60 We follow the same conclusive remarks on this dialectical tension as explained by Maurizio Ferraris, 'The Meaning of Being as a Determinate Ontic Trace', *Religion*. Eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Oxford. Polity Press, 1998), 170–211.

61 From Robert Gibb's introduction to Levinas' 'God and Philosophy.' In *The Postmodern God. A Theological Reader*. Ed., Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 51.

62 Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245.

63 John Caputo's critique of Marion's *God Without Being* is sharp and relevant. He outlines some of the 'dangers' that Marion's account encompasses, particularly in regard to the areas of Ecclesial centralized power (see Caputo's section 'Ecclesiology Without Violence,' 143–147). Caputo is also right in his Derridarian approach to language and conditionality, reflecting upon the implicit and inevitable 'violence' of mediation within every discourse—including Marion's!

64 Ferraris, Ibid., 196.

65 *God Without Being*, 107.

66 I thank Fr. Michael Barber, SJ, and Fr. Fergus Kerr, OP for criticism and advice throughout the process of writing this essay. I am also grateful to Sally Gunter and Andrew Forshaw, OP for proof-reading my work.

# *The Younger Mrs Ward*
## A Catholic Novel of 1899

Bernard Bergonzi

One hundred years ago two Mrs Wards, not related to each other, were writing novels in England. Mrs Humphry Ward had achieved instant fame in 1888 with *Robert Elsmere*. This story of an earnest clergyman who loses faith in organized religion keyed into Victorian anxieties and controversies about faith and doubt. Its author, born Mary Augusta Arnold, was a granddaughter of Dr Arnold of Rugby and a niece of Matthew Arnold; she was a woman of high intellectual and scholarly attainments, a devout agnostic but keenly interested in religion. Ten years later she turned her



https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01712.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

attention to Catholicism, in *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, a character study of a Catholic squire in the Lake District. Mary Ward had good personal reasons for being interested in Catholicism. Her father, Thomas Arnold Junior, was one of the 'wanderers' who flit through Victorian religious history. He became a Catholic under Newman's influence when he was in his thirties, but reverted to Anglicanism some years later. After several more years he returned to the Catholic Church, just in time to stop him from being elected Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, which was still dominated by the Anglican establishment. Arnold then remained a Catholic until his death in 1900. In his later years he was Professor of English at University College, Dublin, where he was a friend and colleague of the Professor of Greek, Fr G.M.Hopkins SJ. Arnold's changes of direction were intensely painful to his non-Catholic family. Mary Ward felt the pain, but she loved her father and tried to understand his beliefs. The attitude to Catholicism in *Helbeck of Bannisdale* uneasily combines sympathy and puzzlement; it is a powerful story, but limited by the author's traditional Protestant tendency to reduce Catholicism to superstitious devotions and Jesuitical intrigues.

In 1899 a new and younger Mrs Ward appeared on the literary scene when she published her first novel, *One Poor Scruple*. If Mrs Humphry Ward was characterised by reverent agnosticism, Mrs Wilfred Ward wrote in a spirit of committed Catholic faith. She was born Josephine Hope; her father was a Tractarian convert, and her mother, Lady Victoria Howard, came from a distinguished Catholic family; among her forebears was the Elizabethan martyr, Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel. Josephine's parents died when she was young, and she was brought up by her grandmother, the Duchess of Norfolk, at Arundel Castle. In 1887 she married Wilfred Ward, whose Catholic credentials were equally strong if less venerable. His father W.G.Ward had been a friend and disciple of Newman in the Oxford Movement and became a Catholic shortly before Newman. His breach with Anglicanism was marked by his book *The Ideal of a Christian Church* and he was always known as 'Ideal Ward'. W.G.Ward was fiercely ultramontane—notoriously hoping for an infallible papal definition to appear in *The Times* every morning—but he had an affable temperament and was widely liked and admired; Tennyson called him 'Most generous of ultramontanes, Ward'. His son Wilfred, though an entirely orthodox Catholic, was a more flexible and liberal religious thinker than his father. He was a productive writer, as philosopher, lay



https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01712.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

theologian and biographer, and, like his father before him, was editor of the *Dublin Review*, the principal organ of educated Catholic opinion in England.

Wilfred and Josephine Ward were dedicated Catholic writers who were much more integrated into the national culture than earlier Victorian Catholics had found possible or even desirable. Their friends included such prominent figures of the age as Tennyson and Huxley and Gladstone; the Wards broke free from any notion of a Catholic ghetto. One of their children, Maisie Ward, was to achieve celebrity as a Catholic writer and publisher; her biography of her parents, *The Wilfred Wards and the Transition*, published in two large volumes in the 1930s, is an indispensable account of the intellectual climate of English Catholicism at the turn of the century.

When *One Poor Scruple* appeared, the publisher seems to have deliberately presented the new Mrs Ward as a rival to the older and more established one. *One Poor Scruple* could be seen as a challenge or corrective to the latter's picture of Catholicism in *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, published the previous year. One reviewer, at least, seems to have accepted the gambit, describing *One Poor Scruple* as 'far and away better work than anything the authoress of *Robert Elsmere* has given to the world'. *One Poor Scruple* is a study of life among the lesser Catholic gentry, and is an early example of what was later described as the 'Catholic novel' as produced by Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh and David Lodge. In her account of what the central character of the novel, Madge Riversdale, calls 'the old Catholic lot', Josephine Ward was describing what she knew from the inside; Evelyn Waugh's attempt to present the similar milieu of Lady Marchmain's family in *Brideshead Revisited* seems forced in comparison.

*One Poor Scruple* is divided between two worlds, rural and metropolitan, Catholic and secular. The former is exemplified by Skipton-le-Grange, the home of the Riversdale family, who preserved their faith throughout the penal times. The Riversdales lead quiet, devout lives as country gentlemen and their families, and take no part in the public life of the nation. Set against their world is fashionable London society of the 1890s: sophisticated, worldly and more than a little world-weary, rather as portrayed in Wilde's comedies or Henry James's *The Awkward Age*, living without regard for principle or firm moral positions. Madge, the young widow of the Riversdales' dissolute son George, moves between the two worlds. Josephine Ward presents her as a



https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01712.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

convincing character, *petite*, attractive and vulnerable, a lukewarm Catholic who is fatally drawn to the glittering prizes of smart society. In particular, she is much tempted by an offer of marriage from Lord Bellasis, who is rich, handsome and seemingly in love with her, but who has the disadvantage, for a Catholic, of possessing a divorced wife. Madge's devout coreligionists think of her as leading a dangerous life, while the fashionable world mocks her remaining religious scruples.

Josephine Ward is an excellent story-teller, with a profound interest in human nature. Her account of the Riversdales shows a keen sense of history, and she is responsive to the cultural and intellectual currents of the *fin de siècle*. One of the lesser characters, Mark Fieldes, is an ironic portrayal of Paterian aestheticism, and another, Cecilia Rupert, defiantly embodies the New Woman, much discussed in the 1890s, Mrs Ward's most striking quality is a combination of firm moral sense and strong imaginative sympathy. To a remarkable degree she loves her characters, even those she cannot admire, like Fieldes and Cecilia. She understands, and can even share, Madge's feelings, where the pursuit of fashion, the clothes, the invitations, the luncheons and dinner parties and balls have an appeal that is almost spiritual. Mrs Ward rejects this spiritualized worldliness, but she understands its appeal and effectively conveys it to her readers. As the story unfolds, there are some good angels striving to keep Madge on the right path, particularly her saintly sister-in-law. If, at the end, Madge refuses Bellasis, this is less a matter of severe Catholic doctrine driving out love than of a rejection of worldly glory, to which Madge has never completely succumbed, and which the unbelieving reader can readily see is an inadequate goal.

*One Poor Scruple* stands up well after a hundred years, as a work of absorbing and intelligent fiction (it is currently available in paperback from Tabb House, with an introduction by the present writer). If some of the issues it deals with are now part of history, others still concern us. The novel's final sentence, in which the author dismisses her characters, is traditional in wording and sentiment, but it echoes in our own current moment: 'And now we bid them farewell and commit their fate to the coming century'.



https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1999.tb01712.x Published online by Cambridge University Press