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# The Pragmatist and the Aesthete: Late Nineteenth-Century Religion and Theology in Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and Ellen Glasgow's *Phases of an Inferior Planet*

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The Pragmatist and the Aesthete: Late Nineteenth-Century Religion and Theology in  
Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and Ellen Glasgow's *Phases of an  
Inferior Planet*

by

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This text is dedicated to Tamara Bratton, James and Wendy Antonio, Sauce and Apple, Daniele Pantano, Debbie McLeod, Lee Davidson, Pat Nickinson, and John Fleming, who all gracefully accepted my unreasonable imposition on their ears and time. I would have been hard pressed to complete this piece without their professional and personal assistance.

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Late Nineteenth-Century Pragmatic Clergy in Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*  
and Glasgow's *Phases of an Inferior Planet*

Matthew Antonio

ABSTRACT

A comparison between Ware, Forbes, and Soulsby from *The Damnation of Theron Ware* provides a glimpse into one aspect of the theological upheaval of the time. The above comparison between Ware and Algarcife, from *Phases of an Inferior Planet*, however, hearkens forward to the alienation and questioning of identity so much a part of the Twentieth Century. By viewing Ware as a foil for Forbes and Soulsby in tandem with Algarcife, a more complete picture of the transition between nineteenth and twentieth-century religion and theology may be found.

Understanding the encounter between the traditional and the liberal clergy requires a close examination of the way Ware, Forbes, Soulsby, and Algarcife interact with religions and theologies and adjust their actions in order to maintain the balance between the two, and how each character's interaction with the figure of the aesthete aids in the negotiation.

Ware cannot aspire to the erudition of scholars like Forbes and Algarcife, nor is he able to understand the aestheticism, the "art for art," of Madden, from *Damnation*, and Musin, from *Phases*. He is unable to maintain a dogmatic theology in the service of religion like Soulsby. He is an anachronism, caught between centuries, caught between two religious, theological, and aesthetic historical moments.

## Chapter One:

### The End of the Nineteenth Century

Nineteenth Century scientific developments contributed to the constant fundamental change that characterized American Christianity of the time. These changes arose from innumerable advances in scientific work including geology and, most significantly, Alfred Russel Wallace's and Charles Darwin's efforts in evolution. Many geologists of the early nineteenth century attempted to reconcile the Bible with geology, which presented as significant a challenge to Biblical accuracy as evolution later did, resulting in what Conrad Wright terms "The Religion of Geology," a term used to define the pursuit of the science as a way to provide evidence for the Christian God (336).<sup>1</sup> Following the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871), religious institutions were again at pains to defend a literal interpretation of the Bible. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, when *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) and *Phases of an Inferior Planet* (1898) were published, evolution supplanted geology as the arena for debate between science and religion. Just as other scientists negotiated the division between geology and religion, authors such as John William Draper in *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), Andrew Dickson

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<sup>1</sup> Wright's paper, also titled "The Religion of Geology" (1941), taken from Edward Hitchcock's 1851 book, *The Religion of Geology and its Connected Sciences*, discusses three American geologists who attempted to use geology for the glorification of God; Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864), and James Dwight Dana (1813-95). Wright argues that *The Origin of Species* ultimately undermined these geologist's efforts.

White in *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), and Lyman Abbott in *The Theology of an Evolutionist* (1897) attempted to reconcile evolution and religion. One might view the attempted reconciliation as the prevalent mode in which evolution and religion interacted in the public mind. Ronald L. Numbers, in his 1985 paper, "Science and Religion," explains that no such neat division between the two terms is tenable. Numbers concludes that to see a simple conflict between science and religion "assumes the existence of two static entities, 'science' and 'religion,' thus ignoring the fact that many of the debates focused on the questions of what should be considered 'science' and 'religion' [...] it distorts a complex relationship that rarely, if ever, found scientists and theologians in simple opposition" (80). While a simple opposition may not, from a current point of view, be defensible, for this discussion the pertinent views are those of nineteenth century writers, such as Frederic and Glasgow, who, in their novels, present science and religion as separate entities in a mutually supportive relationship.

The attempt to synthesize science and the Bible was, in part, what led to the growth of a modernist or liberal approach in theology.<sup>2</sup> William James made one such

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in his book *Catholics in America* (2004), Patrick W. Carey describes liberal Christians in the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century as wanting "to give a Catholic direction to contemporary currents of life and thought by accommodating Catholicism to what was best in the new age while preserving the essentials of faith and ecclesiastical government" (55). Resistance to liberal thinking ran high, particularly when Pope Pius X replaced Pope Leo XIII in 1903. In 1907, Pius released *Lamentabile* and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, a papal decree and an encyclical, which condemned what the Pope referred to as "modernism" (68). The Methodist abolition effort is an example of the social reform element frequently associated with liberal tendencies within Christianity. But even within the Methodist organization opposition to abolition arose, resulting in the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal

attempt at reconciling traditional Christianity, evolution, and science as a whole—an attempt crucial to the texts under consideration—in his work on the philosophy of pragmatism.<sup>3</sup> He recognized that “darwinism has once for all [*sic*] displaced design from the minds of the ‘scientific,’ theism has lost that foothold; and some kind of an immanent or pantheistic deity working *in* things rather than above them is, if any, the kind recommended to our contemporary imagination (Pragmatism 34). The practice of pragmatism, according to James, “is to try to interpret each option by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true?” (Pragmatism 23). This is a philosophy divorced from the metaphysical and dedicated to the physical world. William James’ version of pragmatism emphasizes the discovery of personal truths at the individual level through experience.

Pragmatism has a number of characteristics pertinent to this study, specifically the focus on action and the definition of truth. One must ask, when considering any action, the practical difference between competing results. After comparing the practical results of each action, the one that offers up the most benefit is considered true. About truth, or truths, James writes, “the pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases, and generalizes. Truth, for him, becomes a class-name for all

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Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South following the schism of 1844 (Hempton 106-7).

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Peirce coined the term “pragmatism” in his article “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” published in *Popular Science Monthly*, January 1878 (James 23) in which he promoted the philosophy as a scientific method by which to achieve an objective truth that transcends individual circumstances. For a thorough examination of the inception, aims, and development of early pragmatic thought and also recent trends in the philosophy, see James T. Kloppenberg’s 1996 essay, “Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?”



sorts of definite working-values in experience” (Pragmatism 33). Again we find a distance from abstraction and metaphysics in favor of experience and action. Another characteristic of truth for the pragmatist is that truth is always “true in so far forth,” or, put simply, truth is provisional and subject to historical change. As the circumstances of material world change, so too may the provisional truths depending on whether or not those truths still offer the greatest practical benefit. James addresses the potential for truths to clash when he observes, “the greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths” (Pragmatism 37). A provisional truth only can be established if one’s current stable of truths does not conflict with the new arrival.

Three of the four characters to be examined—Father Vincent Forbes, Sister Soulsby, and Anthony Algarcife—demonstrate these characteristics. These characteristics allow us to identify the pragmatist as an emergent character type in late nineteenth century fiction about American religion. The pragmatist clergy, ready to adapt themselves and their theologies to the changing religious climate of the era, appear as major figures in both Harold Frederic’s *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and Ellen Glasgow’s *Phases of an Inferior Planet*. The title character of Frederic’s novel, a fundamentalist, innocent, naive Methodist clergyman, acts as a foil to the pragmatists. Ware is gifted at public speaking, but based on his seminary education lacks knowledge of Higher Biblical scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, his ambition drives him to pursue a traditional path to success within his Methodist church.

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<sup>4</sup> As John B. Gabel writes in reference to the rise of Higher Biblical criticism, “Pioneers of the Higher Criticism recognized that, in some respects at least, the Bible was undeniably a book like any other, with authors, languages, styles, messages, audiences, and a history of transmission—all of which could be examined by the same

During the last half of the nineteenth century Methodism was pulled in two directions. Methodist congregants surged from less than three percent of all religiously affiliated Americans in 1776 to over thirty-four percent by 1850 (Hatch 178). Following such expansion, however, Methodism developed into an organization that provided opportunity for financial and social advancement, rather than the grassroots movement that “in America transcended class barriers and empowered common people to make religion their own” (Hatch 179). Hatch notes, “as the number of Methodists expanded, what it meant to be Methodist became far less clear. Some Methodists continued the plain-style worship [...] of the early camp meeting. By the 1850s others were building gothic churches and folding gentility and refinement into the very definition of being religious” (188-89).

Frederic dramatizes this division between the “plain-style worship” and “gentility and refinement” in *Theron Ware*. In the first chapter, Ware and his wife, Alice, are attending the annual Nedahma Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, an event used to assign the clergy to congregations.<sup>5</sup> Frederic writes, “for a handsome and expensive church building like this, and with such a modern and go-ahead congregation, it was simply a vital necessity to secure an attractive and fashionable preacher” (7).

Given his renown for oratory, Ware anticipates receiving the Tecumseh congregation as

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literary/historical methods that had long been brought to bear upon secular literature” (24). Ware, by his training, is familiar with the Bible as the word of God rather than a document composed by humans, an issue he is forced to confront when he attempts to write a work about Abraham.

<sup>5</sup> The struggle between episcopacy and egalitarianism is seen from the very inception of American Methodism. In 1784 Francis Asbury refused to take on the role of bishop assigned to him by John Wesley himself unless the preachers he was to govern elected him (Schell 76).

his new assignment. Tecumseh is a congregation of the new kind, an expensive building with high prices on the best pews, demanding a fashionable voice. Contrary to the expectations of both the Wares and the other attendees, Ware is not appointed to Tecumseh, but rather to the congregation of Octavius. In sharp contrast to the modern tone of Tecumseh, Ware is placed into a congregation insistent on simple religion. After the Wares move to their new home in Octavius, Ware conducts his first meeting with the trustees. He is told “we don’t want no book-learnin’ or dictionary words in our pulpit...some folks may stomach ‘em; we won’t. Them two sermons o’ yours, p’r’aps they’d do down in some city place; but they’re like your wife’s bunnit here, they’re too flowery to suit us” (29). For *Theron Ware* the most pertinent element of Methodism in the second half of the nineteenth century is the confrontation of the bare and simple people’s religion with the Gilded Age desire for ornament.

The Aesthetic Movement in America provides a complimentary vantage point with which to view these novels. Allison Pease offers a general overview of the elements of aestheticism in the late nineteenth century when she writes:

roughly, Aestheticism tends to place a high value on the following: artistic form, a heightened consciousness that is alert to both physical and spiritual experience (spirituality often deriving from physicality), art’s ability to create sympathy, art’s ability to recreate the individual beholder through a process of conscious self-transcendence (this may also be called “self-culture”), and the individual’s need for self-expression in spite of, or at the expense of, social norms. (98-9)

The pragmatist has no room for any action taken at the expense of social norms. Thus the pragmatist's isolation or the absence created by his or her division between religion and theology may be soothed by contact with self-expression. *Theron Ware* presents the aesthete Celia Madden, with whom Ware becomes obsessed. Roger B. Stein points out the attractiveness of Madden for not only the character, Ware, but also the publishers of the novel, Stone and Kimball. Stein writes, in an examination of a poster advertising *Theron Ware* that, "Stone and Kimball [...] saw the sensuously aesthetic Celia as the key to attracting readers is evident in the poster that they commissioned from John H. Twachtman (1853-1902) to advertise the book" (43). The poster does not depict the title character, but rather presents Madden draped in the long red hair she herself identifies as an icon of her aestheticism (Twachtman). Marianna Musin from *Phases* presents a similar character, dedicated to music and its ephemera. In the opening scene we see Musin buy a photograph of Max Alvary in the character of Lohengrin from Wagner's opera. She is herself an aspiring singer who, as will be seen later, suffers greatly when forced to abandon her artistic pursuits. Though Madden and Musin are the two more straightforward aesthetes in the novels, even the pragmatists demonstrate an appreciation, and perhaps a need, for the aesthetic.

Ware's experience with his new congregation primes him to be drawn in by the aesthetics of the well-educated, modernist Catholic priest, Father Forbes, and the traveling actress-*cum*-revivalist, Sister Soulsby.<sup>6</sup> By his desire to lead the Tecumseh congregation, Ware establishes himself to the reader as a social aspirant and when he

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<sup>6</sup> During Ware's initial encounter with Forbes "most of all he was moved by the rich, novel sound of the Latin as the priest rolled it forth" (45). The auditory ornament subordinates the true meaning of the experience to Ware.

encounters the embodiments of what he desires to become, Forbes and Soulsby, the trappings of their religions present a method to him by which he may achieve his only vaguely imagined goals. Ware's desire to become like Forbes and Soulsby is not born of a need to serve his flock, nor does he understand how his new mentors' religions are constructed for the benefit of their congregants. Ware is subject to his own aspirations rather than a desire to benefit his congregation. He thus contrasts with the pragmatic element common to the religious leaders, Father Forbes and Sister Soulsby in *Theron Ware* and Anthony Algarcife in *Phases*. Ware's story exemplifies what happens to a traditional (despite his desire to become worldly), naive, and ambitious man in the last decade of the nineteenth century when he encounters modernist and pragmatic religious leaders like Forbes, Soulsby, and Algarcife.

Forbes believes that the Church is a human institution, not a divine one, subject to historical changes and human involvement. He explicitly states that the Church at his time is not the Church as it was founded. As will be discussed later, Forbes balances personal religion with public theology. As Elmer F. Suderman points out, "religion" was a personal affair in the late Nineteenth Century, characterized by the individual's "conduct [...] toward God and toward his fellow men" (61). "Theology," on the other hand, is the institutionalization of religion with formal hierarchies and an altogether more dogmatic view of humankind's relations to God (61). Religion is individual. Theology is institutional. Suderman's distinctions also define a dividing line between fundamental and liberal clergy. Forbes confines the expression of his religion to a select group of friends. He conducts his Church affairs according to institutionally established means that, he believes, are necessary for the good of the congregation. At the conclusion of the

novel, Forbes, despite witnessing the way his own religion contributes to Theron Ware's degeneration, remains cheerfully dedicated to a modernist approach to Christianity.

In *Phases*, Glasgow presents a character similar to Forbes in Anthony Alarcife, the scientist and avowed atheist who becomes an Episcopalian clergyman, though not through sincere conversion. Just as Frederic does, Glasgow portrays a priest whose religion is at odds with his theology. Even though Alarcife affirms his atheism following the adoption of his new vocation, he performs admirably at his post, garnering the respect and allegiance of the laity. By an assiduous dedication to the smallest issues any of his parishioners advance he is described as rivaling "in popularity the Brockenhurst scandal, and his power is only equaled by that of—of Tammany" (191). While Forbes seems to maintain a reconciliation between his religion and theology, Alarcife needs the duration of the novel to achieve even a grudging compromise. At the end of the text, Alarcife must, by his own mandate, choose between suicide and using his evangelical power to aid the lower ranks of New York society. He allows himself to live and decides to continue his double life, a lie as he would describe it, because living is the action that yields the most benefit. Thus, Alarcife cuts a pragmatic figure similar to Forbes, though a considerably darker one.

*Theron Ware* also depicts another pragmatist, Sister Soulsby. She and her husband are traveling revivalists, moving from one Methodist congregation to the next, using their theatrical experience, and experience as grifters, to raise funds for each local board of trustees. Like Father Forbes', Sister Soulsby's religion is unorthodox. Unlike Father Forbes, Soulsby explicitly outlines her religion in a series of discussions with Ware. She preaches a religion (theology as Suderman identifies it is absent from her

approach) of pragmatism, initially unsettling to Ware. Because of her overt explanations of her religion, scholars such as Patrick K. Dooley and David H. Zimmermann identify Soulsby as a figure of salvation. However, Luther S. Luedtke and Scott Donaldson view her as a snake in the garden. She provides another pragmatic foil to Ware, though one distinct from Forbes and Alarcife because of her freedom from the formal hierarchy of a church and thus from dogmatic theology. She uses the conventions of a dogmatic congregation like Octavius to achieve her goals, but is not subject to the Methodist institution. Soulsby appears in the final scene of the novel, aiding Ware in his transition from upstate New York clergyman to Seattle politician. She remains dedicated to her pragmatic religion, but, unlike Forbes, she demonstrates an understanding of the cost Ware has paid in trying to embrace it, much as Alarcife understands the toll taken by his double life of atheist and priest.

The above comparison between Ware, Forbes, and Soulsby provides a glimpse into one aspect of the theological upheaval of the time. The above comparison between Ware and Alarcife, however, hearkens forward to the alienation and questioning of identity so much a part of the Twentieth Century. By viewing Ware as a foil for Forbes and Soulsby in tandem with Alarcife, a more complete picture of the transition between nineteenth and twentieth-century religion and theology may be found.

Understanding the encounter between the traditional and the liberal clergy requires a close examination of the way Ware, Forbes, Soulsby, and Alarcife interact with religions and theologies and adjust their actions in order to maintain the balance between the two, and how each character's interaction with the figure of the aesthete aids in the negotiation.

Chapter Two:  
Survey of Criticism

*Phases of an Inferior Planet* is regarded, on the rare occasion it is remembered, as the least of Glasgow's minor works. Glasgow gained her critical reputation from her Virginia novels, and *Phases* is one of her three New York novels.<sup>1</sup> *Phases'* current lack of critical attention can be attributed to a combination of its poor initial reception and the critical focus on Glasgow's Virginia novels and autobiographical work to the exclusion of all else. Perhaps a reevaluation of the work, particularly in comparison to one of the minor classics of the last decade of the nineteenth century, can do much to dispel the idea that Ellen Glasgow's second novel was of an inferior quality to her more revered works, such as *Barren Ground* or *The Romantic Comedians*.

Of the scant critical material available on *Phases of an Inferior Planet*, most is found in general surveys of Glasgow's writings, such as J. R. Rapers' *Without Shelter: The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow* (1971) and Marion K. Richards' *Ellen Glasgow's Development as a Novelist* (1971). Each tends to summarize the novels and evaluate Glasgow's growth in the craft of fiction rather than analyze *Phases*. Through a structural examination of late nineteenth and early twentieth century novels, both evangelical work intended to convert the reader and more literary efforts, Elmer F. Suderman's 1961

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<sup>1</sup> *The Descendant* (1897), *Phases of an Inferior Planet* (1898), and *The Wheel of Life* (1906). *Life and Gabriella* (1916) may be considered a fourth New York novel, though only part of the story occurs there.



dissertation *Religion in the American Novel: 1870-1900* provides an excellent, though brief, look at *Phases*, and *Theron Ware* as well. The only mention Suderman makes of *Phases* comes in his section on how the novelists of this era handled death with regards to religion, explaining that at that time the possibility of uncertainty and anxiety about the afterlife were becoming acceptable by a wider reading public. *Ellen Glasgow: The Contemporary Reviews* (1992), edited by Dorothy Scura, provides insight into the initial reception of the novel by presenting a range of critical views from the period immediately following the publication of *Phases*. Most reviews were uncomplimentary, particularly when compared to the promise of her first novel, *The Descendant*. The review appearing in the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* was typical when it published: “we must confess that *Phases of an Inferior Planet* is distinctly a disappointment” (17). Not all the critics were as displeased with the work. A piece that originally appeared in the *Boston Evening Transcript* praised her for her development since her first novel and even went so far as to compare her with Thomas Hardy (23-25). Despite a few admiring voices, the overall reception of *Phases* was lackluster.

*The Damnation of Theron Ware* has attracted far more critical attention than *Phases*. Thomas O’Donnell, in his article “Harold Frederic (1856-1898)” (1967), maintains that Frederic scholarship did not properly begin until Paul Haines wrote his 1945 dissertation on the subject. Two other dissertations had appeared before 1945, both of which addressed Frederic’s work, though they did not make it the primary focus (39).<sup>2</sup> Despite Haines’ dissertation, Frederic scholarship did not begin in earnest until the late

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<sup>2</sup> *Naturalism in the American Novel* by Charles Walcutt (1938) and *Clergymen in Representative American Fiction, 1830-1930: A Study in Attitudes Toward Religion* by Emerson C. Shuck (1943).

1950s, due in large part to O'Donnell's work. While the period from Frederic's death in 1898 to 1959 saw only thirteen texts analyzing Frederic's work, the period from 1960 to 1969 saw forty-nine new scholarly works on Frederic and his writings. Since 1969, a steady stream of Frederic scholarship has been produced, though at a decreasing rate. The 1970s saw a slight decline to thirty-seven texts, while in the 1980s the number dropped to only twenty-three. A sudden resurgence between 1990 and 1999 generated thirty-six works, including Bridget Bennett's excellent biography in 1997. The current decade's quantity of Frederic scholarship has dropped to a level rivaled only by that of the 1940s with four texts. One of those four texts, however, is Robin Taylor Rogers' web-based bibliography of Harold Frederic scholarship for the twentieth century. It is her website which, supplemented by my own bibliographic searches for scholarship in the twenty-first century in major databases, provides this history of Frederic scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

Of *Theron Ware* scholarship there are a few articles and books dealing with pragmatism and the religious transformation that provides a backdrop for both novels.

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<sup>3</sup> One of the most useful resources for the *Theron Ware* scholar is Robin Taylor Rogers 2003 website, *Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware: A Study Guide with Annotated Bibliography*. Rogers has compiled an exhaustive bibliography of articles, books, reviews, and any other pertinent work done on *Theron Ware* in the Twentieth Century. Rogers also includes 83 full annotations of various sources. The bibliography is accessible in full or divided into 14 "Areas of Criticism," including Religion and the Clergy, Pragmatism, Gender Issues, Sister Soulsby, and Cultural Context, all of which are pertinent to this study. Rogers also includes lengthy additional resources titled Biography, Timeline of Significant Events, Writings by Frederic, Frederic and Contemporaries: On Writing, Bibliographical Studies, Critical Reception, Dissertations and Theses, Discussion Questions and Topics for Essays, and a Glossary. For an even more detailed bibliography of work prior to 1975, including writings by Frederic and texts about Frederic before 1900, see *A Bibliography of Writings by and about Harold Frederic* compiled by Thomas F. O'Donnell, Stanton Garner, and Robert H. Woodward (1975).

Patrick K. Dooley's "Fakes and Good Frauds: Pragmatic Religion in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*" (1982) is the best examination of how pragmatic thought plays a critical role in the novel. Dooley relies on James' version of pragmatism, as opposed to C.S. Peirce's, to demonstrate the way in which Frederic addresses the challenge science presents to religion during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Dooley establishes how James uses pragmatism as a way to negotiate a supportive truce between evolutionary thought and the traditional Christianity it seems to repudiate. Dooley writes that James believed "the truth of religion and religious belief is its beneficial consequences and valuable effects" (75). A belief in God is beneficial; thus God is true. Frederic's portrayal of characters like the Soulsbys and Father Forbes is an accurate reflection of pragmatic practice that negotiates between scientific and religious thought. The section on Father Forbes exemplifies this chain of reasoning. Dooley examines Forbes' explanation of religion as a social mediator and accounts for Forbes' view that "theological discussions are [...] mental gymnastics" (78).

Scott Donaldson's "The Seduction of Theron Ware" (1975) also addresses the issue of pragmatism, but with a decidedly less admiring tone. Donaldson presents Sister Soulsby as "the true villain of the piece" (441). He details, through an examination of the interactions between Sister Soulsby and Theron Ware, how Soulsby is a theological predator who affects Ware's degeneration with her "grubby philosophy" (451). Critical to this discussion is Donaldson's presentation of Ware as an innocent worthy of pity, or at least empathy, rather than as a conscious agent of his own destruction. Donaldson discusses Ware's exchanges with Soulsby as indoctrination in "her gospel of pragmatism" (450). Nothing in his theological training or practice has equipped Ware to

contend with Soulsby's arguments for pragmatic religion. Thus, he is drawn away from his simple faith by her rationalizations and appeals to his ambition. He loses innocence, if not naiveté, through her agency. What Donaldson establishes is the character of a traditional clergyman contending with the pragmatic alterations to his religion at the end of the century.

In "The Damnation of Theron Ware as a Criticism of American Religious Thought," (1969) Elmer F. Suderman focuses on the way Frederic departs from the conventions of the typical religious conversion novel of his time in which a young and innocent woman brings a skeptical man to God.<sup>4</sup> Frederic's different approach allows him to inveigh against "the success-seeking, comfort-loving, materialistic, hopeful Gilded Age for its pretense and sentimentality and its blind faith in man's intuitive grasp of the truth" (66). The value of Suderman's article is his examination of Frederic's refusal to adhere to the sentimental or melodramatic types characteristic to American fiction about religion contemporary to *Theron Ware*. *Theron Ware* provides the antidote to an excessive trust in man's holy inclinations. Unlike what the reader finds in the sentimental novels, personal religion is not necessarily the path to God, but rather, for Ware at least, the path away from God. Suderman is also valuable for contextualizing late nineteenth-century attitudes toward theology and religion as distinct arenas. He explains that

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<sup>4</sup> Suderman presents a range of novels such as *The Gates Ajar* (1869) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *They Met in Heaven* (1894) by George H. Hepworth, and *In His Steps* (1897) by Charles M. Sheldon (from whence comes the still-popular "What Would Jesus Do?" preemptory admonition), just to name a few. Suderman contrasts Frederic's handling to the sentimental approach by examining the willful, Hellenistic Celia Madden to the typical female moral-guardian figure that precipitates a conversion. He goes on to trace Ware's change from that point on through the novel and finds that at each significant point in the sentimental conversion tale, Frederic has upended the readers' expectations, creating a story of "counter-conversion".

theology was felt to be more myopic, dry, and exclusionary, whereas religion was seen as broad, interesting, and inviting (61).

Larzer Ziff, in his 1966 book *The American 1890s*, dedicates almost an entire chapter to a study of Frederic in general and *Theron Ware* in particular. Ziff provides the reader with the religious, aesthetic, and scientific context of the 1890s required to understand Ware's interaction with Forbes, Celia Madden, and Dr. Ledsmar. Of specific value to this study are Ziff's observations about the relationship between Ware and, as Ziff calls it, "the new aestheticism and the new science" (213). Ziff details how Ware exchanges his innocence for worldly pursuits, but the knowledge and experience he imagines he acquires are a sham. He cannot gain access to the knowledge of Father Forbes. He cannot appreciate art like the aesthete, Celia Madden. He cannot understand the science of Dr. Ledsmar. And after attempting to develop himself according to the models of his supposed mentors, he cannot maintain his place as a naive clergyman. Ziff concludes that for Ware there is no way back after he has been exposed to the corrupting, though Ware sees it as broadening, influence of the trio. Ziff characterizes this unequal exchange as "the loss of innocent purpose in America" (214). In Ware's new career as an aspirant politician, Ziff sees a shift from a sincere desire to develop one's self, to a cynical exploitation of those who have not yet been altered by the sorts of experiences Ware has experienced.

In David H. Zimmermann's "Clay Feet, Modernism, and Fundamental Option in Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*," (1994) the reader is presented with an examination of Father Forbes' modernist thought and an explicit refutation of Donaldson's view of Sister Soulsby. According to Zimmerman, Ware goes through a

type of conversion when he witnesses Forbes giving last rites to an Irish workman. While Ware is certainly not converted to Catholicism, the experience leads him to investigate Father Forbes, most crucially the priest's thought. Forbes is a modernist clergyman who is aware of the shifts within his own sect necessitated by the unfolding of history. Zimmermann contends "once Forbes has altered Theron's understanding of history, he has altered Theron's understanding of religion" (39). Ware is firmly situated within his own historical moment that is defined by the liberal drift of religion, a situation for which he is woefully unprepared. Zimmermann pays particular attention to the way Forbes does not provide Ware with a way to live with his new perspective on the purpose and history of religion. Sister Soulsby is given that task, one that is contradictory to the Mephistophelian task attributed to her by Donaldson. Soulsby's pragmatic teachings are available to, though probably not adopted by, Ware. These teachings, including Soulsby's insistence on the need for deception in Christian work and the idea that no one is damned until Judgment Day, would allow Ware to continue his Methodist work. What Zimmermann provides is a clear delineation of how the characters function to alter traditional religion to survive in a theological world increasingly defined by a liberal approach to Christianity.

### Chapter Three:

#### The Divide between Religion and Theology

Before embarking on an analysis of Ware's, Forbes', Soulsby's, and Algarcife's methods of exercising their religions and theologies, the distinction between religion and theology bears repeating. Suderman, in "'The Damnation of Theron Ware' as a Criticism of American Religious Thought," points out that the division lay, to the nineteenth-century reader, between the personal and the institutional. As Gaustad writes, in reference to White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (to which Gaustad attributes the title *History of the Warfare between Science and Theology*), "White stressed that the warfare was not with religion, but only with theology: that is, with religion hardened into dogma" (173). Ronald L. Numbers notes that White himself distinguished his own book from an earlier work addressing the same theme, John William Draper's 1874 book, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*. White felt that, between the works, "there was a fundamental difference: Draper regarded 'the struggle as one between Science and Religion,' while White viewed it as 'a struggle between Science and Dogmatic Theology'" (60-1). Even William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) states in discussing the definition of religion, "at the outset we are struck by one great partition which divides the religious field. On the one side of it lies institutional, on the other personal religion" (48).

Theron Ware, the protagonist of Frederic's text, initially has no division in his own practice between the religious and theological. His personal actions are in harmony

with those he performs in public. His adherence to the Methodist institution is demonstrated from the outset of the text. The novel begins at the annual Nedahma Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church during which Theron is not awarded the coveted Tecumseh congregation as expected.<sup>1</sup> He is instead sent to Octavius, a small, orthodox congregation. Both he and his wife, Alice, are crestfallen at the seeming unfairness of the assignment. But Ware, in discussion with his wife, says, “Come, let us make the best of it, my girl! After all, we are in the hands of the Lord” (12). Ware equates the actions of the governing body of the Methodist Episcopal Church with the will of God. He does not separate personal belief from the institution. If the institution has made an assertion, it is his duty to reconcile his personal feelings to it.

Ware’s harmonious perspective at the outset of the novel contrasts sharply with the Ware found in the final third of the novel. He notes this himself in conversation with Forbes when he states, “you have a thousand things to interest and pleasantly occupy you in your work and its ceremonies, so that mere belief or non-belief in the dogma hardly matters. But in our church dogma is everything. If you take that away, or cease to have its support, the rest is intolerable, hideous” (285). Ware confesses that he has lost the ability to subscribe to the dogma of his Church. Patrick K. Dooley points to the inverse relationship between Ware’s ability to believe and the quality of his preaching as proof of Ware’s pragmatic approach. Dooley observes “none of the central religious figures in the

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough examination of Conference in American Methodism see Russell E. Richey’s 1996 book, *The Methodist Conference in America*. The importance of Conference in Methodist theology cannot be overestimated. As Richey writes, Conference served as a governing assembly in concert and often at odds with the episcopacy. Beyond governance and distribution of preachers, Conference served to mark time, establish geographical borders of congregational districts, and structure the nature of Methodist worship (13-4).



novel—Ware, Forbes, or the Soulsbys—believe in God in the ordinary literal sense. Yet each is skilled in the manufacture of the beneficial effects of religion and belief in God” (76).

As will be demonstrated, Forbes, the Soulsbys, and Algarcife from *Phases*, all do possess this beneficial skill. Ware himself, however, differs from them in his intent. In conversation with Celia Madden, Ware says, “I’ve learned to be a showman. I can preach now far better than I used to, and I can get through my work in half the time [...] I was too green before. I took the thing seriously, and I let every mean-fisted curmudgeon and crazy fanatic worry me, and keep me on pins and needles. I don’t do that anymore” (257-8). Ware is certainly skilled at oratory, but his skill does not make him a pragmatist. The only mention he makes of anyone but himself in his declaration to Madden is of “every mean-fisted curmudgeon and crazy fanatic.” There is no concern for seeking the greatest benefit or choosing his actions with a mind to his congregation’s well being. Instead, Ware focuses on himself and his own desire to cast himself as an erudite, world-weary scholar. He is unable to bridge the gap between religion and theology with a pragmatic approach. He toggles from wholly orthodox to entirely heterodox, with no intervening moderate stance, regardless of the effect it has on his congregants. Forbes, Soulsby, and Algarcife differ from Ware in that they do demonstrate a desire to create the greatest benefit.

Forbes explains his religion in a number of passages. One of the most telling comes in a conversation with Ware. Forbes states, “I daresay, though, that if we could go back still other scores of centuries, we should find whole receding series of types of this Christ-myth of ours” (74). Yet Forbes remains loyal to the Church. Forbes gives Ware an

explanation of why he can maintain a division between his religion and his theology in a long passage worth quoting in full:

What you must see is that there must always be a church. If one did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. It is needed, first and foremost, as a police force. It is needed, secondly so to speak, as a fire insurance. It provides the most even temperature and pure atmosphere for the growth of young children. It furnishes the best obtainable social machinery for marrying off one's daughters, getting to know the right people, patching up quarrels, and so on. The priesthood earn their salaries as the agents for these valuable social arrangements. Their theology is thrown in as a sort of intellectual diversion, like the ritual of a benevolent organization. There are some who get excited about this part of it, just as one hears of Free-Masons who believe that the sun rises and sets to exemplify their ceremonies. Others take their duties more quietly, and, understanding just what it all amounts to, make the best of it, like you and me. (250-1)

Forbes provides the reader with perhaps the clearest statement of the pragmatic religious leader. His religion is beside the point. Forbes understands that the theology, the "intellectual diversion," allows him to provide the social structure so beneficial to his congregation.

David H. Zimmerman, examining Forbes as a modernist, states, "when Forbes must interact with his parishioners and their 'faith,' he returns to the traditional formulas and rituals of the Church; indeed, his perceptions of these are at times conservative and archaic." He concludes, "Forbes lacks the strength of character to inaugurate the

theologies he espouses” (39). In Zimmerman’s argument, he situates Forbes actions as derived primarily from a modernist historical view. However, if Forbes is seen as a modernist whose actions are taken from a pragmatic position, his actions achieve a balance between his religion and theology. To publicly challenge the orthodoxy of the Church would be wholly irresponsible because the entire social structure of the congregation depends on it. He does not lack the character to promote his religion, but possesses the character to realize its limitations in the public sphere. Sister Soulsby provides an additional perspective on Forbes’ method of maintaining his theology for the benefit of the laity. She states, in reaction to Ware’s description of Forbes as one “who doesn’t believe an atom in—in things,” that “they’ve got horse-sense, those priests. They’re artists, too. They know how to allow for the machinery behind the scenes” (179).

The theatre and “the machinery behind the scenes” form the basis of Sister Soulsby’s religion. Dissembling forms the basis of her pragmatic approach to the wellbeing of the Methodist congregations to which she and her husband travel. Soulsby outlines her approach to Ware, comparing her approach to that of a theatrical production:

the performance looks one way from where the audience sit, and quite a different way when you are behind the scenes. *There* you see that the trees and houses are cloth, and moon is tissue paper, and the flying fairy is a middle-aged woman strung up on a rope. That doesn’t prove that the play, out in front, isn’t beautiful and affecting, and all that. It only shows that everything in this world is produced by machinery—by organization. The trouble is that you’ve been let in on the stage, behind the scenes, so to speak and you’re green—if you’ll pardon me—that you want to sit down

and cry because the trees *are* cloth, and the moon *is* a lantern. And *I* say,  
Don't be such a goose! (177)

Soulsby has reconciled the traditional with the progressive. The traditional in her analogy is the play itself, the beauty and the affect. The progressive reveals itself as nothing more than an admission of a backstage. Like Father Forbes, Soulsby recognizes the power and importance of an organization. Forbes points out that an organization is created from the aesthetic display of theology, an organization beneficial to the laity. Soulsby agrees with Forbes, but elaborates on the need for an organization behind the curtain. Soulsby's argument is, paradoxically, for the status quo inasmuch as it supports the well being of the worshippers. A theology is needed to construct a social organization. Soulsby does not, however, align herself with a specific theocratic governing body. Where Forbes acts from within the strictures of the Catholic Church to promote social organization, Soulsby is an independent that uses the established Methodist order to manipulate from the outside.

Her independence and methods, however, have prompted some scholars, prominently Luedtke and Donaldson, to conclude that Soulsby is the antagonist of the piece, luring Ware to his downfall. Ware himself has his reservations about Soulsby's methods. In response to his question about whether she and her husband have ever been sincerely converted, Soulsby answers, "Not only once—dozens of times—I may say every time. We couldn't do good work if we weren't" (184-5). In response to her declaration, Luedtke writes that her declaration is glib, without substance and that "Soulsby is able to beat down Theron's moral reservations and convince him that the Soulsbys had given up their earlier way of life because they had 'both soured on living by

fakes' and were now 'good frauds' [...] it is an elementary mistake to accept Sister Soulsby's own self-justifications" (93). The mistake lies not in accepting Soulsby's self-justifications, but in assuming an equivalence between the Soulsby's actions and the actions of confidence men such as the Duke and Dauphin from Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, as Luedtke does later in the same selection. The difference is apparent from the social result of each pair's actions. The Duke and Dauphin are without concern for the destructiveness of their actions, whereas the Soulsbys' work is beneficial to each congregation for whom they perform. This is the essence of the division between the fake and the good fraud.

The cheerful division between fake and good fraud is absent from Anthony Algarcife's experience with balancing religion and theology. The second part of *Phases*, during which the atheist Algarcife has become an Episcopalian Priest, begins with an epigram from Marcus Aurelius' meditations: "And not even here do all agree—no, not any one with himself" (189). Aurelius' words are perfectly applicable to Algarcife and no character is more aware of his internal division than Algarcife himself. The narrator says of Algarcife, "what if he had lived a lie decently, what if he had fought a good fight for a cause he opposed, what if he, in the name of that cause, had closed his eyes and his nostrils to the things that repel and had labored to cleanse the sewer at his door, was it any the less a lie?" (218-9). In *Phases* the reader finds an echo of the fakes and good frauds of *Theron Ware*. Algarcife attempts to live a lie decently, but the tone is far more somber, almost regretful. Algarcife understands the necessity of the lie, but is not at ease in its application. Much of his uneasiness can be attributed to the fact that he is not a pragmatist when he chooses to live a dual life between his religion, if his atheism may be

seen as his religion (inasmuch as it is his personal, affirmative belief), and his theology. When he first assumes the role of Priest following the death of his mentor, Father Spears, “he [Algarcife] was called to the charge, he accepted it without a struggle and without emotion. He saw in it but an opening to heavier labor and an opportunity to hasten the progress of his slow suicide” (241). Algarcife’s feelings are not commensurate to the action of the pragmatist. The focus is wholly upon the individual and the action has not been taken with the goal of creating the greatest benefit.

By the end of the novel, however, Algarcife arrives at the role of the pragmatist. In the final scene of the novel he is confronted with a choice between suicide, inspired by the death of his former wife, and helping his laity. Algarcife is standing in his library, a phial of cyanide uncorked and ready for consumption, when a messenger calls to him from his door:

He replaced the stopper, still holding the phial in his hand. For a moment the heavy silence hung oppressively, and then he answered:

“What is it?” His voice sounded lifeless, like that of one awakening from heavy sleep or a trance.

“You are there? Come quickly. Your men at the Beasley Rolling Mills have gone on a strike. A policeman was shot and several of the strikers wounded. You are wanted to speak to them.”

“To speak to them?”

“I have a cab. You may prevent bloodshed. Come.”

Father Alarcife returned the phial to its drawer, withdrew the key from the locker, and rose. He opened the door and faced the messenger.

His words came thickly.

“There is no time to lose,” he said. “I am ready.”

He seized his hat, descended the steps, and rushed into the street.

(324-5)

At this point in the narrative, Alarcife is able to make a choice based on what yields the greatest benefit. Despite his desire to die, he chooses to live because he will be able to mollify the strikers. He does not, however, dispose of the poison. It still resides in his drawer, ready at a moment to end his life. Alarcife is again demonstrating the characteristics of the pragmatist. The truth of his existence, that it yields the greatest benefit, is provisional and a new truth may be asserted at any moment. Very little of *Phases* concerns itself with Alarcife’s duties as a Priest inside his Church. Instead the reader sees him making calls at individuals’ homes and conversing as a leader outside of the ceremony of his post. It is his pragmatic ability to recognize the value of social organization that allows Alarcife to balance his religion with his theology.

Theron Ware, as seen in the above examination, contrasts sharply with the figure of the pragmatist. Whereas Forbes, Soulsby, and Alarcife are able to reconcile their religions and theologies, Ware, at the end of the novel, cuts himself adrift from the Methodist Church to pursue a career in real estate and politics. Frederic provides a hint of Ware’s future vocation near the beginning of the novel when he writes, in reference to Ware’s former mentor, if “he didn’t think it would be better for him to study law, with a view to sliding out of the ministry when a good chance offered. It amazed him now to

recall that he had taken this hint seriously, and even gone to the length of finding out what books law-students began upon” (24). The seriousness with which Ware approaches the suggestion of an alternate career path suggests an ambivalence toward his position as a minister. He should have become a lawyer, and does become an aspirant politician. Ware never reconciles his religion and theology; he merely defers the issue until it reaches a moment of crisis.



## Chapter Four:

### The Pragmatist and the Aesthete

While Forbes, Soulsby, and Alarcife manage to negotiate some reconciliation between religion and theology through pragmatism, a gap still remains, an absence and isolation created by the internal division, and each seeks to address this absence through his or her relationship to the aesthetic. The relationships each maintains with the figure of the aesthete are, however, fundamentally different and yield different results. Forbes allies himself with the Hellenistic Celia Madden, his Church organist. Soulsby is herself an aesthete, long versed in the theater and still practicing her craft as a traveling revivalist. Alarcife marries the aspirant opera singer, Marianna Musin, though he remains uneasy with her aesthetic pursuits. Again, Ware contrasts with the other characters in his alignment to the aesthete. He pursues Madden as an object of adoration, but for entirely dissimilar reasons than those Forbes has for maintaining a relationship with her. The pragmatists are each to some extent living with the division between religion and theology, but with that division comes isolation, a gap between what they believe and what they do. The sense of art for art's sake, or more accurately, the aesthetic mood, serves to calm the pragmatist's sense of absence by providing a *Lebenskünstler* figure dedicated to the practice of an artistic life.<sup>1</sup> That which generates the greatest

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<sup>1</sup> David Andrews, in his book, *Aestheticism, Nabokov and Lolita*, demonstrates that the aesthetic mood differs from the idea of *l'art pour l'art*. As he writes, "what makes 'art for art's sake' more specific than 'aestheticism' is that the former stipulates what 'art,' 'beauty,' and 'taste' are *not* while the latter stipulates nothing" (13). He goes on to argue

benefit binds the pragmatist. Utility determines his or her action. The aesthete is bound only by a dedication to beauty and thus provides the pragmatist, simply by proximity, with the ornament missing from an entirely practical life.

Theron Ware becomes infatuated with Celia Madden to such an extent that at the end of the novel he misappropriates Church funds to follow her to New York in a vain attempt to win her affections. It is her aesthetic sense that turns him from a clergyman to a besotted devotee. This transformation is completed during chapter nineteen, after which “it was apparent to the Rev. Theron Ware, from the very first moment of waking next morning, that both he and the world had changed over night” (210). During the course of this chapter, Madden, having brought Ware to her home, leads him through her workshop with the accoutrements of painting, sculpture, bookbinding, carpentry, and drawing, into another chamber, a chamber half-lighted and filled with nude statuary, paintings of the Madonna and Child, columns, and cushions. Also in the room is a piano, which Ware first mistakes for a casket, all marks of her aesthetic mood (197-8). She provides tobacco, to which Ware is unaccustomed, though he will try anything to further ingratiate himself with Madden. She is an aesthete concerned with creating beauty for its own sake with a romantic notion of the ancient Greeks who she views as “a nation where all the people were artists, where everybody was an intellectual aristocrat, where the Philistine was as unknown, as extinct, as the dodo” (200). Ware understands none of this explanation. His

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that using the terms interchangeably misrepresents any artist that can be viewed as working in the aesthetic mood by applying an overly restrictive separation between the creation of art and its extant results. While beauty is the primary goal of art to the aesthete, it does not bar utility from being an attendant element, though one always subordinate to form.

relationship with Madden is obsessive rather than that which fulfills a need for something other than the pragmatic.

Father Forbes maintains his proximity to Madden and Madden takes up her charge with zeal. In a conversation concerning the music and art-hating Dr. Ledsmar she tells Ware, “I want you on my side, against that doctor and his heartless, bloodless science” (102). Her statement is a clear revelation of the nature of the relationship between Forbes and Madden. Dr. Ledsmar, Forbes’ only other friend in Octavius, is opposed to art and views it as a signal of any civilization’s impending downfall (83-84). Madden seeks to correct that influence by maintaining the primacy of art and beauty in the priest’s life. Forbes becomes a battleground for the opposing factions of science and beauty and Madden seeks to recruit Ware to swell her force’s ranks. Beauty seems the provisional victor in the ongoing struggle, however. While Forbes and Ledsmar have an old friendship, she holds a place in his Church. It is she Forbes praises by saying “she might be the daughter of a hundred kings” (288). It is Madden with whom he travels to New York at the end of the novel. Ledsmar may be close to Forbes, but Madden is a part of him.

Sister Soulsby differs from Forbes in her relationship with the aesthetic. Just as she needs to belong to no external theological institution to exercise her pragmatism, she needs no outside source to fulfill her need for the aesthetic. She is a thespian, long practiced in the actor’s trade. She tells Ware, “I supported myself for a good many years,—generally, at first, on the stage. I’ve been a front-ranker in Amazon ballets, and I’ve been leading lady in comic opera companies out West. I’ve told fortunes in one room of a mining-camp hotel where the biggest game of faro in the Territory went on in

another” (183). Soulsby is by no means practicing art for art’s sake. She supports herself with her theatrical pursuits and, in a Bohemian manner, does so in the least reputable venues available. Her experience allows her to create the kinds of inspirational effects that she and Brother Soulsby elicit in the episode of the Love Feast:<sup>2</sup>

Then the woman, lifting her head, began to sing. The words were ‘Rock of Ages,’ but no one present had heard the tune to which she wedded them. Her voice was full and very sweet, and had in it tender cadences which all her hearers found touching. She knew how to sing, and she put forth the words so that each was distinctly intelligible. There came a part where Brother Soulsby, lifting his head in turn, took up a tuneful second to her air. Although the two did not, as one could hear by listening closely, sing the same words at the same time, they produced none the less most moving and delightful harmonies of sound. (155)

If she uses her aesthetic talents for the greater benefit of others, then she seems to emphasize utility over art. But her motivations for pursuing the practice of a revivalist show that art maintains a favored position. She explains to Ware, in discussing how she and Brother Soulsby came to be revivalists:

there was a revival at the local Methodist church, and we went every evening,—at first just to kill time, and then because we found we like the noise and excitement and general racket of the thing. After it was all over

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<sup>2</sup> The Love Feast was, as Frank Baker writes, “a deliberate revival by John Wesley of the meal of Christian fellowship or *agape* which was practiced with varying success in the early Christian church and revived by the German Moravians” (131). It served as a communal experience where congregants from a circuit gathered to eat together, hear sermons, and offer testimonies (Schneider 83).

each of us found that the other had been mighty near going up to the rail and joining the mourners. And another thing had occurred to each of us, too,—that is, what tremendous improvements there were possible in the way that amateur revivalist worked up his business. This stuck in our crops, and we figured on it all throughout the winter.—Well, to make a long story short, we finally went into the thing ourselves. (184)

Nothing in this origin leads the reader to believe that utility takes precedence over the Soulsbys' attraction to the artifice, the "noise and excitement and general racket," and their artistic ambition to improve upon the experience which leads them to become revivalists. The benefit to each congregation becomes, in light of Soulsby's aesthetic mood, subordinate to the creation of effect. Her method of harnessing the theological for pragmatic aims fulfills her need for the aesthetic.

Anthony Algarcife is aware, perhaps more than Forbes and Soulsby, of the isolation born from his division between religion and theology. He, however, rejects the aesthetic while simultaneously taking the embodiment of it for his wife. Mariana Musin lives in a New York hotel called the Gotham populated by artists and one determined scientist, Algarcife. She is dedicated to music and the mystique surrounding music. The effect it has on her displays itself in a passage well into the couple's marriage when they attend an opera:

as she sat there in the fifth gallery, drinking with insatiable thirst the swelling harmony, her emotional nature, which association with Algarcife had somewhat subdued, was revived [ . . . ] She felt taller, stronger, fuller

of unimpregnated germs of power, and, like an infusion of splendid barbaric blood, there surged through her veins a flame of color. (117-8)

Only witnessing a musical performance can have such a profound effect on the aesthete, Musin. But unlike Forbes and Soulsby, Algarcife is not fulfilled by the exercise of the aesthetic. In fact he cannot tolerate it. He does all he can to excise the need for it from his wife. In reflection upon his project of dividing the aesthete from the aesthetic he is described as feeling:

relief in the thought that his influence over her was weightier than the appeal of her art. With adolescent egotism, he convinced himself that he was shaping and perfecting a mental energy into channels other than the predestined ones; and while Mariana was matured into a palpitant reflection of his own image, he believed that he was liberating an intellect enthralled by superficialities. (119)

Algarcife's need for the figure of the aesthete is revealed not as something to fill an existential absence, but rather as something to dominate, something in which he may force a transformation.

Between the pragmatists from *Theron Ware* and the pragmatist from *Phases* a distinct change in the character of the pragmatist occurs. Forbes and Soulsby can be seen as products of the nineteenth century whereas Algarcife represents the impending twentieth. A hint of this placement is found in comments about Father Speares, the priest who mentored Algarcife as a boy and young man and from whom Algarcife inherits his own position as a priest. Father Speares is described as one who "At the close of the nineteenth century [...] stood a picturesque and pathetic figure, combating with a

mediaeval eloquence the advancing spirit of his time, a representative of the lost age of faith lingering far into the new-found age of rationalism” (105). Alarcife is the person who takes Speares’ place as a figure of the commencement of the twentieth century, as the exemplar of the age of rationalism. As representative of the shift between centuries he also represents the decline of the aestheticism. In writing about the cultural shift away from aestheticism following the conviction of Oscar Wilde in 1895, William Gaunt writes, “It had caused a wholesale literary and social fumigation” (180). While Gaunt is specifically referring to the aesthetic movement in Britain, his comments do indicate the steady decline of the aesthetic era. Alarcife, while no moralist himself, is emblematic of the cultural shift away from even a tacit acceptance of the aesthete. Caught as he is at the moment of such a paradigm shift, Alarcife is both attracted to and antagonistic toward the figure of the aesthete. He recognizes Musin’s value to him, once he has entered the priesthood, as that which may remedy his isolation, but the remedy is still anathema to him.

## Chapter Five:

### The Beginning of the Twentieth Century

The character of the pragmatic figure bridging the nineteenth century divide between religion and theology is clearly delineated in both *The Damnation of Theron Ware* and *Phases of an Inferior Planet*. None of these figures can accept the received dogma of their respective institutions, nor can any of them publicly preach their own religions. To accept their theologies would be tantamount to denying their own beliefs and to preach their religions would affect a degeneration in the laity, the very people for whom the pragmatist wishes the greatest benefit. Jamesian pragmatism answers the need for the individual caught between religion and theology when he or she accepts that, as Dooley writes, in discussing James' attempt to reconcile the two, "the truth of religion and religious belief is its beneficial consequences and valuable effects. That is, religious truths are not statements of historical fact or claims about supernatural entities; religious truths amount to the advantageous consequences that come with belief in God" (75).

Attendant to bridging the divide is the opening of a gap characterized by the pragmatist's isolation born of living a dual life. The proximity of the figure of the aesthete serves to remedy this isolation, be the aesthete another individual or simply the pragmatist's own aesthetic methods of achieving pragmatic ends. From the cheerful acceptance of the aesthetic by Forbes and Soulsby to the tension between its magnetism and repugnance embodied in Algarcife, the aesthete is a necessary figure for the pragmatist and demonstrates the cultural shift of the era. As Zimmerman writes:



Neither the illiberal fanaticism that characterizes the town's Methodists nor the blind conformity of Octavius' Catholics encompass the whole of religion. The failure of critics to recognize this simple truth has prevented them from recognizing Frederic's portrayal of the transformation Christian thought underwent at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth (35)

While Father Forbes and Sister Soulsby represent the beginning of this shift between centuries and Anthony Alarcife epitomizes its completion, Theron Ware embodies the axle on which the shift turns. John Henry Raleigh reinforces this view when, in his often referenced article, "The Damnation of Theron Ware," he writes:

*The Damnation* is about how the powerful, relentless, experienced intellect of the late nineteenth century, combined with its love of 'art for art,' seduced, quickened, and finally damned the lingering intuitionism and the reliance upon feelings, and the anti-aestheticism, which were the legacy of the early nineteenth and of which Theron Ware is the anachronistic embodiment. (213-4)

Ware cannot aspire to the erudition of scholars like Forbes and Alarcife, nor is he able to understand the aestheticism, the "art for art," of Madden and Musin. He is unable to maintain a dogmatic theology in the service of religion like Soulsby. He is an anachronism, caught between centuries, caught between two religious, theological, and aesthetic historical moments.

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