

**AGAINST THE GRAINS: MARGARET JEWETT BAILEY'S
SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE,
OREGON, 1837-1854**

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Literature, Christianity, and the women's rights movement converged upon one another in America during the nineteenth century. As is apparent from the scholarship of David Reynolds, Nina Baym and others, Christian faith found a new and potent form of expression in fictional literature. Similarly, women who sought to gain the opportunities and rights reserved for men also found fictional writing suitable for articulating their ideas. Although these three—fiction, feminism, and Christianity—found their strongest voices in the east and developing midwest, immigrants to the far west participated also. One of the earliest to do so was Margaret Jewett Bailey, a Methodist missionary, teacher, and author.

Bailey, born Margaret Jewett Smith, sailed from Boston in January 1837 with a small group of Methodist missionaries travelling to the Willamette Valley to convert the Natives.¹ She left for Oregon having assumed great risk; she had not been hired for work at the Mission, yet she could not go home either, for her departure had so angered her father that he had disowned her. In Oregon she acted with similar independence. At the mission she boarded with a single man; later she married William Bailey, a new convert to Methodism who had a long reputation for impiety and rash behavior. During a brief stint as a newspaper columnist, she did not restrict herself to accept moralisms about child rearing and domestic life, but also defended women's rights. For all of these actions she paid a stiff price in social rejection, loneliness, and sometimes physical abuse. For much of her adult life she lived at the fringe of society, aware of social norms but never fully willing to conform to them. Margaret Bailey was a risk-taker in a society which ostracized such women.

¹I usually refer to her by her first married name, Bailey. However, for her single years I use her maiden name, Smith. Where there is potential confusion over the name "Bailey," I use first names, William and Margaret.

An intensively devout woman who frequently recounted mystical experiences of God's presence, Bailey's social troubles and profound worship had similar origins and were mutually strengthening. Her difficulties emerged partly from her independent and sometimes combative personality. Her strong convictions about Christian faith contributed to her independence by providing motivation and justification for socially unacceptable behavior, and her devotional piety provided sanctuary from the loneliness which followed. In 1854 she published a book explaining her origins, her faith, her sexual conduct at the mission, the conduct of other missionaries, and her divorce.² By exposing the truth she hoped—expected—to clear her name and restore her reputation as a woman of piety, indeed, as a zealous disciple. It did not work; the book was not well received and was a scandal to some. Apparently she never published again. Nonetheless, her writing marks the entrance of a vocal feminism into Oregon and illuminates important connections between religious experience and social position.

Literary culture in Oregon was not new in 1854, but publishing for local audiences was. Many stories, travelogues, reports, letters, and other accounts of life in the Pacific Northwest had been written prior to that date, but these were published in the States or in London and were intended for eastern readers. Oregon citizens started their first newspaper, the *Oregon Spectator*, in 1846, only eight years before Bailey published. Sidney Walter Moss wrote his *Prairie flower* in Oregon in the mid-1840s (although he sent it to Cincinnati to be published) and William Lysander Adams published a satirical drama in the early 1850s. The primary outlets for writing, though, were the newspapers. A few besides the *Spectator* were begun, to which residents contributed poetry, stories, letters, and articles. The history of Oregon literature places Bailey among the earliest writers who published in the Pacific Northwest.³

Bailey's book, *The Grains*, was reissued in 1986, having been reconstructed from the three surviving volumes.⁴ Evelyn Leasher and Robert J. Frank, who edited the reissue, called the work a "thinly disguised autobiography." Edwin R. Bingham labeled it an "autobiographical

²Margaret Jewett Bailey, *The Grains: or Passages in the Life of Ruth Rover, with Occasional Pictures of Oregon, Natural and Moral* (Portland: Carter and Austin, 1854; reconstructed reprint, eds. Evelyn Leasher and Robert J. Frank, Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1986).

³Edwin R. Bingham, "Forward," in Bailey, *The Grains*, v. Alfred Powers, *History of Oregon Literature* (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1935), 195–213.

⁴Evelyn Leasher and Robert J. Frank, "Introduction," in Bailey, *The Grains*, 18–20. The reprint had been urged earlier by the historian of Oregon literature, Herbert B. Nelson, in his essay "Ruth Rover's Cup of Sorrow," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 50 (July 1959): 91–98.

novel;" both are appropriate descriptions.⁵ The autobiographical nature is unmistakable. Much of the detail can be corroborated by other sources pertaining to the Methodist mission in Oregon. Although the scholarly work surrounding her is small, historians have repeatedly credited Bailey with an insightful, penetrating mind. Her critique of the Lee mission in Oregon's Willamette Valley judged with blunt precision mission Superintendent Jason Lee and the Methodist organization of which she was a part. If Bailey sometimes sounds eccentric and shrill, her book, nonetheless, is most commonly treated by historians as a generally accurate and analytical commentary on the mission.⁶

However, Bailey set out to write neither her life story nor a history of the mission. Her fundamental aim was to clear her name and re-establish her reputation as a pious Christian, obedient to God and reasonable in her dealings with people. The book is an apologetic as much as an autobiography, a defense of self and a repudiation of enemies. Additionally, though, it was written using fictional conventions. Bailey was well-read. "Excessively fond of her books," she was sometimes accused of reading novels on the Sabbath instead of attending meeting.⁷ At ease in the fictional genre, she renamed all the people involved, taking for herself the name "Ruth Rover," and organized the text to lead up to a turning-point crisis in the middle and a climax of tension at the end. She cast her story in some of the important literary and cultural themes of the day: an expanding vision of women's abilities, the necessity of temperance, the shortcomings of men's piety, the naivety of women outside the home, and the power of faith, to name a few. An "autobiographical novel" it is, life-story of hardship and of faith retold in the context of literary convention.

Margaret Smith was a venturesome person. She enjoyed, or at least sought out, the fringes of society, the decisions which rocked convention or expectation, and rigorous attention to the claims of the gospel. More than a decade before the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 displayed as kindred the plight of the colonies under British tyranny and the subservience of women to men, Smith regularly and consistently asserted her personal independence. Wooed by suitors in Massachusetts, she painfully turned them down, once to become a missionary, another time because they differed in doctrine, a third time because she did not sense

⁵Bingham, "Forward," vi. Leasher and Frank, "Introduction," 6.

⁶For her assessment of the Lee mission see Bailey, *The Grains*, 136ff. For three examples of Bailey's reputation as an observer, see: Bingham, "Forward," vi; Robert J. Loewenberg, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and the Methodist Mission 1834-1843* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 70, 117; and Janice K. Duncan, "Ruth Rover'-Vindictive Falsehood or Historical Truth?," *Journal of the West* 12 (April 1973): 240-253.

⁷Bailey, *The Grains*, 28, 83-84.

"the approbation of heaven."⁸ Resolved to become a missionary teacher, she pursued that goal single-mindedly, despite the great conflict involved. Her father, near death, wanted his daughter near. He refused to pay for her education and threatened to disown her if she left. Although the rest of her family was more sympathetic, they also disapproved. Hoping to mollify her family with the assurance that she would be at a mission only a few years, Smith decided to attend the Wilbraham Academy and completed the required work quickly, supported financially by the Missionary Education Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Ten days before a ship was to set sail for Oregon carrying Reverend David Leslie and family to the mission, an invitation was made to Smith to travel with Leslie as a domestic. She insisted that she go as a teacher, which would require petitioning the Methodist Board of Missions in New York. Short of time, several pastors agreed to petition the Board on her behalf and support her themselves if the Board would not appoint her.⁹

She took ship under the protection of Leslie, a single woman without employment from the Board, firmly committed to teaching the Indians, yet under the guardianship of a man whose expectations of her included domestic care and companionship for his wife. It was a delicate situation to be in, but Smith was highly independent and Leslie was demanding and shrewish; neither was conversant with delicacy.¹⁰ Even before they left Boston, Leslie had asked Smith to wait on and take care of his children; already, she had refused to do so. During the trip, Leslie did not attend to her needs for warm clothes, but had them stowed under the hatches; during shore visits, he did not arrange for her sleeping quarters. By voyage's end, they were not speaking to each other, but communicated only by letter, and Leslie had refused to visit the communion table with Smith. When Leslie offered to acknowledge his sins and rejoin the broken bonds of fellowship, Smith refused to discuss the matter further until they reached Oregon.¹¹

At the mission, Smith's independence created further problems. Leslie represented her to Jason Lee as a servant of his family, without an appointment and with no announced future plans. Leslie's introduction angered Smith considerably; she thought of herself as a missionary teacher who had sacrificed suitors and family to come teach Indians. Lee, though, had no teaching assignments for her; he had too many women

⁸Bailey, *The Grains*, 32, 46, 38.

⁹Bailey, *The Grains*, 42-52, 58-59.

¹⁰In the mid-1840s, Reverend George Gary, Mission Supervisor from 1844 to 1847, was astounded that the "scold" of Leslie's house was not Leslie's wife but Leslie himself. George Gary, "Diary of Reverend George Gary," ed. Charles H. Carey, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 24 (1923): 279-280, 283.

¹¹Bailey, *The Grains*, 78-87.

already and more Indians than he could feed. Without the financial backing of the Board, he could not hire her as a teacher. He offered her domestic work aiding his wife, Anna, in the kitchen. Smith was eventually given charge of the girls' education, but in a move which must have exasperated mission leaders, became so distraught over the conflict with Leslie that she resigned the school by December 1837. Lee, better suited for entrepreneurial work than management, was unable to mediate between Smith and Leslie. The conflict escalated to the point where Smith left the mission and resided temporarily at Fort Vancouver until Leslie and Cyrus Shepard personally asked her to return as a teacher.¹²

Shortly after her return to the mission, Smith again placed herself in a highly vulnerable position; she boarded alone with a single man, William Willson. Here, indeed, was a woman who lived life on the edge. Willson had pursued her in marriage since she had arrived in September 1837. Smith refused; Willson persisted. Finally, in June 1838, Smith agreed, but by that time Willson had given up and had mailed a proposal to someone on the east coast. Both knew that the mail could be overtaken within a month and the letter returned by September of that year, so they sent after the courier and waited. September went by and the letter did not return. According to Smith, they spent a very pleasant winter together as an engaged couple and grew quite close, but December came, with no letter. Finally, in an effort to hasten the marriage, Willson proposed that they become sexually intimate; surely the church would readily marry them if such were the case. Smith, outraged, adamantly refused ever to marry him. Willson, now equally irate, went to the Reverend Leslie to confess that he and Smith had committed sin together and should at once be married. Leslie believed Willson, refused to accept Smith's furious denials of wrong doing, and threatened to expel her from the mission for the crime and for such an unrepentant attitude.¹³ Under great pressure and amid promises that the confession would not leave the mission, Smith signed a confession admitting her sin.¹⁴

Three months later she married William Bailey, for reasons which she did not record.¹⁵ Although Margaret hoped that her husband would be hired by the mission as a doctor, William was never hired, so Margaret, to her dismay, discovered that she had married herself off the mission. Charles Wilkes, visiting the Baileys in 1841, heard a slightly different account for her exit. Apparently he was told that she left because there was no work for her to do there as a teacher and because of her frustration that the

¹²Bailey, *The Grains*, 88-90, 115-120.

¹³Leslie had the power to do so because Jason Lee was in the States at the time recruiting support and personnel and had left Leslie in charge. D. Lee and J. H. Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon* (New York: J. Collord, 1844), 166.

¹⁴Bailey, *The Grains*, 148-154.

¹⁵They were married March 4, 1839. Bailey, *The Grains*, 159.

"great missionary field to the north" had been neglected.¹⁶ Regardless of the reasons, she left and, having never received an appointment, she may have left with no pay for her nearly two years work.¹⁷

Described by Margaret as reckless and violent and by another woman as a "mad dog," William had arrived on the west coast in the mid-1830s by jumping ship in San Francisco. After evading pursuit by the ship's officers, he had joined a party of trappers bound for Oregon. Indians attacked them, killing several and splitting William's chin and upper jaw. Thus, in the summer of 1835, after several days' walk through southern Oregon, he staggered into the mission, weak from hunger, his chin and upper jaw crudely held together with his shirt. An extended period of seeking religion led to his conversion early in 1839, in the midst of the revival which followed Willson's tearful confession of sin. Therefore, apparently, he made some progress in the faith. However, new converts often did not remain converted, as Margaret knew, or were not steadfast in their faith. The second day of their marriage, after morning prayers, William announced that he would no longer pray with her; as Margaret pressed him, he further declared that he would never go to church again.¹⁸

William was often violent with his wife, kicking, throttling, and beating her. At one point Margaret was made lame by his abuse. He humiliated her by fighting with her and deriding her in public places, by secretly confiding to others that his wife was a harlot, by locking her out of the house and denying her credit at all the stores. He shot his own pigs and cows, broke his furniture, and gambled away much of the money he made. The two agreed, at times, that his behavior was wrong; both agreed that alcohol was principally to blame.¹⁹ A cycle emerged of abuse, repentance and promises of abstinence, followed by a return to drinking and further abuse. More than once Margaret thought of divorce; more than once she came to the conclusion that she was trapped, unable to afford the trip back to Massachusetts.²⁰

¹⁶Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Lee & Blanchard, 1845), 362. I see no inherent conflict between these two explanations; both could be true.

¹⁷Bailey, *The Grains*, 136. Commonly the Mission and the employee settled accounts at the end of employment; Bailey mentioned no such settlement. Elsewhere she mentioned being trapped in Oregon, having no money to pay ship's passage home.

¹⁸Bailey, *The Grains*, 181-186, 242. Susan Downing Shepard, Willamette, to Ann [Mrs. Joseph A.] Lloyd, September 15, 1839, Mss 1219, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon.

¹⁹Mission Superintendent George Gary agreed that alcohol was a problem; commenting on an election, he wrote: "The friends of Alcohol, voted, I suppose, for Wm. Bailey." Gary, "Diary," 280.

²⁰Bailey devotes the final fifth of her book to the divorce and the incidents leading up to it, Bailey, *The Grains*, 241-309. The examples listed here come from 197, 242, 244, 250, 254-255, 257, 260, 280-281, and 292.

Yet life was not simply miserable for Margaret. Indeed, for the decade of the 1840s she records times that were as pleasant and peaceful as she ever had. When her husband was absent, she was often lonely and missed his companionship, the warmth of his body in bed, and the security he offered, especially at night. She repeatedly expressed her love for her husband and her belief that he loved her as well.²¹ One visitor recorded that the Bailey household was very pleasant, William a "worthy host" and his wife "amiable." "The latter had come from the States, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Mission," stated Thomas Farnham, "and had consented to share the bliss and ills of life with the adventurous Gael; and a happy little family they were."²² Charles Wilkes indicated that Margaret worked very industriously in her garden, keeping it "exceeding well."²³ She often was alone, as her husband was gone with governmental and medical duties. She worked the fields, visited Indians, entertained guests, cared for the dying, and aided immigrants as her husband traversed the Willamette Valley. Although sometimes this became odious, especially when her husband showed no gratitude, she also received pleasure from her efforts and was able to laugh at her mistakes and be pleased with her accomplishments.

She rarely attended church. Early in their marriage she did not visit the Mission, although every now and then meeting was held at their house. In 1840, shortly after their marriage, the Mission moved south, to the location of the current state capital, Salem. By her reckoning, this placed the Bailey residence about twenty-five miles from each of the two growing towns in their vicinity, Salem and Oregon City. For a long time she could not travel, either because she was lame, her hip having been injured by her husband, or because of "pulmonary consumption." When she was able to ride, though, the distance was far enough to keep her home. At one point six years passed during which she attended only one meeting and never visited the Lord's Table.²⁴

However, her absence from church bothered her less and less as the years rolled by. The common evangelical speech continued to be a part of her vocabulary: a "sweet influence" came over her one evening mysteriously in January 1850, until she remembered that in the States it was the time of the monthly concert of prayer. She concluded that "Perhaps some one was remembering unworthy me at the Throne of Grace, and I was

²¹Bailey, *The Grains*, 188.

²²Thomas J. Farnham, *Travels in the Great Western Prairies* (London: Richard Bentley, 1843); reprint, Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels 1748-1846*, vol. 29 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 19. Farnham was an uncritical commentator; by his account, the Mission was all sweetness and light.

²³Wilkes, 361-362.

²⁴Bailey, *The Grains*, 201, 198, 232.

receiving the benefit."²⁵ There were times, also, when she wept for the loss of church privileges. Often, though, she found expression for her faith in less conventional terms. Freed from the tensions which accompanied life within a believing community and surrounded by land of surpassing beauty, she found new opportunities to worship God. "In groves of my own choosing I have passed many an hour in meditation, prayer and praise, and the reflection afforded me that in them I was quite alone with nature, and with God, was an irresistible charm."²⁶ In such a setting the beauty of God's creation became as important to her as his promise of redemption. Her poems changed accordingly. Earlier efforts had been filled with the sad heroics of the pious life or the sorrows of marriage; during the 1840s some of her poetry became pleasant and calm and reveals a clear joy which she found in the natural world.

Blessed clouds, O, how I love ye,
 Dropping down your gentle rain;
 Lovely clouds, not far above me,
 Here ye have returned again.

In the region where ye travel
 God is seen, and everywhere;
 Sinners here, how great the marvel!
 Still receive His sovereign care. . . .²⁷

It was probably during this time that she read Byron's poetry; all of it, she supposed. Byron was distasteful to other evangelicals and Bailey's friends were a bit shocked when she expressed her appreciation. Several years earlier, Jason Lee had read Byron's "Sarda napalus" only to conclude that the author must be "if not infidel in principle (which is most probable) a total stranger to all vital experimental religion."²⁸ Bailey found him an attractive poet and apparently was able to quote him with ease. His sorrows and scandals, his sense of the heroic and perhaps the "incalculable, defiant, and reckless" aspects of his poetry enabled Bailey to identify with him; these, after all, were all part of her own life.²⁹ Byron's awareness that he had caused his own pain stood out in her mind and she pitied him for the pain which she knew that awareness caused.

²⁵Bailey, *The Grains*, 237.

²⁶Bailey, *The Grains*, 221, 223.

²⁷Bailey, *The Grains*, 240. Another poetic example can be found in Bailey, *The Grains*, 195-197; in a prose selection, a particular flower came to represent for her the passion of Christ's crucifixion, Bailey, *The Grains*, 231.

²⁸Jason Lee, "Diary of Reverend Jason Lee," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 17 (September 1916): 254. The title, according to one contemporary publication, is one word, "Sardanapalus." George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron in verse and prose*, compiled by Fitz Green Halleck (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1849).

²⁹David Perkins, ed., "George Gordon, Lord Byron," in *English Romantic Writers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 779.

“Poor, suffering, Byron! Sensitive tenderness like thine, could not have come from a heart altogether depraved.”³⁰

The Baileys lived in French Prairie, “in about the centre of the catholic village” and so became quite familiar with people of a faith which she regarded as heretical. Although she found cause to doubt their integrity—their horse racing, gambling, and working on the Sabbath offended her—she also found friends. At times she nurtured neighbors who were sick. Her Catholic neighbors, in turn, sheltered her from her husband, sometimes for days at a time. Once she welcomed Father Blanchet into her home and enjoyed a pleasant visit; he “very kindly” invited her to visit him at the falls and “spend a week with his niece.”³¹ This was unusual cordiality for a Catholic priest and a former Protestant missionary. Bailey’s faith entered an expansive time during the 1840s, appreciating Byron, gaining friends among the Catholics, and finding new, more peaceful expression amidst the groves of great trees surrounding her farm.

This was part of a familiar pattern, though. Alone with her books and God she often was happy. Within society, she repeatedly was not. *The Grains*, organized more thematically than chronologically, often separates the two. They belong together, though, for because she could not escape her husband, distasteful company, or her memories, her pleasures were often interrupted. Margaret might visit the neighbor’s for a few days or “retire for a few hours or a day to the grove, and endeavor by relaxation, to forget the keenness of her sorrows; but although they might be overcome for that time—yet the cause being not removed—she had to realize their renewal, and each time find herself driven nearer and nearer to despair.”³² In 1854, after fifteen years of marriage, the Baileys were divorced, out of which Margaret received virtually no material recompense for her years of farm and domestic labor: personal effects and clothing, a piano, one hundred dollars, and some real estate in Butteville.³³

Once divorced, she settled in Salem, supporting herself by writing, teaching, sewing, and keeping boarders. Probably she lived off the small savings she had accumulated in the States, as well, for in later years she was quite poor.³⁴ Most likely writing was for her a job, not a leisure pursuit. She contributed a short-lived column to the *Oregon Spectator* and wrote *The Grains*. Both were controversial and brought conflict with editors

³⁰My speculation that she read Byron at this time is based on the fact that she did not mention him until these years. Bailey, *The Grains*, 215, 234.

³¹Bailey, *The Grains*, 198, 232, 222, 235, 244.

³²Bailey, *The Grains*, 244.

³³Leasher and Frank, “Introduction,” 9.

³⁴Leasher and Frank state that she had one thousand dollars on interest in the States, but the origins of this they do not record.

and reviewers. Although she won praise as a "chaste and elegant" writer for her work at the newspaper, the book was not well-received by reviewers or by the public.³⁵ After a brief, publicized scuffle with reviewers, Bailey disappeared from literary circles. She suffered through two more marriages, appears in the land records and a census, apparently never published again, and died impoverished in 1882.³⁶

Discerning readers' responses to *The Grains* remains a difficulty. Janice K. Duncan stated that the reaction against the book continued until Bailey "had fled north to Washington Territory and all but two copies of *The Grains* had been destroyed by outraged citizens of the Willamette Valley."³⁷ However, a number of unresolved issues and potential contradictions emerge with Duncan's statement. Duncan's statement is tantalizingly brief, leaving open for question who these residents were and why they were so angry with Bailey. Furthermore, Bailey lived in Salem, married, divorced, bought and sold land, and built "brick stores" through the 1850s and up into the early 1870s; she didn't leave for Washington until perhaps the mid-1870s, twenty years after the publication of her book.³⁸ At that date, it seems unlikely that she fled in fear. And finally, the book was remembered in documents published much later: an obituary, a marriage notice, and other public notices. Were the books destroyed, it seems unlikely that they would have been widely remembered and referred to.³⁹

Despite the open questions regarding response to *The Grains*, people often did not respond positively to the author. Bailey repeatedly pushed against the limits of women's authority and status, often rejecting male authority (and female decorum) without compromise. Some authority figures—such as her father—she turned from firmly, yet with gentleness and compassion. Others she renounced with a startling fierceness. Her second suitor she apparently loved dearly, until she learned that he was pursuing other young women besides herself. After she broke off the relationship, her memory of him was "as of a grave with a poison flag growing above it and contaminating the air with its noxious breath."⁴⁰ Some authority figures she merely tolerated, as when men commented that

³⁵*Oregon Spectator*, June 16, 1854.

³⁶For biographical information after her divorce, I have relied on Leasher and Frank, "Introduction," 9–18. A more detailed history of her life is available there, including a description of her other writings, mostly letters and poetry.

³⁷Duncan, 240. For her source, Duncan footnoted an oral interview with Malcolm H. Clark, Jr.

³⁸Leasher and Frank, "Introduction," 15–18.

³⁹For greater elaboration on the problems with Duncan's conclusion, see David C. Thomas, "Religion in the Far West: Oregon's Willamette Valley, 1830–1850" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1933), 64–65.

⁴⁰Bailey, *The Grains*, 32.

she worked too hard on the farm.⁴¹ Others she ignored; she freely gave away clothes to the Indians against Jason Lee's wishes. Sometimes her rejection of men came only after great pain. From her first husband she endured drunkenness, infidelity, deceit, and physical abuse, yet she remained with him for fifteen years. Rarely did she conflict with women; rarely did she enjoy close and kind relationships with men. Such relationships existed for her, but in this book, at least, they did not occupy center stage.⁴² In her repeated rejection of male authority—in family, in marriage, and in the church—and in her insistence upon making her own decisions, she adopted a feminist position of greater breadth than she readily admitted.

In her newspaper writing she portrayed herself in more ambivalent terms. Early in 1854 she started a newspaper column in the *Oregon Spectator*. Through it she hoped to serve women, contribute to the literary arts in the new Territory, and promote "piety, morality, usefulness and refinement."⁴³ Her first column for the "Ladies Department" included the pronouncement that within this space would be defended women's rights, with the assurance that the columnist did not support women who strove to take the proper place of men. Yet in a cautious, roundabout way, Bailey wondered: since woman is limited to the nursery, the kitchen, and the parlor, and since woman is "restless, confined, shackled and retarded in the delightful exercise of her mental capacities," if she should try to expand her range of pursuits, there is no telling if she should fail or not. Writing more directly and more strongly, Bailey stated that it was no wonder at all that a woman "should find herself uneasy, undetermined, insufficient, and unengaging." The recurrent duties of singing lullabies and putting up viands fully explained such unease. She concluded with a promise to clarify her views in a forthcoming issue.⁴⁴

But when that issue appeared, five weeks later, her hesitancy remained. Advocacy of women's political rights was out of the question for her. "*Man* is formed to rule and *woman* to depend." Yet she recognized the evils which resulted from bad marriages, defined not as those which were abusive but those in which the woman had no influence over her husband, and hinted at strengthening divorce laws. But her hints were vague:

this brings us vis-a-vis in view of the most glaring and formidable evil which exists in society, viz.: unsuitable marriages, and which suggests many thoughts which might be treated separately, and which, in connection with the subject of education, would cover about the whole arena of her position in society.⁴⁵

⁴¹Bailey, *The Grains*, 228.

⁴²For instances, she had fond and respectful memories of Reverend Miner Raymond, a theologian and teacher at Wilbraham, and Reverend A. D. Merrill. Bailey, *The Grains*, 56, 34, 316n1. She also had severe conflicts with Susan Shepard.

⁴³M. J. Bailey, *Oregon Spectator*, May 12, 1854.

⁴⁴M. J. Bailey, *Oregon Spectator*, May 12, 1854. In *The Grains*, 265–6, Bailey made similar comments speculating confidently on women's abilities should they ever receive a chance.

⁴⁵M. J. Bailey, *Oregon Spectator*, June 16, 1854.

Bailey supported women's rights conceptually; her column was to be, in part, a forum for discussion on the topic. Yet, when commenting on specific political agendas or social roles, she became uncomfortable and non-committal. Politics was a man's arena. Entering it through rational argument in the newspaper was difficult; calling for the inclusion of women, impossible.

She was far more comfortable expressing herself through the conventions of fictional literature.⁴⁶ Her literary bent, education, and substantial reading led her naturally to one of the most popular forms of women's expression of the day—the novel. Nina Baym's study, *Women's Fiction*, describes in detail a plot found in much fiction written by women in the mid-nineteenth-century. Baym summarized it concisely:

The many novels all tell, with variations, a single tale. In essence, it is the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world.⁴⁷

According to Baym, women's fiction gained its power precisely through its repetition; the conventional plots, stereotyped characterization, and perhaps most importantly, the common foundation of expected piety and religious belief all gave the women's novel the ability to communicate vividly with other women. David Reynolds has taken issue with the idea that one type of fictional writing can be called "women's fiction," but Baym's description holds for Bailey's book.⁴⁸ As Bailey portrayed herself, she was a woman abandoned by father, suitors, church leaders, and husband. Men abandoned her, though, not because there was something wrong with her, but because their piety was deficient. Her mother, not her father, was the pious parent. A suitor was found wanting in doctrine. Leslie was unrepentant of his selfishness. Willson suggested that they tell the church they had been sinfully intimate. Her first husband was unregenerate and from that followed naturally intemperance, infidelity, and deceit. On occasion she did wonder at the naivety of her youth, the simplicity of her earlier thinking, or the obstinacy of which she was capable, but very consistently she described herself as being pious, upright, moral, and Christian.⁴⁹ In her perception, she was abandoned not because she

⁴⁶David S. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). Reynolds argues that through the nineteenth-century religious writers turned increasingly to fiction as a means to express and encourage faith.

⁴⁷Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 11.

⁴⁸David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 337–339.

⁴⁹For examples, see Bailey, *The Grains*, 28, 49, 88.

had done any wrong, but because the men in her life—the main supports for women—were themselves unsupported by true Christian faith. She did not reject men in general or the concept of male authority, but men who had forsaken their claim upon her submission by themselves abandoning full submission to Christ.

Reynolds suggested an alternative typology to Baym's overplot in which he described seven different categories of female characters, some with sub-categories. Reynolds outlined the "moral exemplar," the "adventure feminist," and a large grouping of types within "the literature of women's wrongs."⁵⁰ Bailey, familiar with literature as she was, wove many of these types into *The Grains*. Certainly she portrayed herself as the "moral exemplar," pious, active, willing to judge men according to a higher law. Certainly she was the "adventure feminist," voyaging half-way around the world, building fence, keeping farm, and visiting savages, all done with little assistance and accompanied by occasional praise from men that she worked as hard as a man. Bailey was the "victim," a drunkard's wife; she was the oppressed "working woman," performing domestic labor and farm work for neither appreciation nor pay. She was the "feminist criminal," breaking into her own house after her husband locked her out, in order to recover the property she brought to the marriage.⁵¹ She was the "sensual woman," but with a moral twist, rejecting suitors whom she ardently loved, confessing to sexual intimacy which she denied, pursuing her Lord with passionate yearning.

The Grains is an intensely human book, more concerned with thematic portrayal of the past than with the construction of main characters in stereotypical and therefore inhuman roles. The result is a set of characters—especially Bailey herself—presented with the edges sharp, the contradictions intact. Such diversity of claims and roles contributes to the book's fragmentation, but also makes it more interesting and more important as an expression of the diversity within an early Western author's conceptions of women's potential and goals.

In nearly all of these roles, Bailey defended her nonconformity with religious arguments, not with feminism. She was unable to wait for her father's death, for instance, because while she waited countless savages would die without hope. The rejection of one suitor occurred because she found it important to be "closing, resolutely, her ears to every enticement of an earthly nature."⁵² Her willingness to board with a single man she defended with claims to faithful chastity. Her resistance to domestic labor emerged because she had travelled to Oregon to teach Natives the gospel. In all her challenges to the prevailing authority and wisdom, and

⁵⁰Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 338–367.

⁵¹Bailey, *The Grains*, 250ff.

⁵²Bailey, *The Grains*, 39.

in response to the social stigma which resulted from a life of challenge, she took refuge in spiritual truths which defended her behavior.

She also looked to the Spirit for refuge from the pain and loneliness which were the consequences of nonconformity. Religious ecstasy was not uncommon to Methodists in 1840. Pastors tried to create powerful feelings in their audiences and hearers sought such a response. To experience the overwhelming tension and fear of guilt before the judging God and then to be ravished by feelings of forgiveness and release, this was a hoped-for sign of salvation and, after conversion, of God's presence. Bailey cultivated that cycle more than any of her compatriots at the Oregon mission. The most lonely of the missionaries, she also turned the most toward mystical union with Christ. Over and over again Bailey described herself as fleeing to Jesus from pain, suffering, loneliness, and sorrow. There she found relief from her trials, acceptance, and renewed energy to pursue truth and speak the gospel to the Indians.

After many days of intense mental anguish, I was last eve enabled to realize a blessing from God which yielded peace, faith and consolation to my wounded spirit. I do not remember to have ever realized the Saviour of sinners so near me. The same Son of David who walked about Galilee . . . seemed to be present in my little state-room. . . .⁵³

Baym has described "women's fiction" as stories of "trial and triumph," in which the abandoned woman finds within herself the skill, intelligence and perseverance to triumph over adversity. Bailey experienced no such final triumph; indeed, her life was tragic. Nevertheless, *The Grains* is infused with triumphant colors. Despite her repeated experience of separation and loss, Bailey doggedly sought and expected victory over falsehood. Her last printed works were responses to cruel reviews of her book (one read, "who the dickens cares, about the existence of a fly, or in whose pan of molasses the insect disappeared").⁵⁴ Even at this point, though, she was still hurling challenges and expecting to win. To one reviewer she responded: "Harness on your scales of scurrility, and in your right hand take the spear of a corrupted press. . . . Come on to combat, and, with the help of Omnipotence, we defy you!"⁵⁵ As she stretched convention, defended herself, and took comfort from God, the doctrines of spiritual triumph and sanctification sustained her. However, they also betrayed her. Supported by an unshakable belief in the power and ultimate victory of truth, she had difficulty adjusting for the power of those whom she strove against. More than once she appears to have been unaware that her power to succeed in defiance of cultural norms was far less than the promised power of spiritual triumph. More

⁵³Bailey, *The Grains*, 213.

⁵⁴Bailey, *The Grains*, 18.

⁵⁵Bailey, *The Grains*, 310-311.

than once she was surprised to find that sanctified behavior, the victory of the Spirit, was too much to expect of others. As she wrote about her arrival at the mission:

Ruth Rover is now on mission ground—that *holy* place where she had so long desired to be, and among those devoted servants of God with whom she had most ardently wished to associate—that people who had *left all to follow Christ*—among whom she had expected to find “fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers.” But alas! she is still on earth—in the kingdom of this world. Men may have changed the place, but they have kept their nature. They find the same hearts with them on mission ground, as they had to mourn over in their native land.⁵⁶

Bailey’s final triumph was not over men or male authority, nor over her worldly naivety, nor even over some recurrent sin, but over the constant temptation to be less faithful. The great success she portrayed was steadfast faith; the victory she anticipated was to be won through the Spirit.

Bailey’s book was autobiographical; she intended to defend her name from those who betrayed, ostracized, and libeled her. To do so, she cast her work in the genre of the fiction of her peers. She was familiar with that literature and comfortable using it to articulate important beliefs about Christian faith and women’s rights which were more difficult to express outside of the conventions of fiction. Three themes pervade the novel: the unreliability of men and Bailey’s consequent need to succeed on her own, the necessity and difficulty of taking up the Cross of Christ in a fallen world, and the sanctuary offered by God for refuge from suffering. These are common nineteenth-century themes of literature and culture; they give the book its shape as a novel, as Bailey drew them out in the form of her conflicts with David Leslie, William Willson, and William Bailey. However, she also moved beyond the conventions to include an expanding understanding of piety. Her Catholic friends, her appreciation of Byron, and her acute awareness of revelation in nature are part of the religious vitality of the nineteenth-century and further illustrate her willingness to flaunt convention. Conformity and non-conformity were tightly linked. Her willingness to take risks in defiance of both men and women reinforced a powerful and individualistic mysticism just as her faith supported and helped to justify her nonconformity. Nina Baym has argued that themes such as these were intended to articulate the lines of true power in the world and shape the social structure around that reality; Bailey used them as if they had the power to clear her name and restore her reputation.

⁵⁶Bailey, *The Grains*, 77.