Introduction
Liturgical Modernity

Scholars of nineteenth-century literature are wandering between two worlds, one dead and one apparently powerless to be born. There is now general agreement about the inadequacy of a once-standard story of secularization, a story in which religion goes into terminal decline thanks to a host of challenges ranging from industrialization and urbanization to Darwin and the higher criticism of the Bible. Progressive secularization has died for us, then, but it remains unclear what new paradigms will replace it. Any plausible answer to this question must grasp and extend the following insight made by Charles Taylor, Talal Asad, and John Milbank: that the very idea of religion as a set of privately held beliefs about supernatural phenomena is itself, in fact, a modern invention, tied to the notion of the secular as a realm of public, neutral rationality.[1] In the wake of these thinkers, it seems amply clear that secularization entails less a loss of belief than the redefinition of religion *as* belief.

Literary scholars in particular have seldom appreciated how thoroughly the modern redefinition of religion as private belief transforms religion's relationship to aesthetics. If aesthetics – especially in its etymological sense of *aesthesis* – has to do with what we see, touch, taste, and so forth, then the interiorization of religion in a secular age removes religion from the realm of aesthetics. Taylor calls this removal "excarnation" – that is, "the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside 'in the head'."[2] Excarnation means that religion and aesthetics part ways, and that parting provides the backdrop for Matthew Arnold's famous assertion that "most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."[3] Once religion is reduced to fleshless doctrines and lifeless abstractions, poetry – and aesthetic culture more broadly – does indeed emerge as a living, breathing alternative.

Of course, the notion that poetry replaces religion has had immense influence over readers of nineteenth-century literature, but this idea also

lapses easily back into the now dubious story of progressive secularization: As religious belief falters – so the story goes – poetry takes its place.[4] How might we escape this return to a linear narrative of secularization? How might we rethink excarnation rather than unconsciously assume it and, in that assumption, remain captive to oversimplified accounts of the secular as merely the loss of belief? How might we reconfigure the relationship between religion and aesthetics? This book argues that the Romantics and Victorians themselves supply a compelling though often unappreciated answer in their persistent fascination with liturgy – with, that is, religion at its most incarnate, at its most aesthetic. For liturgy here signifies the entire ritual life of a religious tradition as embodied in physical forms and temporal patterns. The bread and wine of the Eucharist, the chanting of daily prayers in Judaism, the incense burned in a censer before the image of a saint or god, the oil and water used to anoint and baptize, the yearly cycle of holy days that structure time, the architectural form of a religious building – all these and more constitute the liturgies that fill nineteenth-century British literature and draw religion and aesthetics together rather than seeing the latter as a surrogate for the former.

Even Arnold – representative *par excellence* of poetry's displacement of religion – complicates this idea by way of liturgy. Consider, for instance, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855). There, Arnold does indeed lament Christianity's decline, but he – or at least his lyric persona – arrives at this conclusion only after disclosing his mysterious attraction to the ritual life of the Carthusian monks. Their prayers, their celebration of the Eucharist, and even the rhythm of their garden work – the material practices of the monastery – engross him until he asks himself: "And what am I, that I am here?"[5] What is a self-confessed doubter doing in a liturgical space? The poem then anxiously reasserts its unbelief. Haunted by the accusations of his rationalistic teachers – "*What dost thou in this living tomb?*" (72) – Arnold begs forgiveness and tries to explain himself. The apprehensive tone is telling. The monks' way of life – their liturgies, their habits – render Arnold's commitments momentarily questionable and force his anxious clarification. For an instant, the line between the religious and the secular, between Carthusian faith and Arnoldian doubt, grows blurry. That, I claim, is what liturgy often does in nineteenth-century texts: it blurs boundaries familiar to modernity – boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul. Such blurring, moreover, resists the excarnating reduction of religion to merely private belief separated from material reality.

This book therefore presents an alternative picture of secularization, a picture having much less to do with doctrines – whether personally believed or doubted – and much more to do with a shared discontentment with the prevailing boundaries just mentioned. Put simply, liturgy upsets these boundaries and, in doing so, brings into view what I will define in a moment as "liturgical modernity." At once spiritual and material, liturgy incarnates unseen realities in concrete forms – bread, wine, water, temples, churches, and so forth. Romantic and Victorian writers deploy this incarnational power for a host of interlocking reasons: to reinvest the natural world and material objects with spiritual meaning, to reimagine the human person as porous and malleable rather than as closed and mechanical, to resist the bodily practices and temporal structures of industrial capitalism, and to enflesh otherwise abstract ethical commitments.

Taking up the last of these concerns, William Wordsworth's "Essay on Morals" (1798) laments how rationalistic philosophies – he has those of William Godwin and William Paley in mind – have no power to incarnate themselves in daily life: "I know of no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds, & thence to have any influence worth our notice in forming [our] habits."[6] Seeking such visceral power, Wordsworth turns not only to poetry but also to liturgy. Poetry, according to the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), stimulates the passions and pleasures while also ordering that stimulation via metrical form. "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798) enacts this orderly stimulation by eliciting "sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" – corporeal stirrings that nevertheless bring "tranquil restoration."[7] The liturgical site of the abbey and the poem's titular date – July 13, 1798, the eve of Bastille Day – already point ahead to the topics of my first and second chapters, respectively: liturgical action and architecture in *The Excursion* (1814) and the French Revolution's festivals and ritual calendar in *The Prelude* (1805/1850). This commerce between the literary and the liturgical, the poetic and the ritual, makes it harder to tell a story in which literature simply replaces religion as a secular surrogate. If religion is left in the realm of abstract dogma – a neighborhood it would share with Godwin's and Paley's bloodless philosophies – then poetry and aesthetic culture can quite easily seem like a living, breathing substitution. But once liturgy and poetry unite to engage bodies and passions, then perhaps a revitalized sense of religion emerges.

Perversely, then, I want to reinterpret Arnold's maxim about poetry and religion in a way that Arnold would no doubt dislike. "[W]hat now passes"

for religion will indeed be replaced by poetry because what has passed for religion in modernity is in fact excarnated belief. Poetry offers to religion what modernity has so long denied to it: flesh, form, and vital juices. Or, to put my point more provocatively, when excarnated religion is replaced by poetry, what appears is liturgy. Perhaps this poetic revitalization of faith is why Arnold, to his own surprise, finds himself enamored of Carthusian rituals that would provoke his teachers' suspicions. Let me be clear, however: By highlighting the attraction to ritual and the resistance to excarnation on display in Arnold, Wordsworth, and others, I am not making any pronouncement on what these writers personally believe or disbelieve in the modern sense of the word belief. Indeed, I consciously avoid this question precisely because it lapses back into the definition of religion as private, cognitive assent to otherworldly propositions.[8] If belief does emerge in the discussions that follow, it must do so in a thoroughly incarnate form.

Even the Creeds, which distill Christian doctrine, were for the early church as well as for *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes like Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde not so much abstract propositions – isolated facts accepted or rejected by individuals – but rather liturgically enacted words inviting worshippers into fathomless mysteries. As Gilbert, a character in Wilde's "The Critic as Artist" (1890), observes, "Forms are the food of faith. . . . The Creeds are believed, not because they are rational, but because they are repeated. Yes: Form is everything."[9] And if the Creeds are forms – aesthetic structures animated through repetition – and not abstract statements of positivistic fact, then neither are they simply inwardly held beliefs. Gilbert even attacks the notion that inward convictions are the fundamental source of meaning and that external actions flow from such convictions; on the contrary, external actions – rituals – reshape inward dispositions. Again, deploying liturgical language, Gilbert asks, "Do you wish to love? Use Love's Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring" (196). To our excarnated ears, this sounds backwards: Rituals, we suppose, are merely the outward trappings of a more fundamental inner devotion. Gilbert disagrees, and perhaps surprisingly, that disagreement aligns him not only with aestheticism but also, as we will see, with the premodern priority given to ritual.

Just as aestheticism puts little stock in speculative abstraction and inward authenticity, liturgy similarly refuses to consign religion to otherworldly propositions and fleshless interiority. On the contrary, in liturgy, unseen spiritual realities take on material form, or, to put it the other way around, the material does not oppose the spiritual but rather gives access to

it. John Keats – who explicitly abjures Christian beliefs – nevertheless inhabits this spiritually charged yet thickly material space in "Ode to Psyche" (1820). Keats laments that the goddess of his title has no devotees because she ascended to the Olympian pantheon only after Christianity had displaced pagan worship. Psyche lacks an "altar heap'd with flowers," "incense sweet," and such material oblations.[10] The speaker will not simply offer these; he will, in his prayer to the goddess, become them:

> So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
> Upon the midnight hours;
> Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
> From swinged censer teeming;
> Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
> Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.
> (44–8)

The sensory weight of Keats's language makes worship not so much a matter of interior belief but of incantation and sensory material practice. Moreover, Keats perceives that this embodied devotion follows naturally from an enchanted view of reality – a view he self-consciously recovers by speaking of a time "[w]hen holy were the haunted forest boughs, / Holy the air, the water, the fire" (39). The materiality of Keats's worship is but an upshot of his sense that all things are sacred.[11]

Keats inhabits what Catherine Pickstock would call "liturgical" subjectivity.[12] In her poststructuralist account of the medieval Latin Mass, Pickstock explores how liturgy calls the self into a mystery that can be experienced but not exhausted, a mystery that can be tasted and touched but not fully mastered. Liturgy thus opens up a medial space between presence and absence and inculcates a selfhood that is "coherent but not foreclosed."[13] This selfhood appears in the dramatis personae of Wordsworth's *Excursion* and undergoes extensive elaboration in Pater and Wilde. Already, however, we have seen Keats's own effort to cultivate a selfhood that is at once coherent enough to become a temple – a structure – to house Psyche's worship and yet porous enough to be possessed by that divinity. Signaling that porosity, Keats not only becomes the very oblations Psyche lacks but also – in the temple that is himself – leaves "a casement ope at night, / To let the warm Love in" (66–7). Divine traffic – Psyche and Cupid – will come and go, haunting Keats's liturgical self. This notion of the self is amenable to Keats's own formulation of negative capability and provides a striking counterpoint to more familiar versions of modern subjectivity. Where Descartes and Kant seek a stable

foundation for knowledge in the self-contained knower, the liturgical subject remains open to that which exceeds human certitude. Quoting the second edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Jean-Louis Chrétien writes, "reason 'must force nature to answer its questions,' and . . . reason is 'like a presiding judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions put to them'."[14] Chrétien observes that Kant's "approach is more soliloquy than dialogue. The chief focus is not the question but the extorted answer. In no way could the answer ever exceed our question."[15] By contrast, the liturgical self awaits this excess, this answer that surpasses any rational containment.

The following chapters treat writers who seek some version of this liturgical space where matter and spirit join, where ritual opens the self to mystery. But like Arnold and Keats, these writers also intuit that excarnation somehow threatens this union – threatens, that is, to drain matter of spiritual significance. Anticipating Taylor's insight that in modernity "our religious life . . . comes more and more to reside 'in the head',"[16] Keats acknowledges that the temple he builds for Psyche will reside in his own mind. Arnold, too, registers the threat of excarnation when he mistakenly says that the Carthusian monks pass the Eucharistic host from "hand to hand" (42). In fact, the host would have been placed directly on the tongue – a slight error, perhaps, but one suggesting that Arnold's liturgical images are slipping away from their concrete instantiations. Matter thus loses its spiritual meaning and religion goes inward. The texts I explore, however, blend literary and liturgical form to resist this drift toward excarnation, and that resistance in turn complicates the relationship of religion and aesthetics.[17] Indeed, it is often difficult to say whether these texts are proposing literature as a substitute for religion or whether they are trying to reimagine religion as once more bodily and material. What is clear is that interior beliefs and abstract ideas that have no flesh – no connection to material practices, to sacred objects, to habits and rituals – are effete.[18]

Even while the Romantics and Victorians themselves frequently lament excarnation, some landmark readings of nineteenth-century literature tend to treat religion in precisely these terms. According to such readings, the Romantics naturalize the supernatural by applying Christianity's otherworldly doctrines to the human imagination, and the Victorians register the rise of religious doubt in the wake of successive challenges to dogma. As M. H. Abrams argues in *Natural Supernaturalism*, the Romantics aim to "save traditional concepts, schemes, and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation" and to

"reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego."[19] Abrams thus observes, "The title *Natural Supernaturalism* indicates that my recurrent . . . concern will be with the secularization of inherited theological ideas."[20] Walter Houghton provides a similarly foundational and frequently repeated reading of how this Romantic effort to salvage Christian ideas falters in the Victorian age: "the romantic sensibility had found the divine spirit rolling through all things," but in the wake of Lyellian geology and Darwinian biology, "nature became a battleground in which individuals and species fought for their lives."[21]

Despite their many insights, Abrams's and Houghton's accounts assume rather than question the genealogies that lead in the first place to religion becoming a matter of abstract supernatural ideas – ideas that could either be naturalized or subtracted altogether in the face of modern challenges to belief. What recedes from view here is the more ancient sense – pagan and Christian – of all things sharing in the divine. Operating within this participatory vision, the medieval mystic Julian of Norwich – to take but one example – sees the whole of creation as saturated through and through with divine presence, each creature enwrapped by God's love.[22] It would be hard for Julian to grasp any sharp division between the natural and the supernatural. Romanticism's impulse to blur the natural/supernatural boundary, then, might be read not so much as a secularizing move but rather as a recovery of creation's participation in the divine. What is more – and as I discuss later in relation to John Keble – this participatory vision carries with it a symbolic, allegorical approach to sacred texts, an approach that most scholarly accounts of the conflict between Victorian science and biblical literalism cannot accommodate.

Beyond Abrams, Houghton, and other seminal twentieth-century scholarship, however, more recent trends in nineteenth-century studies have qualified or rejected the standard narrative of secularization already described – the narrative, again, in which religious beliefs either find a naturalized expression in the poetic imagination or wither away before the challenges of the natural sciences and German biblical criticism. Exemplifying this new trend, Colin Jager's *Book of God* argues for the enduring significance of eighteenth-century natural theology in the Romantic period while his second book, *Unquiet Things*, more ambitiously – and more in line with my own aims – finds in Romantic texts a discontentment with the prevailing norms of the modern secular state. Where Jager attends to scientific and political discourse, Norman Vance and Charles LaPorte consider how the German higher criticism offered

Victorian writers much more than just another occasion for religious doubt. For Vance, biblical criticism provoked Victorian novelists to reimagine faith by, for instance, appropriating the "grand narrative of salvation history" for their own narratives of human moral development.[23] Similarly, LaPorte sees Victorian poets as not so much conceding the demise of biblical authority to the higher criticism but rather probing that criticism and using it to forge new notions of religious and poetic authority.

Even more relevant for my argument, though, are a few recent inquiries into both the liturgical and theological resonances of Romantic and Victorian writing. Lori Branch, for example, draws on eighteenth-century moral philosophy to argue for a surprising continuity between Wordsworth's early celebration of spontaneity and his later attraction to Anglican ritual. Where Branch ends with Wordsworth, Kirstie Blair – as noted previously – takes him as a starting point to consider how nineteenth-century writers frequently construed literary and liturgical form as analogous. Karen Dieleman, too, observes the connection between the texts of Victorian poets and the weekly forms of worship experienced by those poets. My argument accords both with this larger effort to revise our notion of secularization and with the new attention to liturgical forms. However, I hope to excavate more fully the genealogies of the secular and the religious, for only in light of these genealogies does the full significance of Romantic and Victorian liturgy appear. As mentioned earlier, "Ode to Psyche" locates the liturgical self within a world where all things – forest, air, water, fire – are holy. This enchanted picture of reality is foreign to the modern view in which the natural world – a closed space of mechanistic causality – opposes the supernatural, which becomes imagined as a separate, otherworldly realm. This separation of natural/supernatural echoes across modernity's other characteristic divisions: matter/spirit, body/soul, reason/faith, and philosophy/theology – or, to put the last division in more contemporary terms, science/religion.

The story of how we arrive at such bifurcations is complex and has generated many retellings of late – including those by Taylor, Milbank, Louis Dupré, Thomas Pfau, and Michael Allen Gillespie. Each of these retellings explores slightly different, though interlocking, historical and conceptual developments. These new narratives of secularization reject former accounts in which something called religion goes into terminal decline as a result of Renaissance humanism or Enlightenment rationality. Rather, the roots of the secular, it would seem, stretch further back into contingent developments during the late Middle Ages. Explaining the

position exemplified by Julian of Norwich, Dupré describes how, from antiquity through the high Middle Ages, most pagans and Christians conceived of all things as participating in the divine.[24] So, for instance, the Apostle Paul himself quotes pagan Greek poets – forerunners of Keats's enchanted vision – in order to affirm that "we live, and move, and have our being" in God (Acts 17:28). In Paul's wake, mainstream Christian theology continues to develop this participatory connection between God and creation along both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian lines. To cite two of the most famous examples, Augustine's *Confessions* – a fourth-century text – refers to God as Being and speaks of God filling all things with himself so that all creatures borrow their existence from him.[25] Elaborating the same participatory metaphysics in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas calls God the very act of being from which all finite beings derive their existence. Or, in Thomas's more succinct formulation, "God is in all things, and innermostly."[26]

For a host of reasons, this antique and high medieval vision of creation sharing in God's life loses its cultural and intellectual supremacy in the late Middle Ages. At this point, the natural/supernatural binary and the attendant divisions mentioned emerge. To simplify a very complex story, a number of late-medieval voluntarist and nominalist theologians, such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, scrutinize the Neoplatonic and Aristotelean elements of earlier theology. Ockham, for example, sees this pagan philosophical inheritance as a threat to God's absolute sovereignty and power. The earlier, participatory tradition reinterpreted the Platonic forms – the archetypes of all creatures – as dwelling in and reflecting God, who was himself named by those highest and interchangeable Platonic forms: the Good, the True, the Beautiful, and, of course, Being. Ockham and other late-medieval nominalists see these Platonic forms as limiting God's freedom, constraining his ability to act and to create in whatever way he chooses. According to the previous theological consensus stretching from Augustine to Aquinas, God acts in accordance with the goodness and rationality that simply are of his nature and therefore part of the fabric of being itself. However, for the voluntarists and nominalists, God wills whatever he pleases, and what he wills is good simply because he wills it. Ockham, for example, even goes so far as to say God could will his creatures to hate him and that "if He were to do so He would not sin."[27]

Ockham and others therefore fundamentally reconceive God's relationship to creation. Creation no longer participates in God by way of archetypes and forms; it no longer lives and moves within God's being

and goodness. Rather, God becomes an inscrutable, all-powerful agent who now exercises his arbitrary will over creation from outside. As Terry Eagleton wryly puts it, God becomes a "cosmic chief executive officer."[28] Increasingly construed as an omnipotent individual rather than the fullness of being in which all things share, God starts to look like Milton's Jehovah or Blake's Noboddady. This picture of God as a non-participatory tyrant will eventually provoke Romantic Prometheanism. But that is to look far ahead. Much earlier, this tyrannical God starts to emerge as the participatory view recedes – a recession that opens an ever-sharper separation between the natural and the supernatural. The natural no longer shares in the supernatural but rather opposes it. Nature becomes an autonomous, closed, even secular sphere apart from the supernatural and from God, who acts upon his creation – if at all – as an outside force. So, for instance, as Rowan Williams puts it, miracles become synonymous with divine intervention and "interruption" rather than, say, the "opening" up of creation to "its own depths," to its own perpetual sharing in and sustenance by the divine.[29] A gap also opens between reason and faith. Reason might apply to the natural world here below, but faith alone can approach Ockham's inscrutable, arbitrary God.

Excarnation appears too. Because faith is now directed toward an otherworldly God, and because material reality no longer participates in that God, material objects – bread, wine, statues, icons, and so forth – lose their devotional value and even become distracting idols. Reformation iconoclasm follows quite naturally from excarnation. In this way – as in many others – the Reformation does not in fact reject nominalist–voluntarist scholasticism but extends it.[30] John Calvin's picture of God predestining the saved and the damned is but an intensification of Ockham's emphasis on absolute divine sovereignty. Likewise, Martin Luther's assertion of individual human autonomy echoes the very same concept of freedom first devised in late scholasticism to speak of divine agency. A major consensus thus emerges from recent genealogies of the secular: The closed, mechanical, natural world of modernity – a world divorced from the supernatural realm of faith – is not simply the result of Enlightenment reason or even Renaissance or Reformation individualism, but rather the unforeseen conclusion of a deeper theological transformation.[31] That voluntarist–nominalist transformation sought to emphasize God's sovereign power but inadvertently encouraged the dichotomies I have been describing – dichotomies that set the stage for the construction of religion as private belief.[32]

Disciplinary boundaries and literary periodization might make this genealogy seem irrelevant to Romantic and Victorian literature. This book contests