This mode of allusion and quotation is consistent throughout the 1832 narrative
but retained on a lesser scale in the standard narrative. For example, in the earliest text of 1832,
Joseph Smith presents his boyhood ponderings as quotation: “well hath the wise man said the <it
is a> fool <that> saith in his heart there is no God”(12). This embedded quote from Psalms 14.1
is missing in the later edited version. While this same stance of interior questioning is also
described in the standard 1838 narrative, it is represented with straightforward questions in
contemporary language rather than in allusive phrases.

But all versions of the First Vision use similarly uncited quotation in reporting Smith’s
dialogue with deity. In the standard 1838 narrative, this divine dialogue is recorded with this
quote, “they draw near to me to with their lips but their hearts are far from me, They teach for
doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power
thereof.” This is an amalgamation of wording found in Isaiah 29.13, Matthew 15.8, and 2
Timothy 3.5.21 This kind of quotation follows the patterns of oral narrative and speech-making,

21 Compare this to the 1832 record of the dialogue with deity. “Joseph <my son> thy sins are
forgiven thee, go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the
Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who may believe on my name may have
Eternal life <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they
turned aside from the gospel and keep no <my> commandments they draw near to me with their
lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the
earth to visit them according to thir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which <hath> been
spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[ostles] behold and lo I come quickly as it [is]
written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father” (Histories 13). Although no
especially seen in the linguistic patterns of American sermons. Take, for example, Martin Luther King Jr.’s, “I Have a Dream” speech, which makes reference after reference to passages familiar to the culture of his listeners. There is no “quote, un-quote” in this speech, yet he alludes to national documents and speeches, patriotic songs, and the Bible, in a seamless text of his own. King is no innovator in this. Although early American Puritans delivered sermons that were closely cited with scriptural references and composed written texts before they were delivered in a church setting, this practice shifted in the early 1800s. The religious culture contemporary to Joseph Smith instead practiced a much less scholarly mode of sermonizing: Extemporaneous sermonizing was becoming widespread, made popular especially by the Methodists. In Joseph Smith’s own day, preachers and speech-makers also used such rhetorical patterns, from Absolom Jones to William Elery Channing to Lucretia Mott (American Sermons 891). These intertextual references create a deft interweaving of American frontier English and biblical (King James Version) English. This is a dialogue between past and present, but one that does not seek to distinguish itself as such. It instead creates an ostensibly seamless continuity of culture between the biblical past and contemporary American life, in which sacred subjects are expressed using a special linguistic register or mode of discourse inextricably tied to the language of the Bible. This form of embedded quotation, with its elevated religious register, creates a lyrical or aesthetic experience for the reader. It brings readers out of the quotidian and toward the possibility of mystical experience. It is performative in its dramatic recreation of biblical language, and as such, it invites readers to participate through aesthetic experience rather than through rational reflection.

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references are stated in this passage, the language of this narrative is in fact a mixture of Biblical passages with phrases that can be traced back to the Psalms, Paul’s epistle to the Romans, the prophecies of Isaiah, the gospel of Matthew, and the Apocalypse of St. John.
However, a different form of quotation also emerges in the JSH, one that is more familiar to modern sensibilities, and more similar to the documentary and scholarly citation format established by secular standards of scholarship. In contrast to uncited blends of biblical phrases, the JSH also adds chapter and verse citations at significant points in the narrative. In one notable example, Smith gives formal citation for the scriptural prompting for his own first prayer, “I was one day reading the Epistle of James, First Chapter and fifth verse which reads, ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.’” Earlier Puritan sermons followed this more rigorously cited standard of sermonizing, being more text-based than orally generated. Contrast this to the 1835 narrative also describing his decision to ask God.

Being wrought up in my mind respecting the subject of Religion, and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment, matter involving eternal consequences. Being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove, and there bowed down before the Lord, under a realizing sense, ask and you shall receive, knock and it shall be opened, seek and you shall find, and again, if any man lack wisdom, let [him ask]235 of God who giveth to all men liberally & upbraideth not. (120)

While this earlier version does indeed use words from the Epistle of James, it also cites other verses from disparate sources in the Bible with no source attribution. The earlier implicit heteroglossic language, or dialogue between Joseph Smith’s “normal” language and the borrowed language of the Bible in preceding versions, is at times made explicit in the 1838 narrative. In this later version, the boundary between biblical and contemporary language is clearly demarcated more often than not, with one mode of expression pronouncing authoritative statements and the other describing present-day application. The standard Joseph Smith History thus condenses the rambling and blended biblical language of earlier versions and provides some limited direct citations. How does this change the genre expectations of the text? By explicitly
citing biblical passages, readers are invited to test the validity of this text by referencing these scriptures for themselves. By upholding a standard biblical text as an authority, this narrative invites a reading interpretation based on argument and reason. Rather than simply setting a tone with biblical language, these direct quotes point toward a thesis, a lesson to be taught. The concluding sentence in verse 26 of this first vision narrative in the revised 1838 history lends to this didactic aspect of the text, “I had found the testimony of James to be true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.” Thus the “any of you” referred to in James 1.5 can then be given universal application, with Joseph Smith’s story as exemplum. This use of quotation minimizes its own aesthetic or performative qualities in that it points away from itself and to the message it conveys. The narrative turns this quotation into a building block for argument.

In addition to the aesthetic and rational incorporation of biblical references, through an amalgamation of both of these kinds of intertextual allusions, the JSH creates a typological narrative that goes one step further than both the documentary quotations and the embedded oral culture previously identified. This further step is crucial to understanding the emplotment at work in the text. Take for example Smith’s description of the religious atmosphere of his boyhood experience. The ‘stir’ in the environs of Palmyra is demonstrated through a particular kind of quotation, “some crying, ‘Lo here’ and some Lo there.” This quotation is presumably not one from the actual streets of Palmyra, as it in fact can be found in the New Testament, Matthew 24.23. Why include this indirect reference to biblical language to describe a contemporary scene rather than the interior religious musings of the narrator? As readers we are not to take this as verbatim documentation of the appeals of ministers heard by Smith, nor should we take this wording as a simple stylistic imitation of biblical language in order to create a sacred register for
the narrative. Instead, because this is a reference to a specific biblical scenario, as readers we can know what *kind* of preachers these are. Without a direct citation, this quotation counts on the biblical familiarity of its readers. In the verses alluded to in Matthew, Jesus warns his followers of people in later generations who would preach false Christs. Through the use of this uncited quote, the preachers in Joseph Smith’s community are thus linked to the apostate or heretical Christians identified in the New Testament. The importance of this quote is based on an understanding of the history of the world as described in the Bible. This is a typological construction in that the American 19th century public re-enact ancient, canonized texts, thereby claiming fulfillment of biblical prophecies.

A second kind of allusion is found in the narrative when Smith describes the local community’s rejection of his visionary experience. Smith expands the narration of this opposition by echoing Paul the Apostle with his question, “who am I that I can withstand God?” (Acts 11.17). He then recounts a very brief summary of Paul’s bold testimony of Christ before the King Agrippa. This reference is explicitly cited—it does not rely on the reader’s cultural knowledge of biblical stories. But while this allusion is bold in linking Joseph Smith to Paul, it does not claim a *fulfillment* of prophecy. While Joseph is still validating his own experience with this allusion to Paul’s similar story of miraculous belief, he does not claim that this similarity was biblically foretold. Thus this construction does not necessarily rise out of a cosmic sense of divine history. That is, while Joseph Smith may set himself up as a Paul figure, his narrative does not seek to prove historical design. The narrative shows a poetic or sympathetic similarity between characters and situations, but it does not claim a necessary historical link between the two.
To summarize: the use of quotation can be formed into three categories. The first is journalistic and literal: a transparent reportage of lived events that gives authority to language itself. Second is a usage that overlaps with oral conventions of an American Protestant sermon tradition and is performative in its evocation of biblical language. The third category of quotation matches historical or otherwise scholarly writing, relying on citation of documents and references to outside authority.

Like the contrast between framing device and narrative content, the differences between types of quotation show a variety of genres at work in the narrative in its embedded heteroglossia. Found data, seen in the form of quotation that is journalistic in nature and using contemporary language, directs readers toward the kind of secular history that might be found in court testimony. But this idea of history’s deep respect for records and language interaction also lends itself to the idea that linguistic dialogue is in itself a sacred activity. But the language register of all narrative versions is also consistently interlaced with biblical language, thus always situating itself within a larger context of history. When these varied registers interact, they create a typological narrative. This dialogue between past and present fulfills an emplotting function, filling in gaps of sequence and motive with biblical precedents, and the very notion of a religious historical narrative sets up a “sequential” theology: Joseph Smith’s First Vision narrative continually reaches back into the biblical past in order to find a model for its own

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22 Hansen, Klaus. “Mormonism and the American Experience.” on Joseph Smith cultural context’s practice of mixing different epistemological positions “Moreover, these people did not tend to make the distinction that a modern, scientifically oriented world makes between the natural and the supernatural. Rather, the two merged into one. And the validity of experiences in both worlds could be verified by a kind of common sense ‘Baconianism’—a crude process of hypothesis verification that was also part of such cults as Mesmerism and Spiritualism” (42)
divine design. This is the essence of Hayden White’s definition of myth in interaction with the ideal of pure history as found data.

1.4 Implications of dialogism in the Joseph Smith History

This analysis has brought to the foreground a dialogue of multiple registers in Joseph Smith’s personal history. One of the simple results of this heteroglossia is that it is difficult to assign it to one particular textual genre: its process of shifting registers brings it both in and out of alignment with categories such as the Christian conversion narrative, the prophetic autobiography, and the institutional narrative or millenarian narrative. Its heteroglossia could also be interpreted as a literary form of code switching: in tracing the developmental stages of this text we uncover a writerly experiment in which the narrator is always rethinking audience and purpose, shifting registers to lend meaning to raw information. As the social act which motivates the text shifts, so does the language and narrative design. It is important to keep in mind that in the JSH, despite its multiple versions and careful editing, there is still a distinctly naïve quality to this heteroglossia. Why? Because, unlike fiction or parodic narrative, this is a text to be taken in earnest. It is meant to be true. This preoccupation with truth, however, is evidenced in experimental forms of language that in their turn present varied definitions or forms of truth itself: In this narrative, we find truth as “found data” or raw experience, truth as aphoristic assertion, truth as religious creed, and truth as evidence of divine plan (through experience, through repetition of biblical types and circumstances, and through the fulfillment of scriptural prediction or prophecy). In examining the heteroglossia of the Joseph Smith History, the found data or experiential standards of truth that are dictated by documentary history share the stage with these other myth or narrative-driven forms of truth.
What emerges as well is a kind of textual conversion process, or a continual bridging of horizons of expectation: through its dialogue between language of the past and the present, of secular and religious sectors, of collective and personal perspectives, this text makes connections in order to bring these modes of discourse into compatibility while maintaining their differences. The individual experience of the boy Joseph Smith is converted into a narrative that is accessible to a collective readership through the process of emplotment. But through the intertextual references and heterglossic framing devices analyzed here, various plots emerge. Joseph is by turns an innocent convert disengaged from society, a prophet receiving keys from heaven to form a new religion, an American farmer without pretensions, a preacher of the holy scriptures. His individuality is in constant tension with the social context in which his story situates itself.

As mentioned previously, much of the scholarship I turned up in preparing for this chapter consisted of historical analysis. There is comparatively little in the way of specifically literary analysis of the First Vision narrative. My research seemed to make obvious to me the magnetic draw of emplotment not just in narrative texts, but in scholarly analysis, prompting readers to make (out of sometimes contradictory material) a cohesive, even monologic, text. But what is interesting about Mormon theology as seen from this particular narrative point of view is its complex dialogue of ideas and its quest for a kind of comprehensive and pluralistic realism, not its monologism. This may be considered in part a peculiarity of the Mormon culture itself. As claimed by such scholars as Brooke in Refiner’s Fire, the cultural sources of Mormonism can be traced to religious and philosophical movements as widely ranging as from Puritanism to Free Masonry, to Anabaptist Millenarians. On the other hand, this effort at comprehensiveness can be seen in the broader scope of 19th century philosophical and religious movements across the United States. As Ann Taves asserts in her study, American religion of the 19th century
experienced an explosion of expressive modes, resulting in multiple movements utilizing multiple modes of discourse at variance with each other. The Joseph Smith History exhibits this multiplicity. Its text can be seen as a reflection of Bakhtin’s theories on novelistic realism as it gives voice to the multiple facets of a complex contemporary society.

Smith’s last article of faith, written in the 1842 Wentworth Letter also reasserts this kind of comprehensiveness: “if there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” The question of language then becomes a potentially thorny one. What kind of discourse can serve this new religion that claims in fact to be a restoration of all truth? Is it inevitable that this culture of spiritual abundance be concretized and simplified in one coherent and monologic narrative? Or is it possible to create a narrative that lends itself to embrace a larger vision of religious experience? This analysis does not claim that the First Vision narrative is successful in creating a text that comprehends the vastness of Mormonism’s concept of truth. However, the Joseph Smith History, as a sometimes contradictory dialogue of literary styles and agenda, does demonstrate the complexity of creating a text that situates individual religious experience within the context of collective ideology or history. This text in particular reveals a feature of hybrid utterance. Through diversity of language, heteroglossia, the text expresses its own process of conversion, showing the shifts and interactions necessary in dynamic interactions of multiple voices and genres. But in place of a strict teleology, these multiple changes create an interactive and dynamic sense of religious identity formation and textual expression. The tension between individual experience and the collective, or ineffability and eloquence is performed within the dialogism of the multiple precedents to, and their traces within the Joseph Smith History First Vision narrative.
Chapter 2 - Fear and Trembling: Defining Genre, Defining Faith

In a discussion of the relationship between form and content in literature, it is hard to ignore Søren Kierkegaard. His preoccupation with style and varied modes of discourse dominate his writings, and his collected works are a heteroglossic interplay of pseudonymous authors each voicing a distinct view. His theories of epistemology and ontology never stray far from this preoccupation. In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard combines his commentary on genre with an investigation of faith itself.

Although Søren Kierkegaard is a contemporary with Joseph Smith, their writings are not often analyzed from the same interpretative approach. However, despite the fact that Kierkegaard writes on the other side of the globe and from within the culturally elite context of post-Hegelian, post-Romantic academia, worlds away from the rough and ready cultural setting of Joseph Smith, both writers speak to a similar anxiety of expression: How does one tackle the process of writing according to traditional genre conventions or established modes of discourse while conveying the ideas and experiences of a potentially ineffable subject, religious truth?

Kierkegaard’s approach to this subject differs vastly from that of Joseph Smith. On the one hand, Smith writes from the literal frontier of Western culture, with a frontiersman’s cultural knowledge of texts and textual theory (that is, limited), and his rudimentary literacy borrows with naive facility mainly from oral and textual Biblical culture. He experiences the writerly problems of ideological expression without formulating any particular theoretical approach and tackles the writing process as a means to an end. In contrast, Kierkegaard’s range of scholarship
comprises libraries of classical and modern literature, publications of satirical social commentary and literary gossip, and a centuries-old wealth of performing arts. His life of relative leisure produced writings that are saturated with artistic and literary allusions, from Mozart’s operas to Lessing’s dramaturgy to Germanic folk tales. And all these are referenced with a kind of hyper-consciousness of the writer’s own privilege of cultural wealth. Søren Kierkegaard’s treatment of genre, therefore, is not a naively genuine struggle of expression, but a meta-commentary on genre itself. In so doing, he certainly responds to and pushes against contemporary trends of philosophy of his day, but he also seeks to go beyond these trends as his study reflects upon a vast history of ideas and expression. Throughout the text of Fear and Trembling, his meditation on faith, Kierkegaard implicitly asks why an analysis of style and structure is necessary to an investigation of ontological or epistemological questions of faith. The linguistic relationships between varied modes of expression become a performance of a more comprehensive conceptual model of individual and collective religious experience.

Thus Kierkegaard presents a double endeavor in his works, and this is particularly evident in Fear and Trembling. On the one hand, Kierkegaard’s focus is expression itself, a subject which all philosophers, poets, or anyone interested in language can read with interest. On the other hand, in seeking to define the parameters of genre, Kierkegaard’s various texts do not abandon the quest for real content, and they seek to develop a definition of faith that would interest the most devout truth-seeker. The combining of these endeavors can be illuminating for both sides. This combination brings questions of textual authority, reader response, concept and phenomenon to a necessary foreground. Through his multi-voiced and dialogic texts Kierkegaard brings the concept of faith into the realm of established philosophical discourse. But by situating his definition of faith within a text that also seeks genre definition through the construction of
heteroglossic voices, Kierkegaard brings crucial questions about ideological texts to the foreground. This study will examine Kierkegaard’s demonstration of and differentiation between literary genres. I will also address the relationship between this genre discussion and the definition of faith in Kierkegaard’s text. These questions necessarily center around the establishment of textual authority and the burden of time and historicity on expressive modes. The question of a genre-based response on the part of a reader and its role in situating the individual in relation to the universal in the realm of faith becomes a process of defining religious conversion. Kierkegaard thus examines the function of expressive texts in the process of personal conversion, that is, of genuine learning and genuine change on the part of the individual.

While these questions appear throughout many of Kierkegaard’s writings, this analysis focuses on Fear and Trembling as a more clearly elucidated exploration of faith and the variety of expressive modes. Fear and Trembling is devoted to defining and demonstrating the concept of faith. The subtitle of Fear and Trembling, “a dialectical lyric,” also establishes the text as a demonstration of two opposing textual genres: philosophical or dialectical writing and lyric or poetic writing. Fear and Trembling seeks to define the criteria and functions of these two textual genres while it simultaneously seeks to define faith. In the process it also addresses the relationship between genre itself (or the variety of expressive modes) and the reality of faith. I also examine Kierkegaard’s first serious philosophical endeavor, The Concept of Irony, as a work that laid the foundation for his definitions of genre and opened the door to discussions of faith. Other references will be made to Either/Or, The Book on Adler, and Concluding Unscientific Postscript, along with some of Kierkegaard’s journals and drafts.

2.1 Kierkegaard’s religious, philosophical, and literary background
Kierkegaard’s writings straddle fields of devotional religion, academic philosophy, and imaginative literature. Kierkegaard’s biography shows a similarly eclectic blend of educational, familial, and cultural influences that place the developing Kierkegaard as a potential bridge. An examination of these influences within his life helps to illuminate central preoccupations in his work: First is his unrelenting outsider’s stance stemming from his persistent interiority, which fueled his drive to subvert the established academic institutions of his day. A second preoccupation is with the interactions of aesthetic genres with traditionally philosophical subjects, especially as applied to the division between historicity and reason, or phenomenon and concept. Also evident in Kierkegaard’s intellectual development is his focus on realism or the “life-view” in narrative texts.

Søren Kierkegaard’s biography reveals a personal religious development that is both engaged and ambivalent. His family background provided him with a solid interest in both theological and institutional aspects of religion, with his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, figuring as a strong intellectual and spiritual influence. On the one hand a Leibnizian and proficient secular debater (Hannay 36), Søren’s father was also devoutly Christian with ties of sympathy for (though not consistent participation in the meetings of) the Moravian Brothers. As Alastair Hannay describes in his biography of Kierkegaard, the Moravians showed similarities to the anti-establishment tendencies expressed in Kierkegaard’s writings: “Moravian teaching was almost diametrically opposed to the liberal-rationalist Lutheranism prevailing at the time. It spoke to the feelings rather than to the intellect, was anti-clerical and preached inner rebirth and indifference to the trappings of bourgeois life” (Hannay 37). The Moravian Brothers were an offshoot of the Pietist movement, which in turn was inspired by separatist monastic movements from within the Catholic tradition. Texts rising out of these Catholic movements became
prominent in Kierkegaard’s own spiritual development. One that is frequently referenced within Kierkegaard’s journals and notebooks is *Imitation of Christ*, a medieval text that has consistently found a strong readership among Catholics and Protestants alike and that focuses on a highly personal spiritual journey, a philosophy strongly aligned with Pietism. Kierkegaard identified his own rejection of worldliness and social engagement with the Pietist movement in this passage from his journal: “Yes, indeed pietism (properly understood, not simply in the sense of abstaining from dancing and such externals, no, in the sense of witnessing for the truth and suffering for it, together with the understanding that suffering in this world belongs to being a Christian and that a shrewd and secular conformity with this world is unchristian), yes, indeed pietism is the one and only consequence of Christianity.” (JP 3, 3378 quoted in Barnett 201). Christopher Barnett traces this influence on Kierkegaard’s world view: “Kierkegaard learned from the Pietists that humans are not so much ‘political animals’ as ‘spiritual beings.’ He also learned from them that social relations—no matter their scale—can flourish only when persons realize their spiritual natures.” (Barnett 210) Kierkegaard’s writings manifest a wariness toward society, its institutions and fleeting trends; rather, his writings reconstruct the inherent pathos but inestimable value of the personal quest for the divine.

Despite his personal sympathy with separatist Pietist ideology, the young Soren Kierkegaard initially tried for a career within the state-sponsored church. After some schooling at the Royal Pastoral Seminary, Kierkegaard preached his first sermon in Holmen’s church in 1841, (the same year that he defended his MA Dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*). Early drafts for this sermon foreshadow the later publication of *Fear and Trembling*, focusing on the subject of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, but these drafts were later abandoned. The final draft sermon was a discourse from a New Testament subject, which won some praise from the more
intellectual of his listeners (Hannay 138). But the young Søren did not thrive as a clergyman and gave up a career as pastor, leaving the way open for his brother Peter to become the clergyman of the family. Peter Kierkegaard eventually attained prominence as the Bishop of Aalborg. While some scholars observe that perhaps Kierkegaard’s Pietist/Moravian sympathies put him at odds with a state-sponsored ecclesiastical career, Christopher Barnett points out the importance of realizing that the church (whether Catholic or in its Protestant varieties) experienced a long history of anti-institutional movements within its confines. Corrective movements within the church institution were not new with Kierkegaard’s writings; instead they were and are part of the dynamic tension of ecclesiastical systems. Religiously speaking, Kierkegaard chose this corrective, questioning role, while simultaneously professing faith. While he himself and countless students of his work dwell on the paradox of this position, it is a pragmatically viable one. In other words, neither the questioning believer nor believing polemicist is a radically new creature introduced by Kierkegaard, but one that has existed within Christian institutions for centuries. But Kierkegaard still presents problems to those who identify him as a religious writer. What exacerbates the murkiness of Kierkegaard’s religious positioning is his insistence on maintaining a philosophical or dialectic position rather than ecclesiastical stance and in seeking out an academic rather than devout readership. Today Kierkegaard’s writings are interpreted as pro-religious by some and as nihilistic by others, in part because

23 “The commentators noted that it had been ‘very well memorized’, ‘the voice was clear’, the tone ‘dignified and forceful’. The sermon had also been written ‘with much thought and sharp logic.’ They added that although admittedly the thought was ‘consistent’, its ‘wealth of ideas’ put it beyond the reach of the average person. One commentator remarked that Kierkegaard had represented ‘the struggles of the soul’ as being far too difficult to have any ‘appeal’ to average people ‘to whom such matters are unfamiliar’. The language, however, won ‘great’ praise.” (Hannay 138)
religious aspects of his texts are blended with the stylistic genre conventions of contemporary philosophical discourse.

Søren Kierkegaard’s background and education prepared him for the academic philosopher’s life as well. Educated in classics and rhetoric, Kierkegaard defended his dissertation on Socrates, titled *The Concept of Irony*, in 1841. With this accomplishment, he would have been qualified to fill an academic position within a university system such as his alma mater, the University of Copenhagen. But, just as Kierkegaard ultimately rejected a mainstream career in the church, he also failed to find a niche within institutions of higher learning. This did not prevent him from writing with a kind of academic authority. But his independent position outside academic systems reflects his ideological outsider position as well. In particular, much of Kierkegaard’s writing is in response to Hegelian philosophy, starting from an early imitation of Hegel and shifting to various positions of antagonism. Despite this preoccupation with Hegel, it may be fairly said that much of Kierkegaard’s familiarity with Hegelian philosophy came second-hand (through the commentaries and writings of Danish and German scholars in Kierkegaard’s more immediate community of thinkers like Poul Møller, J. L. Heilberg, Adolph Adler, and others), and that his writings respond instead to the overwhelmingly dominant schools of thought that rose out of Hegel’s individual influence.²⁴ Kierkegaard’s philosophical protest is therefore a response not only to a particular thinker but also to the prevailing philosophical schools of his day. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel died in 1831, but a

²⁴ “Although Kierkegaard used Hegelian concepts and techniques at certain points, his knowledge of Hegel remained superficial. He read some of Hegel’s Danish and German disciples and was familiar with a series of second-rank speculative theists, but he seemed to lack interest enough to immerse himself in the work of any single thinker. His attitude toward philosophy is perhaps summarized in his remark of 1837: ‘Philosophy is life’s dry nurse; it can stay with us but not give us milk’” (Thompson 57).
decade after his death, when *The Concept of Irony* launched itself on the faculty of University of Copenhagen, the academic world (dominated by Germany) was still a Hegelian world, full of offshoots of Hegel’s systems of universal principles. It is against these secondary schools of thought that Kierkegaard pushes in such works as *Fear and Trembling*. In much of Kierkegaard’s writing, Hegel stands as a kind of figurehead for the construction of intellectual systems, the facilitation of abstract thought, and the championing of progressive world history. Thus, while Kierkegaard’s aspirations to religious authority proved tenuous and non-committal, his attitude toward expounding philosophy within the hallowed institutions of higher learning proved likewise ambivalent as they both revere and subvert institutional learning. His writings pushed against not just individual thinkers but against the academic institution as a whole as he wrote against both bureaucratic and intellectual systems.

It is illuminating to compare Kierkegaard’s relationship with religious institutions with his relationship with philosophical systems and institutions. In many ways, Kierkegaard wields his religious stance of faith against philosophical systems and modes of discourse. Consider, for example, Johannes de Silentio’s insistence on the disingenuousness of philosophers who claim to go “beyond faith:” “In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. It perhaps would be rash to ask where they are going, whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture to assume that everyone has faith, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of going further”(7). Johannes de Silentio holds up this concept of faith as the one thing that will stump his bigheaded philosopher contemporaries—as the chink in their systematic armor of ideas. On the other hand, Kierkegaard’s stance in regards to both kinds of institutional authority, whether religious or academic, is corrective, and he is quick to find fault with contemporary establishments. As he demonstrates especially in *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard characterizes
the institutional church as standing in opposition to individual subjective experience—as yet another manifestation of a potentially oppressive system.

Kierkegaard pushes against these systems with his fierce defense of individual reality and insistence on the contrariness and idiosyncrasy of experience. And while this ideological stance comes through in the message of various of Kierkegaard’s texts, it is just as effectively demonstrated in the eclectic and disjointed style of his writings, a style which borrows from artistic genres and incorporates them into philosophical discourse. Pattison describes the effect of his foray into the arts as a deliberate attack on academic philosophy:

If—as library cataloging systems tend to assume—Kierkegaard is to be read as a ‘philosopher,’ it needs to be noted that Kierkegaard was a philosopher who had the very self-conscious intention of corrupting the purity of academic philosophical discourse. That is, he was not simply aiming at attacking certain philosophical positions but was seeking through his manner of writing to show the distortions inherent in the conventions of philosophical writing that prevailed in his contemporary world. In support of this assertion, we have, most obviously, the evidence of his actual practice, in which he mixes rigorously abstract argumentation with all manner of anecdotal material, humor, and trivia that often resembles the literary ephemera of popular feuilleton literature. (Pattison “Kierkegaard and Genre” 491)

Kierkegaard’s outsider stance had much to do with his focus on the subject itself, wary of any systematizing structure that could belittle the experience of the self. Eclectic and aesthetic modes of expression became Kierkegaard’s recourse to give voice to the subject over the institution.

*Kierkegaard’s background in genre philosophy*

Kierkegaard’s interactions with religious and philosophical institutions show his affinity for the outsider’s stance, the corrective position. But Kierkegaard’s interest in the various literary and artistic moderns, both Danish and broadly European, point us toward the real impetus behind his philosophical innovation. Søren Kierkegaard was interested in various forms of artistic expression as alternatives to philosophical modes of discourse—not as alternatives to deep
thinking but as a way to convey concepts and ideas without resorting to stylistic conventions of discursive rhetoric. Crucial to this interest is his insistence on the “real” and his championing of the phenomenological against the dominance of the abstract. Fascinated by the theater, opera, and other creative media, Kierkegaard’s writings are lavish in their praise of performance and artistry, even while dealing with philosophical subjects. Kierkegaard’s passion for varied artistic genres and their philosophical application can be traced to a number of cultural influences. One is a contemporary and fellow Dane, Johan Ludvig Heiberg, who directed him toward the theoretical study of genre itself. A second is the German philosopher and dramaturge of the previous century, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, also a genre scholar and religious rationalist outsider. Also of importance were various writers from within the larger Romantic movement such as folklorists Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm and historical romance writer, Sir Walter Scott. These various writers ventured into both scholarly and creative writing: All were literary historians of sorts, working to transfer older forms of artistic culture into the context of their own day. With their influence, Kierkegaard was able to delve more deeply into the interaction of immediacy and reflection, or experience and rational thought as all of these writers experimented with genre as a way of tweaking these two poles of comparison.

As a prominent dramatist and scholar in Kierkegaard’s contemporary Copenhagen, Johan Ludvig Heiberg exerted an important influence on Kierkegaard’s theories of genre. Son of an exiled satirical dramatist, Heiberg spent some time abroad in Germany with his father and also teaching at the University of Kiel before returning to his native Denmark and starting a revival of vaudeville on the Danish stage, while still maintaining interest in serious “high-art” theater. Heiberg was an anti-Romantic, defending satire, humor, and wit against what he perceived as an all too serious Danish Romanticism. He was also interested in a close examination of the
appropriateness of style to content, and strove for a balance of form and subject (Pattison 477). His differentiation of various art forms according to a “dialectic of immediacy and reflection” was especially attractive to the young Kierkegaard (Hannay 16). In Heiberg’s system, for example, music provided hearers with a purely sensuous immediacy, which allowed for little if any reflection. Literary arts (including drama), on the other hand, contained the potential for a harmonious balance of immediacy and reflection. Heiberg’s writings inspired Kierkegaard to recreate a similar dialectic of immediacy and reflection by constructing interactions of genres within his own literary works. There are, however, theoretical differences in Heiberg’s and Kierkegaard’s respective approaches to genre. As both dramatist and philosopher/critic, Heiberg prioritized the role of the philosopher. Heiberg’s world was a Platonist’s world, in which the philosopher governed the taste and passions of the people. Like other classicists before him, Heiberg also valued harmony over paradox, while Kierkegaard foregrounded paradox and idiosyncrasy. Pattison argues, “What Kierkegaard himself produces seems not to be a body of literary work in which the relationship between content and form is one of balanced reciprocity (which Heiberg insisted was the sine qua non of all good literary work) but of conflict and incommensurability” (Pattison 478).

A study of Johan Heiberg is useful in positioning Kierkegaard within the immediate scholarly context of his contemporaneous Copenhagen and in pointing out his intense interest in the variety of the arts. However, Kierkegaard’s personal and philosophic relationship with Heiberg also illustrates Kierkegaard’s insistent outsider stance within this same cultural milieu. Although Kierkegaard started out an enthusiastic supporter of Heiberg’s philosophy of genre, this changed after Heiberg published a negative review of Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, a review that Kierkegaard saw as exhibiting a misunderstanding of his fundamental argument. After this
incident, his praise of the philosopher was greatly tempered. Kierkegaard seems to have found it difficult to maintain philosophical allegiance with any living scholars, especially ones who, like Heiberg, may have enjoyed a privileged status within the hierarchy of academia or publishing circles or took a critical stance against himself.

Kierkegaard’s hesitancy to ally himself with contemporary members of the establishment and his quest for mavericks and loners also finds demonstration in his seeking the past for literary and philosophical heroes, such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, philosopher of theatrical forms and other creative arts. Lessing is referred to at various points in Fear and Trembling as one of the narrator’s literary role models, and Kierkegaard devotes an entire section of the Concluding Unscientific Postscript to praise him via an examination of his subjectivity. Throughout Kierkegaard’s works, Lessing appears as a kind of posthumous mentor, and in Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard pays him tribute: “what he says is undeniably very brief, somewhat evasive, but since I am always very happy when I can find the opportunity to include Lessing, I promptly do so” (88). Lessing fell easily into outsider stance with writings that straddled varied fields of scholarship: religion, history, theater. In his “Laocoön” he delineates the cognitive differences between the experience of the plastic or spatial arts and the temporal arts

25 Kierkegaard continues this praise, “Lessing was not only one of the most comprehensive minds Germany has had, he not only displayed an extremely rare precision in his knowledge, which enables one to rely on him and his autopsies without fear of being taken in by loose, undocumented quotations, half-understood phrases picked up by unreliable compendiums, or of being disoriented by a stupid trumpeting of something new that the ancients have presented far better—Lessing also had a most uncommon gift of explaining what he himself had understood. With that he stopped; in our day people go further and explain more than they themselves have understood.” (88)

26 Hannay asserts the position of Climacus in the Postscript, “The kinship Climacus seeks with Lessing, then, and in the ironic spirit of Lessing himself, lies at the level of subjective thinking, which apart from other things is the thinking of someone in continual development and never resting on a ‘result.’” (Hannay 293).
(as in poetry or music). More importantly, he questioned the compatibility of history and theoretical claims, asserting an unbridged gap of reasoning between historical actuality and conceptual truth. Lessing proposed the necessity of a “leap” from the historical phenomenon to theoretical statements, asserting that Christian dogma could not logically be concluded from historical events. In his “Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft” Lessing asserts, “Accidental truths of history can never serve as proof for eternal truths of reason, and the transition by which one would base an eternal truth upon historical testimony is a leap” (qtd in Hannay 293). For Lessing, history as genre was not compatible with the genre of theological texts or dogmatic assertions. Kierkegaard, like Lessing, saw the relationship between concept and phenomenon as a conflict that was too glibly passed over by contemporary philosophers. But Lessing’s interest in artistic genres and his insistence on their distinctive functions also provided Kierkegaard with precedents of thought and expressive modes. Kierkegaard’s project in *Fear and Trembling* is centered both on the cognitive act of the leap of faith and on the leap required by the juxtaposition of diverse genres or modes of expression.

Prompted by this conflict, Kierkegaard focused increasingly on the expression of historical reality, of the phenomenon. This is seen as well in his allegiance to writers such as Thomasine Gyllembourg. Gyllembourg, the mother of Johan Ludvig Heiberg, wrote novels which fulfilled Kierkegaard’s ideal of the “life-view” (Hannay 108). For Kierkegaard, this life-view narrative was grounded in reality, epitomized by the realist and folkloric narrative methods of Walter Scott – *not* by the writings of Hans Christian Andersen, whose narratives Kierkegaard criticized as too fanciful and disconnected from real life. For Kierkegaard (and for many others), Walter Scott was the man of the age. And it was significant for Kierkegaard that he achieved this stature not as a philosopher but as a “mere” historical romance writer, one who blended the
prosaic with the legendary, who brought characters to life without preaching morality or bringing readers into esoteric flights of fantasy. In Kierkegaard’s view, Scott’s works claimed a truth more real than the systematic philosophies of the age, not despite but because they ventured beyond philosophers’ established rhetorical modes.

Inspired by imaginative writers like Scott, Kierkegaard brought to his own philosophical writings his love affair with the art of story-telling and character portrayal. His writings demonstrate both his loyalty to the “life-view” and Heiberg’s original focus on the dialectic of reflection and immediacy, which bring him ever closer to a reconciliation of the phenomenon and concept. Additionally, his closely juxtaposed genre conventions as he constructs diverse modes of expression within the same text recreate the cognitive leap described by Lessing. In Fear and Trembling, Johannes de Silentio approaches Lessing’s “ugly ditch” of cognitive dissonance, and although he never claims to execute the leap successfully, he traces its path through his text.

2.2 Examination of text: The Concept of Irony lays the groundwork

Of Kierkegaard’s prolific writings, his dissertation, The Concept of Irony, sets a particular precedent for the discussion of literary genres in Kierkegaard’s later writings. Defended the same year that Kierkegaard delivered his one and only church sermon, the dissertation itself positions itself as a textual gadfly in relation to the philosophical establishment. Although the faculty accepted his defense, granting him the title of Magister Artium, Kierkegaard was criticized for his style: informal and nonstandard. Kierkegaard had already received special permission to write it in Danish rather than the standard Latin, with the justification that his own language was more appropriate for his consideration of the modern
period (Concept “Introduction” xi), but his irregularities of tone and digressive paths of reasoning were too much for some of the faculty. Kierkegaard had anticipated this criticism, but defended it as his own personal effort to “lighten the burden” of his subject with an “ease of style” that was prompted by his metaphorical need to “sing at my work” (“Introduction” xii).

Both the unusual style and important subject matter of The Concept of Irony laid the groundwork for discursive and philosophical principles that surface later in Kierkegaard’s works: First, Kierkegaard explores the relation between phenomenon and concept through an examination of the figure of Socrates. The focus on figure keeps subjectivity ever-present, especially as seen through the examination of the daimonion of Socrates. It is also tied to the concept of literary genre as it introduces a personal point of view through subjective modes of expression.

Kierkegaard not only presents through expository discourse but also demonstrates in a kind of literary performance the idea that the subject of his dissertation, irony, cannot be clearly presented within expository genre conventions. Thus, although irony may emerge within the context of certain genres, irony itself becomes a kind of non-genre through its infinite negativity. This possibility of a non-genre opens the door for a later paradoxical discourse of faith as presented in Fear and Trembling.

The Concept of Irony sets precedents for the centrality of history and the real in the later work. Reader expectations toward a philosophical treatise on irony might not anticipate a historical narrative. But Kierkegaard introduces his subject with an insistence on the consideration of a “historical-actual” figure: Socrates (9). In fact, as Kierkegaard analyzes the

27 “Before I proceed to an exposition of the concept of irony, it is necessary to make sure that I have a reliable and authentic view of Socrates’ historical-actual, phenomenological existence with respect to the question of its possible relation to the transformed view that was his fate through enthusiastic or envious contemporaries. This becomes inescapably necessary, because the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates. Concepts, like individuals,
portrayal of Socrates by Xenophon, Plato, and Aristophanes in turn, he always comes back to the question of the “phenomenon” of Socrates. His priorities are clear: first the real, then the abstract, and he explains that it is only through the historical figure that this concept can be brought to light. Borrowing from Socrates’ own claim to be the midwife of ideas, he claims firmly that, “the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates” (9). This insistence on the historical-actual Socrates leads us to Kierkegaard’s definition of genre, which is crucially linked to the discussion of the construction of personality within text and of a personal point of view. For Kierkegaard, figures such as Don Juan (especially in his iteration as Mozart and Da Ponte’s Don Giovanni), Faust, and the Wandering Jew were a fascination not just for their character concepts, but also in their varied realization within the arts. In other words, his fascination is not only in their abstract personalities or symbolic representations of ideas, but in how these characters come to life through diverse representations and performances. For Kierkegaard each performance or literary realization of these figures exhibits more than just the variety of choices of style and expression. Each of these performances (in Bakhtin’s term, each utterance) presents a new conceptualization of the character, with fresh nuances of theory, ontological import, and philosophical significance.

In *The Concept of Irony*, the representations of the figure of Socrates are seen both through the first person and third person perspective. That is, Socrates is a both a philosopher-as-speaker and philosopher-as-figure. Although his ideas, his dialogic method, and his martyrdom for intellectual integrity give him expression as the father of philosophy, Socrates can only be known through the portrayal of others, and his own voice is therefore filtered through secondary have their history and are no more able than they to resist the dominion of time, but in and through it all they nevertheless harbor a kind of homesickness for the place of their birth” (9).
texts. In other words, he is subjected to the genre interpretation of others, as Kierkegaard shows in his analysis of Plato’s dialogues, Xenophon’s history, and Aristophanes’ comic theater. For Plato, Socrates becomes a poetic figure; for Xenophon he is a documentary one; and for Aristophanes, Socrates is a comic figure.

This centrality of figure is also prominent in Either/Or, which centers around a Don Juan figure; the Book on Adler, which takes the contemporary Adolf Adler poet-prophet as its subject; and Fear and Trembling, which uses the figure of Abraham to convey the concept of faith. All of these texts also marry the question of figure with modes of discourse or the lens of genre. Adding to these historically recognizable figures as objects of scrutiny, Kierkegaard’s texts also depend on the personality of their writer. After The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard’s authorship splits into a variety of pseudonymous voices. Each pseudonym represents a subjective character—a personality rather than an objective generator of argument. For Kierkegaard, ideological discourse is thereby necessarily grounded in situation and point of view. This idea can be rephrased in Bakhtin’s terminology: each text must recognize itself as an “utterance” in order to resist dangerous levels of abstraction and totalization. Just as Socrates is a necessary subject but one who is also portrayed through various genres, so are all authors or speakers. Humans speak through the filter of genre, as Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms attest. Thus the lens of genre is blended with the lens of subjectivity.

In this way, The Concept of Irony’s discussion of genre asserts the necessary marriage of form and content. The text points to the dialogue of voices as an exchange not just of ideas but also of genres, styles, or modes of discourse. For example, Plato is characterized as a poet, one whose linguistic methods, even while creating the possibility of dialogue, are distinct from the negative irony of Socrates. His text thereby foregrounds the dialogue of voices as an interaction
between his own poetic voice and Socrates’ phenomenological existence (30-32). While Plato is the idealist of tragedy, Xenophon, as the empirical historian of finitude, creates an entirely different Socrates, while Aristophanes brings yet another version of Socrates onto the stage as comic ideality. It may be said that there is nothing groundbreaking on Kierkegaard’s part in identifying these writers with distinct genres; however, what Kierkegaard does add to the discussion of genre is his insistence on the role each of these genres play in questing for the truest representation of the historical-actual. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard defines genre not only by style, but also by its particular relationship with reality. The three expressive modes of Xenophon, Plato, and Aristophanes all strive to convey the historical reality of Socrates, and Kierkegaard goes to great lengths to judge the relative success of their endeavors. He dismisses Xenophon as obtuse and naïve but grants both Plato and Aristophanes praise for their literary constructions, ultimately pronouncing Aristophanes the “truest” representation of Socrates.\(^{28}\) The chronological relationship between these writers and their subject is not dismissed. Aristophanes is after all Socrates’ contemporary. This gives greater credence to the lifelike quality of his portrayal. Kierkegaard does not claim that Aristophanes comic caricatures provide “direct evidence” of Socrates’ historical-actual person, yet Kierkegaard defends the value of Aristophanes’ writings as a direct interaction with a living person (128).\(^{29}\) In contrast, Plato

\(^{28}\) “Aristophanes’ view of Socrates will be found to be more true in terms of the comic and consequently more just, and likewise one will also see a way to remove some of the difficulties that otherwise would remain in this Aristophanic play if one defines this position more specifically as an ironic position—that is, allows the subjectivity to pour out in its profusion, but prior to this lets it egotistically terminate in irony” (153)

\(^{29}\) “Aristophanes’ view of Socrates will provide just the necessary contrast to Plato’s and precisely by means of this contrast will open the possibility of a new approach for our evaluation. Indeed, it would be a great lack if we did not have the Aristophanic appraisal of Socrates; for just as every process usually ends with a parodying of itself, and such a parody is an assurance that this process has outlived its day, so the comic view is an element, in many
writes in hindsight, as does Xenophon, and their literary depictions (poetic and documentary) are less true to life. What Kierkegaard inevitably brings out with this discussion is the idea that genre necessarily comes back to immediate reality of the historical-actual. Literary writing necessarily conceptualizes, turning the immediacy of life into a theoretical or abstract artifact. But the examination of genre becomes a crucial study in examining how each mode of discourse attempts to bridge the gap between concept and phenomenon, Lessing’s ugly ditch.

While Kierkegaard keeps the question of genre tied to subjectivity and to phenomenological reality, also embedded in his text is the idea of a non-genre. For Kierkegaard, irony is the mode of discourse that introduces infinite negativity. In his discussion of Plato, Kierkegaard explicates the difference between Plato’s positive (and poetic) speculative philosophy and Socrates’ negative irony. Many discussions focus on Socrates’ epistemological process, his teaching through questions. Kierkegaard insists on the idea that Socrates does not give his students knowledge but rather offers them the recognition of their lack of knowledge. While Plato stands eager to build concepts and ideas through speculative dialogue, Socrates leaves his students with ignorance. This can hardly be said to be a style of learning, if all knowledge is negated by ignorance. And unlike the poetic Plato who questions only in order to build anew, Kierkegaard insists that Socrates does not build up what he tears down. His irony instead only negates. It is an “absolute infinite negativity.” Kierkegaard quotes Hegel’s view of Socrates’ irony, “It may actually be said that Socrates knew nothing, for he did not reach the scientific construction of a systematic philosophy. He was conscious of this, and it was also not

ways a perpetually corrective element, in making a personality or an enterprise completely intelligible. Therefore, even though we lack direct evidence about Socrates, even thought we lack an altogether reliable view of him, we do have in recompense all the various nuances of misunderstanding, and in my opinion this is our best asset with a personality such as Socrates” (128).
at all his aim to establish a science” (175). For Kierkegaard, this pure negativity is tied to the immediacy of Socrates’ living existence. While Socrates’ interpreters, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, all add to his messages by contextualizing or emplotting his historical-actual self within a constructed reality, the real Socrates does not contextualize, speculate, or emplot. He only negates. The concept of irony becomes the idea of canceling out concepts, denying emplotment, and backing away from a system of ideas. Without ideas, what is left? The pure phenomenon, the immediacy of presence.30

In the Concept of Irony, even this negativity is necessarily linked to subjectivity. Kierkegaard introduces the idea of the daimonion (τὸ δαίμονον) as an abstract, “a negative and not a positive,” acting as a warning and not a command (159). It is the introduction of interiorized self-reflection, not an exterior code of morality or ethics that originates with the state but one that is assigned only to the individual. The oracle had previously taken this role, but only after Socrates acquired his “daimonion,” was it possible for him to know himself, as the oracle enjoined.31 It is this possibility of non-constructive but ultimately positive reality tied closely to

30 In his concluding paragraph, Kierkegaard remarks, “On the theoretical side, essence must manifest itself as phenomenon. When irony is controlled, it no longer believes, as do certain shrewd people in everyday life, that there is always more than meets the eye; but it also prevents all idol worshipping of the phenomenon. And just as it teaches respect for contemplation, it also rescues it from the verbosity that believes that giving an exposition of world history, for example, should take as long a time as the world has needed to live through it.

Finally, insofar as there may be a question concerning irony’s ‘eternal validity,’ this question can be answered only by entering into the realm of humor. Humor has a far more profound skepticism than irony, because here the focus is on sinfulness, not on finitude. The skepticism of humor is related to the skepticism of irony as ignorance is related to the old thesis: credo quia absurdum [I believe it is absurd], but it also has a far deeper positivity, since it moves not in human but in the anthropological categories; it finds rest not by making man man but by making man God-man” (329).

31 This championing of subjectivity is echoed in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript and brings us out of the realm of the classical tradition and into Kierkegaard’s familiar Christian
the immediacy of subjective experience that opens the door for a later paradoxical discourse of faith as presented in *Fear and Trembling*.

2.3 Examination of text: *Fear and Trembling*, defining genre, defining faith

*The Concept of Irony*’s focus on the subjective inevitability of genres or modes of expression re-emerges in *Fear and Trembling*’s poetic treatise, which tackles one specific principle, faith. Faith is a high stakes topic, one that, as we have seen, Kierkegaard simultaneously holds up as superior to the contemporary preoccupations of academic philosophy even while he evades any claim to authority on the subject. With its subtitle: “Dialectical Lyric,” *Fear and Trembling* introduces its genre debate overtly. If Kierkegaard is to convey faith in *Fear and Trembling*, he is therefore confined to speak within the framework of genre. In *Fear and Trembling*, this discussion is narrowed to the genre categories of the aesthetic lyric or poetry and dialectical philosophy, and Kierkegaard spends much of the text meditating upon whether these genres have the capacity to communicate faith. In order to do this, he both defines and demonstrates these genres within his text. The question of whether these two modes of expression can be reconciled is an important one to the question of whether faith can be conveyed through language. But it is also a question of whether the aspects of reality to which these genres give expression can be reconciled as well. The dialogism at play in this text is deliberate: It explicitly prompts readers toward conceptual and theoretical implications as it linguistically performs the inherent tension between the subjective and the collective religious preoccupations: “Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity; subjectivity is essentially passion, and at its maximum an infinite, personally interested passion for one’s eternal happiness. As soon as subjectivity is taken away, and passion from subjectivity, and infinite interest from passion, there is no decision whatever, whether on this issue or any other. All decision, all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity” (33).
experience. In the following discussion, I will analyze the definitions of genre as demonstrated in *Fear and Trembling*, as well as the confinium, or the ambiguous boundary between both genres in Kierkegaard’s work. Kierkegaard’s self-conscious foregrounding of this dialogue leads readers into a demonstration of both a conceptualization and the experience of faith. Kierkegaard’s juxtaposed genres pose implicit questions: Does the expression or comprehension of faith require a reconciliation of these genres? Does it instead require a rejection of genres or the transcendence over genre? I will also suggest a Kierkegaardian taxonomy of expressive modes or genres and their correlation to aspects of reality. Through this text, I assert that Kierkegaard’s focus on dialogic genre sets up an epistemological and ontological study of faith as a fundamental principle of human experience.

In his *Postscript*, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Climacus asserts, “Objectively the emphasis is on what is said; subjectively the emphasis is on how it is said” (202). In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio insists on both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ as crucial factors in determining genre. Thus, in *Fear and Trembling*, the dialectical and lyric as separate genres are both explicitly defined and stylistically demonstrated. This genre discussion is present from the first page reference to Hamann: “What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies the son understood but the messenger did not” (3). This reference to codes, to speaking in a way that could be hidden from or misunderstood by certain listeners, invokes the question of subjectivity in text. In this text, genre is grounded in the individual subject. The pseudonymous speaking subject is Johannes de Silentio, a character who says little about himself except to describe his role within two opposing genres of expression. While this is certainly a description of style, it is just as much a description of his point of view and persona. As a speaking self, he inevitably speaks according to certain modes of expression; that is, he speaks from within a framework of
language. Johannes de Silentio is persistent in his declarations of genre authority or lack thereof. He does this by commenting on his own writing style, making asides that identify him as a dialectical philosopher, “I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically” (90). But he also makes assertions to the contrary that identify himself as a subjective poet: “The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is poetice et eleganter [in a poetic and refined way] a supplementary clerk who neither writes the system nor gives promises of the system . . . He writes because to him it is a luxury that is all the more pleasant and apparent the fewer there are who buy and read what he writes” (7). Thus, Kierkegaard defines genre as a speaking voice, one with the authority of a particular linguistic vocation.

But the text goes further to identify genre with persona or figure in its abundance of featured characters. In The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard insists on the primacy of the historical-actual person of Socrates. His evaluation of the varied genres of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes doubles back to their accuracy in portraying Socrates the man. In other words, the content is crucial. Likewise, Johannes de Silentio comes back to this central importance in his discussion of various personalities or figures in Fear and Trembling. As Johannes de Silentio defines various genres and literary categories, he uses various characters as case studies. For example, he discusses the tragic genre by describing Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia for the good of his people, abstracting the narrative from the script of the play. Agamemnon’s character and life dilemma constitute the tragedy. That is, Kierkegaard mentions little of the structural or aesthetic requirements of the literary genre of tragedy; rather, he focuses on the moral and ethical crisis at stake in the life of this main character. Likewise, his discussion of Abraham centers on what in the motives and mindset of Abraham would qualify him for particular kinds of stories (genres). This is reminiscent of Aristotelian discussions of the genre, though it sidesteps
Aristotle’s stylistic recommendations for successful tragedy. This brings us to the idea that there are right and wrong genre interpretations of classic narrative figures. Just as Kierkegaard rejects the genre interpretations of Socrates on the part of poetic Plato and historical Xenophon, Johannes de Silentio ultimately rejects two major genre interpretations of Abraham: the poetic(aesthetic) and the philosophical (ethical). He does this first by building these genres within *Fear and Trembling*, both demonstrating and analyzing their roles and characteristics before debunking their claims to express faith.

*Defining the philosophical dialectic in Fear and Trembling*

The text of *Fear and Trembling* demonstrates these two genres in both form and content. How is *Fear and Trembling* structured as a philosophical dialectic? Much of the organizational and linguistic structure of *Fear and Trembling* can be interpreted according to conventions of philosophical discourse. It also establishes faith as a theoretical concept, one worthy of the abstract theories of academic philosophy:

The text’s organizational structure follows certain rhetorical patterns of philosophical discourse. For example, its chapter headings are imitative of Aristotelian Problemata. Other section headings such as the “Exordium” and the “Eulogy on Abraham” also reflect styles of persuasive oratory. Thus the work’s macro-structure falls into non-narrative philosophical discourse by offering the reader clear dialectical organization. Individual sections also continue the question and answer format, leading to persuasive conclusions. This is seen particularly with each Problema, its subtitles clearly posing questions for abstract thinkers: “Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?”; “Is there an absolute duty to God?” and so forth, followed by answering persuasive discussion. Johannes de Silentio consciously participates in contemporary
philosophical debates through his frequent references to Hegel as the ‘contra’ of his argument. His contra is not simply Hegel but the mainstream philosophy of Denmark and the broader European community in the 1840s. True to his role as a philosopher and debater, Johannes de Silentio clearly identifies his opponent and gamely follows the structure of debate. With this familiar structure, the text becomes an argument, polemically finding flaws in the arguments of contemporary thinkers. It has points to prove, and (at least initially) leads readers to anticipate a persuasive conclusion. A text structured along these lines has a distinct teleological purpose to define faith.

But for Kierkegaard, genre also defines and is defined by subject matter. In this text, ethics rather than faith is revealed to be the appropriate subject for dialectical discourse. Johannes de Silentio opens each of the Problemata with a qualification of the assertion that the ethical is universal. Defining this concept further, he identifies the universal as consistent or timeless (54), abstract or impersonal (68), and “disclosed” (82) or able to be expressed. In all three Problemata, the ethical is connected to Hegel’s systems, which prioritize the external over the interior individual. The text defines philosophical discourse as qualified to express what is ethical because its method of expression is the definition of universals and abstract principles. What then is the relationship between philosophical discourse and faith, or between ethics and

32 from Problema

“The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another angle means that it applies at all times” (54 Problema I).

“The ethical is the universal, and as such it is also the divine” (68 Problema II).

“The ethical as such is the universal; as the universal, it is the disclosed. The single individual, qualified as immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden” (82 Problema III).
faith? Kierkegaard discusses this in the context of the ethics of Abraham’s story, which simultaneously incorporates and rejects universal principles. Ethics plays a strong part in the story’s drama and leads to Abraham’s crisis of decision. “The ethical expression for his relation to Isaac is that the father must love the son” (70-71). Although this filial love is transgressed in the narrative when Abraham offers to sacrifice this ethical love, there would be no crisis, no test, without a foundation of this family love. Faith must comprehend ethical systems—or the inflexible positioning of the individual within the universal or collective—before it can go beyond them. Codes, systems, and universal laws are therefore presented as a necessary catalyst for the crisis that produces faith. In defining the genre of dialectical discourse, Kierkegaard matches content with structure. The subject matter of Fear and Trembling qualifies as philosophical or ethical in that the text looks for definitions, seeking to codify and systematize the principle of faith. In this way, it presents faith as an intellectual concept. This is the function of dialectical discourse. It speaks to the intellect and posits its imagined audience as philosophically-minded.

By introducing the dialectic as an expressive genre in itself, Kierkegaard demonstrates that there is a particular and appropriate way to talk about ethical systems and universal principles, a linguistic model that both supports and realizes them. But by introducing this as a specific mode of expression, Kierkegaard also limits its purview. Fear and Trembling asserts that a genre that asserts universal truths is not in itself universally comprehensive. It is limited in its necessary exclusion of the particular or the subjective. Thus, constructing a language that addresses universalities is not the same as creating an expressive mode that comprehends all of reality. As Hamlet says to Horatio, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Hamlet 1.5.166-7). Kierkegaard would say that philosophy, or the
dialectical genre, cannot give expression to purely subjective and experiential realities. It must recognize that, “Even if someone were able to transpose the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does not follow that he has comprehended faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it entered in to him” (7). Ethical philosophy is likewise not comprehensive. It does not address all possible scenarios or realities, in particular, the reality of faith in its absolute relation to the divine. As Johannes de Silentio claims: “Philosophy cannot and must not give faith, but it must understand itself and know what it offers and take nothing away, least of all trick men out of something by pretending that it is nothing” (Fear and Trembling 33).

Demonstrating the lyric in Fear and Trembling

But working against Johannes de Silentio’s personal role as philosopher as well as the textual dialectical structure is the undercurrent of the poetic or aesthetic. Kierkegaard in some ways makes the definition of the lyric simple by constructing it as the inverse of the dialectic: not ethical, not universal, not systematic or demonstrating a clear pattern of cause and effect. But he also enacts the lyric within his text through his incorporation of narrative, his focus on character or the subjective perspective, and repetitive cadences or refrains. As does The Concept of Irony, Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling likewise centers on a character, that of Abraham, required by God to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham is stopped by an angel before committing the deed, but this very duality of sacrifice and non-sacrifice is explored by Johannes de Silentio as the supreme example of faith.

In Kierkegaard’s schema, philosophy does not re-create the real or the particular. It instead abstracts and universalizes. But Kierkegaard’s version of the lyric, especially in its realization as story-telling, is both imaginative and grounded in the real-historical. Like his
models, Walter Scott and other “life-view” novelists, Kierkegaard endeavors to use imagination in order to illuminate and re-create reality. Beyond the portrayal of Abraham, vividly imagined characters abound throughout the text of *Fear and Trembling*, each giving expression to a subjective viewpoint. One of these characters is introduced as a potential model for readers. In his Exordium, Johannes de Silentio describes this unnamed man: “That man was not a thinker” (9). He instead desires to experience, to see what Abraham saw or to see Abraham himself. Not “an exegetical scholar” he nevertheless thirsts for a kind of knowledge, not abstract but experienced. “His soul had but one wish, to see Abraham, but one longing, to have witnessed that event” (9). With this imagined character, Kierkegaard demonstrates his lyric genre as having an imaginative grounding in the immediate or the historical-actual.

Kierkegaard draws his narrative models from a wide variety of sources. Stories of Abraham himself alternate with stories of many different characters—some of which are narrated in detail and others of which are not much more than fleshed out metaphors. These range from narratives of classical drama, such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia, to folktales like that of Agnes and the merman, to apocryphal texts like the story of Tobias, to references to historical figures such as Elizabeth I of England. Whatever the original genre source of these stories, they are spun as tales in *Fear and Trembling*, with a songlike rhythm and structure. These many instances of narrative performance inspire the imaginative sympathy of readers. The focus is on characters, often re-creating non-hero’s thoughts and passions to highlight the point of view of what might be seen as a secondary character. For example, in Johannes de Silentio’s retelling of the apocryphal story of Tobias, he finds an alternate hero. Rather than focusing on Tobias himself, who heroically marries a girl whose seven previous husbands have been killed on their wedding night by a demon, Kierkegaard’s version focuses on the bride, Sarah. This exploration of a
traditionally secondary character highlights the reality of each experience. In exploring Sarah’s aloneness, her subjectivity is brought to the foreground.

And while Johannes de Silentio asserts his role as dialectician, the contradiction to this very insistence can be seen elsewhere in the text. In the draft of the text, Johannes de Silentio is identified as “a poetic person who exists only among poets” “by no means a philosopher” (F&T Supplement from Journals 243-4). Pseudonyms themselves imply a kind of lyric, as long as the poetic genre requires a kind of disguise—a masked or veiled speaking. With this theatrical utterance again we see the priority given to the figure, or subjective point of view. This is seen in performance rather than expository method. The imagination is called upon as much as any powers of reasoning.

If dialectical philosophy entails an argumentative progression toward a logical conclusion, then the lyric resists this sense of conclusion or teleological progression with its use of poetic repetition, or the cadence or musical aspect of repeated phrases. Within the structure of the text are narrative vignettes that re-enact scenarios modeled after that of Abraham, each scenario varied just slightly from the preceding one. One example of this poetic structure is in the repeated refrain of the mother whose child must be weaned. At the end of each re-enacted tale of Abraham in the Exordium, Johannes de Silentio also imagines and reimagines the strategies of this mother toward her child, juxtaposing her story to the variations of Abraham’s

33 “But here I stop; I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically” (F&T 90).

34 “A First and Last Declaration” from Postscript: “What is written is indeed my own, but only insofar as I put into the mouth of the poetically actual individual whom I produced, his life view expressed in audible lines . . . So in the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about them except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them . . . My wish, my prayer, is that if it occur to anyone to cite a particular saying from the books, he do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonym.” (quoted in Thompson 138-9)
story. These insertions evoke epic similes, or homely scenarios of family life that lend experiential immediacy to the theological obscurity of the imaginative interpretations of Abraham’s faith. These repetitive cadences stand parallel but opposed to logical structure, as they repeat the very philosophical questions that Johannes de Silentio poses according to philosophical conventions. Instead of presenting theoretical questions in abstract language, these brief vignettes create an imaginative immediacy, prompting the reader toward a sympathetic but inconclusive exploration of real human experience. Poetic constructions like this re-posit the abstract questions of philosophical discourse. But while the subtitles of philosophical Problemata propose answers to its own questions according to dialectic conventions, Johannes de Silentio repeats these questions in poetic form far more than he answers them in expository discourse. This questioning repetition itself becomes a kind of poetry of immediate experience.

Why infuse lyrical story-telling in this work? With this structure, Kierkegaard demonstrates what it is that expression aesthetic actually does, and so doing represents epistemological and ontological approaches toward faith. His narrator is much more forgiving of the poetic than the philosophical. Yet, he insists that even the genius of Shakespeare has not articulated the reality of faith:

Thanks, once again thanks, to a man who, to a person overwhelmed by life’s sorrows and left behind naked, reaches out the words, the leafage of language by which he can conceal his misery. Thanks to you, great Shakespeare, you who can say everything, everything, everything just as it is—and yet, why did you never articulate this torment? Did you perhaps reserve it for yourself, like the beloved’s name that one cannot bear to

35 from Exordium

“When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast . . .” (11).
“When the child has grown big and is to be weaned, the mother virginally conceals her breast . . .” (12)
“When the child is to be weaned, the mother too is not without sorrow . . . “ (13)
“When the child is to be weaned, the mother has stronger sustenance at hand . . . “ (14)
have the world utter, for with his little secret that he cannot divulge the poet buys this
power of the word to tell everybody else’s dark secrets. A poet is not an apostle; he drives
out devils only by the power of the devil (61).

Kierkegaard’s inclusion of lyrical elements can be of comfort to subjective self. Through the
imaginative sympathy required by a performance or a lyric depiction of character readers are
offered a vicarious individual experience, to encounter reality “just as it is.” The lyric then
becomes the genre of escape and self-gratification, but it can also be the genre of self-sacrifice
and integrity. What matters is the self, not the system. Poetry and story-telling are defined as
genres in the appropriateness of the subject matter they portray. This is accomplished through
repetition, lyrical evocation of emotion, and a recognition of the subjective self.

2.4 The implications of dialogic genres in Fear and Trembling’s development of faith

The result of this dialogue of genres is a crucial question in Kierkegaard’s development
of faith. Out of this genre discussion, can Kierkegaard develop a new mode of discourse or
expression that conveys the concept of faith, that is, a third expressive genre? Lessing’s
metaphor of the leap requires a reconciliation of the phenomenological and the theoretical. Does
the dialogic construction of Fear and Trembling suggest that this leap of faith might be
accomplished through a bridging of these two modes of expression, interpreted by Kierkegaard
as aesthetic and philosophical? The question then, becomes whether Kierkegaard is able to
accomplish this reconciliation in his work. Is faith in fact a kind of atonement, or “at-one-ment”
of two modes of expression, two differing conceptualizations of reality?

Certain aspects of the text can support an affirmative answer to this question.
Demonstration of reconciliation of genres can be seen as Fear and Trembling’s construction of a
dialectical lyric is in some ways a true blending or a blurring of genre categories. This expression
of faith can be seen as a comprehension of both the lyric and the dialectic, offering a model for
faith itself as a combination of the ethical and the aesthetic. On an obvious structural level, the
text does indeed combine elements of these two genres without clear demarcation. *Fear and
Trembling* is, after all, not divided in half as some of Kierkegaard’s works are, (for example,
*Either/Or*). Although lyrical expressive elements are more prominent in the Exordium and
philosophical rhetorical models are especially clear in the Problemata, these sections also present
an undeniable blend of lyric and storytelling with thesis-driven argument. But this blending also
can be demonstrated on a linguistic level as well. One controversy in the translation of the text
into English demonstrates this blend: Kierkegaard titled the first section of the “Problemata,” (in
Danish), “Foreløbig Expectoration.” When translated into English by Howard V. and Edna H.
Hong, this becomes “Preliminary Expectoration.” Alastair Hannay’s translation on the other
hand is “Preamble from the Heart.” Although Hannay’s translation seems to approach a more
poetic interpretation of the phrase in its identification of individual emotion, the basis for “From
the heart” is a much more literal etymological analysis of Kierkegaard’s use of a Latin rather
than Danish term: (‘ex’ = from + ‘pectus’ = the breast).  

(36) (Editor’s note: Fear and Trembling 343). The Hongs’ translation, “Preliminary Expectoration,” makes comical reference to an
orator’s clearing his throat before speaking.  

This is a satirical nod to dialectical rhetoric. But

36 (In SK’s original version, this section was simply called “Introduction”)

37 Kenneth Itzkowitz argues in favor of the Hong’s translation: “The Hong footnote on this title reads "From the Latin ex + pectus (from + heart, breast), an outpouring to the heart, in line with the subtitle, 'Dialectical Lyric" (1983, 343n). Hence Hannay gives us the heart but omits the breast. He loses the sense of clearing the lungs, as a speaker may do, for instance, when trying to prepare an audience to listen. (Ahem.) Indeed, in the second place, Cassel’s New Latin Dictionary gives "pec-tus" most literally as "breast" (as in the English word "pectoral"). But it also gives two transferred usages: "(1) the breast as the seat of the affections; the heart, soul . . .
[as in] to love with the whole heart. . . [and] (2) as the seat of reason, understanding, the mind:
[as in] toto pectore cogitare' (429). Hannay’s "Preamble from the Heart" may not capture this
second transferred usage. . . Third, Webster’s New World Dictionary gives "expectorate" as
derived from the Latin *expectoratus*, the last participle of *expectorare*, meaning "to banish from
the fact that multiple translations are possible seems to point to the ambiguity of genre identification. By using the Latin “expectoration,” Johannes de Silentio opens himself up to the possibility of conveying a comically vulgar image of an orator clearing his throat, while still maintaining the linguistically valid interpretation of a lyrically heartfelt text. This ambiguity is further heightened by the fact that it confuses Kierkegaard’s differentiation between the immediacy and vicarious experience of the lyric versus the abstract theorizing of the dialectical. We are presented with a performance of oration – the dialectic genre as live experience. Viewed in this light, then Hannay’s translation, “Preamble from the Heart” seems unexpectedly static and definitional to describe a lyric text.

Another instance of the ambiguous boundary between genres is in the interpretation of Kierkegaard’s pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio, as a possible biographical or cultural allusion. Alastair Hannay traces this name to Kierkegaard’s personal past: In unpublished works Kierkegaard writes about one “Johannes” in distinctly autobiographical terms, especially in reference to his experiences with his father (Hannay 36, 44). Kierkegaard describes his father’s imaginative “walks” in which he and his youngest son Soren would pace their library floor while describing from memory the sights of the outside streets of Copenhagen. With this imaginative representation of the life of the city “Johannes” becomes a participant in a type of dramatic performance, aesthetically enacting the outside world. However, in a second passage

the mind, expel from the breast” (511). Here, the Hong and Lowrie translations become the hands-down winners. The "Preliminary Expectoration" is the preparatory banishing of faith from reason. "Preamble from the Heart" misses this entirely. It also misses the common meaning of expectoration as spit, which is the fourth and next to last point. We cannot simply dismiss the possible relevance of this meaning. In volume one of Either/Or, the aesthete reflects on himself: Time passes, life is a stream, etc., so people say. That is not what I find: time stands still, and so do I. All the plans I project fly straight back at me; when I want to spit, I spit in my own face” (26).
Kierkegaard focuses on Johannes’ father as a remarkably gifted debater skilled in argument, one who has the construct and deconstruct rational argument: “It happened; in a moment everything was turned around, the clear became unclear, the certain doubtful, the contradiction a self-evident truth” (quoted in Hannay 44). This pseudonym, in invoking Kierkegaard’s childhood experiences, brings us to both the lyrical world of the imagination and the world of philosophical discourse. Kierkegaard is consistent in using subjective characters (like his pseudonymous authors) to define genre, and the fact that Johannes in fact unites multiple genres in his single persona indicates a possible reconciliation of these genres.

As we see, in Fear and Trembling the dialogue between the lyric and the dialectic is intricately complex, sometimes merging into harmonious combinations. It is not always a clearly antagonistic debate of contrasting styles. What is accomplished by this deliberate combination and juxtaposition of genre styles, then? It may be claimed that Kierkegaard’s goal is to create a new mode of discourse for the writing of faith, for Johannes de Silentio insists that faith fits neither exclusively with the poetic nor solely with the philosophical: “Faith is no esthetic emotion but something far higher; it is not the spontaneous inclination of the heart but the paradox of existence” (47). Kierkegaard establishes that faith is not aesthetic, but he also insists that it cannot be constructed by philosophical conventions. “Philosophy cannot and must not give faith, but it must understand itself and know what it offers and take nothing away, least of all trick men out of something by pretending that it is nothing” (33). Aesthetic expression illicitly indulges the “spontaneous inclination of the heart,” while philosophy robs from the individual to pay universal systems. If evocations of the dialectical and the lyric can be combined in such a way as to make them inextricable from each other, then perhaps they can work together to convey this concept of faith.
But the question of whether Kierkegaard constructs a harmonious reconciliation of both
genres can also be answered in the negative. Pattison argues that Kierkegaard’s construction of
genre in his works reflects “conflict and incommensurability” rather than harmony, and is a
deliberate contradiction to Heiberg’s formulas for appropriately balanced style and content
(Pattison 478). Johannes de Silentio’s own assertions give support to this, as his claims of genre
authority are generally phrased as negatives: Johannes asserts on one page that he is not a poet38
and on another that he is not a philosopher.39 He never states that he is both, nor (aside from the
work’s subtitle) does he create a term for what mode of expression he can claim in positive
terms. Faith, as the in-between paradox, neither purely subjective nor purely universal, cannot be
understood based on the parameters of these two antithetical genres or modes of discourse. Faith
becomes the in-between paradox: it cannot be understood based on the parameters of these two
genres or modes of discourse but is firmly rooted in experience. James Pattison interprets this to
mean that Kierkegaard refuses genre classifications as being essentially irrelevant to Christian
expression.

The difference between literary or poetic writing and what Kierkegaard would regard as
properly Christian writing (if we think of this latter as a genre) is that the latter
necessarily privileges the demands of existence over those of artistic perfection and is
therefore driven to generate forms that advert to their own secondariness in relation to the
infinite importance of the religious content. This could be put another way of saying,
simply, that there is no such genre as “Christian” writing but that Christian writing will
demonstrate its claim to freedom from any literary straitjacket by employing all and
sundry formal means “ad lib.” (Pattison, “Kierkegaard and Genre” 495)

38 “But here I stop; I am not a poet, and I go at things only dialectically” (F&T 90).
39 The present author is by no means a philosopher. He has not understood the system, whether
there is one, whether it is completed; it is already enough for his weak head to ponder what a
prodigious head everyone must have these days when everyone has such a prodigious idea. (7)
In other words, faith may take any form of discourse or expression for its infinite meaning, but no particular genre will ever be perfectly apt. Certainly, *Fear and Trembling* puts questions of genre into some confusion, and the claim that it successfully harmonizes or reconciles genres in a new expression of faith can be undermined. But why construct a dialectical lyric, if style or genres themselves are irrelevant? After establishing these contrasting genres, where does this actually put faith? Does Kierkegaard create a new genre that is necessarily a combination or interaction of both philosophical dialectic and lyrical narrative? Or, as Pattison indicates, does religious writing need to be deeper than genre, thus requiring a subversion, a disguising, and an ultimate refusal of existing genres?

I do not believe that Kierkegaard would agree with a categorical refusal of literary genre as expression of Christianity. His view of Christianity was, after all, not simplistic, and not even confined to the concept of faith that is the focal point of *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard’s Christianity, particularly its visible church aspects, can be conducive to universal narratives and ethical systems. This is demonstrated in the *Book of Adler*, in which he contrasts the initially prophetic claims of Adler with the uniformity of the institutional church that challenged Adler’s claims. Philosophical, or systematic modes of discourse have a solid place in Kierkegaard’s concept of Christianity, even if *Fear and Trembling* demonstrates their inadequacy to convey the paradoxical concept of faith. Kierkegaard in fact demonstrates in *Fear and Trembling* that any institution, whether establishing a code of ethics or organizing an administrative hierarchy, makes use of philosophical modes of discourse. He is less explicit about the role of the esthetic genre in religious writing. This genre finds its expression in fairy tales, serendipitous scenarios, and stories of vicarious gratification of the subjective self. Yet, throughout the course of his development of the esthetic genre in *Fear and Trembling*, we discover that this genre comes
closer to human experience or the historical-actual phenomenon. The highly experiential nature
of the poetic or story-telling narratives that Kierkegaard incorporates into much of his writing
demonstrates performative genre conventions of aesthetic creative arts. In Fear and Trembling,
the representational rather than rhetorical narratives of Tobias, Agnes, and even the
autobiographical subtext of the pseudonymous voice of Johannes de Silentio himself create a
level of performativity within the text. Fear and Trembling offers readers imagined experiences
with its forays into the lyric genre, and thereby distances itself from the conceptual or abstract.
This expressive mode is therefore in some ways more conducive to an expression of faith, which
is itself dependent on the subjective individual experience. As Johannes de Silentio claims:
“Even if someone were able to transpose the whole content of faith into conceptual form, it does
not follow that he has comprehended faith, comprehended how he entered into it or how it
entered in to him” (7). Johannes de Silentio describes the mysterious man who is introduced to
readers in the Preface. Not “an exegetical scholar,” and desiring experience over abstract
thought, he nonetheless seeks after a kind of knowledge, validating the need for experience in the
realm of faith.

Thus, both the ethical (philosophical) and aesthetic (poetic) genres have a distinctly valid
role within religious writing. Although Fear and Trembling rejects the full expression of faith
through these two genres, certain aspects of Kierkegaard’s formulation of the institutions and
culture of Christianity can be expressed through genre conventions. Renunciation and
resignation belong to the realm of the ethical, a reason-based system that translates into
philosophical writing. Desire, on the other hand, based on the exaltation of the subjective
individual and its potential escape from universal principles, finds its expression in the aesthetic
or lyrical point of view. A true synthesis of these two modes of expression would not preserve
the integrity of these aspects of reality. *Fear and Trembling*’s dialogic approach, in which both genres have voice and do not concede to each other, is realist in its endeavor to give voice to both the language universal systems and the lyrical subjective voice.

The question of faith’s ineffability remains, however. Also at variance with Pattison’s thesis for the irrelevance of genre, and still answering ‘no’ to the question of reconciling modes of expression is the position that faith has no language at all. Religion’s ethical systems and its personal experiences may find expression in expository or poetic language, but faith itself may still be said to remain paradoxically enigmatic. *Fear and Trembling* is preoccupied with this ineffability. The narrator is, after all, Johannes de Silentio, whose namesake could be identified as Saint John the Silent, an ascetic monk of the early medieval era. This narrator dwells on Abraham’s laconic role in the Genesis narrative, interpreting it not just as narrative stylistic choice but as the character’s inability to express his thoughts and feelings intelligibly during his experience. Johannes de Silentio says of Abraham, “Speak he cannot; he speaks no human language. And even if he understood all the languages of the world, even if those he loved also understood them, he still could not speak” (114).

But after declaring Abraham’s silence, the narrator continues to qualify his assertion: “—he speaks in a divine language—he speaks in tongues” (114). What is this divine language that Abraham speaks? We might also ask why Kierkegaard chooses a discussion of genre as the best way to convey faith. There are several clarifications that result from this focus. First, in defining and demonstrating dialectical discourse, Kierkegaard claims that definitions themselves belong to a genre or specific mode of discourse. To define a concept is to venture into a dialectic realm of expression. This process of definition and the resultant intellectual certainty that the definition of concepts makes possible are dependent on a philosophical linguistic system. Second, the
reflection or performance of subjective experience also belongs to a genre. To imaginatively re-create subjective reality is to venture into the poetic. This does not result in intellectual knowledge but in the experience or performance of the creative work. The authority of a poet is not compatible with that of philosopher in that his work cannot be used as a building block in creating a system of thought. Rather, through the poetic experience, the individual can lose himself in vicarious subjective experience.

Faith itself cannot be fully defined because it does not fully belong to the realm of dialectical language or universal systems. It also cannot be poetically re-imagined fully —That is, it does not indulge the subjective ego even while it requires the subject to stand alone. Thus the only way it can be conveyed is relationally—that is, within dialogic process. A meta-commentary on expression itself is crucial here because only this view of expressive subjectivity recognizes the relational nature of our personal identity within the world of ideas and experience. The interactive structure of diverse modes of expression becomes a synecdoche of the relational or dialogic processes in the construction of identity and ideas. By creating a clash of genres, Kierkegaard creates an epistemological or cognitive crisis, in a philosophical argument that is not effectively persuasive or didactic. His text simultaneously offers aesthetic experience that is always held in check by its dialectic framework. Readers are teased with the possibility of understanding concepts but also offered aesthetically constructed stories or vignettes that offer readers an experiential witness to faith without delivering faith itself. This expressive conflict is a literary (or literal) demonstration of the conflict of faith. In other words, the language of faith is one of dialogue, even when the interlocutors are speaking in such different modes as to make the conversation absurd. I would posit that it is only such a crisis that makes faith possible. By creating a boundary or confinium of interaction between genres, Kierkegaard demonstrates the
necessity for language and literary structure even within its seemingly fixed categories, and for a parallel structure for the principle of faith. Faith itself is impossible without this clash of disparate elements or modes.

Kierkegaard’s text suggests a distinct taxonomy for each of these three genres or modes of human experience. The philosophical terms for the three categories addressed are the ethical, aesthetic, and the absurd. Thus, according to this philosophical taxonomy, and relying solely on a philosophical language of universal concepts, faith has no meaning. In contrast, the literary or linguistic terms for the three categories addressed refer to style or expression. In Kierkegaard’s own terms, two categories are identified as the dialectical and the lyric. Their interaction (faith) results in silence or ineffability. Based on aesthetic criteria, faith has no voice. But with these three categories of human epistemology and ontology, Kierkegaard also recreates the three cardinal virtues of Christianity: faith, hope, and charity. Charity is identified in the ethics, self-sacrifice and resignation of philosophy; hope, in the happy outcomes and subjective focus of aesthetic serendipity; faith in the paradox, which, instead of being the first step in the path of discipleship (as implied by Paul’s epistles, particularly 1 Corinthians 13) is the final and purest qualification for Kierkegaard. The fact remains, however, that without a sense of the self-centered individualism of hope (esthetic-lyric) and the self-effacing universalism of charity (ethical-philosophical), faith has no point of departure. Faith is not possible without the two metaphorical banks of the ditch. It is dependent on both in order to leap between the two. Thus, while it must be concluded that faith itself is a purely subjective paradox without its own expression within fixed genre conventions, it can be realized within the tension of these opposing realms of genres. It is introduced, sketched out or silhouetted, by the dialogic interaction of genres.
I’d like to return to the question of narrative. Of all the writers in this study, Kierkegaard seems least interested in constructing histories or plots. Yet, he refers to the question of narrative structure at various moments within *Fear and Trembling*. For Kierkegaard, faith, though arising out of a conflict of diverse modes of reality, does not participate in a model of progressive history. This model of history belongs to the ethical or universal realm. Kierkegaard describes an ethical hero as one whose cause is vindicated by the passage of time, one who, “Aware that he is a paradox who cannot be understood, a hero who has become a σκανδαλον [offense] to his age will shout confidently to his contemporaries: The result will indeed prove that I was justified” (62). But this quest for an end result is to be resisted in a discussion of faith’s paradox. “We are curious about the result, just as we are curious about the way a book turns out. We do not want to know anything about the anxiety, the distress, the paradox” (63). The implication is that faith is caught in the tension of immediate reality.

On the other hand, the aesthetic realm defies constructions of history that are dependent on cause and effect. Johannes de Silentio tells the story of the lovers who hide the secret of their love for the sake of their own self-sacrifice. Through no weakness of their own resolve, their true love is found out and their path is made smooth. “Even though they never had time to sleep on their heroic resolution, esthetics regards them as having bravely battled their intention through over a period of many years. As a matter of fact, esthetics is not much concerned about time; be it jest or earnestness, time goes just as fast for esthetics” (85-86). The aesthetic does not need to be tested by universal principles and resists ethical systems. But its naïve escape from the exigencies of time and the laws of cause and effect is likewise antithetical to the experience of faith, which is dependent on its own resistance to these laws. The aesthetic and the ethical both
depend on a relationship with time and cause and effect that result in particular kinds of narrative structure. Faith does not exhibit this same relationship.

In both his opening and closing statements, Johannes de Silentio, insists on the folly of seeking to “go further.” His parting appeal is against the glibly optimistic theories of progress in human thought. Faith, as the “highest passion,” does not develop from generation to generation, but is achieved by single individuals. This, and his closing anecdote about the disciple of Heraclitus, yet again evokes Hegelian system and their idea of progressive world history. Hegel in fact even cited Heraclitus as an inspiration of sorts for his own systems of thinking. For Kierkegaard, however, the idea of progress is suspect. If we as readers are left with Heraclitus as a parting figure, then we are left with a philosopher whose thoughts survive only in fragments, and who was known as the philosopher of riddles, the weeping philosopher. Although Kierkegaard introduces many brief narratives into his text, these stories are recounted as only hypothetical emplotments. As hypothetical scenarios, these repetitions and variations on themes of plot and character avoid closure. Johannes de Silentio’s many re-imagined tellings of Abraham’s story resist a definitive version or interpretation. Thus, Kierkegaard’s construction of history or narrative is prolific but fragmented.

In Fear and Trembling, the question of structured dialogue between modes of expression and modes of reality can be seen as a reconciliation, but its sense of atonement (at-one-ment) is strongly qualified. That is, the subject and the collective, the aesthetic and the ethical, can only be unified by maintaining their distinct separation through dialogic interactions. By contrasting the two genres of lyric and dialectic, Kierkegaard creates a meta-commentary on what it is to be human, blending the abstract impulse with imagination and immediacy. The structured contrast of diverse expressive systems doesn’t communicate in direct language, but in a language that can
be outlined but never quite described directly. The ultimate irony of this text is in its universal application of pure subjectivity. Although Abraham is held up as a hero of faith who defies comparison to any other religious devotee, it becomes clear that his crisis of universal and subjective modes of expression and experience is shared by humanity. Religious conversion in *Fear and Trembling* is shown to be the recognition itself of this very human crisis. As Johannes de Silentio says, “Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is a passion” (67). Abraham’s silence then becomes a language of the divine. His dialogic divine language, his speaking in tongues, reconciles and unites human life.
The choice to examine the interaction of genre and language variety in Eliot’s religious narratives is perhaps not an obvious one. Eliot’s novels in many ways stand in stark opposition to the genre preoccupations and stylistic experimentation of Kierkegaard’s eclectic writings. While Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* forces an insistent subjectivity into center stage, only to be confirmed in its ineffability and unknowability, Eliot’s novels tend toward the common experience of the human race, seeking to gather humanity together under one net of progressive world history. While Kierkegaard focuses on particularity and individuality, highlighting this through pseudonymous authors who write in varied generic modes of expression, Eliot provides a strongly (at least ostensibly) monologic narrative in her novels, one that ties her plots together with a firm philosophical and realist voice – Eliot’s own voice. Even identifying Eliot’s novels as religious takes some defending. Her brand of religion is non-theological and secularizing. Her appreciation of religious devotion does not usually translate into advocacy of particular creeds or dogmas. Instead she champions ethical principles extracted from a variety of religious traditions. Kierkegaard articulates a paradox of faith, one intrinsically opposed to the systematizing tendencies of philosophical ethics; Eliot, on the other hand, seeks for a reconciliation of religion and philosophy and is strongly motivated by progressive, even utopian, goals of unified and cooperative social structures. Eliot never loses her vision of a sweeping progress of history, one that situates individuals and their subjective experiences within the larger context of social connectedness.
But this contrast with Kierkegaard is not at all absolute. For all Eliot’s monologizing of varied modes of discourse and her secularizing tendencies toward religion, there are two novels that venture deeply into the complications involved in these processes: *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*. The fourth and final of her novels, written in 1863 and 1876, respectively, these two are cluttered with issues of translation and interpretation (or misinterpretation) between varied sign systems and modes of communication. More importantly, of all of Eliot’s novels, they are the two that most clearly explore the mystical or numinous aspects of religion and the psyche, the side of spiritual experience that is not easily translated into moral codes of conduct or rational systems. The diversity and interactions of language and genre within these novels become a means to explore this hard to express territory, and they illuminate a world of inner and non-rational experience.

But a close examination of these interactions between language and sign systems also shows significant differences in the two novels, *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*. I will compare and contrast the articulation of the numinous in both novels. Both novels also experiment with various modes of expressing a language of interiority, a realm of experience closely tied to conceptualizations of the divine. This linguistic variety and experimentation (and the questions of translation and interpretation that this variety raises) spill into non-linguistic modes of communication in the two novels, as Eliot associates aesthetic modes of expression such as visual art and music with the language of the numinous or the occult. Finally, I will analyze the difference in genre conventions between the narrative structure of *Romola* and that of *Daniel Deronda*. Through the differences in these two novels’ treatment of language, sign systems, and genre, I will identify developmental changes in Eliot’s advocacy of religion and the interaction of the numinous with history and the human psyche. While *Romola*’s treatment of this broad
subject demonstrates a universalizing impulse or a desire to abstract religious narratives into a universal moral code, *Daniel Deronda* leads readers to value the individual rootedness of particular creeds and traditions and the need for difference in the face of universalizing impulses. Thus these two narratives of conversion and personal change are traced in divergent paths, as her verdict on the question of whether the numinous can participate in the world of social interaction changes. In her later novel Eliot demonstrates the feasible possibility of a dialogism of mystical and social-ethical religious experience. The tension of this dialogic relationship, however, is seen in both novels.

3.1 Eliot’s history of religious affiliation

What was religion to Eliot? George Eliot provided ample commentary on her own nuanced religious philosophy and personal religious history in her letters and essays. Her life story traces a path from religiously observant devotion to secular philosophy. Born in 1919 in the British Midlands, a region known for its dissenting movements, Eliot was brought up in the mainstream Church of England, but her early girlhood was nevertheless just as strongly influenced by her Methodist aunt and uncle. This Methodist influence can be seen in the penchant for plain living and strict sense of ethics of her early years. As a young woman, Marian Evans was suspicious of the arts and instead dedicated her studies to moral tracts and ethical philosophy. Her early moral zeal did not lessen with the years, but her loyalties changed significantly with her discovery of German philosophy, particularly through her interest in the

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40 One striking experience of her aunt, Elizabeth Tomlinson Evans, provided the basis for *Adam Bede*. Like Dinah the Methodist preacher in Eliot’s novel, Tomlinson once ministered to a young mother who was imprisoned for killing her own child.
writings of the young Hegelians. In 1842⁴¹ she declared to her father that she was leaving Anglicanism, thereby causing a heart-breaking estrangement between them. After a short-lived compromise with her father, in which she agreed to attend church but not to profess belief, she moved out of her father’s house and formed a new circle of friends that included philosophizing free-thinkers⁴² such as Herbert Spencer and Charles and Cora Bray, who further distanced her from institutional worship.⁴³ Prompting the further development of her own philosophy was her passionate interest in historical-philosophical movements on the continent. This led her to translate David Friedrich Strauss’s Das Leben Jesu, a seminal work that challenged the historicity of the New Testament narrative while asserting this narrative’s importance as intellectual myth-making. She followed this translation with another of Feuerbach’s Essence of Christianity, a work which likewise argues against the historicity of the Christian narrative and

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⁴¹ In a letter to Robert Evans 28 Feb, 1842: “I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness.” (Letters 128)

⁴² In a letter to Francis Watts 3 August 1842 “I can just now grasp nothing as truth but the principle that that which is best in ethics is the only means of subjective happiness, that perfect love and purity must be the goal of my race, that only while reaching after them I can feel myself in harmony with the tendencies of creation. . . . It seems to me that the awful anticipations entailed by a reception of all the dogmas in the New Testament operate unfavourably on moral beauty by disturbing that spontaneity, that choice of the good for its own sake, that answers my ideal.” (Letters 143-4)

⁴³ Charles Bray’s autobiography, Phases of Opinion and Experience during a Long Life (1884) declared his belief in God, but not a god who required worship or prayer. Bray also rejected a belief in the devil and in punishment for sins. George met various friends through her association with the Brays: Robert Owen, John Chapman, J. A. Froude, Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Combe, Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau and H. G. Atkinson. (Ashton 40-41)
instead asserts the idea of God as a mythological reflection of human consciousness. After her decision to live in an unsanctioned marriage relationship with George Henry Lewes, who was legally married to another woman, she further found herself beyond the reach of the visible church, those institutional hierarchies and social bylaws that condemned her lifestyle. Yet it was at this point, only after joining forces with Lewes, that she ventured into the imaginative realm of novel-writing, constructing novels that are full of religious conversion and compromise. As novelist, she put herself in the shoes of religious seekers, creating for herself an identity as literary advocate of various marginalized groups. Of her novels and fictional works, *Adam Bede*, *Romola*, and *Daniel Deronda* are especially concerned with the persuasive forces of religious institutions and charismatic leaders, as well as the conversion or enlightenment of various significant characters. Her other novels deal with these elements in less focused ways, but an analysis of aspects of her other works certainly helps to illuminate her overall aims as a religious writer. For Eliot, Christianity and religion itself needed to be reduced to their essence (q.v. Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*), distilled into a purer and more universal definition of the good. Her novels were in many ways a means to this end.

In personal writings, both young and more mature Eliot referred to the ambiguity she felt toward the public, social, and political character of the Church. As early as 1839, in a letter to her teacher Maria Lewis, young Marian Evans wrote, “On no subject do I veer to all points of the compass more frequently than on the nature of the visible church. I am powerfully attracted in a certain direction but when I am about to settle there, counter assertions shake me from my position” (Haight 25). Three years after writing this letter, she disaffiliated herself from this visible church. But twenty-three years later, as Eliot was researching in preparation for writing *Romola*, she wrote to her longtime friend Barbara Bodichon, “Pray don’t ever ask me again not
to rob a man of his religious belief, as if you thought my mind tended towards such robbery. I have too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with No-faith, to have any negative propagandism in me. In fact, I have very little sympathy with Free-thinkers as a class, and have lost all interest in mere antagonism to religious doctrines. I care only to know, if possible, the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning till now.” (Letters IV 64-5 Nov 26, 1862, quoted in Himmelfarb 62). Eliot’s allegiance to this “lasting meaning” or essence of faith while distancing herself from the institutions of worship is reflected in her novels’ ambiguous stance toward religious affiliation. Eliot peoples her novels with institutionally affiliated religious figures who are both good and bad examples of this pure essence of Christianity. Middlemarch, one of Eliot’s least religious narratives, demonstrates this ambiguity with its two prominent clergymen characters: Casaubon and Farebrother. Casaubon is a dismal representative of religious adherents, offering the world only dead scholarship and demonstrating no understanding of human nature or the world around him. He and his endeavors are similarly decrepit, ineffective, and selfishly motivated. It is significant that he has no congregation, no community to which he ministers. Farebrother, on the other hand, might be considered the novel’s model of Christianity: by far the most self-sacrificing character, Farebrother offers his friends and associates both guidance and unselfish support to his own detriment. His selflessness toward his community is Eliot’s demonstration of religion as it should be.

The connection between Eliot’s focus on diverse modes of discourse and the world of religious ideology is perhaps encapsulated by this quote from an early work: “Religious ideas have the fate of melodies, which, once set afloat in the world, are taken up by all sorts of instruments, some of them woefully coarse, feeble, or out of tune, until people are in danger of
“crying out that the melody itself is detestable” (Scenes of Clerical Life 298). Eliot saw the good principles behind religious creeds as necessarily distorted or obscured by varied customs and practical expression. In other words, while principles may be true or universally valued, these principles were subject to misinterpretation or poor performance.

Passionate about finding truths within religious creeds and practices, George Eliot nevertheless espoused a view of religion itself as necessarily broad. This view embraced not only the various Christian denominations depicted in her novels but also secular creeds and viewpoints that require deep conviction. She links secular and deistic creeds by couching both in familiar religious language. This is illustrated by her novel Felix Holt, in which the protagonist claims a personal conversion story. Refusing to affiliate himself with any particular religious denomination, instead, his conversion is to a life of simplicity and unselfishness and to zealous political activism. Without embracing a particular theology, Felix Holt nonetheless espouses a clear socio-political doctrine with the fervor of a proselyte and refers to his choices of lifestyle in terms familiar to personal conversion narratives. Felix Holt, Mr. Farebrother, and various other characters in her oeuvre, like Silas Marner, for example, all demonstrate Eliot’s advocacy of a religiously inspired morality, even when (or especially when) the results of this morality have secular benefits. But Eliot’s secularization of religion finds a counterbalance in both Romola and Daniel Derona, novels which bring mystical and irrational aspects of religious traditions and beliefs to the foreground.

3.2 An overview of Eliot’s novels

Eliot didn’t start with ambitions to be a novelist. In her early youth as a fervent evangelical, she disapproved of novels as an effective means of social or religious reform,
particularly when directed toward a religious audience.\textsuperscript{44} After her break with religious institutions, she forged her way into philosophical circles, writing essays, editing the \textit{Westminster Review}, and earning a reputation as a German translator. Her foray into fiction was an experiment in “natural history,” inspired by historians such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (Caragnan 448-9). Acting in accordance with Riehl’s ideals for a new kind of historical narrative, Eliot sought to immerse her readers in the past through the imaginative narrative history of her first fictional work, \textit{Scenes from Clerical Life} in 1857. Showing a strong stylistic debt to Walter Scott, Eliot wrote sympathetic depictions of rural English life colored with both humor and sentiment. These three “scenes” have limited plot and character development, ending abruptly and showing general immaturity of narrative writing skill. However, their placement of internal struggles of morality and spirituality against a backdrop of homespun realism presents readers of Eliot’s works with a foundation for her later more complex novels. Although she focuses somewhat on the rivalry between Dissenters and the Church of England establishment in \textit{Scenes}, her characterization of true morality does not proselytize for a particular denomination, and her sympathy for Evangelicalism is tempered by her depiction of the human foibles of adherents of varied creeds. Thus while \textit{Scenes of Clerical Life} had significant relevance to the politics of religion in her own contemporary society, each story points to an “essence” of religion that finds application in later novels. For example, the conflict of inner passion and outward-focused

\textsuperscript{44} Feb 16, 1839 to Maria Lewis “Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones. They are a sort of Centaur or Mermaid and like other monsters that we do not know how to class should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance. Domestic fictions as they come more within the range of imitation seem more dangerous. For my part I am ready to sit down and weep at the impossibility of my understanding or barely knowing even a fraction of the sum of objects that present themselves for our contemplation in books and in life. Have I then any time to spend on things that never existed?” (Haight Vol 1, 23)
morality of “Mr. Gilfil’s Romance” finds an echo in Gwendolen Harleth’s horror at her desire for Grandcourt’s death, as well as in Daniel’s spiritual mentoring of Gwendolen’s moral awakening. The conversion narrative of “Janet’s Repentence,” one that is prompted by a connection of human sympathy, can be compared to the awakening stories of Eliot’s later heroines: Hetty of Adam Bede, Romola, Esther Lyon of Felix Holt, and again, Gwendolen of Daniel Deronda.

However, Eliot’s 1859 novella, The Lifted Veil, offers readers an opposing vision of literary technique and theme. This short novella is a first person narrative, speaking from the viewpoint of a clairvoyant whose relationships with others are ruined by his insight into their sins and weaknesses. Unlike any of Eliot’s other writings, it has gothic tendencies reminiscent of the works of Mary Shelley or E. A. Poe, combining an interest in science and psychology with questions of the occult. Though sometimes ignored in discussions of Eliot’s canon, The Lifted Veil can be seen as a precedent for some of the mystical or psychic visionary characters and moments in later novels. Romola’s brother is just such a mystic: blind to human affection and connection but clairvoyant to future events and the inner state of human souls. Even Gwendolen experiences the horror of prevision, but this is depicted by Daniel Deronada’s narrator as being linked to her selfishness. Thus Eliot’s first two published works of fiction writing foreshadow some of the preoccupying questions that emerge in her later novels: What is the relation of the numinous to the realm of human sociality? What are the signs and causes of a moral awakening, and how do these interact with moments of spiritual awakening? Are the moral and the spiritual necessarily separate realms of human experience?

After The Lifted Veil, Eliot abruptly shifted back into realist and moralist narratives: Her first full-length novel, Adam Bede, 1860, continues in the same vein as Scenes of Clerical Life, depicting the humble classes of humanity and sympathetically representing Methodism, a
denomination whose adherents tended to be from the lower classes in England. By this point, Eliot’s reputation as a fiction writer was overtaking her already established reputation as a moral and philosophical scholar. With The Mill on the Floss in 1860 and Silas Marner, in 1861, Eliot continued to uphold ideals of realism espoused by such influential writers and critics as George Henry Lewes, and her novels abound in middle or lower class characters, plentiful scenes of dialogue with colorful transcriptions of local accents, and a strongly moral tone providing context for family dramas.

But Eliot embarked on a new project with Romola (1862-3): Set in Florence during the Italian Renaissance, it nonetheless strives for a historical realism that was supported by hours of exhaustive research on Eliot’s part. Eliot’s insights into Italian culture are thoughtful, but the novel clearly points readers to apply its narrative to the Victorian context of Eliot’s own day. With her next three novels: Romola, Felix Holt the Radical (1866), and Middlemarch (1871-2), Eliot constructed symbolic histories in which characters are crafted into emblematic figures representing larger social forces. Within these novels, Eliot’s sweeping commentaries on the progress of philosophical and social movements through time, readers can trace a narrative enactment of Hegelian principles of history. These bildungsroman novels trace the development of individual heroes and heroines in order to point readers toward a historical development of the progress of world civilization. Each novel directs readers toward the long view of history. But Eliot’s final novel, Daniel Deronda (1876), is yet again a departure from narrative patterns set with these previous novels, though still an experiment in historical theories. With this last novel, Eliot diverges from Hegelian views of the progress of world history and looks to Jewish culture and narrative romances as models for her novel’s structure. Of all her novels, Daniel Deronda has prompted the most varied interpretations and analyses, in part because of its double focus on
two very different heroes: Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. Open-ended in its resolution, the novel questions and modifies the German philosophical quest for a unified narrative of world history. Instead, this novel sets up alternative histories and modes of expression within its narrative structure, following genre patterns of chivalric romance in its interweaving strands of miraculous coincidences, providential rescues, and forays into mysticism. It validates cultural and ideological diversity with its introduction of multiple heroes and gives a potentially disorienting alternative to the unified plots of her previous novels.

While Eliot’s narrative oeuvre ends with *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot’s very last publication adds an intriguing development to the enactment of literary genres within her texts. Published shortly before her death in 1880, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), is a collection of essays with a fictionalized author. Part imaginative narrative, part philosophy, Eliot’s last publication returns readers to the serious-minded cultural commentary of her early works while adding a leavening of self-aware subjectivity and self-parody. Theophrastus Such is reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authors in his blurring of the lines between philosophical and poetic genres.

### 3.3 Sign systems in *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*

Differences between the function of language and sign systems in the two novels, *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*, show key developments in Eliot’s language of the numinous, a concept of the divine at times inextricable from Eliot’s concept of the inner human psyche. Eliot’s earlier novel, *Romola* sets up a world of eclectic and competing language systems, ones that often fail or are deliberately deceptive. This cacophony of language is pitted against a non-linguistic world of reason and compassion that transcends time and space. *Daniel Deronda*, on the other hand,
though also creating moments of misunderstanding and linguistic failings, insists on the positive and even ethical importance of language and expressive systems. Within this later novel, language is brought to the foreground not just as a conveyor of information but also as a vehicle for sympathetic influence. In both novels, the tension between the individual, the divine, and a collective or social reality becomes a question of language and expressive systems. The heteroglossic interactions within the structure of each novel offer a demonstration of Eliot’s realist model of the individual within a social world. The position of the interior psyche and its relation to the numinous divine is a central question that is answered differently in the two novels.

Romola: As a case study for Eliot’s discussion of competing modes of expression, Romola sets up a world of clear language differences. The novel’s setting is crucial to this. Florence at the close of the 15th century is a city ripe with culture, receiving the spoils of antiquity from a conquered Byzantium, nurturing the seeds of political and economic modernity, and clinging to the mystical and ascetic cultures of medieval monasticism. Romola portrays in laborious detail this crossroads of cultures: east and west; ancient, medieval and modern; text-centered versus oral or illiterate; the political alongside the familial and ethnic. A microcosm of civilization and its discontents, the novel carefully constructs scenarios of both successful and unsuccessful communicative modes. Eliot presents this variation of expressive modes as a richly realist tapestry that enhances the novel’s pathos (even when it employs humorous parody). Its opening scene is one of overcoming linguistic obstacles to understanding. Tito Melema, the classically educated foreign visitor in Florence is confronted by the illiterate but pragmatically eloquent local junk-seller, Brattaferri. As Brattaferri speaks to Tito, “The deep gutteral sounds of the
speaker were scarcely intelligible to the newly-waked, bewildered listener, but he understood the action of pointing to his ring . . . “(12). This code-switching process is repeated throughout the novel as characters of diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds interact within a dynamic society.

In *Romola*, these divergent modes of discourse highlight society’s need for translation and interpretation between varied ideologies and cultures. The diverse sign systems are embodied in and given expression through her cast of characters: under Eliot’s pen, these varied personalities become figures of ideological significance as well as spokesmen for varied modes of discourse. Thus she portrays the clash of the sign systems of Renaissance humanism (with Piero di Cosimo’s art and Bardo dei Bardi’s classical scholarship) against the sermons and visionary language of religious mysticism (through Fra Luca, Girolamo Savonarola, and even Camilla). *Romola* also constructs a world of folk symbols (given expression by Tessa, Nello, and Brattaferri), which stands apart from the erudite sign systems of the ruling classes (like the Medici family and Bernardo del Nero). Classical humanism, mystic preaching, folk expression, artistic media, and political rhetoric each find realization in Eliot’s novel, but with varying success. As title character, Romola begins the novel as a young woman striving to master the language culture of her father. As she develops into maturity, she encounters each of these language systems and finds herself in the position to experience and evaluate their efficacy.

This efficacy or success of language systems in *Romola* is based on their eloquence, or their power to persuade and inform. Though *Romola* seems to present us cases of both successful and failed eloquence, closer reading shows that deeply successful eloquence is not always rooted in language or linguistic factors. One example of failed communication is embodied in the character of Romola’s father, Bardo dei Bardi, a representative of ancient scholarship. In his
quiet, staid library, readers are introduced to a character whose name aptly reflects his life’s goal, to carry on the legacy of poets and writers of ancient times. Bardo dei Bardi is metaphorically the poet of poets, but he is frustrated in his scholarly efforts by his lack of audience. No one (until Tito Melema’s arrival) has sufficient linguistic knowledge to help him maintain the continuity with the past that he desires. Bardi is blind, dependent on others to read and interpret ancient texts for him, as all ancient texts need interpreters. The novel’s one other significant classical scholar, Baldassare, also carries with him a different kind of blindness. Not an ocular affliction, Baldassare’s sporadic dementia makes him unable to interpret or understand his own previous knowledge. Without a continuity of literacy and remembrance, his former learning is useless. Likewise, the knowledge of the past can be lost with even one weak link in the chain of preservation. Thus Romola shows the eloquence of antiquity to be tenuous, dependent on politics and personal whims for its survival. Because Bardi lacks willing or successful interlocutors who can participate in dialogue with his learning, the wealth of ancient texts that he possesses is lost. Because of Baldassare’s isolated life of hardship and deprivation, his store of knowledge is likewise unreliable.

While the classical texts of Bardi and Baldassare demand high levels of education and preparation in order to produce an exact and accurate translation, Romola’s world of religious preaching and mystical expression is wider in its audience and is more flexibly interpreted. This sign system is dominated by Fra Savonarola, but is highlighted as well by the visions of Fra Luca and Camilla. Although conveyed orally, through public preaching or private persuasive sessions, this mode also depends much on symbol. Ambiguous in its interpretation, it relies not only on the speaker but also on the imaginative powers of the hearer. This is demonstrated with the varied reactions of the characters to Savonarola’s preaching. For example, after listening to Fra
Savonarola speak, Romola feels a deep motivation for moral purity, while Baldassare is moved to intense vengeance after listening to the same sermon. The same sermon inspires these two characters toward divergent courses of action, though neither listener can necessarily be accused of misunderstanding his message. George Eliot’s narrator reflects on both the mixed nature of Savonarola’s preaching and the mixed character of his audience: “Perhaps, while no preacher ever had a more massive influence than Savonarola, no preacher ever had more heterogeneous materials to work upon. And one secret of the massive influence lay in the highly mixed character of his preaching. Baldassare, wrought into an ecstasy of self-martyring revenge, was only an extreme case among the partial and narrow sympathies of that audience. In Savonarola’s preaching there were strains that appealed to the very finest susceptibilities of men’s natures, and there were elements that gratified low egoism tickled gossiping curiosity, and fascinated timorous superstition” (Romola 234).

If the test of eloquence is persuasion, and the test of persuasion is the ideological or religious conversion of individuals, then Romola offers us an ostensibly obvious candidate for the most eloquent speaker: Fra Savonarola. As Romola is converted on her way out of the city, she has her own road to Damascus experience, called to repentance by a priest with an uncanny knowledge of her personal crisis. However, her subsequent intense loyalty to Fra Girolamo is explained by the narrator in somewhat ambiguous terms. We find that Romola’s conversion cannot truly be traced back to the linguistic aspects of their encounter: “She had simply felt that his mind had suggested deeper and more efficacious truth to her than any other, and the large breathing-room she found in his grand view of human duties had made her patient towards that part of his teaching which she could not absorb, so long as its practical effect came into collision with no strong force in her” (445). Eliot doesn’t attempt to reproduce (either by imitation or
direct quotation) the rhetoric of Fra Girolamo. She instead describes it indirectly by painting a picture of its effect on the Florentine public and certain individuals. Romola’s own personal call to duty is one of the few conversations scripted out for Savonarola, but it borrows from the direct, authoritative, and penetrating style of speaking that Eliot researched from his sermons. And yet, in narrator Eliot’s commentary, Romola catches a vision of duty that is “suggested” rather than dictated to her. Savonarola’s persuasive eloquence is a catalyst for Romola’s own deepening understanding; she comes to recognize a moral truth already found within her heart.

This ambiguity toward language is reaffirmed later in the novel: Romola, after all, experiences two conversions. Both involve Romola’s leaving the city of Florence, escaping the ties of marriage and family. In the first, she is intent on escaping the city and her husband when Fra Girolamo exerts his charismatic eloquence to call her back to her duties and prompts her moral awakening and religious conversion. But the narrative of the second conversion experience puts into question the need for eloquence in language at all. The second time, however, no one stops her flight; no one speaks to her or uses persuasive language in any way. In fact, Fra Girolamo has betrayed her only friend Bernardo del Nero, and Romola is no longer affected by his rhetoric. Just as his speeches have no effect on Romola, so does language itself lose its relevance in her life decisions. Instead, she is set adrift (literally and figuratively) without the purpose that had previously given structure to her life. Her re-conversion to duty and a life of service comes from pragmatic action itself; that is, from actively helping a plague-stricken village of people who do not all speak her language but nevertheless revive in her a sense of purpose and an energy to do good. Her second return to Florence is again a return to duty as she seeks the people who might need her care and guidance. Thus, this second conversion is to a life of sympathy, not a particular denomination or theological creed. With this second experience,
becomes a free agent, to do good according to her own conscience, affiliated with no religious leader or institution.

Thus Eliot’s earlier explanation of Savonarola’s effect on Romola is reaffirmed with the circumstances of her second conversion. Her initial awakening to moral duty may have been sparked by the (linguistic) dialogue between herself and the priest, but the gradual interiorization of her duty has little need for linguistic expression. In fact, Romola’s final longing to hear Savonarola’s words is not fulfilled. He utters no final words of clarity before his execution; instead, the narrative simply records, “Savonarola’s voice had passed into eternal silence” (579). Likewise, the polyphony of Romola’s surroundings becomes less and less relevant as the plot progresses. In Romola, the ethics of sympathetic community-building rises above human language systems.

Chronology, the passage of time, plays a part in this system of anti-linguistic ethics. Eliot’s reconstruction of a geographically and historically remote Italian culture, with her incorporation of Italian words and phrases, as well as literal translations of Italian proverbs and sayings, requires a kind of dialogue between the English-speaking reader and her foreign cast of characters – another task of interpretation. But as readers are introduced to a language that is different from their own, invited to bridge that gap through an imaginative sympathy of feeling for these characters of a distant land and time, Eliot simultaneously explicitly invites readers to look beyond cultural and linguistic differences and towards a sympathy that is deeper than language. In her Proem, the narrator describes an angel’s journey through time from the Renaissance Italy to her present day:

Go not down, good Spirit! for the changes are great and the speech of Florentines would sound as a riddle in your ears . . . confuse yourself with no inquiries into scholarship, official or monastic. Only look at the sunlight and shadows on the grand walls that were built solidly, and have endured in their grandeur; look at the faces of the little children,
making another sunlight amid the shadows of age; look, if you will, into the churches, and hear the same chants, see the same images as of old--the images of willing anguish for a great end, of beneficent love and ascending glory; see upturned living faces, and lips moving to the old prayers for help. These things have not changed. The sunlight and shadows bring their old beauty and waken the old heart-strains at morning, noon, and eventide; the little children are still the symbol of the eternal marriage between love and duty; and men still yearn for the reign of peace and righteousness -- still own that life to be the highest which is a conscious voluntary sacrifice. For the Pope Angelico is not come yet (7-8).

This Proem sets the tone for Romola’s thesis on the diversity of sign systems. Language differences are recreated in all their complexity in the novel, but they are set up only to be dismissed as distractions to the enduring message of life. Thus while the world of both secular and ecclesiastical scholarship is one of tenuous communication, Eliot’s novel brings us through it and beyond. Eliot’s novel ends with the creation of a new family unit after a traumatic plot of death and betrayal. Romola’s role as adoptive mother of her husband’s illegitimate children and loyal sister-friend to their mother and various other needy characters is also embodied through the subdued concluding role of language diversity. By the end of the novel, cultural, generational, and linguistic differences, as well as gaps in bloodlines, are bridged through a wordless compassion.

Daniel Deronda: While Romola follows the development of a single young woman through hardship and moral awakening, Daniel Deronda intertwines the stories of at least two young heroes: Gwendolen Harleth is a young woman of less-than-ample means, seeking her fortune in the marriage market. Headstrong and fundamentally selfish, the narrative shows her slow awakening to a sense of moral responsibility toward others, influenced in part by an unhappy marriage and also in part by her friendship with the morally sensitive Daniel Deronda. The novel is also a bildungsroman for the young Daniel Deronda, however. Unlike Gwendolen, he starts out kind-hearted and morally astute. His narrative does not trace his development toward a
rational morality or unselfish compassion, but instead tells the story of his discovery of his parentage, his finding a spiritual connection with Jews, and his eventual sense of vocation to politically and spiritually dedicate himself to the Jewish people. Daniel Deronda experiences a kind of prophetic call, spiritually based but with implications that lead him to a life of active engagement with society.

Like Romola, Daniel Deronda invites readers into a world of cultural diversity, a context that conducive to a heteroglossia of diverse sign systems. Eliot’s final novel opens with a cosmopolitan scene in the casino at Monte Carlo: “Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocrat and English plebian” (8). With its international setting and varied cast of characters, the text itself nonetheless initially presents readers with a surprising lack of language diversity, an interesting contrast to Romola’s linguistic contructions. If we consider language as a figure in Daniel Deronda, it is no longer Romola’s overt language diversity, portraying conflicting forces of society, history, and psyche through metonymic clashes of sign systems. While allowing her characters, even culturally Jewish ones, to speak in a fairly monologic contemporary English diction, Eliot nevertheless explores issues of translation and interpretation while developing an argument for humanity’s need for understanding between both individuals and groups. In the highly literate society of Daniel Deronda, language variations are often embedded within written texts, whether read by characters or inserted as epigraphs for the benefit of the novel’s own readers. Not only do Deronda and his fellow characters interact significant contemporary texts in German, Hebrew, Italian, and French, throughout the course of the novel, but novel also introduces readers to a range of texts that extends back in time into the archaic history of the Jews. In her analysis of the function of translation within the novel, Jennifer Raterman asserts the fundamental optimism of Eliot’s
“translation” project in this final novel: “Rather than arguing for the impossibility of either intercultural or interpersonal communication . . . Eliot’s final works develop an epigraphic narrative structure in which foreign words invite readers into textuality as a network of social and historical relations, pushing Eliot’s fictions of ‘fellow feeling’ beyond national borders” (Raterman 35). Just as the novel’s characters read texts in multiple languages, so does the novel’s inclusion of non-English language epigraphs invite its readers to become similarly cosmopolitan in their reading habits. As in Romola, the diversity of language in Daniel Deronda serves Eliot’s social philosophy, urging readers to look beyond their narrow cultural boundaries and toward a larger sense of social unity and sympathy.

But Eliot’s final novel balances this inclusive philosophy, one that should be familiar to any reader of Eliot’s novels, with her titular character’s need for rootedness and particularity. Daniel only learns of his Jewish heritage as an adult, but his grandfather’s vision for the Jewish people becomes a mantra for the novel. His grandfather’s hope for the link between Jews and secular Europe, which he describes as “a balance of separateness and communication” (724), is couched in linguistic terms, and is a readjustment to the sweeping cosmopolitanism or a generalized call for human sympathy that appears in some of Eliot’s novels. Daniel’s decision to join himself with the Jews is demonstrated by immersing himself in Hebrew language and aesthetic and philosophical culture; then by dedicating himself to advocating their cause for nationhood, separate from other European and Middle Eastern political states. In fact, although

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45 Raterman continues, “The epigraphs to Daniel Deronda emerge throughout the course of the novel as a space for complex, increasingly multilingual narrative commentary. Of seventy epigraphs, eighteen (or about one quarter) either appear in or reference a language other than English, and the percentage rises significantly if we consider only the novel’s second half, in which thirteen of thirty (or nearly forty percent) of the epigraphs invoke a foreign language” (53).
Daniel Deronda’s story could be described as a conversion, in that he aligns himself with a religious identity, he experiences this conversion as much in relation to his cultural and social context as he does in relation to an interior change of heart or belief.

The socially structured nature of this conversion reflects both the broadly inclusive philosophy so characteristic of Eliot’s cosmopolitan ideals and a new sense of the need for a particular ethnic identity. Thomas Albrecht cites Kwame Anthony Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers to illuminate a new definition of cosmopolitanism in Daniel Deronda. “In the context of political and ethical philosophy, cosmopolitanism is usually taken to mean a sense of moral obligation towards a universal human community rather than towards a specific national or local community. Appiah however recalls the original Greek meaning of cosmopolitan, “citizen of the cosmos,” noting that the term cosmopolitanism is inherently paradoxical in that it evokes not only a universal context (the cosmos) but also a particular context (the polis). He maintains that consequently there are two different ethical obligations entwined in the notion of cosmopolitanism: a universal obligation to all human beings regardless of citizenship or kinship, and a particular obligation to one’s fellow citizens, neighbors, or kinfolk, which implies the recognition of specific differences between people, and the potential valuing of certain lives over others. (Albrecht 389)

With Deronda’s change of religion, he effects a linguistic and cultural change of identity as well. In doing so, he necessarily distances himself from his British identity, even from his intimate connection with Gwendolen. In his separation from Gwendolen, however, he lessens the trauma of separation with his assurance of continued communication: this separation is not to be a bitter one, nor is it evidence of a lack of sympathy. (Nor is it, as film interpretations might suggest, a bittersweet failed romance). In Deronda and Gwendolen’s last scene together, he
refers to the change in their intimacy, “We shall not be quite parted . . . I will write to you always” (805). In fact, the last communication from Gwendolen is a written note. The friendship is still to remain vital, but with the distance of text-based communication, Deronda achieves his grandfather’s goal of “separateness with communication.” Unlike the chaney success of Romola’s textual connections from the ancient past to the Renaissance present, Daniel Deronda’s text-based communication accepts the necessary distance between interlocutors while nevertheless celebrating its bridging role.

The separation of text-based language systems sets an interesting precedent for the broader demonstration of language in Eliot’s final novel. In contrast to Romola’s indiscriminate sense of unity between disparate groups and diverse language systems, Daniel Deronda presents a confederacy of language systems, each speaking to the needs and understanding of a particular group. Ezra in fact discusses the need for suitable language when he recounts his difficulties in finding an audience for his prophetic vision for his Jewish people. When he repeats to Deronda the advice of the wise men of his community, “The Book of Mormon would never have answered in Hebrew” (499), he is reflecting on the need for particularity and rootedness: for every age and people, a specific language. This particularity is brought to even sharper focus in the individual main characters of the novel: Daniel Deronda, Ezra Cohen, and Gwendolen Harleth are lonely characters, on a quest to find interlocutors who understand them. In many of Eliot’s novels, sympathetic understanding is a process of learning another’s language. But while earlier novels like Romola assert the need to understand all people, not discriminating between class, creed, or race, Daniel Deronda asserts a need for particular interlocutors. There is a resistance to the idea of easy interpretation or an absolute sense of universal communication. Instead, we see various individuals, but especially the title character, search for individual
understanding. The narrator’s description of Daniel’s character, that “he had never had a confidant” (469) is answered with Ezra’s own self-description, “the living were deaf to me” (498). Ezra, in his visionary quest for friendship, describes this idealized friend as a single “auditor,” rather than a plural audience. This is not to say that the intimate bond of communication between Ezra and Daniel is necessarily an end in itself. After all, both Ezra and Daniel eventually hope to be able to speak to the understanding of the Jews as an entire people. However, this public communication cannot take place until their partnership of private communication is established.

Daniel Deronda’s reconciliation of characters is therefore not based on universal sympathy alone. The need for finding a hearer is individualized. This is reflected in the novel’s unusual conclusion, a significant contrast to that of Romola. While Romola remains the central figure of her novel, the end scene brings readers to a sense of group identity. The small cluster of survivors in the closing chapter (Tessa and her children, Mona Brigida, Piero de Cosimo, and Nello the barber) are a reduced microcosm of the original Florentine society depicted throughout the novel. In contrast, this smaller version of Florence is softened into cultural compromise by time and succeeding generations. For example, Tessa’s ignorance is softened by the learning of her children, while Mona Brigida’s vanity is mitigated by her fondness for Tessa’s children. Those same modes of discourse represented throughout the novel are here represented in less formidable terms: Classical scholarship is present in the book of Petrarch’s poems that Lillo is studying. Ascetic religious mysticism is present in the shrine to the memory of Fra Girolamo. Tessa still wears the charm around her neck, but while the ignorant peasantry represented with Tessa is passed down to her children, it is beautifully blended with Tito’s refined sophistication. Romola’s unified microcosm of society is achieved in the novel’s harmonious resolution. The
contrast with Eliot’s final novel is stark: *Daniel Deronda* scatters its characters at the end of the novel. While Deronda himself heads off to learn new languages in a new land, Gwendolen is left with her native people, perhaps growing into a suitably upstanding wife for Rex Gascoigne. Readers are not given the conclusion to stories of other significant characters like the Klesmers or the Meyricks. Yet, this separation is portrayed as a necessary step forward for all the characters involved. Not a restful resolution, it reflects a tension of separation in both the novel’s verbal and traditional cultures.

3.4 Visual imagery as a language of the numinous in *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*

But Eliot deepens the scenario of diverse languages in both novels by including multiple aesthetic genres as modes of expression for her various characters. She depicts these aesthetic modes of expression especially when addressing the concept and experience of the numinous. Indeed, *Romola*’s moral-rational conversion comes after some significant depictions of the world of the numinous. Notably, Romola’s problematic relationship with numinous aspects of religion are presented as a question of communication. When it comes to the world of spiritual mysteries, *Romola*’s relies heavily on visual images. The novel’s construction of this world of visual signs is seen in the mongrel folklore of the people, which in its illiteracy utilizes image and object. It is also seen in descriptions of Piero di Cosimo’s art pieces, as well as in verbal articulations of mystic visions.

The folk world of image and object is first introduced to us by Brattaferri, the peddler whose wares, whether rags or jewels, achieve symbolic significance. When he first encounters Tito, they communicate through objects and gestures, and his initial interest in Tito’s ring sets the stage for a detective story that revolves around tangible artifacts that carry deep significance.
Eliot’s narrative of physical symbols is continued with the quaint superstitions of Tessa’s pendants and charms, along with Nello the barber’s misguided attempts at physiognomy. The wordless language of physicality and objects is in fact the lingua franca of these characters. It is this unlettered communication that runs as a steady undercurrent throughout the novel, more than in any of Eliot’s other novels. Ideas, emotions, and religious ritual are conveyed through objects and talisman signs. These signs carry great power, even while simultaneously demonstrating their limitations. In fact, Tessa is deceived into thinking she is lawfully married through the deception of physical symbols as the city’s street performers parody the sacraments of the church through a brightly colored spectacle of good-humored mimicry.

But the world of crudely fashioned folk symbols is not distant from Renaissance artistic expression. Piero di Cosimo (one of the real historical figures depicted in the novel) paints images that sometimes rely on a familiarity with Classical culture, as his paintings of Ariadne, Priam, and Oedipus demonstrate. But Cosimo ventures deeply into Christian visual symbolism as well. It is Cosimo who deepens the doomsday vision of Fra Luca by designing an allegorical float for the religious procession at the end of Book I, one that personifies death and puts the fear of the afterlife into the hearts of its viewers (200). Piero di Cosimo’s mode of expression is intuitively (and accidentally) clairvoyant. It gets at the heart of characters’ true identities, as is demonstrated by his early recognition of Tito’s potential for treachery. This clairvoyance is not conclusive or based on factual evidence, yet his artistic depiction of Tito as Sinon, the Greek whose persuasive lies led Troy to their downfall, becomes a key to Tito’s interior recognition of his own guilt and serves as foreshadowing not just for the reader but for Romola as well.

The intuitively prophetic visual symbols of Piero di Cosimo’s paintings create a bridge of signifying systems to the world of mystics and visionaries in the novel who likewise
communicate through descriptions of visual symbols. These visionaries, however, are the least effective—the least eloquent—in their communication with Romola, despite the fact that they speak the truth. Although Fra Luca’s (Dino’s) vision is ineffective, his prophecy of the danger and sorrow about to befall his sister at her impending marriage is verified. The mysticism of Dino and even of opportunistic psychics like Camilla is never debunked. Readers, in fact, recognize the validity of the brother’s vision of doom for Romola as a true premonition, however strongly the narrator demonstrates this mode of communication to be conducive to misunderstanding and failure. With the pronouncement of his vision immediately followed by his death, Romola is heartbroken that “the silence of misunderstanding could never be broken” (172). Readers are then invited to imagine another feasible outcome of Dino’s concern for his sister: “The prevision that Fra Luca’s words had imparted to Romola had been such as comes from the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom apart from the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom; the revelation that might have come from the simple questions of filial and brotherly affection had been carried into irrevocable silence” (173). In Romola, the world of visions is not communicated effectively precisely because it favors communication with the divine over communication with fellow humankind. In fact, the “shadowy region” described by Eliot seems more of a demonic or occult resource than a divine realm. Thus, in Romola, mystical religion is useless without sympathy. Its mode of expression, the visionary world of symbols, is likewise ineffective. In this novel, modes of expression that require interpretation and deciphering are rejected precisely because they alienate their hearers instead of building bonds of understanding. Fra Luca’s portrayal as an ineffective communicator parallels his mode of conversion. As he tells Romola that he felt the urge to “flee” from society, so does his mode of discourse demonstrate this distance from human interaction and human
sympathy. In contrast, Romola’s conversion, unlike that of her brother, does not bring her out of the world, but rather brings her into closer engagement with it. Her conversion likewise does not find expression in the visionary and cryptic world of symbol.

Little of Romola’s mystery of visual symbols spills over into Daniel Deronda. One instance, however, is a strong one: Gwendolen’s fright at the appearance of the “dead face” behind the panel. The mysterious painting locked in Gwendolen’s room makes its entrance early on in the novel, and Gwendolen’s reaction to it is a “shudder” and an immediate desire to cover it again, “snatching the panel out of the hand of the culprit, she closed it hastily, saying, ‘There is a lock—where is the key? Let the key be found, or else let one be made, and let nobody open it again; or rather, let the key be brought to me.’”(27). Gwendolen’s horror at the image of death and fear recalls to readers Romola’s reaction to her brother’s similar vision of death and doom, but with a significant difference. While the narrator defends Romola’s behavior and gives the fault instead to Fra Luca’s insensitivity to his listener, Gwendolen’s behavior is accompanied by no such justification. Rather, it serves as an indication of Gwendolen’s refusal to see certain realities, her horror at emotions within her psyche that she can’t understand. Eliot’s construction of Gwendolen has essentially merged the two characters, Fra Luca and Romola. Like Romola, Gwendolen she feels distress and bewilderment at the cryptic vision of death, while, like Fra Luca, her resistance to the pull of human sympathy makes her susceptible to these same fearful visions.

In fact, for readers, this scene foreshadows Gwendolen’s later struggle with her guilty desire for her husband’s death and her haunted horror after his drowning. For readers, but also for Gwendolen, this visual image becomes a kind of mystical prophecy similar to the vision of Fra Luca. But the difference in the way these two heroines interact with visual images of death or
mysteries highlights a contrast in the way these two novels deal with the numinous or occult. The narrative of Romola passes with some relief beyond the world of visions and into the clear light of rational humanism, assigning visions only to monkish or anti-social characters. Daniel Deronda accepts the numinous world as a force to be reckoned with and by combining in Gwendolen’s character both the mysticism of Fra Luca and rationalism of Romola, the novel situates the numinous within the human psyche. Although characters within Daniel Deronda vary in the extent to which they embrace visions, psychological mystery, and the numinous, these mystical realms are in no way dismissed by the narrative but are instead shown as serving to advance the characters’ growth.46

3.5 Music as a sympathetic language of the numinous

Eliot’s exploration of the ineffable or irrational side of human experience requires a mode of expression that can be intelligible to readers. Daniel Deronda explores other expressive media to this end. The second appearance of this mysterious image, the “dead face,” occurs during the tableau of A Winter’s Tale—and it is revealed (though indirectly) by Klesmer’s music:

    Herr Klesmer, who had been good-natured enough to seat himself at the piano, struck a thunderous chord—but in the same instant, and before Hermione had put forth her foot, the movable panel, which was on a line with the piano, flew open on the right opposite the stage and disclosed the picture of the dead face and the fleeing figure, brought out in pale definiteness by the position of the wax-lights. (60)

This incident ushers in a new expressive mode within Eliot’s novel: while Romola makes very little use of music as communication, music becomes a dominant mode of expression in Daniel

46 Terence Cave describes this shift toward an explanation of the ineffable: “Eliot, at this late stage of her life, has become a kind of Hamlet to her former Horatio, exploring in Daniel Deronda those depths of experience that are not ‘dreamt of in [the rationalist’s] philosophy.’(xxix)”
Nearly all characters of importance are musicians of some kind, whether by profession or inclination. (Even Lush plays the cello in his own private rooms.) Music in *Daniel Deronda* is linked to realm of emotion and experience not explained by rational systems of thought. As such it modifies *Romola*’s narrative journey past the relevance of language and into an ethical and wordless sympathy. Instead, music in *Daniel Deronda* provides a medium of expression that provides a bridge between the cryptic mystery (and even horror) presented by visual images in both art and the subconscious and the unifying sympathy that Eliot advocates in all her novels.

Eliot’s creation of Mordecai Cohen, later known as Ezra Cohen, blends the two expressive media of the visual and the musical as Ezra himself becomes a bridge figure between cultural systems. In fact, Eliot introduces her readers to his mystical and prophetic abilities while he stands on a literal bridge over the Thames. As a mystic, Ezra experiences visions similar to those attributed to characters like Fra Luca in *Romola*. Yet, although Ezra’s visions are described in visual terms (though certainly with more positive imagery than the dead face seen by Gwendolen or the deathly warnings of Fra Luca), the narrative brings these visions into the contemporary social world using a kind of synaesthetic combination of artistic expression.

Leaning on the parapet of Blackfriar's Bridge, and gazing meditatively, the breadth and calm of the river, with its long vista half hazy, half luminous, the grand dim masses of tall forms of buildings which were the signs of world-commerce, the oncoming of boats and barges from the still distance into sound and color, entered into his mood and blended themselves indistinguishably with his thinking, as a fine symphony to which we can hardly be said to listen, makes a medium that bears up our spiritual wings. (474)

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47 I will refer to this character as Ezra throughout this study.

48The larger context for this quote amplifies the synaesthetic quality of his vision: “Mordecai's mind wrought so constantly in images, that his coherent trains of thought often resembled the significant dreams attributed to sleepers by waking persons in their most inventive moments: nay, they often resembled genuine dreams in their way of breaking off the passage from the known to the unknown. Thus, for a long while, he habitually thought of the Being answering to his need as one distantly approaching or turning his back toward him, darkly painted against a golden sky. . . . Leaning on the parapet of Blackfriar's Bridge, and gazing meditatively, the
This blend of “sound and color” create a “symphony” of impressions. It is also notable that Ezra’s mystical visions are described in the heart of the city of London at the Thames River. Eliot’s river imagery is a constant not only throughout *Daniel Deronda*, but also throughout many of her novels, from the *Mill on the Floss* to *Middlemarch*. The flow of history, with all its social dynamics, like the flow of this river, is crucial to Ezra’s visions. Unlike Fra Luca, who removes himself from the world and likewise from any sympathetic interaction with humanity, Ezra’s quest is to find a medium of communication with this world. He finds this in the bustling city of London, not as a reclusive scholar who turns away from commerce and learning. In fact, it is the merchant Cohen family who introduces Ezra and Daniel. Eliot’s description of Ezra’s “symphony” of mystical visions is not only a blend of the expressive media of varied sensory perceptions, but also a blend of the varied vocations and functions of a multi-faceted social network of characters. The inclusion of music in the description of Ezra’s visions takes his experience away from the static symbols described by visionaries like Fra Luca and into a dynamic world of change, flow, and social interaction.  

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breadth and calm of the river, with its long vista half hazy, half luminous, the grand dim masses of tall forms of buildings which were the signs of world-commerce, the oncoming of boats and barges from the still distance into sound and color, entered into his mood and blent themselves indistinguishably with his thinking, as a fine symphony to which we can hardly be said to listen, makes a medium that bears up our spiritual wings. Thus it happened that the figure representative of Mordecai's longing was mentally seen darkened by the excess of light in the aerial background. But in the inevitable progress of his imagination toward fuller detail, he ceased to see the figure with its back toward him. It began to advance, and a face became discernible; . . . The visionary form became a companion and auditor; keeping a place not only in the waking imagination, but in those dreams of lighter slumber of which it is truest to say, ‘I sleep, but my heart waketh’—when the disturbing trivial story of yesterday is charged with the impassioned purpose of years.” (473-4)  

49 In other novels, music plays a role in spiritual conversion. In Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*, Maggie’s encounter with Thomas à Kempis’s *Life of Christ* is described in musical terms: “A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the
With Ezra’s prophecies set within a world of dynamic (musical) interactions, Eliot brings the numinous into a social or cultural setting. Musical encounters and musical imagery continue as a means of conveying cultural understanding. As *Daniel Deronda* maintains cultural diversity throughout the novel, music becomes the medium for communicating a sympathetic understanding for “other” traditions like that of the Jewish culture without preaching specific creeds or systems. Instead of communication through visual symbol—or any kind of symbol at all—musical communication occurs on an even more fundamental level, without the same need for contextual or linguistic understanding. Instead of a language that is informative or that persuades its speakers to be convinced of a particular truth, *Daniel Deronda*’s musical communication is emotive and unifying.

But if music becomes a new less dictatorial or didactic language for the numinous in *Daniel Deronda*, this does not mean that music as a communicative system does not carry a sense of authority. On the contrary, Herr Klesmer, perhaps the most unambiguously victorious character of the novel, bases this authority on his role as musician. This authority extends to some of the most important characters: He is the one who shapes the destinies of Gwendolen, Catherine, and Mirah. He dismisses Gwendolen, collaborates with (and eventually marries) Catherine, and sets Mirah on her course of professional success. Catherine Arrowpoint (a pointed name for the rival of Gwendolen, named for the archer goddess) identifies Klesmer’s “cosmopolitan ideas” and explains to the boorish Mr. Bult that, “He looks forward to a fusion of races” (242). Klesmer himself responds to Mr. Bult’s bourgeois belittlement and clarifies the relationship between his cosmopolitanism and his role as musician:

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night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor” (Book 4 Chapter 3).
A creative artist is no more a mere musician than a great statesman is a mere politician. We are not ingenious puppets, sir, who live in a box and look out on the world only when it is gaping for amusement. We help to rule the nations and make the age as much as any other public men. We count ourselves on level benches with legislators. And a man who speaks effectively through music is compelled to something more difficult than parliamentary eloquence (242).

In Julius Klesmer, Eliot establishes a kind of world ruler, one who (like his namesake Julius Caesar) conquers the world, although his empire is only governed musically. But what does he communicate through his music? In this novel, the content of this expression is not clear, perhaps because this content is less important than the mode of expression. Music therefore becomes the purest mode of expression—not measured for its ability to convey information or for its rhetorical eloquence but, rather, for its effect on the sympathies. This is illustrated by the effect of Mirah’s singing on Daniel. Notice the opposition directed against visual imagery in this description of what the narrator describes as “perfect singing”:

She sang Beethoven's "Per pietà non dirmi addio" with a subdued but searching pathos which had that essential of perfect singing, the making one oblivious of art or manner, and only possessing one with the song. It was the sort of voice that gives the impression of being meant like a bird's wooing for an audience near and beloved. Deronda began by looking at her, but felt himself presently covering his eyes with his hand, wanting to seclude the melody in darkness; then he refrained from what might seem oddity, and was ready to meet the look of mute appeal which she turned toward him at the end (372).

This is no mere romantic appeal, but one that has far-reaching effects within Eliot’s theory of sympathy. That is, Mirah’s music doesn’t simply make Daniel fall in love with her. Rather, her music symbolically deepens his sympathies and enlarges his understanding of others. It is noteworthy that this very same song, again performed by Mirah, serves as an appeal to Daniel for the voiceless Gwendolen as well.50

50 “He awaited her coming in the back drawing-room—part of that white and crimson space where they had sat together at the musical party, where Gwendolen had said for the first time that her lot depended on his not forsaking her, and her appeal had seemed to melt into the melodic
The deepening of Daniel’s understanding of Judaic culture can also be traced through his musical encounters. Mirah’s “lisped” Hebrew songs are an example of these, as culturally specific artistic expression that transcends common linguistic barriers. But Daniel’s initial response to Jewish music when he ventures into a synagogue in Vienna is described by comparing that music to well-known Christian composers Palestrina and Allegri. Thus Eliot avoids the implication that Judaism has a corner on music; rather, music in this novel situates itself in the realm of the universal. Daniel’s response to this music is not just strongly emotional. Along with music’s effect on his emotions, Daniel also receives an enlightening vision of universal unification: “a binding of history, tragic yet glorious” (368). Music, the medium for Klesmer’s vision of a “fusion of races” is a language of sympathy. It is a necessary element in Ezra’s visionary experiences for this very reason: music brings the solitary knowledge gained by an isolated experience with the numinous into the realm of shared dynamic social interaction.

*Daniel Deronda* constructs music as a communicative realm that enhances and deepens verbal speech. Yet, while certain musical events in the novel are recorded verbally, such as the Italian arias sung by Mirah and the lieder performed by Klesmer, the novel also gives us cry—*Per pietà non dirmi addio*. But the melody had come from Mirah's dear voice.” (Chapter 65)

51 “Deronda, having looked enough at the German translation of the Hebrew in the book before him to know that he was chiefly hearing Psalms and Old Testament passages or phrases, gave himself up to that strongest effect of chanted liturgies which is independent of detailed verbal meaning -- like the effect of an Allegri’s *Miserere* or a Palestrina’s *Magnificat*. The most powerful movement of feeling with a liturgy is the prayer which seeks for nothing special, but is a yearning to escape from the limitations of our own weakness and an invocation of all Good to enter and abide with us; or else a self-oblivious lifting up of gladness, a *Gloria in excelsis* that such Good exists; both the yearning and the exultation gathering their utmost force from the sense of communion in a form which has expressed them both, long generations of struggling fellow-men” (367).
examples of music that has power to express even while the words are not understood: the
Hebrew songs of Mirah, sung in the ‘lisped’ accents of her childhood, the music of the
synagogue, and Klesmer’s impassioned arpeggios. Eliot inserts this musicality of expression into
her characters’ dialogues as well, and the narrator frequently describes the tones and timbre of
human voices themselves as musical instruments. In fact, in Daniel Deronda, voices alone are
powerful communicators without the words they articulate. Grandcourt, for example, is
described as double-voiced: “Grandcourt, like many others, had two remarkably different voices.
Hitherto we have heard him speaking in a superficial interrupted drawl suggestive chiefly of
languor and ennui. But this last brief speech was uttered in subdued inward, yet distinct, tones,
which Lush had long been used to recognize as the expression of a peremptory will” (127).
Grandcourt’s two vocal tones convey the two sides of his character regardless of the specific
message he communicates.

The timbre and sonority of Daniel Deronda’s voice is likewise described. When readers
are first presented with his life history, Daniel is introduced as an angelic boy soprano. The
narrative of his growth into manhood is accompanied by description of his adult voice as well.52
Immediately before his encounter with Mirah, Deronda is singing, and it is his voice that first
commands her attention, “. . . apparently his voice had entered her inner world without her taking

52 Daniel’s transition from boyhood to adulthood is conveyed in his change of voice: “The voice,
sometimes audible in subdued snatches of song, had turned out merely a high baritone; indeed,
only to look at his lithe, powerful frame and the firm gravity of his face would have been enough
for an experienced guess that he had no rare and ravishing tenor such as nature reluctantly makes
at some sacrifice. Look at his hands: they are not small and dimpled, with tapering fingers that
seem to have only a deprecating touch: they are long, flexible, firmly-grasping hands, such as
Titian has painted in a picture where he wanted to show the combination of refinement with
force. And there is something of a likeness, too, between the faces belonging to the hands—in
both the uniform pale-brown skin, the perpendicular brow, the calmly penetrating eyes. Not
seraphic any longer: thoroughly terrestrial and manly; but still of a kind to raise belief in a
human dignity which can afford to recognize poor relations” (186).
any note of whence it came, for when it suddenly ceased she changed her attitude slightly, and, looking round with a frightened glance, met Deronda's face” (187). While Daniel never sings for Gwendolen, their first encounter after the wordless casino incident (their first official introduction) is likewise marked by Gwendolen’s perception of Daniel’s voice. Eliot signals this in her epigraph to the chapter, which is a quotation from Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, “Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice, / him or her I shall follow. /As the water follows the moon, silently, / with fluid steps anywhere around the globe.” At Daniel and Gwendolen’s first meeting, the narrator describes the effect of Deronda’s voice (not his words) on Gwendolen and contrasts this with the effect of Grandcourt’s voice. “His [Daniel’s] voice, heard now for the first time, was to Grandcourt's toneless drawl, which had been in her ears every day, as the deep notes of a violoncello to the broken discourse of poultry and other lazy gentry in the afternoon sunshine” (331). Eliot’s musical descriptions of voices convey the universality of music: even those characters that are neither professional nor amateur musicians have an inherent vocal instrument that has the capacity to communicate their inner character to others.

It is important to note that Eliot does not simplistically lump all sympathetic, insightful, and intelligent characters into the professional musicians’ camp. Deronda’s mother, for example, has had the most brilliant musical career of any character, yet she is portrayed as broken, unhappy, and fundamentally selfish. Conversely, the noble-hearted Rex Gascoigne finds a vocation that is perfectly suited to him and his efforts to change the world, but in explaining this

53 This section of Whitman’s poem continues: “All waits for the right voices;/Where is the practis’d and perfect organ? Where is the develop’d Soul?/For I see every word utter’d thence, has deeper, sweeter, new sounds, impossible on less terms./ I see brains and lips closed—tympans and temples unstruck,/Until that comes which has the quality to strike and to unclose,/Until that comes which has the quality to bring forth what lies slumbering, forever ready, in all words” (151 “Voices”).
to his father he draws attention to its unmusical nature. "I should like to end my life as a first-rate judge, and help to draw up a code. I reverse the famous dictum. I should say, 'Give me something to do with making the laws, and let who will make the songs.'"(706-7). But in contrast to his unmusical vocation, Gascoigne’s name can be seen as alluding to George Gascoigne, the poet (and song-writer) whose works praised the reign of Elizabeth I and who also translated Ariosto into English. This would make him an appropriate pair with Gwendolen, whose name invokes the ancient Queen of Britain. It also sets him as an interesting complement to Herr Klesmer’s musical work. As Rex’s father replies to his cheerful declaration, ‘’Well, my boy, the best augury of a man's success in his profession is that he thinks it the finest in the world. But I fancy it so with most work when a man goes into it with a will. Brewitt, the blacksmith, said to me the other day that his 'prentice had no mind to his trade; 'and yet, sir,' said Brewitt, 'what would a young fellow have if he doesn't like the blacksmithing?'” (707). Gascoigne lends his own voice to Eliot’s validation of the variety of vocations, embodied in the variety of expressive modes. Despite Gascoigne’s refusal of a musical vocation, his name invokes a musical poet whose vocation linked him to England’s glorious cultural and political Renaissance.

Shirley Frank Levensen asserts that Gwendolen’s non-musicality is a sign of separation from Judaism, stating, “Gwendolen's entire career and her tragic story can be viewed in the light of her inadequacies in relation to music--that is, musical standards which are represented by the book's idealized Jewish characters and expounded to her in particular by Klesmer and Deronda” (319). I would assert, however, that music and expression through tonal sound elements find their way into each character’s quest for vocation regardless of their ethic or religious affiliation. While Gwendolen’s vocation is still unformed by the end of the novel, she has found a “voice” to follow. And, as Klesmer tells her many chapters before, when she asks him to critique her
singing, “you are not quite without gifts” (49). The fault he finds with her voice at this early stage is also a judgment of her soul, which at this point is immature and selfish. Thus Klesmer’s words can be seen as moral advice, not mere artistic critique: “There is a sort of self-satisfied folly about every phrase of such melody; no cries of deep, mysterious passion—no conflict—no sense of the universal. It makes men small as they listen to it. Sing now something larger. And I shall see.” Gwendolen’s hurt deferral, saying instead that she would sing “by and by” (49) is fulfilled when she answers Daniel’s plea, late in the novel, to live an active, compassionate life. After all, Klesmer’s judgment of Gwendolen’s musical potential is premature, reflective of Gwendolen’s own immaturity, her lack of self-awareness and lack of compassion. Within the context of Eliot’s narrative arc, Gwendolen’s eventual awakening is an answer as much to Klesmer’s moral and musical criticism as it is to Daniel’s undisguised moral mentorship.

Eliot constructs the experience of conversion as a simultaneous calling to an individualized sense of vocation. In Daniel Deronda, conversion is simultaneously a mystical, a historical, and a social experience. Daniel’s explanation to Mirah and Ezra Cohen of his own experience demonstrates this in Chapter 63:

It is through your inspiration that I have discerned what may be my life's task. It is you who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning—the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors—thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather. Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind—the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious meanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. Something like that, I think, has been my experience. Since I began to read and know, I have always longed for some ideal task, in which I might feel myself the heart and brain of a multitude—some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize. You have raised the image of such a task for me—to bind our race together in spite of heresy. (750)
Daniel describes his awakening, calling, or conversion in musical terms that give realization to ancestral and social relationships.

In Romola, symbolic art or visual images portray the numinous world with a kind of proto-Freudian expression of the subconscious. The mystery of these visual symbols, couched in dark but cryptic visions, is incomprehensible to their intended auditors. This world of cryptic visions is present in Daniel Deronda, linked even more closely with the subconscious realm of the psyche. But in her last novel, George Eliot opens up the inner world of incomprehensible symbol by tempering it with an infusion of musical imagery. In introducing musical motifs in Daniel Deronda, Eliot asserts a language of the inner experience, one that is found both in the context of religious devotion and in secular performance. But unlike the systems of visual symbol that as static images can exist outside society, music is inherently interactive and performative, and its domain must be sympathetic understanding. As such, whatever informative message it communicates is incidental to the emotional understanding that it conveys. Eliot’s new language of the numinous is necessarily relational; its strength is in the dialogic act of expression rather than the encryption of meaning.

3.6 Assigning literary genre to Romola and Daniel Deronda

If we compare the narrative genre conventions of Romola and Daniel Deronda, we can find parallels to Eliot’s use of aesthetic modes of expression in the two novels. Eliot preserves the system of visual symbolism introduced in Romola, but complicates and deepens its flat meaning by adding further dimensions of aesthetic expression in Daniel Deronda. Her later novel does not entirely reject her earlier aesthetic construction, but uses it as one aspect of mystical or occult experience against which her musical references are thrown into dramatic
relief. Eliot’s evocations of narrative genre conventions are likewise made more complex in 
*Daniel Deronda*. *Romola*’s narrative presents us with an allegorical history: the Florentine 
Renaissance storyline is shown as a template for Eliot’s contemporary Victorian England, and 
history’s progress is shown to be repetitive, cyclical, and decipherable by rational interpreters. 
But with *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot gives up historical allegory and writes a contemporary narrative. 
As such, it can’t be a symbolic history in the same sense that *Romola* is, lacking both clear 
typological parallels and unified plot resolution. Eliot’s inclusion of the concept and current of 
history in her narrative, however, is just as emphatic. Daniel is, after all, named after the great 
biblical prophet whose apocalyptic visions see far into the future, and his interpretation of King 
Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the stone cut out of the mountain is likewise a visionary world 
history. The biblical Daniel is described in Eliot’s notebooks, “[He] was the first who grasped 
the history of the world, so far as he knew it, as one great whole, as a drama which moves 
onward at the will of the Eternal One” (Irwin 406). This complements Ezra Cohen’s vision of 
world history: 

> The world grows, and its frame is knit together by the growing soul; dim, dim, at first, 
then clearer and more clear, the consciousness discerns remote stirrings. As thoughts 
move within us darkly, and shake us before they are fully discern -- so events -- so 
beings: they are knit with us in the growth of the world. You have risen within me like a

54 As George Eliot’s Hebrew tutor, Emmanuel Deutsch of the British Museum significantly 
impacted Eliot’s understanding of Judaism and the vision. “Deutsch was an enthusiast for a 
Jewish homeland; when he visited Palestine in 1869 he wrote that all his ‘wild yearnings’ had 
been fulfilled. In May 1868 he confided in George Eliot some doubts about his future and his 
calling, to which she replied that he should not distrust his vocation: ‘I believe in it still, though I 
am the least hopeful of mortals both in my own affairs and in those of any one who is dear to 
me.’ Deutsch and his experience, including his painful decline and death from cancer in 1873, 
were etched in George Eliot’s mind as she wrote about Daniel Deronda and his Jewish mentor 
Mordecai [Ezra] in her last novel.” (Ashton 304)
thought not fully spelled: my soul is shaken before the words are all there. The rest will come -- it will come. (501)

Eliot’s frequent allusions to Judaic texts and references to kabalistic traditions show a marked contrast to genre conventions demonstrated in her other novels. Terence Cave points out Daniel Deronda’s shift away from Eliot’s patterns of historical realism and identifies the novel as a romance. “The readers of Daniel Deronda have to learn all over again to read romance, but to read it through, and not against, realism; or, perhaps better, to read it as an ‘evolved’ or ‘developed’ form of narrative, fusing elements from previous narrative modes” (xxviii) Eliot’s romance narrative still includes elements of the historical realism of her past within this last novel but puts them in interaction with the mystical and magical elements of romance narrative. Cave also points out the function of romance to lend to an occult or pre-Freudian narrative, as the psyche becomes a link to the miraculous and the inexplicable (xxviii). While Eliot maintains a familiar realism in her construction of character and setting, her vivid evocations of and allusions to folk tales, biblical histories, and themes of epic romance remind readers that there is more in life than meets the rationalist eye. Daniel Deronda provides readers with a negative model for reading romance in the character of Mrs. Arrowpoint. As Tasso’s biographer, Mrs. Arrowpoint claims that his life was a romance which demonstrated even more heroism than his writings. But when Klesmer and Catherine Arrowpoint declare their intention to marry, against the conventions of society, the Arrowpoint parents cannot recognize Klesmer as the modern romance hero that he is. Mrs. Arrowpoint’s refusal to see the romance elements of her own world is particularly egregious kind of blindness. Likewise, Eliot constructs a contemporary story with characters whose speech, professions, and appearances may be familiar, yet this narrative insists on the miraculous and numinous reality that runs as an undercurrent through the lives of its characters. This romance genre asserts itself as new kind of realism.
What does this changing form and theory of history, from rational allegory to romance have to do with genres of expression? With the shift from visual to an inclusion of sound imagery? Does Eliot’s musical motif connect to genre at all? Indeed, with this shift *Daniel Deronda* becomes an experiment rather than an argument. Music has flow, as does time or history. Its performative aspects are necessarily interactive. With Eliot’s shift to romance, the former static images of decipherable allegory move toward a narrative of intertwining strands of plot. While they may be episodic and sometimes disjointed, they are nevertheless unified by an overarching sense of providence and underlying design.

As a non-dogmatist, Eliot’s interest in spiritual experiences is nonetheless substantial. In her later notebooks she expresses a need for continuity in transitioning from early non-reason-based religious traditions to a modern philosophy of humanism. In many of her novels, she follows a pattern of providing her characters with a misguided or immature religious understanding, which is subsequently resolved into an ethic of community. The individual experience of being called to a spiritual vocation is still valued highly, but this narrative often ends in a departure from religious tradition and toward a more secular or humanistic ethical system. *Romola* depicts this progression clearly. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, the novel’s eponymous hero finds his vocation within the ancient and marginalized religious sect of Judaism. In studying this final novel in relation to Eliot’s earlier works, I find a dialogic openness in its construction of the relationship between the divine and the human, the individual and the community.

In this final novel, Eliot’s ideal of continuity is no longer confined to a universal “essence” of religion. She no longer advocates for an abstraction of the world religions into a rational argument for the ethical communities. Religion instead is portrayed in its particularity, yet the
ideal of continuity is not abandoned. Rather it embodies Deronda’s grandfather’s mantra: “a balance of separateness and communication” (724). In order to realize this, Eliot foregrounds communication through diverse expressive modes. Rather than merging her communities into a unity of wordless compassion, she retains the separateness of ethnicity, religious dogma, and individual idiosyncrasies. The novel asserts that only by retaining these separations is communication possible. The communication that is brought to the foreground in this novel is neither didactic nor dogmatic. With her focus on music, Eliot suggests the need for expression that is performative rather than expository, one that builds sympathies through its own resistance to imposed significations—its focus on the medium as much or more than the intended message. In Eliot’s final novel, religious conversion comes through a necessary interaction with both the numinous and the secular social world. The dialogic structure of language becomes a synecdoche of this very human process.
Chapter 4 - *Malombra* and *Il Santo*: Fogazzaro’s Aesthetic and Rational Conversions

For today’s readers, Antonio Fogazzaro is an obscure writer. He is not often translated into English, no longer widely read in Italian. In his lifetime, he published seven novels, various works of poetry, and several essays (often delivered first as lectures) on literary criticism and theory. All of his novels are preoccupied with faith, specifically Catholic faith; and all of his novels explore both experiential and doctrinal aspects of his religion. The following analysis will compare his first novel, *Malombra*, and his penultimate novel, *Il Santo*. The stylistic differences between these two novels reveal very different conceptions of both the experience and the teleology of faith. In both narratives, Fogazzaro narrates Christian conversions experienced by main and minor characters. But the two novels offer fundamental shifts in narrative structure that result in a demonstration of widely divergent definitions of conversion itself. As Fogazzaro transitions from literary decadence and aestheticism into a much more discursive or argumentative style, his belief system likewise evolves in ways that change the believer’s position substantially in relation to divinity, to human society and history, and even to his own sense of identity.

In 1896, Antonio Fogazzaro enjoyed a comfortable status as Italian man of letters. Already well known for his novels (*Piccolo Mondo Antico* was published the previous year to wide public acclaim), Fogazzaro also lectured frequently both in Italy and France on topics of aesthetics and philosophy. In the relatively new Italian nation-state, Fogazzaro seemed to be an apt spokesman for what the new Italians were seeking: a representative of the bourgeoisie who
portrayed harmony within class structures; a member of the liberal intelligentsia who, unlike some of the anti-clerical revolutionaries of the Risorgimento, envisioned a future of cooperation between the Church and scientific progress; a writer dedicated to his homeland but inspired by the aesthetic movements of greater Europe. Fogazzaro’s reputation of wholesome influence on Italian culture was affirmed by King Umberto I, who appointed him senator in October of that year. Even in his new role as civil servant, however, Antonio Fogazzaro—impassioned Catholic and ardent advocate for Darwinian evolution—chose fiction as his primary medium to expound and elaborate his philosophical ideas on the reconciliation of science, social reform, and the church. It was during this year that he conceived of his most notable character, Piero Maironi, the hero of both Piccolo Mondo Moderno and its sequel, Il Santo. After its publication in 1905, Il Santo was banned by the newly appointed and anti-Modernist Pope Pius X. And it was after this that Fogazzaro’s solid reputation as spokesperson for the Italian people seemed to dissipate: he was disparaged by literary authorities like Benedetto Croce, received ecclesiastical discipline from the church, and saw his public grow slowly indifferent. For a writer who dedicated his craft to achieving an inclusive style that might appeal to as wide an audience as possible, this must have been a blow.

But the shift in Fogazzaro’s reception might also be partly explained by his changes in literary vision. Il Santo shows stark shifts in narrative form from Fogazzaro’s earlier works. A comparison of Fogazzaro’s first published novel, Malombra, with his late novel, Il Santo, shows significant shifts in his methods of constructing religious meaning. His first novel’s narrative follows trends of European decadent literature in its focus on artistic and sensory experience, while Fogazzaro’s structural and stylistic choices of his later novel seem to deliberately set aesthetic questions aside in favor of a direct push for social and religious reform couched in
rational dialogue. While *Malombra* overwhelms readers with its synesthetic overabundance of signs and symbols, *Il Santo* relegates aesthetic media to the sidelines of its narrative, shedding the arts in favor of the rhetoric of rational philosophy. The content of these two novels reflects the change. While the earlier novel foregrounds the numinous, mystical, and occult, *Il Santo* is only ambiguous in its ratification of the mystical aspects of established religion. Thus a close comparison of the relationship between narrative and aesthetic expression in these two novels can demonstrate the tension described by Kierkegaard, one that exists between imaginative expression and systematic discourse. This tension in many ways parallels the opposition of a communal sense of ethics and an individualized concept of salvation. It is also reflected in the juxtaposition of genre conventions and narrative chronotopes; that is, with the shift away from aestheticism comes a change in the narrative juxtaposition of past and present. While *Malombra* is fraught with the theme of the decadence of a past inheritance—its characters are heirs of the sins of their forebears just as they are heirs to their material wealth—the title character of *Il Santo* sheds his past familial identity and lives out events in a world contemporary to Fogazzaro’s readers. That is, in *Il Santo*, the narrative of history is flattened as reflections and references to the past are rejected in favor of an insistent dwelling on the present. The diminishment of historical awareness accompanies a shift in principle characters’ development of a sense of self. *Il Santo*, while a novel of reform and morality, is also profoundly preoccupied with the main character’s crisis of identity. But this identity emerges as historical and familial aspects of the character are rejected.

As Fogazzaro’s novels acquire a more specific religious agenda, visual artistic media and symbolic literary language are sacrificed for direct discourse. While vestiges of aesthetic narrative methods are present in *Il Santo*, the direct, unsymbolic language in this late novel
delivers a clear reformist’s agenda to the political hierarchy of the Catholic church. Fogazzaro’s conflicted struggle with form in his narrative progression is a demonstration of Bakhtin’s insistence in “Discourse in the Novel” that “the study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract ‘formal’ approach and an equally abstract ‘ideological approach.’ Form and content in discourse are one” (259). In my discussion of these changes in the structure of these two narratives, I will also analyze Fogazzaro’s contrasting definitions of conversion, mysticism, and the church as an institution. The question of the ineffability of religious conversion is a preoccupation in both novels: Fogazzaro questions not only what can be expressed in connection with the divine but what should be expressed. He demonstrates both a sumptuousness of religious expression and a contrasting reticence in expressions of faith.

4.1 Fogazzaro’s scientific, religious, and literary Background

Antonio Fogazzaro’s cultural biography is in many ways typical of the late 19th century Northern Italian bourgeoisie. Born in Vicenza, on March 25, 1842, Fogazzaro’s early years coincided with the political upheavals of the Risorgimento. His father was engaged in the unification movement and befriended such men as Gino Capponi, Bettino Ricasoli, and Ubaldino Peruzzi, spending some years in exile in Torino for his anti-Austrian activities. Antonio’s uncle Don Giuseppe Fogazzaro was active (though unsuccessful) in seeking reconciliation between the papacy and the new Kingdom of Italy. The various battles and boundary-disputes of northern Italy forced the Fogazzaro family to relocate several times, and young Antonio grew up in both the Veneto region and Lombardy, where he spent several summers at Oria, in Valsolda. In 1860, his family moved to Turin in the Piedmont region, where he took up studies in law. The Valsolda

55 All three Tuscans who served in ministerial positions in the early kingdom of Italy.
region figures heavily in most of his works, as do the political and cultural tensions both among the northern provinces of the Veneto, Piedmont, and Lombardy and with outside French and Austrian influences.

Unlike some of the popular political novelists of the day, Fogazzaro saw his literary career as a means to defend the Catholic faith. He viewed the church as a potential force for social reform and valued narratives of personal conversion and spirituality. Young Antonio’s choice of literary career is not surprising when one learns that the personal religious influences of his youth were also men of letters. One significant example can be found in Fogazzaro’s uncle Giuseppe Fogazzaro, a notable priest and educator, who also became one of his earliest literary mentors, supporting his hopes for a literary career even while Antonio’s father expressed opposition to his chosen profession. In an autobiographical reminiscence of 1902, Antonio Fogazzaro described the profound veneration he felt for this uncle:

As a child, I didn’t love him merely as a good and affectionate relative but as a superior Being, with a venerable sweetness of countenance and a quiet but brilliant intellectual depth . . . [I saw him] as a man close to God, radiant with eternal Truth; . . . and I saw an ardent flame kindled by his speech and his eyes, whether he spoke to me of the art of Rome or Florence, which was unknown to me, or whether he read to me, in those days of bitter servitude, from the fiery lines of poetry and prose written by Italian patriots, or whether transfigured by a passion of faith he led me trembling after Christ in the gospels or into the shadows of divine mysteries [my translation].

56 Giuseppe Garibaldi published several novels in the 1860s and 1870s, all characterized by their anti-clerical tone, (Clelia 1867, Cantoni il volontario 1870, and I Mille 1873). In Clelia (1870) the narrative blames priests for turning Italy into ‘un paese di morti’ (qtd in Borutta 204).

57 “Io non l’ho amato, da fanciullo, come un parente buono e affezuoso ma come un Essere superiore dall’augusta dolcezza del viso, dalle profondità mentali silenziose e lampeggianti; come un uomo prossimo a Dio, irradiato dalla Verità eterna; come un chiuso vaso di vitali fiamme onde sentivo nella stessa muta presenza di lui un caldo ricreante alito e vedeva erompere nella parola, erompere negli occhi la vampa, sia che mi parlassero dell’arte in Roma e in Firenze, a me ignote, sia che mi leggesse, in quei tempi di amara servitù, versi e prose ardenti di patrioti, sia che trasfigurato da una passione di fede trasse me palpitante dietro a Cristo nel Vangelo o per le ombre dei misteri divini” (qtd in Moretti 12).
Fogazzaro’s remembrance of the religious influence of Don Giuseppe Fogazzaro demonstrates the youthful origins of his own lifelong fusion of politics, religion, and the arts. His uncle’s ecstatic influence conveys a Christian rapture that coexists within the same emotional realm as Italian nationalism and a high Romantic aestheticism. Although Fogazzaro definitive conversion to Catholic Christianity didn’t come until later, this youthful merging of country, art, and religion can be seen in the conversion experiences of characters in *Malombra*, even while Fogazzaro pays a more direct homage to his uncle in his character of Don Giuseppe Flores in *Piccolo Mondo Moderno*.

The young Antonio also relied on the guidance and literary example of Giacomo Zanella, native of the Vicenza region and both priest and respected poet – an influence that is reflected in Fogazzaro’s early forays into poetry. But his conversion from poet to novelist reflected an adult experience of personal intensification of Catholic devotion. The fact that Fogazzaro became a serious writer and novelist only after this religious conversion in early adulthood speaks to his sense of vocation (Salinari 194). With this fusion of piety and literary pursuits, Fogazzaro presents himself as willing heir to Alessandro Manzoni’s literary legacy. Following in Manzoni’s footsteps as a devout and progressive Catholic, Fogazzaro also followed his lead in his novels, reconstructing personal religious experiences within his texts and depicting characters who undergo various forms of religious awakening. His literary evocations of Lake Como can also be interpreted as a direct homage to Manzoni’s loving tribute to this same region in *I Promessi Sposi*. Like Manzoni, Fogazzaro’s early novels are historical, reflecting on past eras of political upheaval in an indirect commentary on the present day. And while both could be considered

58 “Prima della conversione il Fogazzaro aveva il suo attivo solo poche liriche e la novella poetica *Miranda*, che l’intera sua produzione romanzesca si svolge sotto il segno del suo impegno religioso.” (Salinari 195).
social progressives, their literary works were crafted with motives of reconciliation between clashing political forces. Manzoni is no revolutionary, and neither was Fogazzaro for most of his career.

Yet, while Fogazzaro and Manzoni seem to share a common trust in the church, the Catholic church itself experienced a dramatically altered presence in Italy between Fogazzaro’s lifetime and the era of Manzoni’s literary output. In the Manzonian years leading up to Italian unification, the papacy played a strongly political role, with the pope as the head of the Papal States and for the most part acting against any Italian nationalist efforts and intellectualism. When Pope Pius IX introduced some liberal reforms in the early 1840s, with the rationalist Antonio Rosmini by his side as political advisor, there was some hope that the church would unite forces with the Italian unification. But these hopes were dashed when in 1848 Pius IX declared himself and the church to be anti-nationalist and estranged himself from Rosmini. In retaliation, the Italian Piedmont abolished clerical orders and raided monasteries and convents, forcing priests and nuns back into society through the early 1850s. And with the eventual success of unification, the new Kingdom of Italy rallied their armies directly against the pope, attacking Rome and annexing the Papal States in 1870 (Borutta 194-98).  

59 Pope Pius IX called himself a “prisoner of the Vatican” and in 1874 forbade good Catholics from participating in the Italian election. But from 1870 on, the pope’s political power in Italy was significantly curtailed and diffused. In this same year, however, the Vatican declared papal infallibility, a kind of spiritual

59 “Risorgimento anticlericalism . . . combined a set of relatively new secular values and liberal–democratic principles that were shared by all forces of the Risorgimento: the belief in the nation and in universal progress, ideals of individual autonomy, a bourgeois work ethic and generative heterosexuality as the natural way of life. The media was instrumental in circulating these values. The genres and models, themes and stereotypes, narrative, visual and discursive strategies of anticlerical representation were transferred from other countries, especially from France” (Borutta 198).
compensation for the loss of political power. Pius IX’s successor, Leo XIII, was the first pope not to have political control over any territories at all, and he did not make a significant effort to heal the breach between the papacy and the new Italian Kingdom. In some ways, however, his attitude could be seen as more progressive than his predecessor, and in ways that seem directly relatable to the works of Antonio Fogazzaro. Leo XIII ascribed to the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, believing in the possibility of a harmony between religion and science. For example, he brought back the Vatican Observatory in hopes of building the church’s support of science and intellectual endeavor. Leo XIII’s pontificate, from 1878 to 1903 spanned the years of most of Fogazzaro’s literary output, and his restoration of the Catholic Church in Italy through cultural diplomacy and intellectual outreach can be seen in the vision of Fogazzaro’s literary works.\(^{60}\)

Fogazzaro himself remained loyal to the reformist agenda of Rosmini. In a letter to Felicitas Buchner in 1883, he laments the state of the church,

> The body of the Church is damaged. Oh, yes, a lot, I know; and not because most of the faithful followers are unworthy, something quite natural, but because much of the human aspect, perhaps all of the human aspect of religion has decayed, it is exhausted, it has urgent need of universal reform. Antonio Rosmini, a holy priest and one of the most vigorous philosophers of our century, [...] wrote on the wounds of the Church, and he certainly didn’t indicate all of them (qtd in Moretti 13).\(^{61}\)

\(^{60}\) “Il santo sta a Leone XIII come il superuomo sta a Giolitti. Come Giolitti, democratico-parlamentare a parole, creava nei fatti le basi reali di una politica di espansione e di potenza, così Leone XIII, temporalista e intransigente a parole, nei fatti realizzava l’adeguamento della Chiesa alla nuova società democratico-borghese. L’opera e la politica di Leone XIII si possono giudicare diversamente, esse presentano di certo molti elementi contraddittori che è difficile sistemare organicamente, ma nella loro linea fondamentale tendono a superare la frattura creatasi nel corso del Risorgimento” (Salinari 213-4).

\(^{61}\) “Il corpo della Chiesa è guasto. Oh si molto, lo so; e non tanto perché la maggior parte dei fedeli sia poco degna, cosa troppo naturale, quanto perché tanta parte umana, tutta forse la parte umana della religione è invecchiata, è logore, ha urgente bisogno di una riforma cattolica. Antonio Rosmini che fu un santo prete e uno tra i più vigorosi filosofi del nostro secolo, [...] scrisse sulle piaghe della Chiesa e certo non le indicò tutte” (qtd in Moretti 13).
Despite Fogazzaro’s negative view of the church, reformist movements were not unwelcome under Leo XIII, particularly in the area of science and historical inquiry. But while Leo XIII worked to accommodate modernist intellectualism within the church, his successor, Pius X, whose pontificate began in 1903, took a vigorously traditional stance against Catholic modernists, excommunicating thinkers like Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell and placing the published works of many others (including Fogazzaro) on the Index. (Santovetti 151) While the writing of *Il Santo* is not seen as a criticism of the newly elected pope himself, its criticisms of the church might have been tolerated under the pontificate of Leo XIII.

*European literary influences*

Fogazzaro’s personal culture, though strongly Catholic, was also formed by the increasing secular and aesthetic cultural influences of a modern Italian state. While Catholic literary traditions figure strongly in Fogazzaro’s early development, Antonio Fogazzaro’s adult literary philosophy also demonstrates a significant indebtedness to the Scapigliati, as well as to the broadly European and particularly French and English aesthetic trends that this group introduced into Italian literary society. The Scapigliati were bohemian artists and writers who rose up in the generation following the Risorgimento in the early 1870s. Just a few decades after Manzoni’s main literary output, they nonetheless wrote during a drastically different political climate. Convinced that after so much literary focus on political struggle, it was possible to look toward purely artistic aims, they sought a renewal of Italian arts and letters. And although the Scapigliati admired certain Italian literary predecessors (Iginio Tarchetti, for example, added ‘Ugo’ to his name in homage to Ugo Foscolo), these writers primarily looked overseas for their inspiration, especially to gothic writers like E. A. Poe and decadents like Charles Baudelaire. They had no
loyalty to conservative Catholic literary forebears like Manzoni. The stylistic and ideological differences between Manzoni and the Scapigliati can be demonstrated in their contrasting relationship with Walter Scott. Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, though disparaging Manzoni, ardently admired Walter Scott, who is also often identified as one of Manzoni’s major influences. Yet while Alessandro Manzoni looked to Sir Walter Scott’s novels as a model for his own conception of what historical fiction could become, always keeping in mind its function as a moral vehicle, the Scapigliati mined Scott’s novels for their anti-classical affinities, their ties to folk culture, and their (occasional) forays into transgressive gothic themes. These writers started out Romantics of sorts, but quickly moved toward preoccupations with decadence, exploring the gothic, the supernatural, the decaying. Their preoccupation with the past manifested itself as a burdensome inheritance—one that passes down both beauty and corruption. The literary decadents like the Scapigliati movement were fascinated with the corruption of the past, seeing it as inextricable from the aesthetic beauty of European culture.

Fogazzaro was introduced to Scapigliati literary circles in Milano in the late 1860s and 1870s, forming an especial friendship with Arrigo Boito, who along with Iginio Tarchetti and Emilio Praga was one of the key founders of the movement. All three had fought with Garibaldi for Italian unification, but their literary output exhibited more political disillusionment than patriotism. Fogazzaro’s affinity for Boito could be explained in part by Boito’s musical endeavors; he is best known today for his opera librettos, especially for Verdi operas like Falstaff and Otello (although he initially offended Giuseppe Verdi with his profane poetry). Their influence on Fogazzaro is seen in the deepening of his admiration for gothic fiction by such authors as Edgar Allan Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann. But Fogazzaro’s attachment to the conservative Catholic writers of the past, like Manzoni, was not loosened by his association with
the rebellious Scapigliati. Another difference between Fogazzaro and the Scapigliati is in their approach toward religion. The Scapigliati, with their interest in the gothic, in high symbolism, and in the decay of modern life, in many ways defied the devout religious agenda for which Antonio Fogazzaro’s mature novels are known. Del Principe in fact defines this group in terms of their anti-religious assertions, “To be scapigliato, then, in Arrighian terms, meant to issue invitations of defiance to conformists, and to systematically set doubt against faith”(31).

Yet, while the Scapigliati looked to a philosophy of decadence that according to Mario Praz was an attempt at a modern form of religion, Fogazzaro asserted the decay of religion only to instigate reforms through his literary efforts. Decadent writers like the Scapigliati and historical moralists like Manzoni both asserted the important function of the novel in the literary world. Manzoni, however, envisioned this function in its most edifying form, a force for morality in the growing nationhood of Italy. On the other hand, the Scapigliati, like the French decadents, saw their movement as the ultimate subversion of these idealistic literary endeavors. Emilio Praga’s “Preludio” to Penombre declared this subversion with the death of Italy’s idolized “chaste poet.” Praga’s lines called for antichrist poets, the “sons of sick fathers,” who could give expression to an era of ennui and decadence. The world of literary expression became both an apt vehicle for

62 Sandra Bermann comments on the insistent social conscience of Manzoni’s works: “Like Cicero, Manzoni would try throughout his life to reconcile philosophy with rhetoric or, to be more precise, to reconcile his belief in absolute truths with his demands that a literary text be coherent, pleasing and, above all, accessible and meaningful to a broad reading public. If one thinks of Manzoni’s own day, the years of the Italian Risorgimento, when historical writing proper had such political importance, one can understand that the communicative drive of his historical art had particularly strong socio-political dimensions, dimensions of which Manzoni was well aware. Such socio-political emphasis was only reinforced by his self-abnegating religious beliefs – a Catholicism that led him to relinquish any form of art that might reek even faintly of the solipsistic; for him, this would be erroneous art, arbitrary art” (Bermann 42).

63 Noi siamo i figli dei padri ammalati;/Aquile al tempo di mutar le piume,/ Svolazziam muti, attoniti, affamati,/ Sull’agonia di un nume. // Casto poeta che l’Italia adora,/Vegliardo in santé
accessing hidden worlds of mystery and occultism and an end in itself, in short, a new kind of religion. Baudelaire’s theory of correspondences expresses this transference of near mystical power with a theory of art that imbues the world and its artistic and literary symbols with a power of signification that rivals religious theologies of the establishment. As Baudelaire claims in his “Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe,” a thirst for beauty is the proof of immortality, and to be touched by the arts is a communication from the realm of the divine.

With his first novel, Malombra, Fogazzaro set the religious awakening of his characters within a stylistic and thematic context of literary decadence, even while upholding the novel as moral vehicle. With his early writings, Fogazzaro embraced the moral historicism of novelists such as Scott or Manzoni. But he simultaneously explored the darker side of Gothicism in the Scapigliati’s transgressive fiction. In fact, Fogazzaro paid direct homage to Trachetti by naming one of the minor characters of his first novel, Malombra, cousin of Marina Malombra, “Fosca,”

 visions assort., Tu puoi morir! . . . degli antecristi è l’ora!/ Cristo è rimorto!// O nemico lettore, canto la Noja./ L’eredità del dubbio e dell’ignoto,/ Il tuo re, il tuo pontefice, il tuo boja,/ Il tuo cielo e il tuo loto! (Preludio, Penombre lines 1-4, 13-20)

64 “One polemic yet unaddressed by critics, but which may serve as a hermeneutical paradigm, lies in Scapigliatura’s sociopolitical and literary intercourse, in a confusing exchange between Life and Art or, as Merolla has remarked, in the problematic result of this complexity—critical neglect. This study, in investigating such issues, proposes that Scapigliatura has remained a thorny issue—both for critics such as Croce who have found its unconventional approach to neoclassic aesthetics subversive, and for its audience which has regularly shied away from its graveyard thematics—precisely because its polyvalence has gone untested.” (Del Principe 15)

65 “C’est cet admirable, cet immortel instinct du beau qui nous fait considérer la terre et ses spectacles comme un aperçu, comme une correspondance du Ciel. La soif insatiable de tout ce qui est au delà, et que révèle la vie, est la preuve la plus vivante de notre immortalité. C’est à la fois par la poésie et à travers la poésie, par et à travers la musique, que l’âme entrevoit les splendeurs situées derrière le tombeau ; et, quand un poème exquis amène les larmes au bord des yeux, ces larmes ne sont pas la preuve d’un excès de jouissance, elles sont bien plutôt le témoignage d’une mélancolie irritée, d’une postulation des nerfs, d’une nature exilée dans l’imparfait et qui voudrait s’emparer immédiatement, sur cette terre même, d’un paradis révélé.” (Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe 16)
after Tarchetti’s most famous character. Fogazzaro, following the example of the Scapigliati, worked to turn his narratives into an exploration of interiorized human experience. While for the Scapigliati, this often translated into an exploration of the occult, Fogazzaro examined the numinous as well, as another side of the interior life of the soul. He incorporated the preoccupations of members of decadent literary circles with psychology and the mystery of the occult into his mystically religious narrative.66 By the time Fogazzaro was writing Malombra in 1881, he had the literary influence of decadent narrative and poetry (both from Italian and abroad) combined with his religious conversion experience motivating him to explore spiritual expression in his novel.

When asked about his literary influences and inspirations, Fogazzaro wrote in a letter of 1881,67 “It is rather the English (Collins, Braddon, and others) who have encouraged me to follow my own inclination boldly, Dickens above all” [my translation]. Fogazzaro names Dickens as his greatest personal influence, and it is in Dickensian works that we find a combination and reconciliation of the contradictory literary influences on Fogazzaro’s career. He offers a clear model for an exploration of modern individuality with heroes who function within a multi-layered society at times mysterious or seemingly supernatural, but always grounded in its

66“Fogazzaro was given the honorary chairmanship of the ‘Società degli Studi Psichici’ and contributed, together with other writers, including Luigi Capuana, Arrigo Boito, Salvatore Farina, and personalities, among which Cesare Lombroso, to the activities organized by the ‘Society.’ According to Cigliani, the scientific studies of parapsychology and the powers of the mind had a double appeal for the man of science who was not resigned to the materialism of positivist philosophy: ‘it represented a challenge to the unknowable carried out on the level of empirical instruments and, at the same time, a way to satisfy an ill-concealed demand for transcendence’ (Cigliani 2002, p. 25). This is precisely the case with Fogazzaro for whom the emerging of a reality not yet known and not really knowable confirmed the need for religious transcendence” (Santovetti 162).

67“Sono invece gl’inglesi (Collins, la Braddon e altri) che mi hanno incoraggiato a seguire audacemente la inclinazione mia, il Dickens sopra tutti.” (qtd in Corrigan 39).
worldliness and social conscience. In Dickens we find this same straddling of novelistic worlds: the gothic and uncanny is combined with and juxtaposed with a discussion of social circumstances and practical morality. Though not generally a historical novelist (with the exception of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rudge*), Dickens’s novels were always constructed within a social or worldly context. His characters, like Manzoni’s Renzo, struggle to find their place in an often hostile society, and, also like Renzo, usually find their haven of domesticity in the end, after undergoing a thoroughly moral development. The influence of Dickens can be seen in *Malombra’s* narrative methods that combine gothic elements with social commentary. Dickens also emerges in *Malombra’s* character development, in the crises of both personal identity and interconnected morality of its main characters.

In his lecture of 1872, “Dell’avvenire del romanzo in Italia,” Fogazzaro discusses the future of Italian literature and declares the novel as the answer to the modern era. Only within the novel could there be a harmonious fusion of ideology and literary form. Fogazzaro saw it as perfectly suited to the heterogenous world of a new bourgeois Italy:

> There is no place that the book cannot penetrate. Master of all seductions, it possesses all masks, speaks all languages, from that of the gentleman to that of the vulgar. It hides with a provocative smile between two school texts, it shows itself contrite and modest between two manuals of asceticism. It knows with what coarse mischief how to hide under the apron of the ‘milliner.’ It knows what delicate floral scents it can poison the sensibilities of a refined lady. But a times it presents itself with an open face, and with generous, inspired, and honest words says to us: Here am I, the modern poem, the book of great and small, I am the Novel.” [my translation] 68

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68 Non è luogo dove il libro non penetri. Maestro di tutte le seduzioni, possiede tutte le maschere, parla tutti i linguaggi, da quello dei gentiluomini a quello del trivio. Si cela con sorriso procace tra due testi di scuola, si ostenta compunto e pudibondo tra due manuali di ascetica. Sa con quali grossolane malizie nascondersi sotto il grembiule della cretaja; sa con quali sottilissime essenze di fiori e di veleni stimolare i nervi delicati della signora elegante. Ma talvolta ci si fa incontro a viso aperto e con parola onesta, generosa, ispirata ci dice: eccomi, sono il poema moderno, il libro dei grandi e dei piccini, sono il Romanzo” (25-6 qtd. in Salinari 231).
With “Dell’avvenire del romanzo in Italia” Fogazzaro also aligned himself with aestheticism with this declaration: “I believe in art’s absolute independence. Art is no one’s maidservant. One cannot impose on the artist an explicitly didactic purpose to which he must subordinate his supreme love, the sweetness and torment of his soul—Art.” [my translation]69 These statements preceded all of Fogazzaro’s endeavors in fiction. In seeking to fulfill his own recommendations, he set out to write narratives that would speak to everyone, ones that would portray upper, middle, and lower-class characters in harmonious relationships and that would appeal to readers of a wide variety of walks of life. Fogazzaro believed the reading experience should be easily intelligible for his readers. To this end, he strove for a linguistic register in his novels that was neither too low-brow nor too poetically refined. Specifically condemning literature that asserts didacticism over art, he nonetheless insisted on literature’s role as persuasive messenger of honest truth.

Scientific influences

But well into his literary career in the late 1880s, Fogazzaro experienced what Olivia Santovetti asserted as a kind of second religious conversion experience, more ecstatic than rational in its effects. Fogazzaro’s conversion to Darwinian evolutionary theory did not replace his religious devotion, although this new ideological platform gave him a new mission that was at odds with the mainstream religious tradition of his contemporary Italy. Still an ardent Catholic, Fogazzaro saw in evolutionary theory the scientific articulation of what he saw as an inherently spiritual law of progress. Crucial to this endeavor was his encounter with the writings

69 “Io credo all’assoluta indipendenza dell’arte. L’arte non è ancella di nessuno. Non si può imporre all’artista uno scopo espressamente educativo cui egli subordini il suo amore supremo, dolcezza e tormento dell’anima, l’arte” (62 qtd. in Salinari 232).
of American geologist and physicist, Joseph Le Conte, whose *Evolution: its History, its Evidences, and its Relation to Religious Thought* (1888) became the basis for much of Fogazzaro’s perspective on Darwinian philosophy. Fogazzaro’s study of Le Conte helped him develop Darwinism into a theory of the potential evolution of humankind toward a spiritual superiority. Fogazzaro saw in divinity an evolved humanity (Salinari).

Fogazzaro’s serious scholarship in evolutionary theories was at its most intense after he had published *Malombra* and during the time that he was making his first plans and sketches for the Maironi tetralogy, between 1891 and 1898. During this time he published his essay, “Per un recente raffronto delle teorie di Sant’Agostino e di Darwin circa la creazione” in 1891 as an attempted reconciliation of Catholic thought and evolutionary theory. The essays, “Per la bellezza di un idea” in 1892 and “L’origine dell’uomo e il sentimento religioso” in 1893 also addressed the reconciliation of intellectual scientific theories with consistent adherence to Catholic dogma. This required some modification of Darwinian theory: Fogazzaro departed from Darwin’s assertion that chance governs the progress of evolution and instead embraced the concept of “an ordering mind” (Santovetti 150). It was this crusade to reconcile dogma with progressive scientific endeavours that brought Fogazzaro more fully into the circles of Liberal Catholics (or Modernists). Fogazzaro forged close friendships with thinkers such as Father Semeria, Freidrich von Hügel, Genocchi, and Bonomelli. He was also intellectually influenced by the writings of Sabatier, Houtin, Loisy, Laberthonnière, Blondell, and George Tyrell (Santovetti 150). Raponi summarizes the themes of the Modernist debate as, “balance between freedom and principle of authority, the primacy of conscience, the relationships between science and faith, the position and the role of laity within the Church, the need for a return to a Christianity of the origins” (quoted in Santovetti 151). Especially after the publication of
Malombra, these themes of political engagement within the Catholic church appear within Fogazzaro’s novels. It is in the comparison of Malombra and Il Santo that we can see the narratological shifts that reflect Fogazzaro’s spiritual and ideological development.

4.2 Summaries: Malombra and Il Santo

Malombra (1881) is Fogazzaro’s first novel, published after several forays into poetry, including the complex semi-narrative poetic work, Miranda. Malombra’s plot interweaves the life stories of several characters. We are first introduced to Corrado Silla, a young lawyer and writer who is mysteriously invited to visit a country estate belonging to a Count whom he has never met. When he arrives, he discovers that Count Ormengo is the lost love of his long dead mother. By strange coincidence, Count Ormengo’s niece Marina, also living on the estate, has recently conducted a letter correspondence with Silla as an interested reader of his only novel, an unsuccessful mystical narrative addressing the subject of reincarnation. This young woman, Marina Crusnelli di Malombra, is the title character. Raised in France, she is now the unwilling and rebellious ward of her Italian uncle. Marina develops more reasons to resent her uncle when she uncovers a decades old letter in her writing desk from a certain Cecilia, an adulterous ancestress who was kept away from her lover in this very same country estate by a stern husband. Before committing suicide, Cecilia had declared a kind of prophetic vengeance in this hidden letter, commissioning the finder of the letter not only to administer her vendetta, but also to inherit Cecilia’s spirit in a kind of willing reincarnation. Although Marina’s French skepticism dismisses this message from the past, over the course of the novel she begins to believe herself to be indeed the reborn Cecilia. Her mania perceives Silla as the reincarnation of Cecilia’s unfortunate lover, while in her uncle the count she sees the tyranny of Cecilia’s husband. Silla is
drawn in by Marina’s beauty and fierce passion, but he simultaneously develops a friendship with the pure-hearted German, Edith Steinegge, daughter of a political exile acting as secretary for Count d’Ormengo. Silla’s growing love for Edith inspires in him both a moral and artistic renewal, a contrast to his sensual and irrational attraction to Marina. This arrives too late, however, as the novel ends with the death of the Count, brought on by Marina’s violent anger, followed by Marina’s murder of Silla in a fit of passion. Edith is left behind to mourn her would-be lover, but the narrator urges readers to be consoled by the idea that Edith will honor and purify Silla’s not-so-perfect memory throughout her life. Silla’s untimely death cannot halt the development of their love into the eternities.

*Il Santo* (1905) comes as the third novel in Fogazzaro’s tetralogy, after *Piccolo Mondo Antico* (published in English as *The Patriot*) and *Piccolo Mondo Moderno* (*The Sinner*). *Piccolo Mondo Antico* is set in the late 1840s and 1850s, narrating events in the family life of commoner Luisa Rigey and her husband, the disinherited nobleman, Franco Maironi. This story coincides with events of the Risorgimento, and Franco and Luisa embody ideological aspects of this political movement. The differences in their religious philosophies act as a catalyst for much of the drama, and these differences are elaborated both in direct insertions on the part of the narrator and through dramatic symbol. Franco is depicted as the romantic religious traditionalist and ardent patriot. He is artistic and attuned to the natural world. His wife Luisa is a rationalist and religious skeptic whose decisions are guided by a sense of ethics and pragmatism. The couple experiences some estrangement because of their differences, but eventually, Luisa’s rigorous rationalism aids Franco in achieving a greater depth of spiritual and moral understanding. In turn, Franco’s faith carries the family through the tragedy of their daughter’s untimely death.
Luisa and Franco’s son, Piero, born in about 1859, is the hero of the following two novels. Piero is the fruition of the faith of his father and reason of his mother, the aristocracy of his father and bourgeoisie of his mother, the failed Venta of 1848 that and the triumph of the eventual Risorgimento. Never knowing his parents, Piero has grown up to be a maladjusted modern man, unable to find a sense of belonging with either the clerical political party with which he is affiliated or the opposing liberal secularists. *Piccolo Mondo Moderno* follows Piero’s growing sense of unease within society as well as the growing love he feels for a fashionable married Frenchwoman, Jeanne Dessalle. Piero himself is married, but his mentally imbalanced wife is in an asylum. Then novel ends with his wife’s death, preceded by an unexpected lucidity on her part. Piero’s final moments with his wife result in a profound conversion experience and a strong resolve to distance himself from a possible romantic liaison with Jeanne. *Il Santo* follows the results of this conversion, although the first part of the novel focuses on Jeanne herself, pining for the missing Piero and forging friendships with some religious thinkers who correlate to Catholic Modernists in Fogazzaro’s contemporary society. By the time readers see Piero again, we have learned that he is living as an ascetic and seeking a path of Christian discipleship. Though he has not taken orders, he has taken a new name, Benedetto, and lives in the company of monks. This novel traces not only the development of his spiritual and moral leadership in the environs of Rome, but also the development of religious thought in various characters connected to him, most notably his almost-lover, the French agnostic Jeanne Dessalle. The narrative follows his association with various groups of believers and unbelievers as Benedetto urges a populist reform within Catholicism and hopes for a reform of church leadership that in many ways echoes the agenda of Catholic Modernists. Although Piero Maironi/Benedetto eventually has friendly audiences with the pope, who agrees with much of his agenda, the novel ends with
his death and with no significant reforms accomplished. This novel, in addition to advocating for Catholic reforms, is a novel of identity. Throughout the novel, Piero’s identity is questioned on all sides. He himself refuses his ancestral identity. His affiliation with the Dominican order is tenuous at best, as the leadership of the order questions his motives and eventually rescinds their protection within their monastery. While various intellectual groups are intrigued enough to count themselves as his disciples, he declines any real role as leader within these movements. He likewise rebukes the crowds of the poorer classes who follow him hoping for miracles, offering sermons rather than miracles. By the end of Benedetto’s life, the reader has experienced a kind of reverse bildungsroman, a stripping away of social identity and belonging. Benedetto may be a saint, according to the novel’s title, but it is unclear who he really is as a person.

4.3 Fogazzaro’s narrative construction of mysticism, conversion, and religious self-identity

The contrast between Fogazzaro’s early and late career construction of the numinous and the religious self can be demonstrated through an examination of Fogazzaro’s shifting attitude toward the aestheticism seen in decadent literary trends. This contrast can also be examined in his shift away from historical symbolic narrative and toward contemporary settings. The changes in narrative chronotope relate directly to the function of prophecy and its connecting link of past to present in each novel. These shifts in literary style and genre set forth certain theological questions: What constitutes conversion? What is the relation of the numinous to the realm of human sociality? What are the signs and causes of a moral awakening, and how do these interact with moments of spiritual awakening? Are the moral and the spiritual necessarily separate realms of human experience?
I will first address the general aestheticism of Fogazzaro’s novels. This Fogazzarian aestheticism can be defined not only as a foregrounding the arts and validating beauty for its own sake, but also a venturing into a Baudelairian realm of symbolism. As in Baudelaire’s theory of correspondences, for Fogazzaro, the world of beauty became a portal into the world of the numinous or mystical. These traits are highly evident in Malombra, in which Fogazzaro uses aesthetic language to explore individual mystical or spiritual experience. In Malombra, an inheritance of personal qualities or knowledge and the formation of individual religious identity within a social setting also find expression through a highly synesthetic system of arts, literature, and sensory experience. Fogazzaro explores these same issues in Il Santo, but constructs boundaries around his aestheticism while opening up space for rationalist exposition and rhetoric.

I will then explore how Fogazzaro constructs the role of textual communication in both novels, demonstrating his shift from an aesthetic philosophy of text as symbolic medium to one that pushes toward the immediacy of spoken language and direct communication. Finally, I will examine the overall shifts in narrative genre and its implications on Fogazzaro’s theological stance, as Fogazzaro moves from symbolic historical novel to a new contemporary fiction that foregrounds rationalist rhetoric. The genre interactions that occur both and between these novels further the development of Fogazzaro’s theories of spiritual and moral conversion and the role of the self within a religious and secular community.
Piero Nardi describes the work of the poets, musicians, and painters of the Scapigliati movement\textsuperscript{70} as, “La musica orientata verso la plastica; la poesia orientata verso la musica” \textsuperscript{(179,181)}.\textsuperscript{71} The Scapigliati’s experimentation with synesthetic crossover of artistic media followed the example of French poets like Charles Baudelaire, whose theory of correspondences infused human experience with an overabundance of symbols and signifiers. In Baudelaire’s thought, the world’s sensory reality was both experiential and referential, pointing beyond this world and into an immortal realm. The resultant literary aesthetic was a curious fusion of sensuality and mystery: all sensory experience existed as a cipher for something else. This preoccupation with both the visceral senses and displaced signification brings text and art to the foreground. Text itself becomes both sensual and fundamentally mysterious. Rather than a transparent and utilitarian tool of communication, it becomes an entity in itself, one that both seduces and frustrates.

Fogazzaro’s novels vary in their aesthetic leanings, but in the majority of his works, symbol and synesthesia dominate narrative structure. This is clear in his first novel: \textit{Malombra} presents readers a world that is alive with sensory signifiers of spiritual meaning, in which nature and the arts speak to the souls and passions of any character with sensibility. In \textit{Malombra}, the arts are not a sign of any particular creed or belief; instead, both the holy and the profane are presented to readers through the language of the arts. For example, Marina’s tempestuous piano performances, her love of the opera \textit{Don Giovanni}, are a window into her dangerous but sublime passion. Steinegge finds God in the mountain beauty and chapel bells, but his eventual

\textsuperscript{70} (in particular Arrigo Boito’s work in opera)

\textsuperscript{71} “Music directed toward the plastic; poetry directed toward music” [my translation]
conversion rests on the mediation of his daughter, Edith, which Steinegge describes in aesthetic and artistic terms. Despite his aversion to priests, he can listen to Edith speak of religion as if he were listening to “the kind of music that is heard in dreams by the young” (249). It is noteworthy that in the same discussion, Steinegge also praises Edith for her understanding of art and literature, as she becomes a kind of artistic docent for him for the paintings they encounter in Italian churches. She is both an aesthetic and spiritual mediator for her father.

While Fogazzaro’s characterization of less central characters demonstrate limited sensibility to aesthetic and natural beauty, his hero, Silla, is alive to all forms and media of the aesthetic world. This is what qualifies him to be the hero, as one who has the greatest capacity to experience the range of spiritual and profane emotions. One of Silla’s most intense episodes of introspection and soul-searching is conveyed through a succession of visual, musical, and finally literary invocations. The narrator takes us through Silla’s spiritual journey via an aesthetic progression of image and sound. This occurs at a point in the plot in which Silla has returned to Milan, escaping the conflicts and temptations of Marina’s deranged passion. Walking past the cathedral, thinking of Edith and his desires for a pure love, his desire to be free from the “fango ignobile” or “vile mud,” Silla encounters “That vision of marble sculptures and moonlight, useless, adorable glories of the ideal” (268). The introspection prompted by the cathedral’s marble sculptures is followed by the passion of music, when on arriving home Silla plays on the piano, “un walzer diabolico” or “diabolical waltz” (270). But this culminates in his decision to

72 “Pensate, i discorsi dei preti sono cattivi organetti, e questi di Edith sono come musica che si sente in sogno quando si è giovani” (249).

73 “Così ha fatto senso a me, ieri, di cominciare a capire, ascoltando Edith, qualche cosa di quadri” (250).

74 Quella visione di marmi e di luna, inutili, adorabili magnificenze dell'ideale”(268)
send Edith his novel, *Il Sogno*, the same novel that initiated his doomed relationship with Marina, but which might now help him establish a redemptive relationship with Edith. Silla is aesthetically sensitive to the correspondences of the art and literature to the world of emotion and spirit. Like Baudelaire’s “lecteur,” Silla is both the author and reader’s “semblable.” The rekindling of religious hope that he experiences requires a mediator. Edith’s embodiment of music and her affinity with the arts and literature works on Silla as it does on her father, drawing both men upward toward a religious hope.

How does this aestheticism construct a religious reality in *Malombra*? With this insistent aestheticism, *Malombra* infuses its characters with spiritual awareness. The novel also sets up a system of spiritual mediation that is both personal and aesthetically based. Edith becomes a human mediator for her father and Silla, and this process parallels the arts themselves. Rather than a direct understanding of divinity, Fogazzaro shows his characters as receiving indirect or symbolic access to the realm of the numinous through the arts. This numinous realm is always partially hidden. It is mystical in the sense that it is a mystery never fully revealed. Although morality is crucial to the plot of *Malombra*, the novel’s aestheticism clearly differentiates the essence of religion from a rational system of ethics and puts it in an ecstatic realm of the sublime. This realm of experience in fact overlaps epistemologically with the realm of Marina’s occult passions, which are likewise mediated by symbolic and artistic connections to her dead forebear.

*Malombra*’s aesthetic mysticism is further clarified by the fact that certain characters that in fact do *not* demonstrate artistic sensibilities likewise do not experience this passionate or mystical realm of the numinous. Most notably, standing as a foil to this overabundance of sublime is the Count. The Count d’Ormengo, with his integrity and clear-headed principles, is a
moral but not a religious man. We learn this from our introduction to his library: “The Count Cesare made a mess of his collection of classical Greek and Latin works, threw the philosophers and theologians to the clouds, as he would say; kept the historians and moralists close by; boxed up the poets and novelists and threw them in a damp closet . . .” (45). We later learn that while the Count has respect for tradition, he has no fundamental religious belief. His morals are not religiously based but socially and ethically determined. Thus religion in Malombra is fundamentally defined by the numinous, and this mystical realm is portrayed by the arts, music, and poetry—mediators for ineffability and hidden truths. In Malombra, this heightened awareness of beauty and meaning can either be decadent, that is, leading to death or redemptive, leading to immortality.

This emphasis on aesthetic media as mediators to the numinous is starkly absent in Il Santo. In this late novel, few characters have any association with the arts. The novel’s major aesthete is Carlino Dessalle, the musician, novelist, and general dilettante. The title character, Benedetto, is determinedly unaesthetic in his pursuits, choosing manual labor for his life of penitence before becoming a preacher and reformer. His non-aesthetic nature is confirmed before readers encounter him, when Jeanne Dessalle dismisses Noemi’s conjecture that a refined Dominican priest could be Piero based on the fact that Piero is not musical. Of course, while Piero-Benedetto may have never been a musician, he had nevertheless been an aesthetically cultivated man of the world in the previous novel, Piccolo Mondo Moderno. But Piero Maironi’s

75 “Il conte Cesare scompigliò la raccolta dei classici greci e latini; cacciò i filosofi e i teologi verso le nuvole, come diceva lui, si tenne sotto la mano storici e moralisti; fece incassare e gittare in un magazzino umido i novellieri e i poeti . . .” (45).

76 «No!» fece Jeanne, risoluta, scotendo via il dubbio e la congettura. «Non è lui, non è possibile. Non è mai stato musicista!» (64)
turn away from his privileged life includes a dismissal of the arts, and the moments in which the narrator inserts the arts into the text are primarily when Benedetto is reminded of and tempted by his former life. For example, his final temptation to return to his would-be lover is evoked by musical memories:

Now it was the idea that only Jeanne really loved him, that only Jeanne suffered through his suffering. Now it was her voice, complaining that her love was not returned, her voice asking for love, in the tones of a little song by Saint-Saëns, so sweet, so sad, and familiar to them both, and concerning which he had once said to her at Villa Diedo that he could never refuse anything to one who prayed thus. . . Then again that sad, tender little song returned, no longer beseeching but full of pity, of a pity comprehending all his bitter struggle, the sorrowing pity of some unknown spirit that was also suffering and complaining of God, but humbly, gently, pleading for all that suffers and loves in the world (translation of 279-80).

As for literary creativity, in Il Santo’s panoply of characters, the only writer who gains prominence within the narrative is Giovanni Selva. But he is a writer of religious philosophy and biblical analysis, not literary works. After Malombra’s sumptuous aestheticism, Il Santo presents us with an almost stifling sobriety.

This break from aesthetic centrality indicates a change in this novel’s religious focus. Il Santo’s religious experience is decidedly based on moral principles, with the implication that the arts give expression to decadence and are a dangerous vehicle for the passions. Benedetto gives up the enjoyment of the arts with his ascetic life style. It is important to note, however, that he is not a consistent ascetic in any extreme sense, nor is he a long-term hermit. His initial retreat from

77 “Era l’idea che soltanto lei, Jeanne, lo amasse davvero, che soltanto lei soffrisse del suo soffrire. Era la voce di lei che si doleva di non essere riamata, la voce di lei che lo pregava di amore con una cantilena di Saint-Saën, tanto dolce, tanto triste, nota ad ambedue, della quale egli le aveva detto a villa Diedo che nulla saprebbe ricusare a chi lo pregasse così. . . Era da capo la cantilena tenera e triste, con un senso no più di preghiera ma di pieta, di una pietà circonfusa alla sua lotta amara, dell’accorata pietà di qualche spirito ignoto che pure soffrisse e si dolesse di Dio, ma umilmente, dolcemente, e parlassse per tutto che ama e soffre nel mondo” (279-80).
his old lifestyle gives way to an intensely social existence. *Il Santo* implies that the opposite of a decadent overabundance of aesthetic stimuli and epicurean enjoyment of the senses is *not* a pure asceticism or a constant *memento mori*, the dwelling on death or illness. Rather, it is health and moderation, or a life of action versus a life of thought and sensuousness. Piero/Benedetto *at first* lives a life of penitence and abstaining from bodily comforts, and this in fact harmonizes with the decadent world-view in which the body is granted a position of importance, either to indulge it or to suffer with it. But this extreme lifestyle is abandoned when he is taken in by a medical doctor, Professor Mayda, who feeds and cares for him. Noemi writes to Jeanne of this change of life habits, “the doctor is very particular about the quality of his food; he has changed his way of living, eats meat and drinks a little wine.”\(^78\) Benedetto’s early habits of self-abnegation give way to a lifestyle that promotes health and strength (although this change comes too late for him to live a long life). In *Leila*, the sequel to *Il Santo*, Benedetto’s legacy is carried forward by his young medical student friend, Massimo Alberti, out of the hands of poets and musicians and into the purview of practical arts and sciences. Thus, while in *Malombra*, religious and occult seekers alike experience the mediation of the arts and music, in *Il Santo*, the arts are sidelined or rejected outright.

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78 “il medico è molto rigoroso riguardo alla qualità dei cibi, egli ha rinunciato al suo regime, prende carne e anche un po’ di vino” (213).
artistic correspondences. Likewise, the function of text and literature in *Il Santo* reflects its shift away from aesthetic and symbolic mediation with the numinous.

*Malombra* focuses on the interpretative act required by multiple languages and dialects. The Count is first introduced, for example, with his “accento piemontese” (45). Steinegge’s somewhat broken Italian and interjected German phrases continually remind readers of his foreign origins. And the visit of the Venetian cousins introduces dialect and conversations reminiscent of Goldoni’s bourgeois theater, in which characters are identified through the varied dialectic speech. Fogazzaro constructs a theater of the world, with actors who convey multiple associated traits with words and phrases conveying particular accents and dialects. It is significant that Silla himself is not only a novelist but also a translator and budding linguist. *Malombra*’s world is heterglossic, with characters that are forced to bridge the gaps between their diverse modes of expression.

*Il Santo* initially presents a heterglossic world as well. In the opening chapter, readers are again presented with a world of linguistic interpretation and translation through Jeanne and Noemi. Jeanne is not only Noemi’s friend and companion, but also her Italian tutor. The first chapter is sprinkled throughout with blundered Italian phrases on Noemi’s part, along with her reversions back to her native French language. But Noemi quickly loses her language hesitations, and the interpretation of foreign languages just as quickly loses its place of prominence in the main plot of the novel. Although the characters have varied origins, their language is no longer the barrier it is in *Malombra*. In *Il Santo*, linguistic interpretation fades as Benedetto’s vision for a changed Catholic populace gains momentum. Religion is no longer presented as a hermeneutical puzzle but a series of practical reforms and heartfelt personal changes.
The interpretative act made necessary by the varied languages and dialects in *Malombra* is mirrored by interpretive act inherent in the reading of text. *Malombra* introduces its readers to a cast of writing characters. The novel is heavy with letter-writing and literary endeavor, and key relationships revolve around textual exchange. The main character, Corrado Silla, is a novelist who tries unsuccessfully to communicate his mystical philosophy of life to an inattentive public. This novel prompts his letter correspondence with Marina, one that is conducted pseudonymously on the part of both writers. Even the Count is eager to join intellectual forces with Silla in writing a scholarly paper, although this plan is cut short by the untimely death of both writers. *Malombra*’s instances of written communication bring to the foreground the distance and difference between these textual correspondents. While these differences are geographical and ideological in the case of Silla and Marina, in other cases text-based writing spans gaps in history as well, as generations of the past leave textual legacies to their literal or spiritual descendants. In particular, writings that communicate from beyond the grave form the catalyst for the novel’s entire plot development. Most notably, Marina receives written communication from the dead Cecilia, and is fatally infected by Cecilia’s madness and despair through writing. Like Marina, Silla also receives a posthumous letter from his mother urging him to trust the Count. With these two examples, we see these texts as both mediators for the holy and profane. Silla is strengthened and comforted by this communication from beyond the grave—the letter itself seems to have salvific properties, “The dear voice of his mother seemed to come from the world of spirits to speak words not able to be spoken in life and buried in her heart under a stone heavier than that of the tomb” (61). 79

79 “La voce cara di sua madre gli pareva venir dal mondo degli spiriti per dir parole non potute dire in vita e sepolte nel suo cuore sotto una pietra più grave di quella della tomba” (61).
The naming of literary texts and genres also becomes a means of character development in *Malombra*. *Malombra* specifically establishes the relationship of key characters to certain ideological positions via their affiliation to certain genres, nationalities, and eras of literature. For example, this is seen in the attention given to the personal book collections of both Marina and the Count. The description of the Count’s library points out that, unlike his niece’s reading selection, his library contains very little poetry or any artistic expression. The careful catalogue of his library provides the characterization readers need in order to understand that the Count d’Ormengo is an Italian nationalist and traditionalist, while Marina sympathizes with the French rationalist philosophy brought to Italy by Napoleon and his conquering forces. Marina’s simultaneous love of French novels demonstrates the kind of schizophrenia of her worldview: she is both a sensualist and a positivist; she also leans toward the occult and is intoxicated by irrational hypotheses. (In this, she can be considered a predecessor of Luisa Maironi in *Piccolo Mondo Antico*, whose rationalism is overwhelmed by her grief when she seeks a spiritualist connection with her dead daughter.) It is through Fogazzaro’s construction of texts as figurative symbols that readers recognize the historical and ideological position of both characters.

In her study on textuality, Olivia Santovetti interprets the novel’s text-centered plot from a feminist point of view. She calls attention to the “cliché” of the woman reader in Fogazzaro’s novel, embodied by Marina and her hysterical reaction to text. Marina is by turns insane, rebellious, possessed, and vampiric, all in response to the texts she embraces. She in fact rebels against her uncle and against what she views as provincial Italian society by means of her choices of reading, as her taste in French novels and Romanticism is antithetical to her uncle’s literary preferences (Santovetti 160). Likewise, the Count demonstrates his authority and
deepens the rift between himself and his niece by throwing her French novel out the window. Santovetti identifies Marina’s relationship with novels as Bovarysm: the downfall of a silly woman through reading. Although this exclusively feminine syndrome rises in prominence in 19th century writings and culture, it does have an older male counterpart: Quixotism (Santovetti 159). In both cases, novels “alter the equilibrium between fiction and reality” (159). The text becomes something other than means of communication. According to Elena Landoni, the novel serves the love interest between Silla and Marina as, “a go-between not so much as means or occasion to see each other, but instead as a source of fascination, artistic ‘communication’ which mobilizes the attention” (Landoni 75). This reflects the decadent view of the arts—aesthetic symbols and signifiers carry a seductive power that draw attention to themselves, enhancing their own mystery as signs even while they act as messengers meant to clearly indicate an objective reality beyond themselves. Santovetti comments on the application of this to Malombra: “the subtext of this novel is a reflection on the novel as the genre that creates illusions, ‘dreams,’ that are so powerful, so captivating as to alter the normal perception of reality and ambiguously confuse it with the fictional world” (Santovetti 158).

But within the plot of Malombra, it is important to note that it is not only fictional novels that prompt a kind of mystical fascination. Text itself becomes the vehicle of supernatural or ambiguous realities. Although Marina’s curiosity in the occult is piqued by Silla’s novel Un Sogno, it is the letter from Cecilia that puts her over the edge into madness and hysteria. In Malombra, text becomes a medium—that is, a spiritualist vehicle for communication from other worlds. For Silla, his mother’s letter to him before her death is not simply a communication from

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80 Santovetti’s analysis of Silla’s character focuses less on his relationship to writing than his relationship to his position within society. He is the “inetto,” or the antihero of modern times who embodies “masculinity in crisis” (Caesar 2007) (qtd in Santovetti 157).
the past, but from a mystical or heavenly realm. For Marina, Cecilia’s letter also transcends the past and vaults her into an occult world of spiritualist possession.

Can one conclude from this that *Malombra* is a condemnation of textuality, or of novels? But Santovetti asserts that Fogazzaro as author shares Marina’s literary preferences. He himself is a novelist with leanings toward Romanticism and French aestheticism, as he expresses in his influential “Dell’avvenire del romanzo in Italia;” by arguing for the validity of the “seductive” qualities of the novel, he follows the model of French authors embraced by Marina. Even Marina’s moody passion would be intriguing to Fogazzaro (as well as his character, Silla) because she experiences an inexplicable psychological leap between the present and the past, between the earthly and the unearthly. Santovetti finds in the textual experiences of *Malombra* a demonstration of, “mystical rapture: a totalizing experience detached from reality and beyond rational thinking in which the self dissolves its boundaries and experiences a sense of fusion and identity loss. The importance given to the act of reading and writing as aesthetic and mystical experiences is, we will see, the ground in which Fogazzaro’s literary experimentation, which is here anticipating modernist approaches, meets, and is enriched by his theological Modernism”

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81 “I believe that this mirrors the ambivalent feelings of Fogazzaro toward the novel as a genre. In fact, I will go even further and suggest that Fogazzaro was also compromised by the list of “poisonous” books—the generally despised French novels, which he surprisingly, albeit timidly, defended in his speech “Sull’avvenire del romanzo in Italia.” The speech reveals that Fogazzaro and his heroine also shared what could be called a “Romantic” modality of reading: the novel ‘bewitched’ the writer in his youth and made him a ‘devourer’ of literature just like Marina [. . .] It can be argued that in Marina the writer reflected some of his own interior motifs: including his penchant for novelistic illusion, his fascination for the supernatural and metempsychosis (this absorbed him deeply in the period before writing Malombra), and his life-long interest in mystical philosophies. There is more: Marina’s irrational temper (stigmatized in the period as a prerogative of female nature), the hysterical fits, the incipient madness allowed her to detach herself from reality and plunge into the deepest zone of the soul, the unconscious and repressed self—to use a Freudian term—which was precisely the dimension that interested Silla-Fogazzaro, the mystical writer. Fogazzaro’s interest in mystical practices, occultism, and spiritism must be understood in this context” (Santovetti161).
Fogazzaro’s affiliation with the Società degli Studi Psichici indicates the blurred lines between science and religious experience. For Fogazzaro, religion could illuminate scientific studies of the mind, but so also could science enlighten those seeking religious mystical experience.

Thus Marina and Silla both demonstrate a sublime realization of religious mysticism. While Santovetti focuses on the instances of mysticism that are prompted by occult communications on Marina’s part, resulting in danger and death, there are also counter-examples that point readers to a less decadent or gothic kind of mysticism, rather, one that draws characters like Silla and Steinegge upward to a divinely spiritual reality. Silla’s reunion with his mother through her posthumously delivered letter is an instance of this.

Malombra’s textual mysticism finds some repetition in Fogazzaro’s later novel. The opening chapters of Il Santo, in which the title character is absent, put a similar emphasis on text and literary communication. The novel opens with Jeanne Dessalle, staying with friends in Bruges, Belgium, and reading the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck’s L’Intruse. As in Fogazzaro’s naming of novels and artistic works in the library of Count d’Ormego in Malombra, the placing of L’Intruse serves as shorthand in constructing Jeanne’s frame of mind and establishes certain precedents for the novel as a whole. In Maeterlinck’s play, the characters find themselves powerless in the face of death, the “intruder.” This memento mori is reminiscent of Malombra’s own preoccupations with death and the mystical connection between the dead and the living. This theme is strengthened by the introduction of Jeanne’s brother, Carlino. Worldly and cultured, Carlino is planning his own novel, using his sister and her companion to help him block out the scenes. Fogazzaro spends much of the exposition of Il Santo giving Carlino voice to describe his plan for this novel, which narrates the story of an ancient mystic priest who falls in
love with a young maiden. The maiden reciprocates with a love so pure that physical limitations become irrelevant, and they experience a fusion of souls that is both spiritual and physical. In this first chapter we find the novelist Carlino as craftsman at work, offering interpretative analysis on his own text as he goes. Carlino defends his choice of setting for his novel: “For at Bruges, there is the silence of the antechamber of Eternity, and those bells, that I find so draining, could be heard as the calling of angels.” Bruges, whose name means “bridge,” becomes in Fogazzaro’s literary construction a bridge between the earthly and numinous realms. Carlino’s narrative confirms this theme, as he describes his elderly protagonist as the “intermediary between man and spirit” (56).

While this novel within a novel could be seen as reminiscent of the sublime mysticism of love in *Malombra* as Silla hopes for a spiritual union with Edith, the author Carlino’s fascination with the realm of the spirit is merely aesthetic, not heartfelt. In fact, this opening chapter presents a debate between Carlino’s aestheticism (and its relative mysticism) and the devout religion of Jeanne’s earnest Protestant friend, Noemi. Noemi’s contrasting anti-literary point of view is expressed through her indignation at Carlino Dessalle’s “skill” in reading Kempis, which he performs with eloquence but without sincerity. The pietism of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* advocates a lifestyle that is the antithesis of Carlino’s: “If thou wilt receive profit, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and seek not at any time the fame of being learned,” and, "At the Day of Judgment we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done." (*The Imitation of Christ*, Book I, ch. 3). Carlino is unfazed by such advice and refuses genuine belief,

82 “Perché a Bruges c’è un silenzio di anticamera dell’Eternità, e quel *carillon*, che in fondo comincia a seccarmi, può anche passare per un richiamo di angeli.”(55).

83 “intermedio fra l’uomo e lo spirito” (56)
declaring instead, “I am not convinced of anything. I doubt. It’s my way, you know that well” (69).²⁴ He is the epitome of literary dilettante, taking upon himself a mystical persona without the commitment of religious devotion: his literary endeavors are therefore not an effective mediator to the realm of the numinous. Or perhaps the numinous or mystical is simply not the aspect of religion that Fogazzaro wants to advocate. In this first chapter, Fogazzaro challenges the sublime theory of the arts as expounded by Baudelaire and aestheticism. Instead of demonstrating the novel’s power to draw its readers toward immortal realms, Fogazzaro puts Carlino and his literary endeavors on the defensive, with Thomas à Kempis as a model for the self-effacing writer who asks readers not to dwell on his text but instead points them toward a penitent and active life. Here Fogazzaro gives readers a Platonic reminder of the potential hypocrisy of poets and artists.

As in Malombra, in Il Santo, readers are presented with a world that is in perpetual interaction with texts. But while these texts convey messages through a veil of mystery and with some imitation of sublime rapture, the character of Noemi sets a strong precedent of resistance to aesthetic ideals. Her prioritization of experiential reality and edifying rational discourse over aesthetic texts prepares readers for their encounter with the novel’s title character. In fact, by the time readers have finally met Piero Maironi under his new alias, Benedetto, the novel has moved away from the symbolic geography of Bruges and the meta-literary aestheticism of Carlino’s work. Instead, the narrative presents readers with what could be seen as a real-life demonstration or realization of Carlino’s fictional mystic romance. The relationship of Giovanni Selva, white-haired if not quite elderly, with the much younger Maria d’Arxel in many ways mirrors that of Carlino’s fictional pair. The age difference between Giovanni and Maria is not as drastic as the 

²⁴ “Io non sono persuaso di niente. Io dubito. È il mio sistema, lo sai bene” (69).
couple in Carlino’s imagination, but descriptions of their relationship revolve around their spiritual union, using language similar to Carlino’s descriptions. If art and poetry are the incarnation of genuine feeling and thought, then the Selvas are likewise the realization of a divine or Christian love.85 Benedetto’s dying words identify them as such, calling them “the poetry of Christian love.” Giovanni and Maria are one of the few contented couples in all of Fogazzaro’s oeuvre.86 This similar invocation of a living poetry can be seen in Malombra, in Silla’s attraction to Edith Steinegge. Edith claims to have no poetic feeling, but Silla privately qualifies this for the reader: “but there was so much poetry in her voice” (292). In Malombra these instances of natural or living poetry and beauty offer a similar portal to spiritual experience. Like the arts, they also can prompt a mystical rapture in Silla.87 But the Selvas are peripheral characters in this novel, while Benedetto-Piero and Jeanne take up most of the narrative. And the latter couple has no recourse to this happy conjugal reality. In fact, their communication is almost solely through fragments of letters or brief notes (such as the letter warning him to leave Rome in Chapter 7). Even these notes are a dangerous kind of temptation for Benedetto. He does not respond to Jeanne’s written communication, instead making his communications direct and immediate when possible. Text is rejected for personal conversation.

85 “Ultima si avvicinò Maria Selva. S’inginocchiò a due passi dal letto. L’infermo le sorrise, le fe’ cenno di alzarsi.

‘La ho già benedetta in Suo marito,’ diss’egli. ‘Non li so distinguere. Ella è una parte dell’anima sua. Ella è il suo coraggio, lo sia sempre più nelle ore penose che lo aspettano. E siate insieme la poesia dell’amore cristiano, fino all’ultimo. Fermatevi ora qui un poco tutt’e due.’” (327).

86 Like many other Fogazzarian romances, the Selvas’ love initially developed through writing letters. When they meet, it is a fulfillment of their already established spiritual union.

87 Fogazzaro’s insistence on the legitimacy of the physical embodiment of a spiritual love is demonstrated with this Selva marriage. Perfectly religious, they have no need to renounce physical passion.
*Il Santo*’s gradual distancing from textual communication is further traced by Benedetto’s interaction with clerical orders. Benedetto starts the path to “sainthood” in Subiaco,\(^\text{88}\) which can be seen as geographical indication of the progression from text to oral speech. Subiaco’s affiliation with Dominican and Benedetto’s friendship with Dominican priests links him to a culture of preaching and oral rhetoric. In the narrative of Benedetto’s path to uncanonized sainthood, the immediacy of face-to-face communication becomes a priority. Dialogue takes the stage over textual messages between distant correspondents as Benedetto mingles with the masses flocking to hear him preach and begging for healing miracles. Benedetto also organizes evening gatherings with the intelligentsia of Rome who are advocating ecclesiastical reforms.\(^\text{89}\) This culminates in Benedetto’s face-to-face dialogue with the pope himself. Although this communication *does* make allusion to a text potentially familiar to Italian or Catholic readers, it is not to an aesthetic text. Instead, Benedetto makes clear reference to the Catholic philosopher, Antonio Rosmini, Catholic reformer and author of *Delle Cinque Piaghe della Santa Chiesa*. Rosmini was one of Fogazzaro’s most consistent role models, and it is evident that Fogazzaro felt determined to continue Rosmini’s efforts. In a letter written decades earlier in 1883, Fogazzaro foreshadows Benedetto’s “Antonio Rosmini, a holy priest and one of the most vigorous philosophers of our century, […] wrote on the wounds of the Church, and he certainly

\(^{88}\) Subiaco, near Rome, is noted for being the setting of the early Benedictine Order. After the establishment of the Benedictines, German monks settled there, attracted printing endeavors. The first books in Italy were printed in Subiaco, and the Benedictine Order became known for its culture of literacy. It was the dominant order until the Dominicans come on the scene much later in the 1200s. Dominicans were instead known for their preaching, rather than for the printing and disseminating of written texts.

\(^{89}\) Similar meetings of intellectual reformers are organized by Giovanni Selva. In chapter two, Selva insists on a personal gathering, “I believe it would afford the greatest assistance in the spreading of our opinions if we could, at least, know one another. To-night a few of us are to meet together for a first discussion.” (Chapter 2)
didn’t indicate all of them (qtd in Moretti 13). Like Rosmini, Benedetto expounds on four “wounds,” through which he claims the church is figuratively becoming infected. He delineates these in the context of plain conversation with the pope. At Benedetto’s death, he leaves behind no written documents, either literary or philosophical. Thus in his last months of life after his spiritual awakening, Benedetto turned away from written texts. His life of action and direct human contact resisted symbolic codification or any connection with aestheticism.

Malombra offers hints of a similar anti-textual sense of renewal, but with less consistency. Silla writes in his journal about the pure love he feels for Edith and finds literary endeavors inadequate: “My desire is so pure that to write it – ‘it is pure’ – costs me effort, repulses me” (270). Yet, one of his last desires is nonetheless to share his novel with her. Edith herself, writing to Don Innocenzo, also invokes the power of immediate oral communication in her desire for spiritual nourishment, “I need, most honored Sir, your living word, in which there resides a great light, a strength” (282). Yet, there are very few instances of preaching in Malombra. When the cast of characters do go to church, their own thoughts take center stage, with little mention of an administering priest at all, let alone any kind of edifying homily or sermon (165-166).

While text dominates Malombra, the living voice or face-to-face dialogue takes precedence in Il Santo. But it cannot be said that this oral communication acts as a medium to spiritual realms in the same way that text functioned in Malombra. The mysticism of

90 Antonio Rosmini che fu un santo prete e uno tra i più vigorosi filosofi del nostro secolo, [...] scrisse sulle piaghe della Chiesa e certo non le indicò tutte” (qtd in Moretti 13).
91 “Il mio desiderio è tanto puro che lo scrivere – è puro – mi costa uno sforzo, mi ripugna” (270).
92 “Ho bisogno, onoratissimo Signore, della Sua parola viva, nella quale è un grande lume, una forza.” (282)
communication itself is no longer evident. *Il Santo* puts text, art, and symbol in a secondary place. When immediate action is necessary, then text is less effective. Direct communication is the high point of the novel. And its ideal reception on the part of hearers is rational rather than rapturous. Its model, the ecclesiastical reformist writing of Antonio Rosmini, is non-literary. And yet, the novel still frames these direct statements of church reform within a frame of aesthetics. Why? In some ways this seems to support Fogazzaro’s former assertions in “Dell’avvenire del romanzo in Italia” that the novel as a genre is best adapted to reach the widest range of people. But the idea of the novel’s universal application has an interesting relationship with the idea of the novel’s necessary ambiguity in its use of symbol and imagined or hypothetical characters and scenarios. Fogazzaro sets up his usual aesthetic frame of the first chapter only to consistently push against this aestheticism throughout the rest of the novel. Yet, the novel genre confines Benedetto’s didactic moments of preaching the framing of aesthetic narrative.

4.4 Shifts in narrative genre: symbolic history and contemporary commentaries

The narrative’s thematic shift toward time and society is also evident in the larger issues of narrative structure and genre definition in the two novels. *Malombra* is a symbolic historical novel. *Il Santo*’s narrative structure resists historical positioning. *Malombra* as symbolic history presents a fairly clear interpretative task. Through his individual characters, Fogazzaro represents the varied European and Italian peoples struggling in political and cultural clashes through history. Marina, though she is portrayed as Italian Genoese by birth, stands as a figure of the French forces that dominated much of the region. In her short biography, crucial historical events mark turning points in her own life. The Battle of Novara in 1849, a clash between Radetsky of
Austria and Sardinian forces, which were defeated, brings Marina’s family up to Paris. It is in 1859, marking the Second War of Independence, that Marina comes back to Milano with father and English governess Sarah. In this same year, France is drawn into battle against Austria due to the treaty secretly signed with Camillo Cavour, Prime Minister of Sardinia. When the French are victorious, they win Italian territories from Austria, which they rule jointly with the Sardinian government. The attraction and repulsion of French influence in the Italian Unification period is embodied in Marina’s persona. Her death marks the end of an era of French dominance, just as Cecilia’s letter, dated 1802 and citing the beginning of her woes as 1797, marks the period of France’s strongest political control in northern Italy.  

This kind of symbolic historical novel crosses the boundaries of romanticism, decadence, and realism in the nineteenth century European literary tradition. Perhaps the author most obviously evoked by Malombra’s symbolic history is Ugo Foscolo, whose Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis traces the same struggle with French and Austrian forces that Fogazzaro’s Cecilia embodies with her treacherous romance and subsequent punishment. But Fogazzaro could have found similar inspiration for this model of historical narrative in realist novels like Charles Dickens’ Little Dorrit or George Eliot’s Middlemarch as well. With Malombra, Fogazzaro establishes a national as well as personal narrative. This narrative was never simply the story of one individual’s psychological and spiritual progress. 

How does this then construct a religious reality for readers? The historical or generational links that make up the narrative structure of Malombra contribute to his sense of a mystical

\[93\] 1797 marked the establishment of France’s control of Lombardy and Emilia Romagna, (identified as the Cisalpine Republic), after the success of Napoleon’s Italian campaign. In 1802, Napoleon was appointed president of this republic, and its name was changed to the Republic of Italy.
theology. Each main character’s religious narrative can be explicated in terms of relationships between generations: Edith Steinegge is paired with her father. Silla is paired with the Count and his own mother. Marina is paired with Cecilia, also antagonistically paired with the Count. In short, historical continuity between generations contributes to the establishment of personal religious identity. The mystical link between a character and otherworldly realms finds parallels to his or her links to past genealogy, or to the collective past of culture and nation. The mystical becomes identified through a process of connection or integration, as the individual finds his or her place in a chronological theology: one that traces a cyclical fall and redemption from generation to generation.

Hayden White’s stance on historical writing and the inevitable construction of myth through textual emplotment becomes relevant to a discussion of the function of historical novels. In White’s theory, history writing consists of,

metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings. Viewed in a purely formal way, a historical narrative is not only a reproduction of the events reported in it, but also a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in our literary tradition” (White 400).

For White, any historical narrative has the potential for symbolism and metaphor. White’s concept of emplotment can therefore only be enacted through the act of matching narrative elements with the wider scope of literary tradition. Structure is key. Fogazzaro’s aesthetic symbolism necessitates difference and distance between signifier and signified, between past and present, between individuals and the collective whole – but this very distance makes possible a vast network of interconnectedness. The symbolic historical narrative realizes the possibility of structured correspondence and interconnectedness even more intensely, mapping geography, chronology, ethos, art, and nature onto one another in an elaborate schema.
But this shifts with Il Santo. For the first time, Fogazzaro sets his novel in a contemporary Italy, making no reflective statements about the history of his nation. This may seem like a counter-intuitive conclusion: Il Santo is, after all, the third book in an epic family saga, and its characters therefore inherit an unavoidable literary past. But in this novel, the evocation of this past is only a frame for a more focused concentration on the present.

Benedetto’s new life is even more starkly realized when readers contrast it with his past family history. In renaming himself, he disinherits himself. Readers of the first two novels in this series know Piero Maironi as the inevitable (and troubled or decadent) product of his forebears. In Piccolo Mondo Moderno, he mirrors the loyalty and passion of his father and the skeptical rationality of his mother. He is also the namesake of his great-uncle, Piero Ribera, who figures prominently in Piccolo Mondo Antico. Like the characters of Malombra, Piero Maironi carries the burdens, for good or ill, of generations before him. But if one reads Il Santo without a familiarity of the preceding novels, only vestiges of this legacy are evident. Fogazzaro also shifts the narrative structure of this novel. Il Santo is set in the contemporary world, and as such resists connection with historical events whose importance may have not yet been established. Although it reflects the contemporary clash of modernism and traditionalism within the Catholic church, it presents no clear chronology that could possibly coincide with actual events – no historical emplotment.

This is a strong contrast to Fogazzaro’s previous novels, whose commentaries on the progress of philosophical and social movements through time help readers trace a narrative enactment of Hegelian principles of history. Bildungsroman novels trace the development of individual heroes and heroines in order to point readers toward a historical development of the progress of Italian society. But Fogazzaro rejects the symbolic historical model in Il Santo. Its
contemporary setting does not offer the simultaneously national and redemptive view of history that *Malombra* attempted. It also resists themes of decadence in this shift in genre. Although *Il Santo’s* urgent plea for reform can certainly be seen as a confirmation of the corruption and possible decadence of the Catholic Church, there is no real evocation of the past or future in its rationalistic program for reform.

One final aspect of both these narratives highlights a crucial difference in their generic relationship with historical narrative. Both novels are structured around a kind of prophetic utterance, a visionary access to the past or future. If literary decadence is based on a feeling of lateness and the burden of past influences and past cultures on contemporary society, then what role would a prophecy play in such a literary tradition? In *Malombra*, the prophet is Marina, as the oracle of the dead Cecilia. Her prophetic burden is fatal. Marina is led into madness, eventually doing violence to herself and others. But a kind of historical continuity is created through Cecilia’s foretelling of the future. Cecilia’s revenge is undeniably fulfilled, and her burden of past grief and sin is perpetuated into a new generation, even while Fogazzaro evokes a rational ambivalence in regards to the reality of Cecilia’s supernatural influence. The novel obviously condemns Cecilia’s method of prophetic vengeance, yet Silla is also granted a kind of saving grace in the form of a prophetic correspondence from his mother. When he receives her letter, introducing him to what might have been a kind of redemptive figure in the Count d’Ormengo, her words also carry a force of continuity—an emplotment of Silla’s own life. Silla’s conversion might be seen as moving away from the burdened weight of the past and toward a renewal of hope for the future. Edith’s enduring love for him in fact gives him a certain measure of immortality, a future in the living world of society even after his untimely death. *Malombra*, therefore, is a novel about time and continuity. As historical novel, the genre form
Il Santo’s first chapter introduces readers to Piero Maironi’s prophetic vision of his life. This novel’s treatment of prophecy is not purely unbelieving, but it conveys a skepticism that arises out of an intriguing sense of humility on the part of Piero-Benedetto. The opening chapter of Il Santo refers to the written account of this vision as being kept secret and sealed by a priest confidant. In this vision, Piero sees himself in priestly robes and foresees his own death in Rome. This vision is the catalyst for the novel. It is what prompts him to renounce his social position and take up a life of isolation and asceticism, yet he feels consistent unease in presuming a prophetic or mystical vocation. Throughout the novel, he turns away from choices that would fulfill this prophetic vision fully. Instead, at his deathbed he dies on his own terms, though it might have been possible to follow the indication of this earlier vision and thereby fulfill it. Piero’s refusal to cooperate with a prophetic history of his life can also be seen as mirroring his refusal of his past. Likewise, Piero-Benedetto’s Rosminian reforms strive for a universality that does not depend on a historical or generational progression. In Il Santo’s narrative structure, the past is mystery. The clarity of rationality is a universal present tense. Again, this ambivalence toward a narrative continuity prompted by prophetic vision is reflected in the resistance to historical narrative genre conventions and the mysticism prompted by symbolic structures.

94 “Jeanne was unaware that previous to the night when he fled from home, leaving no trace, Piero had entrusted to Don Giuseppe a written account of a vision of his own life in the future and his death; a vision of which she was ignorant, and which had come to Piero in the church adjoining the asylum where his wife lay dying. What did that sealed envelope contain? Surely something he himself had written; but what? A confession, probably of his sins. The conception of such an action, the manner in which it had been carried out, would be in harmony with his innate mysticism, with the predominance in him of imagination over reason, with his intellectual physiognomy.”
4.5 The experience of conversion in *Malombra* and *Il Santo*

To more fully explicate the shift in the concept of conversion or spiritual epiphany between these two novels, I will conclude with a comparison of some key moments of personal religious experience in the two novels. Fogazzaro’s changing approach toward narrative structure supports this shift in his theology of religious identity and conversion.

*Malombra*’s main character experiences such fluctuations of spiritual well-being that it is perhaps easiest to define conversion through its juxtaposition with the experience of a spiritual fall. Fogazzaro himself claimed *Malombra* as a spiritual autobiographical record of his life. In a letter to E. S. Bastiano, in August, 1883, Fogazzaro speaks of the “moral tempests shaking Silla. Instead of his name, you may insert mine into those pages” (qtd in Moroni 11).^95^ The chapter in which the narrator records Silla’s sense of personal redemption and intensification of Christian belief, “In April” is quickly followed by Silla’s rejection of a moral or Christian life and his decision to return to Marina in the next chapter, “*Quid me persequeris?*”

Silla’s spiritual high point in the first chapter demonstrates a concept of religious conversion that is aesthetically mediated, as has already been examined. Like Steinegge, who is blind to spiritual reality until he reunites with his gifted and aesthetically sensitive daughter, Silla is also dependent on Edith’s spiritual help. Silla in fact also experiences a renewal of hope that could be called conversion – a sense of salvation through the mediation of Edith. The romantic intensity of feeling for Edith brings out the multiple levels of both distance and unity that are found within the structure of this narrative. Silla’s sense of spiritual redemption is interpreted as

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^95^ “Vorrei che i suoi occhi le permettessero di leggere poche pagine del capitolo *In Aprile* (verso la fine) dove è parlato delle tempeste morali che agitavano Silla. Invece di questo nome ella può mettere il mio in quelle pagine” (qtd in Introduzione 11).
finding both divine and human connection. Silla seeks connection with Edith, but also hopes to finally find a place in the world of society as well. This is demonstrated by his once again deciding to take up writing. In fact, this is embodied in his textual memorial of this moment in his journal. The chapter ends with his entry: “April 29, 1865, ‘I hope’” (271). Conversion for Silla is once again a sense of vocation, of belonging in the chronology of history, and of connection with others. His faith in divinity is prompted by and expressed through a mystical poetic and aesthetic language, but it is grounded in a narrative of connection, personal relationships, and history.

This is reaffirmed when we see the opposite experience in the next chapter. Edith’s cold shyness shakes his resolve, and he experiences a spiritual crisis of doubt and an eventual fall from grace. In an inversion of the epiphany, submission, and redemption of the Apostle Paul, Silla’s angry prayer quotes God’s own lines: “he asked the King of spirits from the bottom of his heart: Why do you persecute me?” (284). Although Silla has come to the Milan cathedral for spiritual refuge, he finds no eloquent mediation in the beauty of the arts that surround him. He also experiences a loss of memory and history: “He sought to remember the past, when, as a child he would come to the cathedral with his mother, imagining at the sound of the organ the deserts of the Orient, the palm trees, the sea, the contemplative life. Nothing, nothing, nothing: his memory was numb, his heart empty without an echo” (285). Unable to perceive the eloquence of the arts, and unable to access past memories, connect with living people, and feel a

96 “29 Aprile 1865 Spero” (271).

97 “chiese dal profondo del cuore al Re degli spiriti: Quid me persequeris?” (284).

98 “Cercò ricordarsi del tempo passato, quando, fanciullo, veniva in Duomo con sua madre, immaginando al suono dell’organo i deserti di oriente, le palme, il mare, la vita contemplativa. Niente, niente, niente; la memoria era intorpidita, il cuore vuoto e senza eco” (285).
sense of belonging within history, Silla necessarily experiences an anti-conversion.

Throughout much of its narrative, Il Santo approaches the conversion of Benedetto indirectly. His decision to leave his worldly life at the end of the previous novel is not described by Benedetto himself until several chapters into the novel. Most of Benedetto’s characterization is through the reactions and descriptions of other minor characters, and readers are given only select moments of insight into his interior thoughts and feelings. Yet, although there are various characters who also experience a change of religious attitude throughout the novel, (for example, Noemi seems to come close to Catholic conversion, though she is already a devout Christian Protestant), the novel’s focus is still very strongly on the spiritual life of Benedetto.

The crucial moment of spiritual epiphany – a conversion experience of sorts—comes in chapter three, “Notte di tempeste” or “Night of storms.” Benedetto spends the night alone in the countryside surrounding the Dominican monastery. He initially experiences visions of himself preaching to a following in Rome. Then, after an internal struggle and physical swoon, he achieves a feeling of oneness with God’s will. Weak body, but re-dedicated to his life of humility and rejection of social position, Benedetto is set on the path toward sainthood.

Two points come out of the narrated experience of a renewed conversion. First is its particular description of a dialogue of prayer. Benedetto in fact articulates very little. Although he has just recently recounted the experience of various mystical promptings to Don Clemente, he does not continue verbally expressing his thoughts in prayer. And deity does not speak back to him in this experience, but instead is pointedly silent. One of the few quotes in this passage immediately confirms the wordless aspect of Benedetto’s prayer and divine response. As an implied conversation, this climactic prayer-dialogue between Benedetto and divinity is fundamentally ambiguous. Benedetto cries out,
‘Jesus, Jesus, I am not worthy, not worthy to be tempted as Thou wast!’ And he pressed his tightly closed lips to the stone, seeking God in the dumb creature. God! God! the desire, the life, the ardent peace of the soul! A breath of wind blew over him, and moved the grass about him.
‘Is it Thou?’ he groaned. ‘Is it Thou, is it Thou?’
The wind was silent (119).  

Although the silence of the wind can be interpreted as a trial of Benedetto’s faith, or deity’s abandonment of him, Benedetto himself seems to validate this silence by seeking God in the wordless objects of this natural landscape. This reflects the kind of life of holiness he has chosen: not a clerical order of prayer or preaching, but as a manual laborer in the monastery garden within the Dominican order at Subiaco. Language and symbols, in this episode, do not seem to bring him close enough to the divine presence to be satisfying to Benedetto. He looks beyond these to the world of real objects and physical action.

The second point that comes out of this experience reaches beyond the question of language itself and toward the question of narrative structure. Any prophetic vision that Benedetto experiences is, in fact, a narrative, structuring his life by linking his current identity into the chronology of a future setting and circumstances and promising a change in his identity and relation with the world around him. But in this episode, Benedetto’s conversion does not come by means of prophetic vision even though he in fact experiences a very vivid and remarkably accurate one. This vision shows Benedetto as a leader of the masses and a challenge to the corrupt hierarchies of the church later in the novel. This indeed comes true, and readers

99 ‘Gesù, Gesù, non sono degno, non sono degno di venir tentato come Te!’ E porse le labbra strette, le affisse al sasso, cercando Iddio nella creatura muta, Iddio, Iddio, il sospiro, la vita, la pace ardente dell’anima. Un soffio di vento gli corse sopra, gli mosse l’erbe intorno.
‘Sei Tu,’ egli gemette, ‘sei Tu, sei Tu?’
Il vento tacque (119).
eventually recognize the narrative of the novel encapsulated in this foreshadowing vision.

But Benedetto perceives this vision as a significant obstacle to his spiritual well-being. After his soul-searching struggle, described by Fogazzaro through the sensations of physical suffering during Benedetto’s night of exposure to the elements, Benedetto finally experiences a new kind of mystical conversion, one described in terms that resist historical consciousness: “His soul must have been sealed by the central contact with the Being without time and without space, for when Benedetto first regained consciousness he had lost all sense of place and of time” (122). The vision is rejected. “Uncertainties, doubts, memories of the mystic vision, departed from him in his profound self-abandonment to the Divine Will, which might deal with him as it would” (122). Benedetto’s experience directly counteracts the expectation and anticipation prompted by the vision and, along with it, diffuses the vision’s power to insert Benedetto and his identity within a social and historical reality. To use Hayden White’s term, Benedetto’s second mystical experience of the night resists emplotment. Only when he is freed from the narrative necessities of time and place can Benedetto sense saving grace.

What is also striking about this in *Il Santo* is that while Benedetto still feels a sense of calling, in contrast to Silla’s renewed sense of his own literary vocation, Benedetto has no sense of skilled or professional vocation. He is without plans, even though he feels compelled toward a life of action in order to fully realize his feeling of fraternal love for humanity. In many ways...

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100 “L’anima dovette chiudersi nel contatto centrale con l’Essere senza tempo e senza spazio, perché Benedetto, al primo ritorno della coscienza, non ebbe senso nè del luogo nè dell’ora” (121).

101 “Incertezze, dubbi, ricordi della mistica Visione gli si disiolsero nel profondo abbandono alla Divina Volontà, che avrebbe disposto di lui a suo piacimento” (122).

102 Benedetto’s deathbed sermon to his followers continue with this vague sense of work without a narrowed sense of skilled vocation. "Labour that the purified faith may penetrate into life. . . .
this could moment could be analyzed for its similarities to Silla’s anti-conversion in *Malombra*:

Silla’s sense of losing memories of his own life and identity, the one-sided dialogue, even the certainty that closes this chapter. In *Malombra*, however, this loss of context and loss of self is a fall. In *Il Santo*, it is a divine epiphany.

The narrative-building function of a prophetic vision is a source of profound unease for Benedetto. In *Il Santo*, it serves as a framing device that opposes rather than complements the later epiphany that transcends time and space. Redemption or salvation (in Benedetto’s case, sainthood) therefore must be anti-historical and anti-symbolic. At the end of *Piccolo Mondo Moderno*, Piero Maironi resolves to leave the world and his life of society behind. *Il Santo* shows both the realization and contradiction of this resolution. Although Benedetto no longer functions within the hierarchical structures of society, he does advocate engagement with people and the institution of the church. He seeks a universal role, one which cannot be confined by the necessary particularities of social, historical, and personal contexts. Although it answers contemporary needs, it is not historical or political.

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Teach such as these who pray abundantly, often idolatrously, to practise, besides the prayers which are prescribed, the mystic prayer as well, in which is the purest faith, the most perfect hope, the most perfect charity, which in itself purifies the soul and purifies life. . . . let each one work in his own family, each one among his own friends, and those who can, with the pen. Thus you will till the soil from which the pastors arise. My sons, I do not promise you that you will renew the world. You will labour in the night-time, without visible gain, like Peter and his companions on the Sea of Galilee. But, at last, Christ will come, and then your gain shall be great." (trans Mary Prichard Agnetti). “Lavorate per la penetrazione della fede purificata nella vita . . . A coloro che pregano abbondantemente, spesso idolatricamente, insegnate voi a praticare, oltre alle preghiere prescritte, anche la preghiera mistica in cui è la fede più pura, la più perfetta speranza, l più perfetta carità, che purifica per sè l’anima e purifica la vita . . . ciascuno lavori nella propria famiglia, ciascuno lavori fra i propri amici, chi può lavori nel libro. Così lavorerete anche il terreno onde i Pastori sorgono” (326).
4.6 Conclusion

This comparison of *Malombra* and *Il Santo* brings questions crucial to Fogazzaro’s literary endeavors to the foreground: What is the relation of the numinous to the realm of human sociality? What are the signs and causes of a moral awakening, and how do these interact with moments of spiritual awakening? Are the moral and the spiritual necessarily separate realms of human experience? These questions highlight a tension between rationality and the mystical aspects of religious experience that mirror the tension felt between the individual and the collective. For Fogazzaro, his early forays into the interior experience of mystical religion were best expressed through the elaborate structure of symbolic history and aesthetic imagery. The numinous was defined by distance and separation, and the individual was prompted to seek access to the divine through various mediators. In *Malombra* this mediation is enacted by characters such as Edith, but it is more fundamentally realized through the mediation of expressive or artistic modes. The arts and poetic language help to structure this relationship between the individual and the numinous, but these same mediating forces also anchor the individual within social systems of history, family, and ethnic culture. With *Il Santo*, Fogazzaro’s later shift toward a universal application of religious morality, that is, rational religion, resulted in a problematization of these same aesthetic structures and historical contexts. Fogazzaro’s literary construction of Benedetto’s sainthood demonstrates a flattening of the aesthetic elements of narrative. This shift in aesthetic narrative construction demonstrates a distrust of the kind of mystical experience that requires the mediation of symbols or sign systems. Fogazzaro’s demonstrable reluctance in *Il Santo* to engage in either an aesthetic or historical narrative brings the idea of religion outside of sequential theologies and into an
attempted universal present. Thus these two novels show alternative definitions of conversion, mysticism, and a life of Christian discipleship.
Conclusion – The implications of dialogic style in the development of religious narrative

The dialogism that emerges in the texts addressed highlights the fundamental tension between the individual and collective systems and societies. The question of religious conversion moves beyond a recognition of the mystical or numinous to address relational questions of community and historical emplotment. Bridging epistemological gaps between the immediacy of experience and theory and exposition results in problems of ineffability.

The realization of this tension that emerges in the Joseph Smith History is most rooted in the variety of social actions that the narrative itself seeks to accomplish. The different styles or registers used in the narrative express a personal confession of faith, a secular social history, a court testimony of innocence, and a millenarian or divine history. The question of ineffability or unknowability is not as clearly obvious in that the text doesn't demonstrate much linguistic or narrative self-questioning or humility. Yet, the sense of ineffability can be translated into a sense of irrelevance in this text—a cognitive dissonance between the varied types of histories constructed. The construction of a narrative necessarily sets the individual experience in dialogue with various social or collective contexts, and the quest for a Mormon emplotment (history) becomes a juggle of varied different narrative links between the individual and different definitions of a collective narrative.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's narrator is explicit in defining his own genre (or double genre) and makes this definition a substantial question within his text. Ineffability takes a central role in Kierkegaard's text as he doubts the possibility of bridging between the language of
universal systems and subjective experience. But Kierkegaard is also insistent on the need to go beyond a discussion of expression alone in his quest for immediate experience and understanding. In some ways Kierkegaard is the anomaly in this group of four writers because he is least devoted to the construction of narrative. On the surface, Kierkegaard seems to have little to do with crafting a history, whether fictional or non-fiction. Yet, his text is littered with short tales, vignettes, re-tellings or alternative versions of traditional stories. For Kierkegaard, all emplotment is a kind of hypothetical project. On the other hand, Kierkegaard is more explicitly concerned with reality, the "historical-actual" or "life-narrative" as he terms it. The questions raised in the Joseph Smith narrative are both more broadly and more specifically addressed in *Fear and Trembling*, as Kierkegaard points out cognitive dissonance, not between different types of histories but between lyrical and argumentative expression. The Joseph Smith History doesn't question whether the faith experience can be expressed, and neither does it propose any solutions for the problem. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, poses the problem of ineffability, but also suggests possible reconciliation, a reconciliation not just of expressive systems but of epistemological and ontological approaches toward faith. The dissonance of clashing expressive systems becomes a synecdoche for the crisis needed to produce the experience of faith.

George Eliot's two novels, *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*, both show preoccupation with religious experience as identity formation. Despite their forays into philosophical references or expository asides, they are unabashedly novels, so the question of what they are accomplishing as a social act is not nearly as direct as Smith or even Kierkegaard. In this they are less explicitly concerned with their readership and their own genre identity. Yet, they recreate dialogism within their stories, and they in turn can be seen as novels that are in dialogue with each other (or more accurately, the utterance of *Daniel Deronda* is in response to the previous utterance of *Romola*).
While Daniel Deronda can be seen as a more developed and sophisticated articulation of Eliot's philosophy, Romola theories of expression remain central to the later novel. Romola is a novel about communicating, and the varied eloquence of diverse languages is key. The novel, however, comes back to silence and the ineffability of compassion and community. That same tension between the individual and the collective can never be adequately expressed in language or sign systems in Romola, and Romola's narrative distrust of religion and religious experience centers around the social isolation that mysticism not only fosters but requires. The novel demonstrates this through both a critical commentary on language and on cryptic visual images of mystic characters. Daniel Deronda can be seen as a response to Romola's expression of doubtful faith. The novel's discussion of language and the arts in many ways echoes that of Romola, as visual images appear with similar effect on characters. Daniel Deronda makes the significant addition of music as mode of communication, in many ways resolving the problem of ineffability to which Romola clings, yet expressive modes are not only what is at stake in both novels. Romola's distrust of language is also a distrust of dogmas, social stratification, and social hierarchies as a whole. The question of history becomes a crucial one: Romola, despite its novelistic structure as historical fiction, is anti-history, positing the universalism of all human experience. Daniel Deronda, with its more forgiving and hopeful view of language and its inclusion of music, is also more hopeful in its construction of a dynamic and empowering theory of history. This has much to do with Eliot’s shifting sense of the participating interlocutors in her constructed dialogue. That is, if the individual is in dialogue with the collective, how is this collective defined? How does this collective relate to a concept of the divine? Eliot’s sense of the numinous shifts from an isolated and subjective mysticism to an essentially social realm.
Finally, Antonio Fogazzaro falls into some of the same patterns as George Eliot. As in Eliot's novels, the tension of individual to collective religious experience is found within the structure of his two novels, rather than in dialogue with the reader. Fogazzaro's discussion of the arts is more explicit than that of Eliot's: this is in keeping with his background in literary decadence and aesthetic theories of symbolic correspondences. *Malombra* overwhelms the reader with symbolic discourse in its construction of multiple layers of historical narrative. Fogazzaro's later novel, *Il Santo*, retains aesthetic structures that demonstrate theories of symbolic correspondence in order to respond to them with rational unaesthetic discourse. *Il Santo*’s hero in many ways resists historical and symbolic religious experience; yet, the anti-empotment and more purely experiential conversion of Benedetto is still set within a context of symbolic discourse. These two novels of Fogazzaro are situated in dialogue with each other: exhibiting strikingly parallel structures of plot, the later nevertheless inverts the historical and symbolic thesis of *Malombra*. The question of ineffability is at its most complicated in Fogazzaro: these two novels experiment the moral questions involved in a spiritual epistemology or spiritual articulation. Fogazzaro questions not just what spiritual truth *can* be expressed and learned through linguistic/artistic expression, but what *should* be expressed or disclosed. He expresses a linguistic humility within an ironically sumptuous aesthetic frame.
Appendix

Four Versions of the First Vision Narrative

1. History, Circa Summer 1832 – handwriting of Frederick G. Williams and JS; six pages; in JS Letterbook I, JS Collection, CHL
(bold font indicates the handwriting of Joseph Smith. Insertions are indicated in < . . . >).

/A History of the life of Joseph Smith J[ ]r. an account of his marvelous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Ch[ ]rist the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his hand <firstly> he receiving the testimony from on high secondly theministering of Angels thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of — Aangels to administer the letter of the Law <Gospel — > the Law and commandments as they were given unto him — > and in <the> ordinences, forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinance from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God conferred upon him and the continuation of the blessings of God to him &c —

I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the <State> of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instruct<ing> me in <the> Christian religion [. ] at the age of about ten years my Father Joseph Smith Seignior moved to Palmyra Ontario County in the State of New York and being in indigent circumstances were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children and as it required their exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennift of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructtid in reading and writing and the ground <rules> of Arithmatic which const[it] uted my whole literary acquirements. At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously imprest [p. 1] with regard to the all importent concerns of for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the scriptures believing as I was taught, that they contained the word of God thus applying myself to them and my intimate acquaintance with those of differant denominations led me to marvel exceedingly for I discovered that <they did not adorn> instead of adorning their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that sacred depository this was a grief to my Soul thus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[s]i[j]ons the wicke[d] ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the of the minds of mankind my mind become exceedingly distrest for I become convicted of my sins and by searchin the scriptures I found that mankind <mankind> did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized from the true and liveing faith and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the new testament and I felt to mourn for my own sins and for the sins of the world for I learned in the scriptures that God was
the same yesterday to day and forever that he was no respecter to persons for he was God for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their majesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty whose power and intiligence in governing the things which are so exceeding great and [p. 2] marvelous even in the likeness of him who created him <them> and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed well hath the wise man said the <it is a> fool <that> saith in his heart there is no God my heart exclaimed all these bear testimony and bespeak and omnipotent and omnipresent power a being who maketh Laws and decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was an is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity and when <I> considered all these things and that <that> being seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in <the> attitude of calling upon the Lord <in the 16th year of my age> a piller of fire-light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the <Lord> opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph <my son> thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way> walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world that all those who may believe on my name may have Eternal life <behold> the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they turned aside from the gospel and keep no <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to their ungodliness and to bring to pass that which hath been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Apostles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is] written of me in the cloud <clothed> in the glory of my Father and my soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy and the Lord was with me but could find none that would believe the heavenly vision nevertheless I pondered these things in my heart about that time my mother and but after many days [p. 3] I fell into transgressions and sinned many things which brought a wound upon my soul and there were many things which transpired that cannot be written and my Fathers family have suffered many pericutions and afflictions . . .

(Histories 10-13)

2. JS, “sketch Book for the use of Joseph Smith, jr.,” Journal, Sept. 1835-Apr. 1836; handwriting of Warren Parrish, an unidentified scribe, Sylvester Smith, Frederick G. Williams, Warren Cowdery, JS, and Oliver Cowdery; 195 pages; JS Collection, CHL. Includes redactions and archival marking (Journals 53).

9-11 November 1835 – Monday – Wednesday
“... while setting in my house between the hours of nine (ten) & 10 (11) this morning a man came in, and introduced himself to me, calling (himself) self (by the name of) Joshua the Jewish minister, his appearance was some what (thing) singular, having a beard about 3 inches in length which is quite grey, also his hair is long and considerably silvered with age I should think he is about 50 or 55 years old, tall and straight slender built of thin visage blue eyes, and fair
complexion, he wears a sea green frock coat, & pantaloons of the same, black fur hat with narrow brim, and while speaking frequently shuts his eyes with a scowl on his countenance; I made some enquiry after his name but received no definite answer; we soon commenced talking upon the subject of religion and after I had made some remarks concerning the bible I commenced giving him a relation of the circumstances connected with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, as follows—being wrought up on in my mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking upon <at> the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and considering it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involved eternal consequences; being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and bowed down before the Lord, under a realising sense that he had said (if the bible be true) ask and you shall receive knock and it shall be opened seek and you shall find and again, if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradeth not; information what I most desired at this time, and with a fixed determination I to obtain it, I called upon the Lord for the first time, in the place above stated or in other words I made a fruitless attempt to pray, my tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, <I> strove again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet, and [p. 23] and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking, I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my tongue liberated, and I called on the Lord in might prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down upon my head, and filled me with joy unspeakable, a personage appeared in the midst, of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed, another personage soon appeared like unto the first, he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee, he testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God; <and I saw many angels in this vision> I was about 14. Years old when I received this first communication; [. When I was about 17 years old I saw another vision of angels, in the night season after I had retired to bed I had not been a sleep, when but was meditating upon my past life and experience, I was very conscious that I had not kept the commandments, and I repented heartily for all my sins and transgression, and humbled myself before Him; <whose eyes are over all things>, all at once the room was illuminated above the brightness of the sun an angel appeared before me, his hands and feet were naked pure and white, and he stood between the floors of the room, clothed in purity inexpressible, . .] While I was relating this brief history of the establishment of the Church of Christ is these last days, Joshua seemed to be highly entertain after I had got through I observed that, the hour of worship & time to dine had now arrived and invited him to tarry, which he consented to. (Journals 87 – 88; 92)

3. Joseph Smith History. This version, first drafted in 1838 with several subsequent draft versions, is the standard history found in the current Pearl of Great Price. Below is the final edited version. The original draft history was not divided into verses, but apart from normalization of spelling and punctuation, the language of this history is consistent with its original drafts. One notable exception is the inclusion of Joseph’s conversation with his mother in verse 20. From “When the light had departed . . .” to the end of the verse is a footnote penned on December 2, 1842.
1 Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons, in relation to the rise and progress of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world—I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I have such facts in my possession.

2 In this history I shall present the various events in relation to this Church, in truth and righteousness, as they have transpired, or as they at present exist, being now [1838] the eighth year since the organization of the said Church.

3 I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty-third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor county, State of Vermont. ... My father, Joseph Smith, Sen., left the State of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) county, in the State of New York, when I was in my tenth year, or thereabouts. In about four years after my father’s arrival in Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester in the same county of Ontario—

4 His family consisting of eleven souls, namely, my father, Joseph Smith; my mother, Lucy Smith (whose name, previous to her marriage, was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack); my brothers, Alvin (who died November 19th, 1823, in the 26th year of his age), Hyrum, myself, Samuel Harrison, William, Don Carlos; and my sisters, Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy.

5 Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, “Lo, here!” and others, “Lo, there!” Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.

6 For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.

7 I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father’s family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother, Lucy; my brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison; and my sister Sophronia.

8 During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.
My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?

While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.

At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to “ask of God,” concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was
right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join.

19 I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”

20 He again forbade me to join with any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, “Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off.” I then said to my mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.” It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?

21 Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement; and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.

22 I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.

23 It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself.

24 However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise.

25 So it was with me. I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for
saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; and while they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart: Why persecute me for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.

26 I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned—that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but to continue as I was until further directed. I had found the testimony of James to be true—that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.

4. 1842 Church History, 1 March 1842 – JS, “Church History,” in Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, IL), 1 Mar. 1842, vol. 3, no. 9 (whole no. 45), pp. 706-710; edited by JS; includes typeset signature. The copy used for transcription is currently part of a bound volume held at CHL; includes later underlining.

Church History

At the request of Mr. John Wentworth, Editor, and Proprietor of the “Chicago Democrat,” I have written the following sketch of the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter-Day Saints, of which I have the honor, under God, of being the founder. Mr. Wentworth says, that he wishes to furnish Mr. Bastow [George Barstow], a friend of his, who is writing the history of New Hampshire, with this document. As Mr. Bastow has taken the proper steps to obtain correct information all that I shall ask at his hands, is, that he publish the account entire, ungarnished, and without misrepresentation.

I was born in the town of Sharon Windsor co., Vermont, on the 23d of December, A. D. 1805. When ten years old my parents removed to Palmyra New York, where we resided about four years, and from thence we removed to the town of Manchester.

My father was a farmer and taught me the art of husbandry. When about fourteen years of age I began to reflect upon the importance of being prepared for a future state, and upon enquiring the plan of salvation I found that there was a great clash in religious sentiment; if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another; each one pointing to his own particular creed as the summum bonum of perfection: considering that all could not be right, and that God could not be the author of so much confusion I determined to investigate the subject more fully, believing that if God had a church it would not be split up into factions, and that if he taught one society to worship one way, and administer in one set of ordinances, he would not teach another principles which were diametrically opposed. Believing the word of God, I had confidence in the declaration of James; “If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given him,” I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord, while fervently engaged in supplication my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a [p. 706] heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to
“go not after them,” at the same time receiving a promise that the fullness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.

On the evening of the 21st of September, A. D. 1823, while I was praying unto God, and endeavoring to exercise faith in the precious promises of scripture on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as thought the house was filled with consuming fire; the appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body; in a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I was already surrounded. This messenger proclaimed himself to be an angel of God sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel, in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign [...]

Persecution has not stopped the progress of truth, but has only added fuel to the flame, it has spread with increasing rapidity, proud of the cause which they have espoused and conscious of their innocence and of the truth of their system amidst calumny and reproach have the elders of this church gone forth, and planted the gospel in almost every state in the Union; it has penetrated our cities, it has spread over our villages, and has caused thousands of our intelligent, noble, and patriotic citizens to obey its divine mandates, and be governed by its sacred truths. It has also spread into England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales: in the year of 1839 where a few of our missionaries were sent over five thousand joined the standard of truth, there are numbers now joining in every land.

Our missionaries are going forth to different nations, and in Germany, Palestine, New Holland, the East Indies, and other places, the standard of truth has been erected: no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing, persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done.

We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.
We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.
We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.
We believe that these ordinances are 1st, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2d, Repentance; 3d, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; 4th, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.
We believe that a man must be called of God by “prophesy, and by the laying on of hands” by those who are in authority to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.
We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, viz: apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists &c.
We believe in the gift of tongues, prophesy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues &c.
We believe the bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.
We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes. That Zion will be built upon this continent. That Christ will reign personally upon the earth, and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisaic glory.

We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our conscience, and allow all men the same privilege let them worship how, where, or what they may.

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul “we believe all things we hope all things,” we have endured many things and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praise worthy we seek after these things.

Respectfully &c.,

JOSEPH SMITH

(Histories 492-495; 499-501).
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