

SKEPTICAL INQUIRY AND RELIGIOUS AWAKENING

IN BEULAH, BY AUGUSTA JANE EVANS

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THESIS: SKEPTICAL INQUIRY AND
RELIGIOUS AWAKENING IN
BEULAH, BY AUGUSTA JANE EVANS

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DEDICATED TO
MY MOTHER, CHARLSIE RUTH UNDERWOOD, FOR
INTRODUCING ME TO THE LITERARY WORKS
OF AUGUSTA JANE EVANS

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ABSTRACT

Beulah, by Augusta Jane Evans, was hugely successful at the time it was published in America in 1859. A semi-autobiographical account, the author felt it was her duty to warn readers of the problems she had experienced with religious skepticism. Advances in science after the Middle Ages led to the increasing valuation of reason and objectivity. By the early- to mid-nineteenth century it was quite fashionable to be skeptical, especially about religious matters. The eponymous heroine of the novel passes through several phases of religious faith on her intellectual journey of skepticism before she finally reawakens with a mature Christian faith. She eventually learns to properly balance faith and reason.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although very well known in America from the mid-nineteenth century to perhaps the first quarter of the twentieth century, Augusta Jane Evans (1835-1909) is not familiar to most reading audiences today. Her fourth novel, St. Elmo, was the most successful of her nine novels in terms of number of books sold, and its nineteenth-century sales volume rivaled Uncle Tom's Cabin and Ben Hur for American novels (Fidler 129). Beulah, Evans' second novel, was published in 1859, and its decided success provided her with remuneration that would allow her to live comfortably for the rest of her life. Beulah was well received upon publication by both the reading public and critics. An article by O. J. Victor after its publication declared that "Beulah (was) among the most intellectually original of any novels yet produced by American authors" (Sexton 25).

Evans' novels can be classified as domestic or sentimental fiction. But what distinguishes her novels from other Victorian-era literature is that she usually focused on the spiritual struggles of her protagonists. Just such a predicament, with both religious and philosophical components, was presented for the eponymous heroine of Beulah. The central argument that this research will explore is as follows: Augusta Jane Evans created the heroine of Beulah to illustrate the problems of religious skepticism and the limitations of rationalism. Evans herself experienced a similar period in her early life when she evolved from having a youthful religious faith, to a period of skepticism, and then finally

to a period of her life when she valued faith over reason as it regarded religious matters. In this sense, Beulah's experiences are semi-autobiographical for Evans.

Other novels in the nineteenth century may have presented the testing of a woman's religious faith, but Beulah goes "into territory no American female had yet traversed—skepticism stemming from rigorous intellectual inquiry into the most up-to-date theological and philosophical treatises available . . . [and] . . . Beulah's journey takes her into the deepest waters of metaphysical speculation" (Sofer 120). Evans had essentially broken new ground in America literature with Beulah.

As a Christian, Evans felt it was her duty to show how faith in God was more fulfilling for the soul's longings for religious truth than skeptical inquiry, regardless of how honestly that inquiry unfolded. She wanted her readers to avoid the unfulfilling skeptical path that she herself had taken only several years prior. Evans' themes of female independence and religious awakening, along with a highly educated style of writing, combined together for the purpose of uplifting and inspiring the reading audience.

A love interest, common in domestic fiction, is also present in the plot, but it takes until the end of the novel to actualize for Beulah. In fact, she is disinterested in all but one of the male characters who show interest in her, preferring instead to establish an independent life that includes working to earn a living. The focus of the novel is not love, but when the primary struggles of independence and religious doubt are finally resolved, love naturally follows.

An orphan, the precocious Beulah Benton is taken in by a generous guardian, Dr. Guy Hartwell, who financially supports her and helps direct her education. She has an insatiable appetite for learning, and from a young age, resolves with unwavering interest and single-minded determination to be independent and self-supporting. The more she learns, both from school and from books in Dr. Hartwell's extensive library, the more she realizes that there are major issues that remain unanswered by her Christian religion.

Beulah experiences her first moment of religious doubt when discussing sentimental poetry with Clara Sanders, a fellow teacher. But her concerted inquiry effectively begins upon completion of Poe's Eureka. After Poe, she studies other works, such as De Quincey's Analects from Jean Paul Richter, and is especially inspired by Richter's "Dream Upon The Universe." Over the next few years she continues her explorations with publications by Emerson, Carlyle, Goethe, Parker, Feuerbach, Kant, Coleridge, and numerous others. What distinguishes Beulah from other Victorian novels of this era is the very detailed account of the heroine's studied research and intellectual contemplations. Engaging dialogues with various characters show just where Beulah stands on important issues.

The more Beulah explores, with reason and logic making increasing demands on her mind as necessary analytical tools, the more confused she becomes. Many of the philosophical arguments she explores are useless, bringing her full circle back to a state without understanding, and certainly without truth. Beulah thought she could use reason and logic to understand truth, and in some cases she could. But ultimate truths and certain issues of a religious nature did not unfold and reveal themselves through rationalism.

Evans believed one of the problems with religious skepticism is that issues must continually be dealt with over and over, and without the expectation of satisfactory resolution.

Evans thought that the role of an author was not merely to entertain, but to inspire and elevate, especially with themes of morality, and she believed that there was no version of morality higher than that expressed by Christian doctrine. She thus felt a sense of duty, as an author, to create literary works of art that would inspire and bless the emotional and spiritual hearts of the readership. She was often criticized for using obscure or sesquipedalian vocabulary, and for using arcane poetical and metaphorical references. She disregarded these criticisms because, as successful book sales proved, the reading public enjoyed her erudite and inspirational style of writing. It was a combination of Evans' themes of spiritual struggles and female independence, as well as her intellectual style of writing, that attracted so many readers.

During an age that was greatly influenced by scientific inquiry and skepticism, some authors of the nineteenth century assumed a more realistic style of writing in order to capture the nuances of nature and real life. But Evans didn't want to portray the grit of everyday life in her novels just for the sake of realism. As a Christian, she wanted to create art that would inspire, and she took the view that literature doesn't just reflect real life—it inspires greatness beyond what life normally is. She wanted her works to inspire readers to be the best that they could be, regardless of the circumstances of their lives. She believed it was her duty and responsibility as an author to uplift and inspire. Rather than being representational, her novels, as art, were inspirational. Evans uplifted and

inspired by creating a combination of plot, characters, and themes that would present examples of struggles (e.g., social, intellectual, and religious), and used those struggles to have the heroine Beulah Benton evolve both intellectually and spiritually. That evolution of self-discovery, marked by a very strong sense of independence, resulted in Beulah's reestablished religious faith.

In addition to presenting her conservative religious and political views in her novels, Evans always advocated the value of intellectual independence for women. She used a young orphan girl as her heroine in Beulah, illustrating just how tenacious and accomplished a female can be in a male-dominant society, a society that was just beginning to respect women as independent thinkers.

In order to place Beulah in historical context, three different aspects of history will be examined closely. First, the evolution of Christian religion in Western society over the past few hundred years leading up to the mid-nineteenth century will show how religious skepticism developed, particularly in America. There was increasing reliance on reason and objectivity as society advanced in science, education, and industry, and it affected virtually all aspects of life. Secondly, understanding the evolving views of women and their accepted roles in society will illustrate the significance of Beulah as an independent female in American society in the mid-1800s. Thirdly, an examination of the conventions of Victorian fiction will show how Evans presents her message. Evans unfolds the life of Beulah through the role of an omniscient narrator characteristic of Victorian literature, and smoothly alternates with a point of character mode. She

occasionally addresses the reader directly, a poignant convention that marks the power of her narrative style.

There are three major periods for Beulah in the novel regarding her religious faith. As a young girl, she has an innocent, ingenuous faith. This is the faith of a little girl who trusts the religious tradition with which she has been raised.

Beulah's faith evolves into one of skepticism as she explores the works of many influential writers in the fields of literature, history, philosophy and theology. The more she tries to use the philosophical tools of reason and logic to explain the unexplainable, the more frustrated and confused she becomes. This skeptical period of faith for Beulah has three phases. She first looks to others for answers. Then, while still weighing and considering the views of others, she decides to trust her own faculties of reasoning for understanding. Still not satisfied, she decides to rely only on herself and her observations for a revelatory truth.

Finally, after many years of research, skepticism and cogitation, Beulah comfortably settles into a mature faith. It was the third period of her faith, and was a result of countless hours of wonderment and pondering, and one for which she eventually learns to balance reason and faith. She realizes that while rationalism may be required for the secular realm, faith is entirely suitable for the imponderables of the religious domain.

By presenting Beulah not only as a determined and independent female, but also as one who passed through a period of religious skepticism, Evans warns the reader about the problems of skepticism, the very problems that she had struggled with in the several years preceding the writing of the book. Beulah is a fine example of Victorian-era literary

expression regarding issues of female education, female independence, duty, self-discovery, morality, the struggle for truth during religious skepticism, and the eventual religious awakening of the heroine with a re-born, faith-based mindset.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

There are three aspects of history that need to be discussed to place Beulah and Augusta Jane Evans in historical context—that of religious skepticism, female individualism, and Victorian fiction.

Christianity, Reason and the Growth of Skepticism

By the time Beulah was published in 1859, America had been going through an evolving period of religious expression. People were less likely than in prior decades to accept without question the doctrines of the church and were more likely to consider other views that were present and publicly available. The primary issue that James Turner investigated in his book, Without God, Without Creed, is the disappearance of the almost universal belief in God by the mid-nineteenth century. Turner does not doubt that people must have occasionally questioned the existence of God throughout the centuries after the life of Jesus, but he says that such questioning “could sustain itself and grow into lasting disbelief only if nourished by social and intellectual sustenance” (2). But there wasn’t sufficient fuel for disbelief to sustain itself. So any doubts that people may have had periodically were inconsequential in changing the overall religious belief systems of society until after the Middle Ages.

The mysteries of the world couldn’t be satisfactorily explained without a God connection up until the Middle Ages. Mysteries of nature and cosmology, along with many social issues, were all attributable to the mysterious workings of God. Moral codes

were based on religion, and the concept of God as taught through Christian church doctrine helped explain what was right and what was wrong. Without God as an explanation, there was no cohesion to all of life's countless mysteries and unknowns. Belief in God was as common for the medieval individual in Western Europe as was belief that the sun would rise each morning.

One of the first things to happen that led to a diminution of the universal belief in God was the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation, over a period of years from 1517 through 1648, was essentially a breaking of the unity of belief within the Catholic Church, and established Protestantism as a separate branch of Christianity. Further fragmentation led to numerous interpretations of religious doctrines. The rise of multiple beliefs about the Christian church affected the future of belief in God in two ways (Turner 9). First, debate on small issues inevitably led to debate on much greater issues. Secondly, the religious establishment could not control the debate, and secular voices were thus able to be heard. As secular views gained greater ground, clerical leaders found that the church's influence was steadily diminishing.

While the roles of politics and the church had effectively been intermingled in the Middle Ages, the Reformation and its splintering effects loosened the ties. Politics and the church evolved independently after the Reformation. However, they were still tied together as it regarded authoritarian administration. In fact, according to Holmes, "from the fourth century on, state churches were the norm in European Christianity" (9).

There were countless new ideas being expressed between the middle of the sixteenth century and the end of the seventeenth. That mass of new ideas was built upon

the secular mindset that was gaining tolerance. The Scientific Revolution played a large role in the increasing secularization of ideas. A very different universe was beginning to be understood between the publication of Nicolaus Copernicus's On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres in 1543 and Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy in 1687 (Turner 13). The new ideas and discoveries were expressed in numerous fields of study, including human anatomy, astronomy, biology, physics, and chemistry.

As the decades progressed beyond the seventeenth century, there were fewer mystical explanations of the world and its operations. Nevertheless, "the existence of God remained so interwoven with the understandings of men and nature as to be close to indubitable" (Turner 27). Interest in the natural and the mechanical made people realize that the world was complex, but a scientific understanding of its workings was slowly unraveling. The understanding of the machination of the universe provided a new view of God and the cosmos. If there were a God who played a role in the construction of the universe, that role was one that was further removed than had been previously believed, and its role seemed to be hidden through its innumerable natural laws.

Improved systems of commerce, including the spreading out of trade routes, along with the growth and expansion of cities, also played roles in how individuals and societies extended their awareness of an expanding world of knowledge. Belief in the divine was still present much of the time, but God seemed more and more like "an impersonal distant force" (Turner 18).

The increasing use of the printing press allowed ideas of all types to be expressed, and “effectively ended the church regulation of learning” (Turner 11). Books allowed writers to express new ideas, and at the same time, allowed readers in virtually all walks of life to be exposed to those ideas.

A greater ordering of ideas and systematic processes was required to effectively manage the study of science and mechanics. Quantitative descriptions were soon understood to be more precise than qualitative assessments, and methodology became increasingly important. The same mind that methodically analyzed issues of science also critiqued and analyzed religion, and people were becoming more likely to intellectualize the concept of God. “Belief in God . . . came to depend more heavily on cognition and intellectual assent (and it) gravitated slowly from the subjective toward the objective mode” (Turner 24). As such, by the late seventeenth century, church leaders had refined doctrine to fit in with the new modes of thought. Rather than fully doctrinal, religion evolved to become more devotional and pragmatic. Individual faith was as likely to refer to what they did (e.g., communal practices, rituals) as it was to refer to how they believed.

The more that was questioned in society, the more new questions surfaced. People valued reason as a tool to gain understanding, and by the end of the seventeenth century, it was not uncommon for individuals to value both the new scientific way of analysis and the inner process of reason and intuitive perception (Turner 29). This inner world view actually heightened moralism, and kept Christianity alive and relatively strong. Science actually humanized values, because as science and reason spread, the toleration of new

views heightened an understanding of the concepts of freedom and justice (Bronowski 70).

“As a part of their attempt to modernize belief,” according to Turner, “church leaders and religious writers were rethinking the old conception of belief. They were, in effect, dividing the conviction of God’s reality from the trust and love that He inspired.” Belief and faith took on distinctions. Whereas faith pointed to a personal trust, belief pointed to “intellectual conviction of definable propositions” (51). The distinction was notable, and it is faith that Evans finally allows Beulah to have at the end of her novel as a complement to rational belief.

One value of the Enlightenment¹ was that critical methods and analytical approaches were valued as they regarded the exploration of knowledge based on observation and experimentation. In fact, the success of Western society, and especially that of America, was based on the “victory of reason. While the other world religions emphasized mystery and intuition, Christianity alone embraced reason and logic as the primary guide to religious truth” (Stark, Victory x). Not only was reason valued during the Enlightenment, but also benevolence, tolerance, and the progress of secular interests.

Willis argues that “one of the greatest achievements of the Enlightenment was the Disestablishment of religion,” which led to the principles embodied in America’s separation of church and state. Disestablishment of religion happened at an opportune time for America, allowing both religious freedom and political freedom to coexist. Before the Enlightenment, it has been assumed that any ruling party would have an

¹ The Enlightenment is generally recognized as the period in Western society from the mid- or late-seventeenth century to approximately the end of the eighteenth century.

alliance of both politics and religion. America was the exception to this historical trend. With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, “The United States rid itself of throne and altar in one inclusive gesture” (Willis 2). While forbidden at the federal level, some states continued to require church membership. In 1833, Massachusetts was the last state to end its requirement of an established religion.

Of the thirteen original American colonies, nine had state-funded churches during the colonial period, and by 1775, seventy percent of the colleges and universities in the American colonies were of religious origin (Holmes 9). The Puritans were decided antidisestablishmentarianists, believing that a union of church and state was the only way to ensure a moral basis for government. But the Puritans were not always so moral as is commonly believed. They could be vehemently intolerant of differing views.

According to Ahlstrom, there was a “growing dissatisfaction with worldly church leadership and overly institutionalized forms of religious expression” (71). Many of America’s founding fathers were interested in a new religious view known as Deism. This view included a belief in God, but for the most part, rejected much of church dogma, especially any doctrine that couldn’t be substantiated through rationalism. Instead, Deists placed a high value on individual reason. Many of them believed that Christianity was actually “a barrier to moral improvement and social justice” (Holmes 4). Deists did believe in the morality of Jesus, but they knew that state-funded churches had a tendency to be sharply political, and sometimes even tyrannical. Thus, they used reason—considered God’s greatest gift to mankind—to organize their endeavors and daily lives. Most of the founding fathers of America believed in at least some form of Deism,

including John Adams, Ben Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe (Holmes 36).

Deism was influential in America from about 1725 through the first several decades of the nineteenth century, but had already been in obvious decline by the first decade of the nineteenth century (Holmes 49). The Deist qualities of personal freedom, reason, and honest inquiry helped the founding fathers shape America in its early years. But those same qualities also led to the decline of Deism since “Deism excluded the emotional and mysterious aspects of religion. It ignored the need of many humans for spiritual guidance, worship and a community of faith” (Holmes 49).

Literature evolved as religious views evolved. According to Turner, most of the older devotional books depicting a mysterious God had stopped being commercially successful by about 1820. Turner explained that “They were replaced by a new religious literature with a new, reliable Deity. . . . Few tolerably well-read people believed any longer that God interrupted the course of nature to punish or reward His creatures” (79). This type of belief in a distanced God put a strain on orthodox Christian views.

There were still many who wanted more immediacy from the divine; a far-distanced God was not enough. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) had as much influence on the American public as anyone else in the mid-nineteenth century regarding religious beliefs. He accepted personal experience and subjectivity as the only basis for belief, and denied any type of authority that stood between his soul and God (Riepma 51). He believed that God was in every single fragment of existence, and as such, he also was a part of God. This was hard for many Christian traditionalists to accept, especially

those who held an anthropomorphic view of God. Emerson's pantheism was essentially a view that merged the natural and the supernatural.

By the 1850s there was a fair degree of awareness in America of non-Western religions. Turner noted that "Emerson became the first significant American writer actually to incorporate strains of Oriental thought into his own work and to try to reconcile Eastern and Western ideals" (154). For those in American culture who weren't quite sure what they believed, agnosticism became a viable alternative.

In addition to Emerson's Nature, Robinson noted that two other influential theological and political works were also published in 1836—New Views of Christianity, Society and the Church, by Orestes Brownson, and Remarks on The Four Gospels, by William H. Furness. These three pivotal New England-published works, which were effectively revisionist, established "beyond a doubt that a new movement was emerging, which was soon referred to, disparagingly in some quarters, as Transcendentalism" (Robinson 22). This movement offered an alternative to orthodox beliefs, and it appealed to people who were more interested in the definitiveness of science than in the unprovable mysteries of religion.

Some individuals tried to share beliefs that were harmonious with the new views, or at least accommodating of the old. For example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed that religious concerns could not be answered with reason; some matters required faith. He was therefore inclined to side with a view of naturalistic theism. He believed that all of life was a reflection of God (Beer 238). In addition, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker believed that religion could be understood through human nature and its capacity

for believing in the immortal. Individuals like these helped to make religion tolerable for those who might otherwise have become estranged from the Church.

However, Orthodox resistance to the new views of God did not let up. This resistance certainly alienated some. According to Turner, “Evangelicism insisted on a return to orthodoxy, and preached a personal relationship with the living Jesus” (112). That “living Jesus” was symbolic of an active awareness of a moral life, and “many Protestant Church leaders identified religion with morality” (Riepma 51). The growth of non-believers was due primarily to Churches that pushed too hard. Some people needed to step away from the pressure of an authoritarian church. They were already learning that they could think for themselves. But just because they stepped back from the Church did not mean that they did not still believe in God at some level. In fact, religious adherents rose from 1790 to 1860, and except for a slight dip in 1870, continued to rise steadily into the late 20th century (Willis 8).

Societal valuing of personal liberties and freedom was also a factor in skepticism of orthodox Christian beliefs. Having to adhere to the edicts of the church—its rules, its dogma—meant not fully thinking for oneself. As explained by Turner, “Infidelity became a moral obligation as well as an intellectual necessity” (159). Beulah confesses her “infidelity” (i.e., religious skepticism) to Dr. Guy Hartwell at the end of the novel. She truly felt that her investigations had been obligatory for an honest searching of truth.

There had been so many discoveries in science to explain natural laws by the middle of the nineteenth century that scientists needed God only as a First Cause (Turner 77). But the mass public still held on longer to a more traditional concept of God, pulled

primarily by Evangelical Christians who pressed hard for a more approachable view of the Divine. They recognized that understanding the science of natural laws may have warmed the intellect, but did not warm the heart. The concept of a loving, active, and personal God was necessary for religion of the heart. It was with this group that Augusta Evans sided as she wrote Beulah.

Female Individualism

The history of female individualism must also be discussed to help contextualize Beulah within the framework of society during the several decades leading to the mid-nineteenth century. Several women were influential in writing about women's roles in society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notably Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller. In addition, the views of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese are of value as she was a leading scholar in studies of feminism.

Mary Wollstonecraft

Elaine Showalter, a feminist theoretician, wrote that women over the centuries had sought a female voice that could redeem them (15). Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was just such a voice. Showalter believed that Wollstonecraft had been "close to achieving in her life the combination of autonomy, meaningful work, and intimacy she had been seeking" (13). Wollstonecraft's book, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, published in 1792, finally gave women something to look to for guidance in the area of female individualism. It is noteworthy that the word woman was used in the title, rather than its plural women. The significance is that it indicated that what is good for one woman is good for each and every woman (Fox-Genovese, Feminism 41).

During her lifetime, Wollstonecraft frustratingly observed that the only way a woman could rise in society was through marriage. She deplored the condescending view of philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778) who believed that women's education should be directed to make them socially pleasing (Wollstonecraft 21). She believed that a woman in society could be just as perspicacious as any man, given the opportunity, and that to be such required that women be fully educated. Wollstonecraft observed that "it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man (just) because she has always been subjugated" (38). If women were inferior in any way, it was due to a society that had allowed it. At the time of Wollstonecraft's life, girls did not customarily learn all of the subjects that boys did in school. Typically left out for girls were the subjects of mathematics, Greek, theology, and the natural sciences (Douglas 58). Wollstonecraft believed that the perfect education would be one that would prepare a woman to be independent, and that independence must properly and morally be reflected in a life of virtue. It was also important that teaching women how to think and act for themselves with an independent nature should start as early as infancy (Wollstonecraft 49).

Wollstonecraft believed that to be more virtuous really meant to be more fair, and she referred to politics to support her point. Political science was in its infancy at the time that she wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, but she knew that sound politics helped keep liberty rightfully harnessed. Liberty, if unchecked and allowed to blossom naturally, would result in the strongest and the most powerful always being triumphant. But sound political structure, combined with fair and reasonable limits on freedom and liberty, would be the most equitable for all individuals. More equality for Wollstonecraft

meant greater morality, for a moral life cannot be fully realized if women are subjugated by men. When women were subjugated, they “developed cunning, the natural opponent of strength,” in order to compete with the stronger and more dominant male (Wollstonecraft 7). The more that women gained equality with men, the lesser the need for cunning and the greater would be the unfolding of action based on moral virtues.

Regarding religion, Wollstonecraft, for the most part, trusted the doctrines of Christianity. However, she did express concern that “Religion is . . . separated from morality by a ceremonial veil.” It was the dogma, in her view, especially the type of dogma expressed through structured ritual, which prevented the Church from more effectively expressing the morality of Jesus.

Margaret Fuller

In addition to Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) was a brilliant woman who contributed to progressive views of greater equality for women. She is an example of an individual who strove to be the absolute best intellectual she could be. She was highly educated, initially through the Spartan direction of her father, and he did so with as much attention to studying the classics and history as he would have directed a son. Her father would not let her waste valuable study time with “the feminine subculture of etiquette books and sentimental novels” (Douglas 264). By the time Margaret Fuller was in her twenties, she “had the reputation of being the best-read person, male or female, in New England” (Douglas 263). She was the intellectual equal of any educated man.

According to Riepma, “In nineteenth century America, women’s sphere was the home, not the world” (19). By the mid 1840s, Fuller encouraged women to look within themselves to realize that they can reach limits that had previously been undreamed of, both within the domestic sphere as well as outside of the home. She thought that if a woman was fulfilled internally, then all other external-related functions (e.g., domestic duties, marriage) would be harmonious. In fact, she believed that “a house is no home unless it can tack food and fire for the mind as well as the body” (Fuller 243).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was sufficient reason to focus on gender in novels, especially as it presented women, because the spheres for men and women were not only seen as different, but there was also a language difference to describe them (Gigante 4). For example, “the heart” was typically a feminine representation of emotional response, especially that of a moral nature. Evans’ character Beulah possessed emotional qualities characteristic of women in the nineteenth century, but she also possessed a strong internal drive to be an intellectual.

In addition to encouraging women to think independently, Fuller also encouraged spiritual reverence. On religion, she wrote, “I wish woman to live, *first* for God’s sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry . . .” (Fuller 330). She thought that if a woman had any master, it should be none other than God. Fuller believed: “There is but one law for souls, and if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as a man, or son of man, but as son of God” (244). She thus implored women to look inside themselves to commune with the soul within, that soul being the true link to God.

Fuller also believed that a marriage with a strong religious foundation was the best type of marriage for both genders. It would be one for which all other duties and chores would be harmonious, including everything from sharing household responsibilities, to mutual affection, to intellectual stimulation (Fuller 272).

America was still a young country when Fuller was in her intellectual prime, and due to its valuing of freedom and individual liberty, she thought it was an ideal country in which to live and think independently. Beulah was written at a time (the mid-nineteenth century) and in a place (America) that was perfect for a character like Beulah Benton to reach her intellectual potential.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1941–2007) was a scholar who specialized in women’s issues. She argued that the private sphere—the world of woman—offered an alternative model to that of capitalistic competition, and believed that “The world of woman has become a world of reproduction in the broadest sense, including not only reproduction of the species, but reproduction of its values . . .” (Feminism 17). Reproduction in the broadest sense is thus a huge responsibility for women. Through her novels and letters, Augusta Evans was willing to assume that responsibility out of a sense of duty.

Fox-Genovese discussed the concept of particularism in her book, Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism. Particularism is the belief that each being should be the best it can be within the sphere of its own kind. A woman should therefore be the best woman that she can be. Particularism also recognizes a hierarchy in both society and nature where some “ruled over others and all men ruled over the women of

their own family” (Fox-Genovese, Feminism 116). But particularism was eventually superseded by individualism, thereby moving focus from place in society to individual role in society, whatever role that might be.

Fox-Genovese argues that the age of democratic revolution—at least since the eighteenth century—made important the concepts of individual rights and individual freedom. She observed that intellectual women have always been engaged in discussions of important topics of the day, but as the concept of individualism gained recognition, women authors could write in terms that would apply to both genders. So, improving oneself and reaching one’s personal potential could apply to everyone in terms of individualism. Instead of the view of particularism that a woman should be the best woman she can be, the view of individualism was that a woman should be the best person she can be. The concept of individualism thus broadened the possibilities for women, first in thoughts and possibilities, and then slowly in actual practices and roles, and literature evolved to reflect these changes.

Victorian Fiction

The third history to discuss to place the significance of Beulah in context is that of Victorian fiction, also referred to as domestic or sentimental fiction. The single pervasive theme of Victorian fiction is that of interpersonal relations within the context of a given community (Miller 94). More specifically, the theme is often manifested in the various ways a character “may seek to make a god of another person in a world without God, or ... in a world where the traditional ways in which a self may be related to God no longer seem open. Often this search for a valid foundation for the self is dramatized in a woman

rather than in a man” (Miller 96). Some authors of the Victorian era presented the vanity of life in a society that relegated God to Sunday mornings. This vanity often left a void that the characters struggled to fill. Evans must have recognized this too, since Beulah finally realized she couldn’t fill the void within herself with knowledge alone. For heroine Beulah, whose view was presented through the narrator, as well as author Augusta Jane Evans, only God could fill that void.

The narrator plays an important role in Victorian fiction. As described by Miller, the narrator “can move at will in time and space . . . making connections, comparisons, juxtapositions, and generalizations on the basis of a universal knowledge” (113). The narrator works in the present as conversations and events unfold. The narrator can access the past at any time for any character for the purpose of reflection and for showing that each character’s present is a justifiable function of their past. The narrator also has foreknowledge of the futures of all characters, but the reader rarely sees a character’s future due to the typically linear plot in Victorian fiction.

The narrator in Victorian fiction is not only omniscient in the fictional world of the novel, but is also omniscient in the real world of the reader (Miller 65). This omniscience gives the narrator much literary power. It can be poignantly powerful when the narrator’s voice is directed to the reader. The reader then gets a direct message from an entity that is expressing omniscience to the fullest degree.

Augusta Evans, as narrator, presents Beulah in such a way that the reader often knows more about Beulah than Beulah knows about herself. Beulah frustrates the reader at times with her stubbornness. But that stubbornness is also manifested in the

perseverance she displays while seeking to understand the mysteries of life. If Beulah's personality had been any more complaisant and acquiescent, she might have given up on her difficult intellectual journey.

There have been changing views of what is considered Victorian and what is considered feminist. William Fidler considered Beulah a work of Victorian literature in 1951 when his biography on Augusta Evans Wilson² was published. But there is a distinction between the ideal Victorian woman and the real-life Victorian woman. The ideal Victorian woman, as often presented in Victorian literature, "regards the family as the center of life, . . . was the arbiter of polite society and fashion, guardian of the arts . . . virtuous, modest, religious . . . [and] . . . morally superior" (Loftin 100). The real-life Victorian woman was a hard-working woman with many domestic responsibilities.

Despite striving for the Victorian ideal much of the time in her novels, Evans more often presented the real-life Victorian woman by presenting female characters who assumed career roles outside of the home. Beulah was just such a character, choosing to work independently to support herself without assistance of any kind from any individual. Beulah is thus a work showing female independence, with a heroine who is very proud of her independence. But it is also a novel that presents an independent heroine delving into the mysteries of life, and firmly resolving to understand those mysteries through intensive study of literature, philosophy, history and religion.

² Augusta Jane Evans assumed the surname of her husband, Lorenzo Madison Wilson, after they were married in 1868.

CHAPTER 3

PLOT ANALYSIS

At issue in the novel is how Augusta Jane Evans deals with the struggle of religion in a society that has become increasingly reliant on reason and rationalism. She does this through the heroine, Beulah Benton, a young orphan girl who struggles not only with religion, but also with the difficulties involved in being an independent female in a society that is only recently warming to the notion of female independence.

The aim for Beulah is to become a whole, happy self, comfortable with all parts, and fulfilled in all major areas of her life—intellectual, religious, and eventually, romantic. She feels fragmented through much of the novel, especially as it regards her religious odyssey, which she approaches through intellectual means. For Beulah to be completely happy with all parts of herself, she needs to properly blend the qualities of absolute honesty, integrity, knowledge, religious contentment, and finally, romantic love.

There are three major stages of Beulah's religious journey. There is the innocent faith she had when she was a young girl. Then follows a period of several years during which she was skeptical about religion, and during which she struggles with intellectual investigations. She eventually comes out of it all with a mature and confident Christian faith.

First Period of Beulah's Faith: Innocent Faith

The story begins with orphan Beulah Benton at approximately thirteen years of age and living in an orphanage. Not much is known about her upbringing prior to that

time, but she had developed an innate sense of independence, a keen awareness of duty, and a self-assured and self-confident demeanor. She could also be quite stubborn, especially when she felt that she was morally right in a situation.

Evans' decision to make Beulah an orphan forces the heroine to be self-reliant from a very young age. A young girl growing up and maturing within a traditional two-parent household would have been overly influenced by parental views. Being an orphan allows Beulah to explore on her own, and it also shows how a female can be fully independent when placed in difficult circumstances.

In her youth, Beulah has an innocent faith. She and her younger sister Lilly say their prayers regularly at the orphanage. She is also regularly comforted by religious passages when she is troubled. She is often in awe at the mysterious nature of God. Beulah loves music and is amazed at the wonderful power which allows its artful expression through humanity. She knows that beautiful music and art have the power to uplift the human spirit.

Beulah believes she was made for God's glory in some way, but does not yet know how it will manifest. But her religious-related thoughts calm her on occasions when she is despondent. When Beulah is occasionally distressed, she remembers a Bible verse and feels comforted. She trusts the mysterious God that is the foundation of her youthful faith.

Her first exposure in the plot to religious doubt is when she realizes that Dr. Guy Hartwell has no faith in God. As a child, she had believed that religious faith was a part of life, so she is surprised to meet someone who has none.

Beulah's first exposure to hypocrisy is with Mrs. Grayson, because the woman professes to be a Christian but does not act like one. Mrs. Grayson, who adopts Beulah's sister Lilly and friend Claudia from the orphanage, declines to include Beulah in the adoption due to her unattractiveness. Mrs. Grayson thinks the pretty faces of Lilly and Claudia would better suit them for a life in high society. Despite Mrs. Grayson's giving Beulah palliative reassurances that she could come to visit Lilly, she refuses to let Beulah actually do so. This situation distresses Beulah greatly. Dr. Hartwell, who takes her in to live with him when she is ill, reminds Beulah in a later conversation that the Bible charges her to forgive. She finds that idea difficult as it regards Mrs. Grayson, showing just how devastating hypocrisy can be for its victims.

Beulah's Unattractiveness

Being unattractive tends to isolate Beulah, and she spends much time alone. Dr. Christiane Farnan argues that Evans made Beulah unattractive not to gain our sympathy for the character, but to give the narrator a greater authoritative influence on the reader (39). By doing so, the reader is more likely to pay attention to what the narrator has to express. Having a cute or pretty girl struggle with problems would have been too easy. A cute girl with problems at least still has her attractiveness to help her in society. Beulah doesn't require the crutch of beauty to progress in life. Making her unattractive effectively isolates Beulah with her problems and places a barrier, not only between Beulah and other characters, but also between Beulah and the reader (Farnan 35). By having her more socially isolated than other characters, the reader can't get too close to Beulah and relies on the narrator to provide what is needed. Aloneness allows ample time

for practicing music, and she also spends much of her spare time exploring knowledge through books. With his permission, Beulah is free to utilize Dr. Hartwell's study and extensive library at any time.

Humiliation by May Chilton

At her young age, Beulah's sense of duty is tied up in pride and self-respect. After Dr. Hartwell's sister May Chilton humiliates her in front of others, Beulah resolves to permanently leave the plush home of Dr. Hartwell, where both had been residing. Fears often caused conflicts across social classes, and the effects of at least four economic panics that occurred before 1850³ reminded people that they could lose it all (Kindleberger 17). May feels threatened that a poor orphan girl might gain quick access to the resources she expected for herself and her daughter from her brother. But knowing that Dr. Hartwell would evict May and her daughter Pauline if he knew that May had abused her, Beulah assures May that she will not reveal the details. Evans accomplishes two things with Beulah's handling of this situation. First, Beulah treats May like a good Christian would, knowing that dire hardships (viz., eviction from his home) would fall on May and her daughter if Dr. Hartwell finds out what has happened, especially since he had already been frustrated with her selfishness. Secondly, Beulah is empowered in this situation as an independent person. She has power over May, but chooses not to use that power to harm. Instead, she resolves to use her power to move out and locate replacement lodging.

³ Economic panics led to market crashes in 1816, 1826, 1837, and 1847. Matthew Evans, father of Augusta Evans, went bankrupt following the 1847 crash.

Beulah is veritably distressed when she finally leaves Dr. Hartwell's house after May's rudeness. But she is comforted when she faithfully remembers, from Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the world." Beulah still has a faith strong enough to console her.

Dr. Hartwell recognizes an inherent, honest goodness in Beulah, and after much discussion, during which Beulah is stubbornly resistant, finally convinces her to return to his home and care. But Beulah only agrees to do so after understanding that Dr. Hartwell will pay for May and Pauline to live elsewhere. The reader gains respect for Dr. Hartwell for his generosity, knowing that he is willing to see a potential in Beulah that she can't yet see in herself.

Traveling

A friend of Dr. Hartwell's tries to convince him to join him on a trip overseas. Dr. Hartwell has no interest in doing so, saying, "Traveling is a fool's paradise" (Evans 107). What Dr. Hartwell meant was that many things are seen on trips, but very little of an important nature is actually understood. The implication is that traveling takes one further away from one's self, when in actuality, a person's true self accompanies one everywhere. The point made by the author here is that time is needed for self-reflection and that the travels taken by the wealthy from place to place will not bring them happiness. Happiness is an internal realization. Evans was setting up the situation so that one person (i.e., the heroine) would spend time exploring something other than faraway lands—knowledge, and her studies would eventually lead her to the true paradise of religious happiness.

The Mystery of Death

Beulah has a very inquisitive nature about her. She wants to know and understand life and spends the next three years learning, not only from her regular school curriculum, but also from exploring Dr. Hartwell's extensive library. By age seventeen, great questions begin to stir in her soul about mysteries associated with life and death.

As a physician, Dr. Hartwell had seen death often. A discussion begins and the doctor tells Beulah that "Life is but the germ of Death, and Death the development of a higher Life" (Evans 114). She was intrigued by this, and wanted to know more, but he is elusive and doesn't really want to discuss religious-related matters in depth. Dr. Hartwell's statement seems out-of-character from one who has no faith in God. But Dr. Hartwell has been trained in science, and understands life and death from a scientific point of view—that energy can't be destroyed; it just assumes a different form. Beulah would learn later that he is not an atheist, but is instead a pantheist.

Clara's Advice to Beulah

Beulah refuses Clara's advice to have an easier life by remaining in Dr. Hartwell's large home after graduation. Class identity was a very important social recognition in mid-nineteenth century America, dictating "where and how people worked, lived, and played" (Gigante 6). But Beulah says it is her duty to behave the way she does. Clara exhibits a very common view of women at the time, which was that men were far more likely than women to have the financial resources for an independent life. Clara wants an easier life, thinking that a "Woman was intended as a pet plant" (Evans 116). But duty compels Beulah to behave actively, not passively. She reminds Clara that

a woman has a mind and soul of her own, and such a woman must act and do. Beulah prefers independence.

Beulah Studies Many Subjects

Beulah studies almost all conceivable topics in Dr. Hartwell's library. At first she is amused by travel guides and biographies. Then she starts to explore his literature and philosophical works. She finds the works of Edgar Allan Poe especially intriguing. She picks up a volume of Poe's stories that she had read before, and recollects his Usher, Helusion, Ligeia, William Wilson, Morella and the Raven. After remembering numerous stories by Poe, "she caught tantalizing glimpses of recondite psychological truths and processes, which dimly hovered over her own consciousness, but ever eluded the grasp of analysis . . . she shrank appalled from the mutilated fragments which he presented . . . as truths, on the point of his glittering scalpel of logic" (Evans 121). Convolved imagery thus floods her mind.

She then reads Poe's Eureka and "was amazed as the seemingly infallible reasoning, which, at the conclusion, coolly informed her that she was her own God" (Evans 121). Dr. Hartwell warns her against reading too much of Poe with the admonition, "You must not play with such sharp tools just yet" (Evans 121). He realizes she is curious about life, and wants to guide her away from works that will be overly confusing. Beulah isn't yet mature enough to "detect the adroitly disguised sophisms," and she realizes that she has effectively "entered the vast Pantheon of Speculation" (Evans 121). The speculative, analytical mindset has increased its presence in Beulah, and she incorporates a skepticism that she didn't have before reading Eureka.

Second Period of Beulah's Faith: Skeptical Faith

Beulah realizes that she can no longer maintain the innocent faith of her youth.

There are simply too many issues to deal with that religion does not answer. She is determined to investigate and try to understand more. Her investigations unfold over the next few years.

Phase One Of Beulah's Skeptical Faith

Phase one of Beulah's skeptical period is marked by her explorations of the works of others. She looks to authors of literature, poetry and philosophy with the anticipation that their works will provide her with answers.

"Dream Upon the Universe". Dr. Hartwell and Beulah discuss Thomas De Quincey's Analects from Jean Paul Richter. One of those analects, "Dream Upon the Universe," used to inspire him, but he mentions with indifference that it no longer does. Beulah replies that she always expects that it will inspire her. She says that it shall continue to be a guide book to her soul since it encourages her to think about the greatness that must exist beyond our imagination. Their discussion continues, and Dr. Hartwell gives her a passage to read from Richter, the essence of which is that life is a continuous tempest, "a stormy chaos, in an everlasting midnight" (Evans 128). Beulah disagrees and believes that God embraces everything and is an actively involved God.

Dr. Hartwell then proceeds to ask her about her faith. She says it is still strong, but she is silently starting to have signs of real doubt. He then reminds her that he had warned her against reading too much. But she insists that she could never embrace a creed that she had not fully investigated. Dr. Hartwell's problem, as presented by Evans,

is that he has read and investigated so much that he has been left in the confusion without a creed at all.

Beulah realizes that there is no proof her spirit will not completely extinguish at death. There does not seem to be a single trace of evidence from all of the many people who have preceded her in death that there is actually something beyond corporeality. She vacillates between considering complex life questions (e.g., life after death?) and comforting religious passages (e.g., words of Job from the Bible, Handel's Messiah⁴). Despite her confusion, a moderate degree of faith still comforts her as she has a heart "resting in love of the Father" (Evans 132). Her heart may be resting in reverence, but her intellect is having difficulty understanding and reconciling complexities.

Determined to be Independent. Beulah is absolutely determined to live independently. Part of her sense of independence is her resolve to be an independent thinker. But it is her immaturity at seventeen that keeps her from distinguishing between the two. Nevertheless, Beulah is compelled to go through with the plan that she and Dr. Hartwell had agreed upon a few years earlier, namely that she would move out and live on her own after she finishes school. She does not want to burden him, nor would she ever consider taking advantage of his financial resources. She is prepared to be independent at all costs, exclaiming, "Support myself I will, if it costs me my life" (Evans 137).

Valedictory Speech. At her high school graduation ceremony, Beulah gives the valedictory speech. The title of her speech, reminiscent of the views of Mary

⁴ The oratorio Messiah was written by George Friderick Handel in 1741, and is an interpretation of the Christian Messiah as presented in the King James Bible.

Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller, is “Female Heroism.” This valedictory speech presents the argument that women should be the best that they can possibly be within their sphere. This singular passage of the novel clearly expresses Evans’ message to women everywhere. Women readers were far more numerous than male readers of domestic fiction in the mid-nineteenth century, and Evans was effectively speaking directly to them.

Hartwell’s Offer to Stay. Dr. Hartwell tries to talk her out of teaching, realizing it would be a hard life for her to sustain in comparison to her living at his house without having to work. But Beulah has too much pride, and will not accept what she thinks is his charity. She insists on independence and on working to support herself. Her pride of independence is so great that she will not even accept the offer of a reduced rental rate from a landlord at a boarding house who knew of her limited finances. Beulah insists on paying the full market rate, an action that is effectively liberating for her, because by doing so, she proves to herself that she can be independent without special assistance of any kind. Downward mobility can be just as liberating as upward mobility (Gigante 13). Living comfortably in Dr. Hartwell’s house would have freed her up to do more with her time, but leaving his home to struggle on her own affords her the opportunity to value herself.

Dr. Hartwell is frustrated with Beulah for her stubborn insistence to live on her own. But Evans has Beulah take the more difficult path in life, that of insistence to live independently and supporting herself through working, thereby showing the reader that a young girl with determination can indeed be self-sufficient.

“Ancient Mariner”. In a discussion with her friend Clara, Beulah enthusiastically shares that, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the most thrilling poem in the English language, and that it requires at least a dozen readings to recognize “its weird supernatural realms” (Evans 158). Many subtleties of meaning “intended by the poet (can be) easily missed unless the poem is read many times and thought about deeply” (Gardner 169). In this poem, revised at least thirteen different times, Coleridge “created a landscape that obeys other laws beyond those of nature. . . . (The poem) has a symbolic structure which shows a man glimpsing briefly the meaning of the universe which he lacks the full equipment to understand” (Beer 240). Beulah likes the challenge of a difficult poem, but Clara doesn’t want to have to think too deeply.

Clara’s Simple Views. Clara notices Beulah’s odd assortment of ideas, and they go back and forth in a discussion of various literary and philosophical topics. At one point in the conversation Clara starts to say that she is “content to glide on the surface—” but Beulah cuts her off with, “And live in the midst of foam and bubbles” (Evans 160). Clara retorts that it is better than groping away like Beulah, among “subterranean caverns” of ideas and theoretical concepts. Clara is happy with her more modest view of life and her simple faith.

Clara has a very simple religion that Beulah does not fully respect, yet Beulah notices that she is happy. Clara loves sentimental poetry, and has found religious comfort in poetry’s ability to stimulate the emotions. Her love of God is simple. Clara hasn’t examined her faith on any level below blind faith. Beulah cannot accept this type of faith,

thinking it is a lazy way out of understanding truth. Beulah thinks Clara has effectively chosen suppression, or at least “intellectual inertia,” over rationalism (Sofer 123).

Yellow Fever Outbreak. Beulah is so stubborn in nature that she actually resolves not to get yellow fever when it breaks out in her area. Harriet, Dr. Hartwell’s housekeeper, wonders, “I should like to know what you are afraid of” (Evans 154). The author has characterized Beulah as fearless.

Beulah helps nurture the sick during the yellow fever outbreak, feeling that it is her sense of duty. She actually enjoys helping the living, but realizes that she dreads having to shroud the dead. She still doesn’t know what happens after death and is compelled to investigate further.

When Clara is sick with yellow fever, Beulah has too little faith left to even pray honestly because she feels that faith has almost died in her soul. When Clara eventually survives the illness, she thanks Beulah for saving her. But, taking no credit for herself, and aware of Clara’s religious beliefs, Beulah tells her that God saved her. Clara agrees, but immediately clarifies that it was through Beulah’s instrumentality that God saved her. With her simple religious world view, Clara believes that everything happens through and with God, a belief that Beulah used to share.

Clara is Influenced by Poetry. The way that Beulah views the world is presented in another discussion with Clara about poetry. Clara’s simple religious beliefs have been influenced by sentimental poetry. Beulah believes that poetry is the highest form of insanity because of its make-believe world of visual imagery, limitless creativity, and the tendency of some poets to confuse rather than to illuminate. She thinks it must be

madness to spend so much time in that other, make-believe mental world and can't respect the assertion that sentimental poetry could itself be basis enough for religious belief. Yet Clara prefers simple poetry that warms the emotional heart.

Beulah's observations of the world are continuing to mature, and in a conversation with Clara, she mentions many poets and sizes them up, each with a few pejorative adjectives that show how she views the world, but not necessarily how the poets themselves really are beyond what is represented in their poetry. For example, she mentions "the frantic madness of Lamb, . . . the final imbecility of Southey, . . . the morbid melancholy of Cowper, . . . the bitter misanthropy of Pope, . . . the abnormal moodiness and misery of Byron, . . . the unsound and dangerous theories of Shelley, and the strange, fragmentary nature of Coleridge" (Evans 177). She could simplify and quickly analyze these poets, but still struggles with how to reconcile the major issues of life presented in their poetry.

Beulah actually loves and respects many aspects of poetry, but thinks religious beliefs should be based on something more than sentimentality. She wants to explore all departments of knowledge. Evans uses Beulah as an example of a female who works diligently to reach her unrealized intellectual potential. She doesn't necessarily have much leisure time, so she stays up late at night to study and investigate. Beulah is willing to invest the time and dedication necessary to continue to learn.

Beulah takes flowers to Clara one day and says that flowers are "God's undertones of encouragement to the children of earth" (Evans 184). Although confused and increasingly skeptical, she still sees the world in terms of religion and God.

Eugene's Advice to Beulah. Eugene Graham, an old friend from the orphanage, knows that Beulah's chance to remain in Dr. Hartwell's house would afford her the opportunity to have a life similar to his in an upper-class household. He also thinks that being a teacher lowers Beulah in the eyes of high society. Teaching was not an upper class profession, and in the mid-nineteenth century, there were virtually no respectable jobs available for women of high society who wanted to earn money (Riepma 17).

Eugene thinks Beulah would be better off by not working, at least in the eyes of high society. But she doesn't care about those who would have such shallow views of others.

Eugene thinks that one's position in life is reflected by financial worth and gentility. He grew up in the orphanage, but had been adopted by a wealthy family, so he has both perspectives on which to reflect. The middle- and upper-middle classes in America had either witnessed or experienced poverty due to the four economic collapses in the nineteenth century prior to 1850, and they did not want to end up losing much of what they had (Gigante 8). Conspicuous consumption through shopping was common, and the manner in which people dressed and decorated their homes was crucial for identifying their social status. Eugene prefers the more comfortable life to which he has become accustomed, and is content that his social status had been automatically elevated by his adoption. In contrast to Eugene's view, Beulah thinks that inner worth is the only type of worth that matters, and self-respect is of higher value than societal respect. She does not want to fall into a comfortable life. Rather, she wants to work and earn what comes into her life. Her independence-at-all-costs view is accompanied by pride and stubborn obstinacy.

Further Discussions with Clara. Clara is also independent, by circumstances, but would rather not be. She struggles to maintain a living as a teacher and resides in the same boarding house as Beulah. She observes that Beulah is self-reliant and needs no society for her happiness. Here Evans shows that Beulah is an independent young woman whose self-concept of her intrinsic worth is sufficient for happiness. More could be added as an enhancement to happiness, but more was certainly not needed. Books and learning are to Beulah as family and friends are to others.

Trying to encourage Clara to be more confident, Beulah tells her “there is nothing a woman cannot do, provided she puts on an armor of duty, and unsheathes the sword of a strong, unbending will” (Evans 190). Here is a good example Evans gives the reader for how a woman can maintain her inner strength and not let circumstances be devastating in such a manner as to let the emotions be controlling. Women can and should be strong on an emotional level.

Beulah tries to get Clara to reach out to try to understand life’s mysteries. Clara just wants a simple life. Beulah, seeing Clara as weak, and wishing to encourage her, says that one becomes stronger when difficulties are confronted directly.

Beulah questions another religious-related mystery in a discussion with Clara—“why curse a race in order to necessitate a Saviour?” (Evans 208). She was referring to the Biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve, and the eventual appearance of Jesus for redemption and salvation. Clara offers no satisfactory reply, and is glad that she doesn’t explore more, because she does not want to end up like Beulah and torment herself with myriad irresolvable cerebral explorations.

Discussions with Cornelia. Cornelia Graham is a high society belle. Her family adopted Beulah's good friend, Eugene, from the orphanage. Cornelia gave up much of her interest in high society life to explore religion and philosophy, and is so disgusted with the hypocrisy she has seen by churchgoing individuals that she just rejects religion altogether. But Beulah notices that Cornelia is more disturbed by her lack of religious faith than she is by her terminal illness.

Relationships between women of different social classes were common in mid-nineteenth century novels, and reflect a sisterhood of sorts that was enriching for all parties (Gigante 2). Cornelia has a sense of fairness about her and places no judgment on Beulah for coming from a poor background.

Cornelia appreciates Beulah's candor and realizes she has become tired of the shallowness of her regular social clique. She is impressed by Beulah's apparent philosophic and cerebrotonic contentment. Beulah says that regardless of how she appears on the outside, she is not content; she is actually troubled by many philosophical topics. Beulah says she never tires of her books, but only of the topics that they excite. For example, she proudly exclaims that she could read any work by the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle for hours on end, but then would be so full of ideas and cogitations that she would be wearied "beyond all endurance" (Evans 199).

Beulah has a long discussion with Cornelia, including topics posed by Emerson, whose works both believe are aimed at the doctrines of Christianity. Emerson had eventually withdrawn from "the ministry because he believed . . . that as a minister he

could not speak or feel freely . . .” (Douglas 275). Emerson was more interested in living fully in the present than in any afterlife Christianity promised.

Cornelia speaks against hypocrisy, including questioning the sincerity of priests and congregations. Evans’ Inez: A Tale of the Alamo (1850) had attacked corrupt Catholic priests. Her attack here is not as strongly pointed. Priests, being human, are prone to err, and sometimes self-interest gets in the way of being an honest representative of the religion. One of the problems with religion, as expressed by Cornelia, was that “Mammon is the God of this generation” (Evans 236). Too much emphasis on materialism and consumption meant that proper focus could not be placed on God.

German Philosophy. Since Beulah has not found satisfactory explanations thus far, “she plunged into the gulf of German Speculation,” and believes for a while that she has indeed found the “true processes” (Evans 209-210). She is especially intrigued by Goethe, but she soon realizes that those processes still don’t satisfy her. Not only does she not know what she believes, she doesn’t even really know what she doesn’t believe.

Meeting with Magazine Editor. Beulah meets with a magazine editor, who, after some discussion regarding remuneration, finally agrees to publish her work. She initially wants to write to supplement her teaching income. Besides teaching, writing was about the only other respectable way for middle-class females to earn money around the mid-nineteenth century. Writing allowed a woman even greater and far-reaching influence on others than teaching (Riepma 18). Female writers, especially in the mid-nineteenth century, saw sales of literature increasing, and realized they could reach many people and

earn money while they explored what it meant to be fully a woman. As studied by Heilbrun, “Women come to writing . . . simultaneously with self creation” (117).

Dr. Asbury Talks to Beulah. Dr. Asbury has a heartfelt discussion with Beulah, explaining the problems he had personally experienced while searching through the maze of metaphysical philosophy for spiritual answers. He comments on the mass of philosophical research being “sheer humbug,” and says that philosophers have always been trying to unravel the universal mysteries, but that “the arcane are as inscrutable now as ever” (Evans 246). Dr. Asbury explains that both he and Dr. Hartwell had explored much in the areas of philosophy and metaphysics and neither was satisfied with it. But Dr. Asbury observes that his wife is quite happy, and her blessing in life is that she has been a “consistent Christian” (Evans 246).

Doctors Hartwell and Asbury each have the advantage of exploring both the scientific and nonscientific worlds. Both are highly knowledgeable in science and medicine, but also in the humanities and in religion. Neither can find a suitable reconciliation between the different domains. Dr. Asbury comes closest since he can observe daily his wife’s true happiness as a Christian. The pure and honest expression of her religion makes him respect the Christianity he once questioned.

Mrs. Asbury. Mrs. Asbury is portrayed as the devoted Christian wife of Dr. Asbury, the medical partner of Dr. Hartwell. She portrays better than any other character that a woman can be highly intelligent, devotedly loving to her husband, sincerely caring of others, and spiritually reverent. She gets along well with all types of people.

Mrs. Asbury properly balances her public religion (e.g., church activities) with her private religion (e.g., reverence, prayer). Both Dr. and Mrs. Asbury are very kindly, nonjudgmental people who observe others in terms of their own intrinsic worth. They are not at all like some of the well-off individuals of high society who show off their wealth and fashion. Beulah is treated as an equal in their circle of intellectual friends that meets regularly to discuss deep and provocative topics, and she is certainly deserving of such inclusion.

Beulah starts to look upon Mrs. Asbury as a role model. The value of Mrs. Asbury's character in the story is as an example of one who is happy, wholesome and fulfilled in society, in religion, and in marriage. After Beulah leaves one afternoon, Dr. Asbury tells his wife that skepticism is widespread in society and that Beulah, with her stubbornness and inquisitive nature, must pass through the same ordeal that is testing the intellectual portion of every community. Rationalism had led to skepticism.

Pastor Mortimer's Sermon. One Sunday morning, Beulah goes to hear Pastor Mortimer's sermon, which focuses on the richness and pre-eminence of the Christian religion, and it almost seems as if it is directed at Beulah and her struggles to find truth. The sermon is based on the first and last chapters of Ecclesiastes, beginning with King Solomon's words from Ecclesiastes 1:18, "For in much wisdom is grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Solomon meant gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge is ultimately unfulfilling. What knowledge needs as its complement, in Mortimer's (and Evans') view, is a strong religious faith. Knowledge needs to be

balanced with a peaceful inner world, and the one he prescribes is the Christian awareness of God's love.

Pastor Mortimer's sermon is an example of the type of evangelizing that was common in the era of skepticism. His dialectic represents the Church's refutation of the many systems and ideologies to which people had been exposed. His sermon also illustrates how one could become disillusioned with religion altogether. After Mortimer's introduction from Ecclesiastes, he reviews "ancient oriental systems, which he rapidly analyzed, and held up as empty shells" (Evans 254). Pastor Mortimer then lifted "the veil of soufism⁵ (and) he glanced at the mystical creed of Algazzali"⁶ (Evans 254). Next he addresses Grecian schools of philosophy and argues that they had not been satisfactory. He then adverts "to the destructive tendency of the Helvetian⁷ and D'Holbach⁸ systems, and after a brief discussion of their ruinous tenets," he turns his attention and focuses, "with some erudition, upon the conflicting and dangerous theories propounded by" German thinkers (Evans 255).

At last, Pastor Mortimer finally discusses Christianity, which he reminds the congregation has withstood more than eighteen centuries of scrutiny. He argues that human reasoning is incapable of showing man his destiny, and "that human learning was

⁵ Soufism, or Sufism, is an ascetic, mystical Muslim system.

⁶ Abū Ḥāmed Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) was an Islamic philosopher and theologian, known for his skepticism and methodic doubt.

⁷ Helvetia was the Latin name for Switzerland, and the Helvetian system here refers to two religious confessions written in the mid-sixteenth century that express the beliefs of the Reformed churches of Switzerland.

⁸ Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) was a French-German philosopher, known for his atheism and writings against religion.

a great cheat” (Evans 255). Only through the Holy Bible can true wisdom be acquired. Beulah thinks the Pastor is a commanding speaker, and veritably erudite, but she is reluctant to accept his conclusions simply because of his polemics. Her nature requires that she investigate more on her own. For Beulah, listening to him is no more than a didactic intellectual experience. What she lacks is the edifying value of a personal experience.

Discussion with Dr. Hartwell. Beulah has a discussion with Dr. Hartwell regarding her recent explorations, and explains her frustrations. She has noticed that a lot of unmerited criticism has been laid on German metaphysics, and observes that some critics think it is a disease, but she thinks it is instead a remedy, remarking, “Metaphysics do not originate the trouble; their very existence proves the priority of the disease which they attempt to relieve—” (Evans 261). Dr. Hartwell interrupts and suggests it is only a “homeopathic remedy” at best. He reminds her again that he had warned her against exploring his library.

A long discussion with Dr. Hartwell ensues, during which Beulah explains many things that are still confusing. The more she reads in order to understand the world, the more “cloudy symbolisms” she is faced with, and “the deeper grows the darkness” (Evans 262). She expands her knowledge, but in the process, increases her confusion.

Beulah thinks Dr. Hartwell is perfectly suited to tutor her on her quest for two reasons. Not only had he, a medical doctor, thoroughly investigated with methodical rigors the domain of science, but he had also “carefully explored the mines of philosophy” (Evans 262). Beulah wonders about God, and how a soul, which is

supposedly a thread of infinity, could instill itself in a human body. After much discussion, and noticing her mounting doubt, Dr. Hartwell lets her know that he thinks she might be on the very edge of atheism. But she shrinks back, horrified at the thought. She does not want to become an atheist. True atheism, at the time, was very uncommon. Turner observed that, with the exception of poet and true atheist Joel Barlow, “America does not seem to have harbored a single individual before the nineteenth century who disbelieved in God” and he explained that the term “atheism usually amounted to nothing but a Deistic denial of revealed religion” (44). True atheists were very rare, and had Beulah actually been an atheist, she would have felt even more isolated.

Dr. Hartwell tells her he cannot effectively help her, and he should know since he had already experienced that skeptical frame of mind. Dr. Hartwell says he wishes he could help her find answers to the profound questions of the day (e.g., what happens after death), but he admits he is no Swedenborg.⁹ He tells her she’ll have to settle the matter in her own soul. Beulah’s problem is that she had been looking outside of herself for answers to questions that are rightfully directed to the inner realm of thought and cogitation.

Beulah presses Dr. Hartwell and asks about his religious faith, to which he responds that he has none. He does admit to knowing that he exists, and knows that there are many conflicting emotions within him. He finally clarifies his relativistic beliefs by saying, “All must be subjectively, relatively true” (Evans 263). She counters by saying

⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish theologian and philosopher who wrote Heaven and Hell, a lengthy, very believable account of what happens after death. In the book he claims to have visited both heaven and hell on numerous occasions, and presents incredibly detailed and convincing information about each.

relativism might be useful for psychological abstracting but it doesn't deal well with the problems of ontology. Dr. Hartwell replies that the machinery of ideas does indeed allow philosophy to cope with ontology, adding, "The history of philosophy shows but a reproduction of old systems of inquiry" (Evans 264). He says there is no definitive truth about ontology, and asks how the finite soul can even cope with the idea of "Infinite Being." He finally suggests that there are only two solutions for Beulah—pantheism or Pyrrhonism (i.e., utter skepticism).

Nevertheless, Beulah insists on exploring further. She says that even her name bids her to press on, and that there is a land of Beulah somewhere for the troubled spirit. The name "Beulah" is mentioned once in the King James version of the Bible, in Isaiah 62:4, and refers to the land of settlement that the Hebrews had been searching for after wandering the desert for years. They finally found a place of prosperity that they could call home, and in which they could be happy and prosperous. Beulah wants to find a place within herself that is also happy and spiritually prosperous.

Dr. Hartwell suggests that her woman's heart would not long be satisfied with the distractions of metaphysics. His remark was neither chauvinistic nor supercilious. Instead, his reference to a woman's heart shows that author Evans recognized a distinction between men and women—that women's emotional nature is very keen, and overloading the mind with arcane knowledge and philosophical postulates only results in unnecessary frustration as it regards religious conviction.

Beulah Doesn't Care For Pageantry. Beulah continues to observe society and her peers. She sees women degraded by the apparent social obligation to dress up prettily for

purposes of attraction. She sees the ways of carefree and thoughtless revelry for much of high society, and is disappointed with it. She feels she has more important issues to deal with than spending her time making merriment. She continues to spend a lot of time alone, and this solitude provides ample time for her study and reflection.

Cornelia Stands Up For Beulah. Cornelia hears people at a party mocking Beulah who, thankfully, was not in attendance. Cornelia confronts them and rebukes them, pointing out how shallow it is to value a person based on what they have, not on who they are. The reader is used to reading passages in which Beulah is present, but in this passage the narrator exposes the reader to an interaction beyond Beulah's involvement. But the omniscient narrator still expresses her own perspective through the character of Cornelia, one who has grown tired of the conceit of the fashionably elite.

Pauline's Matrimony. Dr. Hartwell's niece, Pauline, marries Pastor Mortimer, and is soon shocked when she faces the reality of domestic responsibility. She is reluctant to give up the life of society for one of subservience to her husband. She is not happy to realize that someone else is in apparent control of her. From a traditional, male-dominant viewpoint of society, men were in charge of the family. Pauline wasn't yet mature enough to know that there was a lot she could do in a marriage and within the domestic realm at which she could excel. At this point, Evans shows the apparent unfairness of such an arrangement; she was unmarried at the time she wrote Beulah. But as Pauline matures from a girl into a woman, she becomes more respectful of her role as a helpful wife. What she had thought was subservience as an immature young lady, she

understands as devotion as a mature woman. Once Pauline looks beyond her own self-centeredness, she truly values her role in the partnership of marriage.

Beulah's First Publication. Beulah's first published article, under the androgynous pseudonym Delta, was titled, "Inner Life." In the article, she disputes matters that Alfred Tennyson had expressed in his poem "The Palace of Art."¹⁰ She argues that, despite recognition of beauty in art, which admittedly does calm the soul, it is true that love of beauty cannot be enough for a soul that wants to know and feel more. It was certainly true for Beulah, for while she loves beauty in both art and music, they alone do not fully satisfy her soul. There are several occasions in the novel where beautiful music and art have proven to be heartening and uplifting for the observers. But that recognition of beauty is fleeting, not permanently soothing. Beulah believes that something else must exist that is even greater, something that will completely fill the soul. She is still trying to reconcile the ideal with the actual.

Philosophical History. Beulah puts aside philosophical ponderings for a brief period to study the actual history of philosophy, but, "She found the historians of philosophy as much at variance as the philosophers themselves." She remembers that Dr. Hartwell had said, "There is no criterion of truth; all is merely subjective truth." Subjective truth is unresolved for all except for the subject, him- or herself.

Victor Cousin. Beulah next studies the eclecticism ideas of French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867), which maintain there is no single criterion of truth, but that many theories and ideas may be considered, each of which provides a complementary

¹⁰ Tennyson's "The Palace of Art" was first published in 1832.

element of truth. With such a system, perhaps Beulah could find a view that would incorporate all she has studied thus far. For a while, she is satisfied, and Cousin's eclectic system works well for her. But when she examines his views relating to whether or not God plays an active role in life, she is appalled—she is not ready and willing to accept his subtle pantheism, with hints of the divine in everything. Cousin believed that there was a mysterious universal unity that binds together the ideas of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and that unity is none other than “the Absolute” (i.e., God) (Cousin 181). Beulah cautiously recognizes that, while bits and pieces from numerous creeds and belief systems might be complimentary, they are still fragmentary, and they won't necessarily all fit together perfectly to become a satisfying, unified creed for her. She becomes disillusioned again, and tires of looking to others for answers.

Phase Two Of Beulah's Skeptical Faith

Tired and overly weary of searching various systems and considering the arguments of others, Beulah decides she will still be open to the consideration of those systems, as well as to new systems she might encounter, but she will have to let her own sense of reasoning judge those systems. The reasoning of no one else will suffice. She has turned a corner in her searching. More than ever, she is determined to believe in something.

Through her philosophical struggles, Beulah wrestles with the grimmest doubts that can assail a human soul. Her own doubts, based on her current filter of the world, and filled with countless ideas from others, make it more difficult. She sees skepticism in

everything—essays, novels, poems, etc. If one looks for doubt, it will be seen in almost everything. She becomes increasingly doubtful, which continues to cloud her research.

Clara's Advice to Beulah. Clara, with her simple view of religion, encourages Beulah to just trust in the religion of Jesus Christ, in which she was raised. She reminds Beulah that her former simple and youthful faith had been comforting. But Beulah knows that her former view is too simplistic for her current sense of awareness and proud perspicacity. She values knowledge too much now to acquiesce to an unrefined and simplistic viewpoint. She does admit to Clara that she is a skeptic, albeit an honest one.

Clara reminds Beulah of the time she had prayed to God to calm the tempest that had thrown off course the ship Eugene had been on in the Atlantic Ocean. Clara tells Beulah that if she couldn't trust a human pilot (i.e., the ship's captain) when Eugene was considered lost at sea, then what makes her think she can trust herself as the human pilot of her own investigations. Her wisdom is simple, and to the point, but Beulah still thinks she can rely on her own rationality to ascertain the truths she desires.

Cornelia's Discouragement. Besides being sick with heart disease, Cornelia is discouraged by her observation of hypocrites. The inconsistencies of professing Christians have been disgusting for her, and she has given up on religion altogether for that reason, discarding religion for herself based on the hypocrisies of others. Beulah would never do that, insisting instead on investigating for herself. Both are disillusioned by hypocrisy, but only Cornelia decides to completely give up on religion without investigating fully. Cornelia finally realizes that Mrs. Asbury is her only example of a

good Christian, and a consistent one at that; she is disappointed in her inability to be more like her.

Cornelia realizes that Beulah has not found the truth she has been looking for either. Beulah says she will eventually find it, but Cornelia thinks she will not, exclaiming, “It is all a mocking mystery . . .” (Evans 309). Beulah says that the field of philosophy promises an answer, but she has just not yet uncovered it. But Cornelia tells her that philosophy and its synonym, metaphysical systems, are worse than useless, and “will make you doubt your own individual existence, if that be possible” (Evans 309).

Beulah asks Cornelia if she has even lost faith in Unitarian minister Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson, authors whose works had previously intrigued her. Cornelia admits that she has certainly lost faith in Parker, and also in Emerson’s atheistic fatalism. Cornelia confesses that the only faith she has is in Mrs. Asbury, and that her own skepticism has left her dark and gloomy. She warns Beulah not to end up like her, and both of them understand that reason alone is still insufficient to explain some of the mysteries of life and death.

Phase Three Of Beulah’s Skeptical Faith

Dr. Hartwell had explored every path of speculation, and after years of study and investigation gave up in despair and settled into refined pantheism, a view consistent with the notion that God, the Almighty, or the All-That-Is, resides in all that exists. It was certainly not an anthropomorphic view of God. Beulah could no longer rely on others for answers, nor could she rely on her own reasoning abilities to understand the mysteries of life. In this final phase of Beulah’s skeptical faith, she wants the religion to prove itself to

her (O'Brien 318). She hopes that answers will manifest in her mind in the form of revelation.

Subjectivism versus Absolutism. Beulah soon realizes it is unlikely that a literal revelation will disclose itself to her. So, she sets out to determine the line of demarcation between realities and myths, between truth and falsehoods. In addition, she believes that a revealed creed, code, or system would not be consistent with the process of rational thought, and that her own consciousness must ultimately furnish the truth. She wonders how far this sense of individualism could go, "And here the hydra of speculation reared its horrid head" (Evans 312). If her own consciousness were the only thing that would furnish the truth she sought, then it might be true for her, but not absolutely true. And here she is puzzled with what seems to be a huge gap between individualism and absolutism, between the subjective and the objective, between the local and the universal.

Beulah picks up a book by Feuerbach and reads, "Every being . . . has its God, its highest conceivable being, in itself"¹¹ (Evans 313). She peruses more and learns, "The object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken objectively . . . consciousness of God is self consciousness . . . Religion is merely the consciousness which a man has of his own, not limited, but infinite nature; it is an early form of self knowledge. God is the objective nature of . . . understanding" (Evans 313). It is understanding that she truly wants in her quest for truth. It is interesting to note that Feuerbach's view of God is a humanistic view. He didn't really believe that God created man, but that man created God as "the personified ideals of the community" (Miller 84).

¹¹ From The Essence of Christianity, by Ludwig Feuerbach, originally published in 1841.

Mrs. Williams. Mrs. Williams, former matron of the orphanage, is a kind woman. She says she never met a happy man or woman who did not have a reverence for God and religion. Mrs. Williams, who views a nonreligious woman as worse than a nonreligious man, tells Beulah that “a Godless woman is a horror above all things” (Evans 314). She knows that women have a special religious responsibility. Women share the legacy of historically being more religious than men, and women converts to Christianity in the faith’s earliest years “greatly outnumbered men” (Stark, What 61).

Beulah observes Mrs. Williams kneeling to pray for Eugene’s recovery after a devastating horse carriage accident. Beulah thinks that if she can also pray, it might ease her aching heart. But she can’t pray because “murky vapors of unbelief shrouded the All-Father from her wandering soul” (Evans 346). Beulah is more confused than ever.

Cornelia’s Final Hours. Cornelia is becoming increasingly despondent that she may soon die without a sincere religious faith. Beulah consoles her by saying that if Christianity is true, then God will judge her fairly due to the honest manner in which she tried to reconcile her doubts. But if Christianity and life after death is false, then there is no need to worry since death is nothing but annihilation. These words, although comforting to Cornelia, remind Beulah that philosophy has offered absolutely no help regarding what happens after death.

There is still a small fragment of faith in Beulah as she prays to God that she won’t die without religious faith. Cornelia soon dies without the truth and creed she sought, and Beulah now realizes that only death itself will be able to provide the definitive answer.

Pseudonym No Longer Needed. Beulah eventually writes using her own name.

Her works have stood on their own in the commercial market, have gained recognition, and there is no reason not to let her readers know that she is a female author. One of the reasons females sometimes wrote under pseudonyms was for the purposes of being “within the shelter of anonymity, the safety of secrecy, to write while protecting the quotidian self leading her appropriate life” (Heilbrun 112). Beulah already had established herself in the working world as a teacher, but she didn’t quite know what to expect from the reading public when she first started having her articles published. Her pseudonym, the genderless “Delta,” provided an anonymous literary power that might not have been available if her identity as a young woman had been initially disclosed. Writing anonymously allowed her work to stand on its own merit, and Beulah proved her ability, earning a moderate level of public interest and fame from her writings.

Dr. Hartwell tries to discourage Beulah from writing for fame. Despite the literary industry being dominated by males, female readership was very high in the mid-nineteenth century (Riepma 31). Beulah knows that the preponderance of her readership is female, but her articles also attract intellectual males, like Reginald Lindsey. Dr. Hartwell knows Beulah well and perceives that women in general have hearts that welcome “holier idols” than fame (Evans 329). He knows that Beulah cannot be spiritually happy and embrace fame at the same time.

Beulah writes an article about a woman’s happiness not necessarily being dependent on marriage. At issue in one of her articles is a hypothetical single woman’s happiness through independence. Evans has Beulah as her heroine in Beulah, and Beulah

has a heroine of her own in her article, so the reader is thus faced with a multi-layered, looking-glass-styled pronouncement of the independence of women.

Discussion with Reginald Lindsey. Beulah begins discussions with Reginald Lindsey, one who is at least her intellectual equal. Subjects of their discussions range from metaphysics to politics, literature, religion and beyond. In one discussion, for example, they talk about Quakerism and its rejection of all extraneous aids to knowledge of God. They then discuss philosophy. Reginald argues that the very absurdities of philosophy are the most potent arguments in substantiating the claims of Christianity. He argues that “Kant’s theory—that we can know nothing beyond ourselves—gave the death-blow to philosophy” (Evans 335). He argues that religious “mysticism contends that reason only darkens the mind, and discarding all reasoning processes relies upon immediate revelation” (Evans 335). He tells Beulah she can’t rely on someone like Swedenborg to provide her with a revelation. She must rely on the Christian revelation, which provides her with Christ as the liaison between the known (viz., humanity) and the unknown (i.e., God). Reginald reminds her that “Skepticism is the disease of minds, which Christian faith alone can render healthy” (Evans 335).

Reginald offers to loan Beulah several art books with European sketches and drawings. He observes that Beulah is not as much of an esthetic pyrrhonist as she is a philosophical pyrrhonist. He asks her what her esthetic creed is and she says it is most closely allied to that of Victor Cousin. Reginald suggests that if she accepts Cousin’s

theory of the beautiful¹², then she must also be inclined to accept his psychological and ethical ideas, which would indicate her leaning toward a pantheistic belief system. She counters that Cousin is not an adherent of pantheism. A discussion of their respective perceptions of Cousin's beliefs continues. Reginald argues that Cousin's pet doctrine of "Spontaneous Apperception of Absolute Truths" clearly renders man a modification of God; God is not a solitary sovereign, but is both substance and cause, and this is the view of pantheism. He is, at the same time, God, Nature, and Humanity. While Cousin denounces pantheism, his system is effectively just that, according to Reginald, who also points out that Cousin's view is slightly different in degree to that of Spinoza¹³, which identifies God with the abstract notion of substance; and like that of Hegel¹⁴, which regards Deity as synonymous with the absolute law and process of the universe. If the God of Cousin possesses a conscious personality, it is one that is infinite, and therefore comprehensive of our human consciousness, and we are therefore a part of it all. Reginald thus concludes his argument for understanding Victor Cousin to be a pantheist.

When it is obvious that the conversation is becoming tedious for Beulah, Reginald considerably backs off a bit, livens the conversation and reminisces about his college life, and about how enthusiastic he and his friends had been when being exposed to new ideas and concepts. They had been intrigued with the study of various theological and philosophical topics, including cosmothetic idealism, hypothetical dualism, noëtic and dianoëtic principles, hylozoism, and hypostasis (Evans 357). Reginald says that he and

¹² Victor Cousin believed there were two kinds of beauty: the real beauty found in nature, and the ideal, sublime beauty found in art forms of all types (e.g., poetry, music, paintings, sculptures).

¹³ Baruch Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher.

¹⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher.

his classmates would often explore philosophy, and as an exercise, would make up the most undemonstrable propositions by appeals to the law of contradiction,¹⁵ or of excluded middle.¹⁶ He thought that he was growing up to be wise. But Reginald and his friends finally realized that all of the absurd discussions had led them nowhere toward truth and the understanding of the complex mysteries of life, and that philosophy simply confused them all. As a student, Reginald hadn't really understood the difference between speculative reason and methodic reason. Adopting the former means that one is open to virtually any idea, but adopting the latter requires a more disciplined and structured approach (Whitehead 65).

Reginald acknowledges that he eventually realized that the process of philosophizing was more valuable to him than philosophy itself. He sums up well his eventual educational frustrations by mentioning the first three lectures of Sidney Smith on "Moral Philosophy." In those lectures Reginald realized that the speculation of countless philosophers are so confused and hypothetical that even their greatest admirers can't all agree on what they actually mean. Unlike science, philosophy doesn't actually rely on experiments, and unlike mathematics, philosophy doesn't have any formal methods of proof (Nagel 4). Meaning is not easy to discern, and when confused by rhetoric and faulty logic, understanding is certainly compromised.

The conversation between Reginald and Beulah continues on topics of idealism, ratiocination, rationalism, and faith versus intellect. They end up talking about the human

¹⁵ In logic, the principle of contradiction holds that the propositions "x equals y" and "x does not equal y" are mutually exclusive.

¹⁶ The principle of excluded middle holds that for any proposition, either the proposition is true, or its negation is true.

faculty of reasoning. Beulah admits that reasoning is often fallacious, but it does have the ability to grasp truths. Reginald rebuts that truth has as many phases and degrees as there are individuals, making each person a prophet in so far as how that person views the world; superstitious beliefs often result (Evans 360). Beulah suggests that the superstitions and fallacies of some people are no argument against the existence of universal principles. But Reginald wonders why those various principles have provided no unanimity of faith. He does admit there is one universal belief—that in the apparent human necessity of religion, an inclination that has developed over countless generations. One thing is sure, he adds: one person’s reasoning about God will not satisfy anyone else.

Beulah tries to dodge Reginald in the coming days as much as possible to try to avoid the deep and confusing conversations. He loans her one work of literature that he says will not necessarily be a system per se that she can rely on for truth, but will be an antidote to the abstractions she has allowed to flood her intellect. It is Sir William Hamilton’s “Philosophy of the Conditioned.” Reginald tells Beulah that Hamilton described two types of ignorance (Evans 365). First, philosophy, with its tools of logic and reasoning, is used to escape ignorance. Secondly, the consummation of all philosophy is ignorance since it reveals nothing about absolute truth. The pursuit of knowledge and understanding is essentially a course between the two types of ignorance. Reginald tells Beulah that he once had searched diligently for truth using reason, but then became lost in “the wreck of beliefs” (Evans 366).

Reginald encourages Beulah to confess her ignorance and inability to gain truth through intellectual explorations, and rest confidently in God and Christianity. Before he

leaves her alone to peruse the work by Hamilton, he shares with her his thoughts about the Biblical account of the fall of mankind. By wanting to be omniscient, “The first pair ate, knowledge mocked them, and only the curse remained. That primeval curse of desiring to know all things descended to all posterity,” and Reginald tells Beulah that she is exemplifying its existence by wanting to know everything. (Evans 367).

Left alone with Hamilton’s essay, Beulah devotes the time necessary to read it in its entirety. She is both stunned and overwhelmed. While considering Hamilton’s astute philosophy, waves of skepticism ebb and flow in her mind. As soon as one problem seems resolved, more problems open up to confuse her. Despite the angst she experiences, she never accepts atheism as the proper creed for her; she always maintains at least a thread of belief in God. She simply knows that something wonderful is there in the confusion. She subsequently admits that “philosophy had mocked her hungry soul” (Evans 371). Finally, after years of frustration while searching both outwardly and inwardly for answers, she drops to her knees, humbles her pride, and prays earnestly.

Third Period of Beulah’s Faith: Mature Faith

Beulah’s inquiry had continued after she moved out of Dr. Hartwell’s house, upon graduating from high school at seventeen. She left his house to live independently, not only in her accommodations, but also in her thought. That’s when “skepticism threw its icy shadow over her. She had toiled in the cavernous mines of metaphysics hopelessly; and finally returning to the holy religion of Jesus Christ, her weary spirit found its rest” (Evans 379). Pieces of her fragmented self finally mend, and she feels contentment for the first time in a number of years.

With “Oh, women! women!” the narrator speaks directly to the readers, wherever they may be, making a plea for them to prove themselves worthy for the noble mission for which they were created. Evans criticizes those who have focused too much on materialism and fashion, and pleads, “God help the women of America!” (Evans 373). Too many had turned their focus to material things and neglected what Evans felt was their natural duty to exemplify a high moral standard.

Beulah continues to study and write professionally. Many educated female writers in the mid-nineteenth century wrote with three purposes in mind—to earn money, to entertain, and to prepare young women to successfully handle life’s inevitable hardships (Riepma 19). Beulah’s writings evolve to warn her readers of the snares in which she has recently been entangled. She writes to direct fellow seekers of truth, just as Evans, as author, does with the novel Beulah.

Beulah is happy with her new mature faith in Christianity. The calmness inside her is most welcome. She reminisces about having just recently wondered about the meaning of life. The works of some philosophers had promised too much, while other works promised too little. She believes the Bible is the sole source for answers.

Beulah began to notice that when she was calm inside, it was easier for her to appreciate beauty in nature, music, books and art. Philosophy could still be puzzling at times, but it was no longer threatening. It no longer commanded her; her religious faith superseded all else.

The process of religious faith is neither all bright, like the innocent faith of her youth, nor all obscurity, like Cornelia’s dreaded lack of a satisfactory creed. She realizes

that Christianity still did not answer all questions, but it needn't do so any longer. Her religious faith compensates for what is unanswerable. She is content that hope and faith are now allies.

Money for Mrs. Grayson

Beulah had always been honest, even in her skepticism. But now she is being an honest Christian, giving her money to the near destitute Mrs. Grayson. Beulah magnanimously redirects some of the money she got through Cornelia's bequest. Mrs. Grayson is redemptively humbled by the generosity of one to whom she had formerly been cruel, and she realizes that Beulah has indeed touched her soul, enriched her consciousness, and exemplified the best in ethical behavior. Mrs. Asbury had been a good role model for Beulah, and how Beulah, wants to be the best Christian she can be.

Romantic Love

Beulah had once respected all that the universe of knowledge had to offer. But now she is happy to worship the God she believes is its Creator. She realizes there is still one thing missing in her life—romantic love. Evans doesn't think that a woman needs a man to be happy, but if a romantic desire exists, as it was for Beulah, then it needs to be fulfilled.

Evans realized that "The heart must have an idol" (384). There is a distinction between religious heart (i.e., soulful longings) and the romantic, emotional heart. Beulah's one unfulfilled longing is for the well being of Dr. Hartwell, who has been away for several years, and who she finally has the maturity to realize she loves.

Dr. Hartwell does finally return and Beulah embraces him lovingly. She professes her love while clinging to him. But he asks her if she clings to him because she romantically loves him, because she pities him for his lack of faith in God, or because she was grateful for his generosity during the earlier years of her life when he supported her. She responds, "Because you are my all" (Evans 411). Beulah has already proven herself a very capable, independent woman. Now Evans extends Beulah's domain in life to include being a loving wife. The all that Beulah refers to is the final component Dr. Hartwell provides for making Beulah feel fully whole. A man is not needed for a woman's happiness, but if she longs for love, only love can totally fulfill her.

After their marriage, Beulah resolves not only to be a wonderful wife and homemaker, but to relegate writing and her success as an author as peripheral to their relationship. She also wants to work, over time, to help Dr. Hartwell see the beauty of her own realized inner religious happiness. As a woman, she is willing to assume the responsibility of exemplifying the highest sense of morality.

Beulah admits to Dr. Hartwell that her infidelity had been a source of many sorrows. The infidelity she refers to did not have other men as its object. Rather, she confesses she had spent too much time focusing on things other than love, including pride, duty, ambition, fame, and independence. She does not, however, admit to spending too much time being skeptical about religion. Exploring truth had been a necessary part of her development as an independent thinker.

Beulah discusses with Dr. Hartwell her recognition of the values of the scientific world. She is amazed at what can be accomplished with studious, methodical systems of

inquiry. But she shares with him that the admiration of the wonders of the physical and scientific world are not necessarily enough for an inner world that desires spiritual harmony with God. She knows that one of the best things that can happen with a religious belief is the inculcation of the morality exemplified by Jesus. Beulah tells him that darkness awaits those with no moral law.

Dr. Hartwell asks her about her current beliefs and she says that not much in philosophy, science, literature, or history has “contributed one iota to clear the thorny way of strict morality” (Evans 418). She believes the Bible and its teachings are needed to illuminate the way, and knows that we can see a little, but not fully, as “through a glass, darkly.”¹⁷ We can see a little, but we cannot see and understand all.

Dr. Hartwell admits that her religion is full of mystery, and she replies, “Yes, of divine mystery. Truly, ‘a God comprehended is no God at all’”¹⁸ Evans (419). It is understood that if God could be comprehended fully, then He would not be much of a God.

In the last scene, Beulah lays her Bible down and looks up lovingly into her husband’s noble face. He affectionately puts his hand on her head and seems to ponder their conversation. The narrator ends with a prayer-like proclamation to the readers, “May God aid the wife in the holy work of love” (Evans 420).

¹⁷ A paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13, referring to our limited knowledge of God in this life, and the requirement of faith to be a Christian.

¹⁸ “A God Comprehended is No God” is attributed to Saint John of Chrysostom (347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Evans' Personal Experience with Skepticism

Augusta Evans started writing her first novel, Inez: A Tale of the Alamo, at age fifteen after her family had moved west from Alabama to San Antonio in 1845. Before moving back to Alabama in 1848, young Augusta was largely homebound due to the dangers of living in a frontier town in the decade following the Battle of the Alamo in 1836. Tensions between Anglos and Mexicans were high, and Comanche attacks on settlers were not uncommon. She had plenty of time to study in the family library, and eagerly explored philosophy, literature, history, geography and science. Inez was not so much anti-Catholic as it was anti-hypocritical, and was a means by Evans to present a serious refutation of some elements of Catholic doctrine and influence. Catholics were not allowed to seriously question their religious doctrine, and had to rely on priests for guidance. The inability to question doctrine was contrary to rationalism, and Evans criticized hypocritical priests. "Protestant evangelical truth emerges largely victorious in Inez," but Evans was likely faced with many religious-related issues that remained unresolved in the several years that followed (Frear 100).

There were high rates of Catholic immigration in the early- to mid-1800s, and tensions between cultures and differences in religious beliefs spawned many anti-Catholic novels by the 1830s and 1840s (Frear 100). Due to steady Catholic immigration, the period of the first half of the nineteenth century saw the Roman Catholic Church

become the largest church in the country (Ahlstrom 555). As a result, many existing Protestant groups felt encroached upon, even if only because group identity appeared to be threatened. The Roman Catholic Church represented “the most powerful . . . institutionalization of medieval superstition, sectarian narrowness, and monarchical despotism in religion” (Ahlstrom 556). Evans had recognized these problems and addressed some of them in Inez. Those issues were fresh on her mind over the next few years until the publication of Beulah, her second novel.

While young Augusta was largely homebound for the few years during which she lived in San Antonio, she was also at least partially homebound when her family moved back to Alabama three years afterward, but for a different reason. She felt she could no longer fit in with the upper class society that her family had been used to associating with before her father’s bankruptcy (Frear 97). And she also did not fit in well with her financial equals in the lower class who were not as well educated and socially refined. Spending a lot of time alone during her youth, as did her heroine in Beulah, allowed Evans to experience firsthand that women could be powerful within the domain of the household.

According to Frear, Evans had been studying the works of poets and philosophers whose religious views were more pantheistic than traditional Christian, and around 1855 she had serious problems with her own faith (101). Evans confessed to Walter Clayton Harriss, a Methodist clergy friend, that her speculation had been uncomfortably tormenting. On January 29, 1856, she had excitedly written to Harris, with many words underlined, “I was almost at that grim goal of speculation, where I believed nothing”

(Frear 101). She assured Harriss by the end of the letter that while her doubts occasionally resurfaced, her faith had been fully and permanently restored.

Harriss had probably been helpful to Evans because he, too, had passed through a skeptical period and eventually realized that religion and faith could be harmonious with philosophical inquiry (Frear 103). Once Evans had regained her faith, she was a devout Methodist until the end of her life. Around 1858, she wrote another letter to Harriss, and vowed, “Now as I write I am strong and well: strong in body, strong in faith, strong in hope for a life of usefulness; strong in a resolution to combat skepticism to the day of my death, and if possible help others to avoid the stormy path I have trod, ere I was convinced of the fallibility of human Reason” (Frear 104). Evans accomplished her mission with the publication of Beulah the following year.

Evans matured as a writer between Inez and Beulah, because she had explored a lot during her skeptical period. While “Inez had been a didactic exercise . . . Beulah was written from life, and consequently came to life for its reader” (Frear 105). Inez had been primarily ideological; Beulah was personal. Evans had truly shared herself in Beulah. The character Beulah exemplifies what Evans herself went through only a few years prior. Beulah’s periods of struggling with knowledge and skepticism were overwhelming at times, and it took a sound religious attitude, fortified with humility, to once again become sublimely reverent and serenely happy.

Evans earned a lot of money for Beulah and was able to live comfortably for the rest of her life. Freer observed that ambition “was problematic for Augusta, both in terms of her domestic ideology, which asserted that woman’s true mission was to exert quiet

influence in the home, and of Christianity, with its emphasis on the need for humility and self-sacrifice” (120). But it was her Christian faith that helped her properly balance a life that included both domesticity and literary fame.

Evans’ Mission as a Novelist

Evans took her writing very seriously and believed it was her duty to present the best in human nature through her literary art. She offered advice to a Jewish friend, Rachel Lyons Heustis, who was interested in becoming a writer. Evans encouraged Rachel to use her natural gifts, be true to her god, and “select the very highest types of characters for the standard has sadly deteriorated of late in works of fiction” (Sexton 21). She reemphasized her point in a subsequent letter to Rachel, in which she wrote, “The world needs elevating and it is the peculiar province of the Novelist to present the very highest noblest types of human nature” (Sexton 22).

Evans wrote to Heustis fairly often, and in another letter from 1860, expanded on the responsibility of an author by writing, “literary women have trials that the world knows not of; are called on to make sacrifices . . . [and] though our Sisterhood work in dark, lonely corners, we have joys and encouragements peculiar to the vocation . . . of doing God’s work” (Sexton 18). To do God’s work for Beulah meant the heroine had to move beyond her isolated self to a self that was fulfilled. The process of her evolving self involved exploring knowledge from every conceivable field of study.

Beulah and other characters struggled with different issues and with different types of literature. Sofer wrote about the types of literature that Clara, Cornelia and Beulah experienced that are the cause of their “spiritual failure” (122). Clara’s

sentimental poetry is portrayed as being an insufficient basis for deep religious belief. Clara must maintain a simple faith, but it is a faith that is necessary because the alternative (i.e., no faith) is much worse (Sofer 123). Cornelia has explored philosophical treatises, many that Beulah also studied. But Cornelia is so frustrated with fashionable religion and philosophical works that she can't rely on literature of any type to console her. Evans shows all of the things that Beulah has explored, and alludes to many more, sometimes with just a word or two in a sentence of conversation to indicate something that the heroine had read or studied (e.g., *Sibylline Leaves*¹⁹, *Zenobia*²⁰, *Philammon*²¹).

Evans wasn't interested in the trend of realism in literature, despite the opinion of many critics who thought it was the only acceptable genre for novels in the mid-nineteenth century. Sexton explained that "One only begins to object if it is asserted this genre of fiction is the only permissible genre, and that nothing else is of the nature of art" (171). Evans believed that "photographic realism was only one criterion of realism, and not a very reliable one" (Fidler 192). She thought the problem with a book like *Adam Bede*, by George Eliot, was that its realism was too coarse and vulgar. Fidler noted that "Her belief was that all the ills of the world are a result of mankind's failure to follow a Christian code of principles (including woman's allegiance to her established place in life), and the economic inequalities cannot be remedied until the primary moral vacuum is filled with brotherly love and Christian faith" (207). Her new religious faith was the moral compass that directed both her personal and literary life.

¹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Sibylline Leaves: A Collection of Poems* was published in 1817.

²⁰ Zenobia was a queen of Palmyra from the third century.

²¹ Philammon was a talented musician in Greek mythology.

Evans presents Beulah as one who can appeal to others and have an influence on them. Her conversations with other characters illustrate numerous struggles and differences of opinion. She is too stubborn and independent-minded to accept the views of others without investigating them thoroughly for herself. With the exception of Mrs. Asbury, no other character was a suitable model for Beulah. One way Beulah does have influence on others is through her writing. In the novel, Beulah had different motivations at different stages of her literary career (Sofer 121). She starts off eagerly ambitious but needs the money to supplement her teacher's salary. After she earns a modest degree of success, her writing becomes an intellectually driven endeavor. Finally, after regaining her religious faith, she writes to warn others against skepticism, just as Evans did in Beulah.

Evans presented morality as a primary theme in all of her nine novels. Fidler commented that most contemporary critics agreed with Evans' conservative morality (207). It was liberal intellectuals who had the most problems with her works, due mainly to their failure to fully understand the societal implication of the values underlying conservatism.

Feminism

According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The perceived cleavage between women's and men's modes of being and understanding, promoted by the ideology of separate spheres, has remained so broad and influential that no understanding of feminism ... is possible apart from it. On the basis of that perceived cleavage, many strong and self-reliant women have been able, in good conscience, to oppose feminism as

either irrelevant or corrosive of women's special mission" (Feminism 22). Augusta Evans was one such woman. She would not have considered herself a feminist by today's standards.

Augusta Evans maintained the belief "that women must accept their natures and their proper social roles" (Fox-Genovese, Introduction xxxiv). She believed in a hierarchical social order in which many factors—including gender, class, race and ability—prescribed "designated social roles" (Faust xxii). People fit in differently in society, and in different capacities, just as individuals of a family fit differently within the family dynamic. Fidler observed that "She was an early advocated of dignified careers for women, provided the women didn't neglect the domestic responsibilities which society and nature expected of them" (156). In Evans' mind, nothing was more important than being valuable within the home, assuming that a home life was what a woman wanted for herself. Fox-Genovese observed that "women do not so much feel belittled as empowered by their ascribed position within families" (Feminism 40). Evans understood this, and had no problem at all with women fulfilling a traditional role within a family. She merely accepted her womanly role with enthusiasm, knowing there was much that she and other women could do to reach their respective individual potentials.

Evans did not believe that women needed men for their salvation. She believed that both men and women should accept ultimate guidance only from God (Fox-Genovese, Introduction xxxiv). Women could not only think for themselves, they could also be intellectuals on par with any man. They could also be financially independent, if

they so chose. But spiritual guidance was one thing that neither gender could offer the other.

Influential Books and Authors

Beulah explored numerous books and authors during her search for answers to life's complexities. A few of these works, some discussed in conversations with other characters, will help to illustrate what Beulah was exposed to and the complexity of her contemplations.

Eureka

Originally published in 1848, Eureka, by Edgar Allan Poe, was the pivotal book that opened wide the door of speculation for Beulah. She had already read several of Poe's works, but the imagery and thoughts that were stimulated in her mind while reading Eureka were powerful indeed, especially because the book encompassed so many fields of knowledge, including logic, metaphysics, and astronomy.

Poe describes early on in Eureka that there are two roads to truth. Deductive (a.k.a., a priori) reasoning is reasoning from the general to the specific. An argument is deductive if the conclusion that is reached is a logical consequence of the premises. Inductive (a.k.a., a posteriori) reasoning is reasoning from detailed facts to general principles or laws; conclusions are made based on observations.

Poe pulls the reader into his rhetoric by initially making simple statements of fact. For example, he states that space cannot be enclosed by two line segments. Another example is that a whole is always greater than any one of its parts. A third example is that

contradictions cannot both be true—an item is either an apple, for example, or it is not an apple.

Poe then describes the two modes of discussion—ascension and descension.

Ascension indicates starting with small topics and expanding the discussion to include broader topics; the mode of descension works *visa versa*. Taking the idea of ascension to its logical conclusions, Poe writes that if one continues to ascend, all certitude gradually “becomes lost in the remote” (18).

Poe then identifies the word God as a concept that we try to associate with the infinite, but it is not possible to do it accurately. If we keep expanding our ideas and concepts toward an idea of infinity, using the mode of ascension, we always fall short because infinity cannot be fully conceived. We can’t conceive of something without limits because it is inconceivable.

Poe then uses the mode of descension to try to grasp the concept of God. If God represents everything in existence, then the next smaller things in descending order would be massive galaxial systems. Larger systems are made up of smaller systems, such as planetary systems. Planets themselves are made up of smaller components which all seem to be driven to a center due to the gravitational pull. All components of matter seems driven to their respective centers; matter is pulled together to form unity of some kind.

Poe’s discussion incorporates the smallest of atoms to the largest of astronomical systems. Those smallest of things are always a part of their larger constituents. So, there is both unity and diffusion. And each system is comprised of its own laws—laws that

maintain that unity. But there is also a spiritual component, according to Poe, and matter is therefore a means, not an end (131-132).

Poe writes that each soul is, in part, its own God, since God, as an infinite being, would comprise every single system, large or small. From the spiritual ether that is everywhere, to the spirit individualized, to independent thought, there are infinite individualizations of Himself (Poe 137). Poe then directs the reader at the end of the story, “That God may be all in all, each must become God” (138). Thus concludes Poe’s Eureka. Beulah must have been excited to realize, through Poe’s view, that she is a component of infinity, and therefore, has God in her, and thus is her own God. After completing Eureka, she wanted to understand that infinity of which she was a part, and began her explorations in earnest.

“Dream Upon The Universe”

“Dream Upon the Universe” was one of the 24 analects that Thomas De Quincey translated from the works of German writer Jean Paul Richter. In Beulah, Dr. Hartwell says that he used to be inspired by “Dream Upon The Universe,” but that he no longer can be. But Beulah, in her eagerness to learn subjects from practically every field of knowledge, says she will always be inspired by it.

In “Dream Upon The Universe,” the reader is awed by the depictions of the grandness of space and the celestial bodies in our vast universe. The most distant stars that we know of require the passage of millions of years for their light to reach us. Space is immeasurably vast. De Quincey writes that there is ample room in space not only for

all physical objects, but also for all of the spirit world, just as there is enough room in each human brain for its own individualized spirit.

“Dream Upon The Universe” includes the recollections of a dream in which the dreamer’s inner spirit emerges from his body as a being of light. The spirit guide tells the dreamer that “two thoughts are the wings with which I move; the thought of *Here*, and the thought of *There*” (Richter 198). The thought of things far away is enticing to the dreamer, who then embarks with the guide on a journey to new and very distant places.

The spirit guide and dreamer explore places far and wide in the universe, to the absolute edges of existence, at reaches where the universe seems to end in infinite darkness. The dreamer feels lonely and despairs trying to comprehend infinity. But the spirit guide offers encouragement with, “O ! creature of little faith ! Look up ! The most ancient light is coming” (Richter 200). That ancient light came from a place beyond all thought. The spirit guide tells the dreamer that there is no need to despair since “In the presence of God there is no emptiness . . .” (Richter 201). The spirit guide tells the dreamer that he can only have earthly images of the unearthly while still in human form. But when the spirit guide itself connects to its unearthly component—its ancient light—all becomes light, very peaceful light. The dreamer realizes he has been given a glimpse of the spirit world, and is surprised to see that life still exists there. He realizes that there is no death, only life. The spirit guide becomes invisible as it merges with its “unseen world of spirits” (Richter 202). Then the dreamer, left without its guide, becomes lonely, wishing for some understanding companion. He then sees the image of Jesus, and realizes that the Christ had been sent by God as a liaison between the finite and the infinite,

between the known and the unknown. Jesus is therefore a personification of God, a personal God, and is here to comfort and guide us in our earthly struggles.

The dreamer awakes happy and invigorated with the new belief of certainty that there is life beyond death. “Dream Upon The Universe” is a call to readers to think and imagine to the very ends of our outer limits, then try to imagine even beyond that, beyond all existence. Doing so gives a hint of the infinite, and that hint of the infinite, according to Richter, is best understood through association with the Christ of Christianity. Beulah found religious inspiration in this story as it was an appeal to investigate and try to comprehend that which cannot be comprehended. “Dream Upon The Universe” is particularly inspiring for those who want to keep trying to comprehend the infinite.

Swedenborg:

The original title of Swedenborg’s unusual book on heaven and hell was Heaven and its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen. He presented himself as a very honest, sincere and sensible individual. At the time of the publication of Beulah, only two explanations were possible to explain the strange account of Emanuel Swedenborg in which he claims to have physically visited both heaven and hell on numerous occasions (Wilson 13). The scientific view of his experiences was that he had been delusional. The religious view was that since God often works in mysterious ways, perhaps He has chosen to work through His vessel, Swedenborg. So when Evans inserted comments by Dr. Hartwell and Reginald Lindsey in the novel referring to Swedenborg, she would have been aware of only these two possible explanations for Swedenborg’s odd account. A third view, a psychological view, did not arise until the end of the nineteenth century

through the research of Carl Jung, namely that the mind may have deep unexplored recesses that allow the expression of untold information and archetypes. (Wilson 13). This third view addresses much of what is revealed through mystical and psychical phenomenon.

Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802–1882) and several of his works were mentioned in Beulah in more than one discussion between Beulah and others. Emerson's Nature was published in 1836. A one-time minister, Emerson had been fascinated by the recent discoveries in geology, zoology, and botany. He wrote about the religious and philosophic dimensions of these new discoveries and the new scientific mind that encouraged them. His belief about nature was “that the external universe and the mind are exact equivalents, corresponding with each other in every particular because they are, finally, products of a single spiritual source” (Robinson 21).

Emerson didn't necessarily discard God and religion. Rather, he saw spirit in everything. In fact, he believed that our ultimate reality was a spiritual reality, and that our material world, along with its innumerable natural laws, was just a manifestation of that spiritual reality.

Emerson's Nature, along with the books by Brownson and Furness, appealed to those who appreciated the recent discoveries in nature and science, but who still had spiritual longings. Not long after the publication of Nature, Emerson gave an academic lecture in August of 1837 at the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard, and followed it less than a year later, in July of 1838, with a lecture for the graduating class at the Harvard

Divinity School. The first lecture was presented as “The American Scholar,” and was well received. But the graduation address, comprised of essentially the same body of information, was couched as “a new religious doctrine,” and was decidedly controversial. Emerson clarified his beliefs by saying that he taught only one doctrine—that of “the infinitude of the private man” (Robinson 11). The academic lecture had been authoritative and intellectually stimulating. But it was divisive when recast as a religious lecture for the Divinity School. According to Robinson, what is commonly known as “The Divinity School Address marked a break in the course of religious thinking in America, pointing to a universal, anti-supernatural, and largely secular religion” (11).

Emerson presented Jesus as the singular example of a man who allowed the greatness that is potential in all of us to fully actualize in himself. At the Divinity School, Emerson shocked some by saying that Jesus’ “claim to a divine nature was in fact only a full articulation of a universally available human potential” (Robinson 63). Also referring to Jesus, Emerson wrote, “Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man” (Emerson, “An Address” 113). This view was understandably shocking to many who maintained the traditional belief that God chose to incarnate in only one individual.

Emerson was very keen at expressing what he understood to be a universal religious impulse. But he shared two criticisms of the Christian Church at the Harvard Divinity School. First, the Church had placed too much emphasis on the person of Jesus. It had become more of a religion about the person of Jesus than of his principles for living. Secondly, the Church was focused too much on what was and what had already

happened. He thought that more focus should be on recognizing “that God is, not was” (Emerson, “An Address” 116).

Emerson also made a comment about the clergy at the Divinity School. He said he was grateful for their contribution, for their intellect, and for their insight. But he was a man too, like they were, and needed to think for himself rather than being told what to believe. It was a strong argument for independent thought, one which was not unwelcoming to other views, but one which required the observation and consideration of other views, and required the using of one’s own reason and intellectual faculties to decide what to accept.

Emerson did not attempt to establish any official system that would require new forms and rites. Instead, he suggested that those interested in his views “let the breath of new life be breathed . . . through forms already existing” (Emerson, “An Address” 126). Despite his criticism of the Church, he still believed his views were not inconsistent within the framework of existing religious practice.

Emerson wrote several essays in 1838 that further defined his views. A few were mentioned in Beulah in one of the deep discussions between Beulah and Cornelia. Compensation was inspired after Emerson had listened to a minister’s sermon, part of which was an observation of the apparent fact that life was not all fair; one must sometimes wait for his or her reward in the next life. Emerson argued that the view that justice was sometimes not satisfied until the next life was fallacious, and that that view might actually encourage more crime. He believed the universe has its own form of justice, and not only was every crime punished in some form or fashion, but every good

deed was rewarded in some manner. It was equivalent to the Eastern view of karma. Just as a fruit tree grows from a seed, but takes time, so does the concept of cause and effect already have its effect quotient in the equation. We can't always observe natural justice and punishment. We are all a part of a larger process, and the universe is represented in every single atom. Every atom is representative of all of existence. Emerson clarified with, "The heart and soul of all men [are] one . . . Jesus and Shakespeare are fragments of the soul, and by love I . . . incorporate them in my own conscious domain . . ." (Emerson, Ralph 301). He wanted to incorporate the finest qualities that he observed in others.

In one discussion with Cornelia, Beulah acknowledges that she believes in the Emersonian law of compensation. Cornelia had despaired due to her illness and in the failure of her own philosophical struggles, but she had found comfort in agreeing with Emerson that the soul has the capacity to equalize any sufferings of one's physical condition. She might be sick now, but has hope for something better in her expectedly short future. She understands that Emerson's law of compensation applies "solely to earth and its denizens" (Evans 227). She believes that the very nature of the law of compensation precludes the need for any retribution in an after life—the law applies now, in the present, and while we are still alive. Cornelia observes how these views must be shocking to Christians. Beulah acknowledges the comment, and agrees, saying that "Emerson's works . . . are aimed at the doctrines of Christianity . . . [and] . . . there is a grim, terrible fatalism scowling on his pages" (Evans 228).

Cornelia then asks Beulah if she is willing to accept Emerson's deistic system. Beulah says that his system can't be considered deistic since Emerson is not really sure

what he believes about God. Beulah comments that some of Emerson's works seem inconsistent when compared with others. She mentions his Self-Reliance as an example of one essay, the theme of which is discernible from its title, which seemed to be at odds with what he wrote in The Oversoul, where he intuitively acknowledges, and acquiesces to a higher power than his own. Evans' characters portray Emerson as sometimes indecisive and inconsistent, and his writings as fragmentary. Emerson himself scoffed at inconsistency being problematic by writing, "Speak what you think now . . . and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks . . . though it contradict everything you said today . . . Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict (what) you have stated in this or that place" (Emerson, Self-Reliance 75).

Beulah acknowledges that Emerson's writings are "sparkling, and often dazzling, but . . . try to fit them into a whole, and the jagged edges refuse to unite" (Evans 229). Beulah admits to once thinking she had found a creed she could rely on in Emerson, but now believes him to be the prince of pyrrhonists (Evans 229).

Cornelia argues that Emerson's creed was essentially pantheistic. But Beulah counters by saying that Emerson admitted in Circles that he was only an experimenter and that nothing he wrote should necessarily be relied on or valued by others. Beulah remarks that Emerson's view is much closer to nihilism than to pantheism.

When Cornelia refers to the "atheistic fatalism" of Emerson, she shares her observation of Emerson's view that there is a sort of predetermination in life, but that it is not directed by anything outside of the system of processes. In other words, there is fatalism, but it is not actually caused by an involved God. Instead, it happens as a result

of the various interplay of events and their consequences by countless choices made by thinking beings and influenced by various forces in life. So, Emerson was not an atheist as the term is typically used today—one who disbelieves in God. Instead, he believed that whatever God truly was could be exemplified in its existence in every single atom in the universe, and was therefore involved at all levels in all processes.

On Emerson, Margaret Fuller wrote, “He belongs to [those] . . . who worship the one God only, the God of Truth. They worship, not saints, nor creeds, nor churches, nor reliques, nor idols in any form. The mind is kept upon to truth, and the life only valued as a tendency toward it” (332). Evans’ apparent criticisms of Emerson through her characters are her apparent rebuttal to his contrary opinions about traditional Christianity. Evans had no problem with an honest searching for truth. Her position was that the search for truth alone will never fully be satisfied when those things being searched have to do with a realm beyond our understanding. It is for those things that faith is required.

“Philosophy Of The Conditioned”

This work, by Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856), was the last one that Beulah read before humbling herself and finally acknowledging that she couldn’t possibly know and understand everything. The work had been loaned to Beulah by Reginald Lindsay, a character who had also explored numerous works in a search for truth. He had progressed farther along the path of investigation than had Beulah, and was trying to guide her.

Hamilton was a Scottish metaphysician who was known for his explorations of topics related to consciousness and thought. Henry Longueville Mansell, an apologist of Hamilton’s philosophy, wrote, “To think, according to all the real operations of thought

which consciousness makes known to us, is to condition” (122). Hamilton believed that to be conscious at all, a person had to be conscious of something, of some object of thought. Thinking effectively conditions that object of thought. Something without any conditions at all would be the unconditioned. It is the problem of the unconditioned to remove distinctions that would make it conditioned. But as long as the ideas of the unconditioned and the conditioned remain distinct, there is no actual understanding or experience of the unconditioned, only a “pair of conditioned existences” (Mansell 4). That which is understood is conditioned by our comprehension; the thing is conditioned by the observer. Beulah wanted to try to go beyond her limited understanding to see how the unconditioned affected her life, but she finally realized that the topic is essentially unapproachable. Conditioned existence is existence in time, but “to attain a philosophy of the unconditioned, we must rise to the conception of existence out of time” (Mansell 47).

Just because something can be imagined does not make it real. A twenty-foot-tall human, for example, can be imagined, but not one exists outside of the imagination. But imagining, thinking about, and trying to understand things beyond the corporeal world (i.e., that beyond the world of the conditioned) is always inconclusive.

Hamilton discussed the relation between existence and thought as sometimes being intrinsic, and sometimes being extrinsic. If existence has substance and quality, it is the intrinsic, or qualitative, relation. Substance and quality are inseparable. In contrast to the intrinsic relation of existence, the extrinsic relation is quantitative, and is threefold—time, space, and degree. Time and space are necessary for thought, according to Hamilton, but degree is not an absolute condition of thought (Tyler 18).

If we think we can conceive of the “infinite in time or space, we only deceive ourselves by substituting the *indefinite* for the infinite, . . . [and] no two notions can be more opposed . . . What the mathematician calls the *infinite*, the metaphysician calls the *indefinite*, and that arguments drawn from the mathematical use of the term *infinite* are wholly irrelevant to the metaphysical” (Mansell 114). The point being made is that not even all philosophers use terminology specific enough to prove their case.

Of the branches of philosophy, logic is born from the condition of non-contradiction (i.e., x cannot equal something that is not x), while metaphysics comes from the idea of relativity (Tyler 18). The condition of relativity effectively limits our knowledge. Of the absolute, we have no knowledge. Things are known only due to their relative natures, and “This is the whole scope of the philosophy of the conditioned” (Tyler 19). It is not reasonable to equate an understanding of a relative nature of something with fully understanding it. The understanding of the taste of salt, and the feeling of salt crystals on the fingers, is very different from what salt is in and of itself (i.e., its essence).

Plato thought that the highest aim of philosophy was to ascend to the unconditioned (Mansell 3). In other words, philosophy should, using its tools of logic and reasoning, strive to understand that which has no conditions (i.e., no restrictions or limitations) for existence. If the unconditioned could be understood, then the rest of the world of conditioned existence could be fully understood. But human comprehension always uses a filter of conditioning.

Hamilton identified three major ways or systems to view ontology or the ultimate nature of existence (Mansell 97). A system of Egotism views all phenomena as modes of mind. This view is also known as idealism since thought produces ideas. Secondly, a system of materialism maintains the view that all phenomena are modes of matter. In addition, a system of pantheism views all phenomena as a mode of Divine existence. Hamilton identifies the pantheistic view as that of indifferentism, and this view sees true existence as neither all mind nor all materialistic. It is a view which sees the differentiation between mind and matter disappear; instead, they merge into something “higher than both” (Mansell 8).

The distinction between reason and faith is not always clearly distinguishable. The sphere of belief is always greater than the sphere of knowledge, and it pragmatically should be. It is valuable when we are pushed so as to expand knowledge, as science continues to prove. But when trying to grasp the concept of the unconditioned, success is never realized. Mansell mentioned that the main point of Hamilton’s philosophy “is the absolute necessity . . . of acknowledging the existence of a sphere of belief beyond the sphere of thought” (51). Faith is therefore needed for matters of the unconditioned. Beulah, after reading Hamilton’s philosophy, finally began to believe that reason and faith can coexist simultaneously.

Mansell shares short summary views of numerous individuals who highly valued reason and logic, but who also maintained a strong religious faith (23-28). He includes the views of Archbishop John of Chrysostom (347-407), Bishop Basil of Caesarea (330-379), Archbishop Gregory Nazianzen (329-389), Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 313-386),

Saint Augustine (354-430), Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376-444), Saint John of Damascus (ca. 676-749), Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1275), Theologian Richard Hooker (1554-1600), Archbishop James Usher (1581-1656), Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611-1684), Bishop John Pearson (1612-1686), Bishop William Beveridge (1637-1708), and Reverend John Leslie (1650-1722). Extracts from these various individuals were combined into one summary description, and represented in first-person plural as, “We believe that God in His own Nature is absolute and unconditioned . . . but we can conceive Him only by means of ideas and terms which imply temporal relations, a past, a present and a future . . . We believe in an Absolute Being, in whose nature these conditions and relations, in some manner unknown to us, disappear in a simple and indivisible unity” (Mansell 28). Beulah could see how many great thinkers and religious leaders maintained religious beliefs based on faith, while at the same time valued rationality.

Hamilton believed that faith in the inconceivable must not only be accepted by the Christian, “but also by the pantheist and atheist . . . the difference being that while the Christian takes a stand on a faith which is in agreement with the authority of scripture and the needs of human nature, the pantheist and atheist are driven to one which is equally opposed to both, as well as to the pretensions of their own philosophy” (Mansell 46). So if the religious believer can admit to not knowing everything, then surely nonbelievers must also be able and willing to admit the same.

“If all conditioned existence is dependent on some first and unconditioned principle, either that principle must be identified with God, or our philosophical

speculations must fall into open and avowed atheism” (Mansell 12). This is similar to the view that Dr. Hartwell shares with Beulah when he tells her that she can be either atheistic or pantheistic. For Hartwell, the rational view is that God is either everywhere, or God is nowhere. Beulah took a slightly different position. She no longer felt compelled to decide one way or the other, but she did accept the religious tradition in which she was raised, deciding that if she was going to err, it would be on the side of piety. She took it even one step further by re-embracing her faith after what she learned from Hamilton’s “Philosophy of the Conditioned.” What she acknowledged from his work was that she simply could never know everything in this corporeal life.

Evans’ Narration Style

The narrator in Victorian fiction “represents . . . the collective consciousness generated by people living together in a community,” and the narrator effectively speaks as “this immanent and all-pervading social mind” (Miller 3). Evans didn’t speak for the secular segment of the social mind—those who were skeptical. Rather, she spoke for the religious segment.

Evans wrote as an authorial narrator, who narrates from the third person, omniscient viewpoint. This type of narrator has knowledge, not only of the fictional world of the characters, but also of the real world of the reader. Such a narrator also makes “judgments concerning other writers, books, and/or historical events, as well as cultural norms” (Farnan 32). Judgments that the reader needs make this type of narrator more powerful than first-person narration, as in, for example, Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë. Jane Eyre was written in a first-person narrative, so it is easy to get to know the

heroine. In contrast, Beulah's isolation gave Evans a stronger narrative voice. According to Farnan, Evans had to oppress and isolate Beulah in order to have that level of authoritative power (38). Oppressing a male character would not have been as culturally acceptable since males are supposed to be strong. Any male dominated by another character—whether male or female—would be considered weak by the reader. But oppressing a female character was easier since females were more often traditionally oppressed by cultures.

What Beulah goes through shows that she has pulled through her oppression and gained a stronger position. Had she remained under the support and care of Dr. Hartwell after graduation, she never would have been as convincing a character to the reader. Overcoming obstacles makes Beulah believable.

Beulah's marriage at the end of the novel is an act of power, not of acquiescence in the sense of Victorian fiction's traditional happy, romantic ending (Farnan 45). The marriage is one of power because Beulah is able to marry on her terms. Namely, she proves herself to be an independent woman, both financially and intellectually, and she possesses a newfound religious comfort. With those two major obstacles overcome and satisfied, she is ready to be a different kind of woman.

One reason for making Beulah unattractive in her younger years is to demonstrate to the reader that there is much goodness in Beulah below her physical appearance. For the reader to comprehend this inner world within Beulah, the narrator is needed (Farnan 49). The stronger Beulah gets, the more isolated she becomes, especially since her demand for independence and intellectual inquiry make it so. Since Evans has isolated

Beulah, she (as narrator) seems to be the only one who truly cares about her (Farnan 53). The reader therefore gets a close-up of Beulah throughout the novel from the compassionate eyes of the narrator.

Evans alternates between the mode of an omniscient narrator and that of a point-of-view character (Farnan 64). Farnan describes Beulah as a point-of-view character—one whose perceptions are presented not through the character herself, as Jane in Jane Eyre, but from the narrator's own consciousness (57). The point-of-view character mode is expressed with language describing how Beulah feels, how she considers something, and how she reacts to situations. When Evans uses the omniscient narrator voice, she is describing what is happening to Beulah and any number of characters. But in the point-of-view character mode, the heroine shows the reader her specific views. The narrator gives the reader occasional, deep glimpses into Beulah's thoughts.

The omniscient narrator sometimes turns her voice directly to the reader. Evans, as narrator, occasionally does just that. She is so in control of the novel and of Beulah and Beulah's actions that she sometimes shares her narrative power with the reader. The convention of the narrator directly addressing the readers was common in Victorian fiction. In fact, "To ask a Victorian author, American or British, not to address (the) readers was a bit like asking a modern-day telecaster to ignore (the) viewers" (Douglas 9). Readers primarily course through the fictional world of the novel, but are occasionally made aware of their external world by the narrator's publicly directed voice. The narrator is thereby effective in both the fictional world of the novel and the real world of the readers.

While the narrator provides access to much of Beulah's thoughts and actions, as is common with a point-of-view character mode, not all is revealed. For example, the reader doesn't really know if Beulah has a romantic attraction toward Dr. Hartwell until very late in the novel. Only as time progresses during Beulah's maturation process does the reader become aware of her affections. Beulah's love for another is not the primary purpose of the novel. She eventually is ready for love once she has satisfactorily resolved her two primary purposes as a character—to exemplify confident female independence, and to experience the problems associated with religious skepticism.

Beulah is simply not ready for romance earlier in her life. She's not mature enough during most of the novel to relax a little of her stubbornness and look beyond her youthful unattractiveness to believe that a man would be interested in her for reasons beyond physical appeal. Dr. Hartwell loves her long before she is ready and mature enough to love him. He realizes the folly of once marrying for beauty, and will not make such a shallow decision again. His first wife, Creola, was exquisitely beautiful, but married him only for his money. Creola's self-centeredness was nonpareil, and she "was recklessly imprudent, and launched into the wildest excesses which society sanctioned" (Evans 383). Dr. Hartwell is able to see in Beulah a different type of beauty, one based on internal, moral qualities and sound judgment. His willingness to look deeper into Beulah, beyond mere surface appearance, elevates him for the reader (Farnan 61). The type of beauty Dr. Hartwell recognizes in Beulah is based solely on her feminine nature and internal character.

After Beulah marries Dr. Hartwell, she realizes she has a different type of power. She knows that the religious faith that has become a part of her life will continue to be an integral part of her life for as long as she lives. She maturely understands that she has a new power as both a wife and as the courier of a Christian sense of morality. “Beulah was conscious of the power she wielded, and trembled lest she fail to employ it properly” (Evans 418). She would certainly employ that power through love and by example.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Professor Michael O'Brien wrote that "Beulah was . . . a meditation on the intellectual problem of modern knowledge [and], because [it] was preeminently a novel of ideas, a work of such high intellectual and abstract seriousness that it is hard to find a peer in antebellum American literature" (316). Beulah truly is a novel of ideas, and it includes mention of, or allusions to, the works of numerous authors, poets, philosophers and theologians. The ideas presented by Augusta Jane Evans in Beulah were the most up-to-date issues at the time in terms of science with its rationalism, and Christianity with its requirement of faith.

Throughout most of the novel, Evans argues for understanding. But in the end, when Beulah accepts religious faith, she seems to be content with the absence of the full understanding she had sought. O'Brien recognizes that "Mind licenses emotion, and emotion in turn gives comfort to mind" (320). Once Beulah accepts her religious faith as a mature woman, she no longer feels compelled to attempt to understand everything. Besides, she finally uses rationalism itself to realize she simply cannot have answers to every single mystery.

While Beulah might seem like a criticism by Augusta Evans on the field of philosophy, it is not. The mention of so many philosophical works in the novel is testament to her great respect for philosophy. Beulah's purpose was to show that philosophy is insufficient to explain certain religious-related matters. Philosophy can take

one down any number of deep mental avenues, stimulating the intellectual faculties with beauty and wonder along countless cerebral pathways. But philosophy is not theology. Neither discipline can explain some of the mysteries that Beulah investigates, but at least theology provides a framework for studying the mysteries of religion. Evans desired more from life than could be gathered from intellectual excursions. She just wanted the comforting effect of religious belief, one that dominates the consciousness and the inner self.

Just as philosophy is not equivalent to theology, neither is theology equivalent to spirituality. Whereas theology studies religion, spirituality is a state of being, often arrived at through processes of realization and awareness. The tranquility of an inner spiritual world is what gave Evans fulfillment, and she found that spiritual comfort in the Methodist denomination of Christianity.

Beulah never acquired all of the answers she wanted, and neither did Evans herself. Evans never claimed that the welcoming of religion in one's life was the universal antidote for the frustrations of skeptical inquiry, but it was obvious that it worked satisfactorily for her. It worked with its reassuring appeal to the emotions of her heart. Traditions that have been steeped in the psychology of humanity for countless generations don't dissipate, regardless of how much the knowledge of science has expanded. The desire for religion is still present. Evans knew that the Christian religion presented the highest ideal of morality in the history of humanity. She wanted to share that legacy with the reading public, and continued to do so through all of her subsequent novels.

Evans provided a number of important characters in Beulah, each of whom played a unique role in affecting the development of Beulah's thoughts and beliefs. Through her interactions with, and observations of, these individuals, Beulah is affected on her journey of inquiry. From Clara Sanders, Beulah learns that tranquility can be experienced with just a simple faith. Cornelia Graham shows Beulah how very frustrating it can be to desire a creed in life and not feel comfortable with any available system, especially since hypocrisy tainted her view of the actual practice of religion. From Doctors Hartwell and Asbury, Beulah learns that highly educated scientific minds often try to force rationality on topics that reason is unable to unfold, and the valuing of reason above all else prevents the understanding of a spiritual peace that can be experienced through a religious awareness. From Eugene Graham, Beulah observes how materialism could be irresistibly alluring. From Mrs. Williams, she learns that women have a special moral duty. From Pastor Mortimer, she hears a sermon that helps her realize why so many people have trouble with religion. From Mrs. Asbury, Beulah observes a woman who appears to have the perfect balance in life in both the domestic and reverential domains. And, finally, Reginald Lindsey teaches Beulah how to balance both faith and reason.

Every work of literature that Beulah studies has some affect on her. Even her appreciation of art and music inspire her. She recognizes pure beauty in art and music, and her appreciation of these things eventually contributes toward the understanding of something beautiful within herself.

Evans felt that it was her duty to warn others of the skepticism she had once faced—a period of her life that was indeed very troubling—and she used certain

conventions to attract a wide reading audience. For example, she did not mention the location where the plot of Beulah takes place, thereby avoiding potential regional prejudices. She also did not mention slavery at all, although it was surely a contemporary and polarizing topic in America in the years preceding the publication of Beulah in 1859. She created as her heroine an unattractive orphan girl. The combination of the three characteristics of being a female, an orphan, and unattractive all contributed to making the circumstances of Beulah's intellectual journey difficult. But the addition of two more crucial factors allowed Beulah to succeed—her strong sense of independence, and her sincere interest in the rationality required of intellectual pursuits.

Beulah's independent nature provided her with the perseverance necessary to stick with the difficult years of relying only on reason to comprehend some of the most difficult subjects that humans have ever contemplated. The very importance placed on reason that led America's founding fathers to structure the country uniquely with a separation of church and state, also initially led Beulah into her quest to understand religious mysteries.

Just as rationality led to the deistic beliefs of the founding fathers, it also led people to recognize that much was missing in life without the emotional appeal of religion. In a similar fashion, Beulah used reason to recognize that a religious awareness actually gave more value to rationalism. Reason and religion could coexist, and Beulah was happier once she embraced both by respecting the proper function of each. Beulah acknowledged that intellectual pursuits have their place in human life, but there are limitations when it comes to trying to comprehend God. By the end of the novel, she

believes that “Science and Religion shall link hands” in a complementary manner (Evans 419).

Most critics of nineteenth-century domestic fiction see the heroine in a novel working to achieve independence in terms of physical safety, emotional stability, and financial security (Gigante 5). In addition to these three objectives, Evans also has Beulah strive for intellectual superiority and spiritual awareness. Evans took what was already familiar in Victorian fiction and advanced upon it for the artistic creation of Beulah. She was fastidious in her attention to detail, and dazzled her readers with a very erudite style of writing. Her countless allusions to philosophical and literary works are extensive, showing that Beulah and other characters, and obviously Evans herself, had explored them all.

Evans’ timing with Beulah could not have been better. Beulah struck a positive chord with the public immediately upon publication, and Evans gained much financial success from its sales. The book allowed her to leave a legacy that illustrated a semi-autobiographical account of her own struggles. Both character Beulah Benton and author Augusta Evans found what they wanted in life—feminine independence and a rich intellectual life, but both meant so much more when based on the foundation of Christian faith and morality.

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