

REVIEWS

Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Religious Belief by Michael D. Hurley. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. viii + 201 pp. ISBN:9781474234092. \$94.00; paperback, \$39.95.

When exploring the nature of their respective art forms or the function and purpose of the imagination itself, artists have often adopted a way of speaking paralleling the sentiments, cadences, and convictions of religious devotion. Michael D. Hurley's *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Religious Belief* not only reminds us but also shows us that poets of the long nineteenth century were especially committed to the practice of speaking about art in religious terms and vice versa. They further forged and experimented with, embraced, or contested the links between the religious sense and the arts, especially between belief and prosody. For instance, Hurley reminds us that William Blake associated the powers and authority of religious witness with verse, insisting that "you can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence." Along similar lines, Gerard Manley Hopkins, prior to his conversion to Catholicism and ordination as a Jesuit priest, was already talking about poetry in terms of the categories of belief and unbelief. For instance, in a letter from his early Oxford days, Hopkins playfully confessed that a "horrible thing" had happened to him: he had "begun to *doubt* Tennyson."

In recent decades, intellectual historians, theologians, and growing numbers of literary scholars (especially those associated with New Formalism and New Historicism) are further exploring the importance and relevance of religion and theology, understanding both as categories that enliven academic and broader cultural, aesthetic, and socio-political concerns alike. Publications on the links between Christianity and the arts are on the rise, including recent titles such as *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought* (2018), Emma Mason's *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (2018), and Bloomsbury's New Directions in Religion and Literature Series, to which *Faith in Poetry* belongs. One of *Faith and Poetry*'s many significant achievements is its extension and expansion of these growing scholarly conversations regarding the profound intersections between religious sensibilities and poetry throughout the long nineteenth century.

Hurley convincingly argues that nineteenth-century poetry is especially and uniquely placed to examine how language works as a vehicle for inspiration, conviction, and, above all, for the exercise of faith – of both aesthetic and religious varieties. Near the outset of *Faith in Poetry*, Hurley shows, among other things, how J. Hillis Miller's landmark study of God's