

Laura Barney's Discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States, 1900–1916¹

LAYLI MARIA MIRON

1 A variety of individuals and institutions made this article possible. Tad Bennicoff of the Smithsonian Institution Archives provided me efficient and generous assistance by scanning and sending a number of manuscripts by Laura Barney. Penn State's Center for American Literary Studies funded my travel to the US National Bahá'í Archives, where, thanks to Lewis Walker, I encountered unpublished transcripts of Barney's 1909 speeches. My husband, Sergey Miron, applied his fluency in Russian to reading Isabella Grinevskaya's play *Bab* and synopsis-ing it for me so I could compare it with Barney's *God's Heroes*. Sarvar Dowhower likewise applied her native tongue in interpreting the introduction of the 1908 Persian edition of *Some Answered Questions* for me. Members of Penn State's Department of English, especially Dr. Cheryl Glenn's writing group, and my parents, Nura and Robert Amerson, gave valuable feedback on drafts. I thank all these contributors for helping bring this article to fruition.

Abstract

The discipleship of the young American Laura Clifford Barney to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the early 1900s resulted in a flow of spiritual teachings from East to West. After several years of intense engagement with her teacher in Palestine, Barney sought to disseminate in her Western homelands what she had learned. Her private and public writings demonstrate how she employed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings in her efforts to influence social discourse by promoting the Bahá'í Faith in Europe and the United States. Examining these teachings and Barney's applications thereof in her rhetoric allows us to witness how a transnational channel of theological knowledge developed.

Résumé

Les années de présence de la jeune Américaine Laura Clifford Barney en tant que disciple de 'Abdu'l Bahá au début des années 1900 a entraîné la dissémination d'enseignements spirituels de l'Orient vers l'Occident. Après plusieurs années d'un engagement intense auprès de son maître en Palestine, Mme Barney s'est employée à propager en Occident les enseignements qu'elle y avait reçus. Ses écrits privés et publics démontrent comment elle a utilisé les enseignements de 'Abdu'l Bahá en vue d'influer sur le discours social en faisant la promotion de la foi baha'ie en Europe et aux États Unis. En examinant ces enseignements et la façon dont Mme Barney les appliquait dans son discours, nous pouvons observer la manière dont un canal transnational de savoir théologique a pu se développer.

Resumen

El discipulado de la joven estadounidense Laura Clifford Barney a 'Abdu'l-Bahá a

principios de los 1900s resultó en un flujo de enseñanzas espirituales desde el Oriente hasta el Occidente. Después de varios años de intenso compromiso con su maestra en Palestina, Barney buscó difundir lo que había aprendido en sus patrias occidentales. Sus escritos públicos y privados demuestran cómo ella empleó las enseñanzas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá en sus esfuerzos por influir el discurso social por medio de la promoción de la Fe Bahá'í en Europa y los Estados Unidos. Examinando estas enseñanzas y las aplicaciones de Barney en su retórica nos permite presenciar cómo se desarrolló un canal transnacional de conocimiento teológico.

The 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago occurred at a uniquely receptive moment for unorthodox views of spirituality, mysticism, and universalism in the West. A widespread search for answers beyond mainstream Christianity had birthed movements in the United States such as Christian Science and Spiritualism. Perceiving degradation in their societies, some Europeans in the Romantic era turned to Asia for spiritual regeneration (Said 115). Syncretic creeds, such as Transcendentalism and Theosophy, incorporated teachings of religions from the Far East—a trend toward universalism that would continue into the next century. Indeed, in this era of colonialism, material resources were not the only imports from Asian territories. Spiritual knowledge crossed borders, too. Many Western Christian missionaries sailed eastward to proselytize, but religious rhetoric also migrated in the other direction,

with evangelists like the Hindu Swami Vivekananda traveling to the West from India (Koppedrayar 7). Some Westerners found in the scriptures of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism the promise of radical spirituality needed to pull their culture out of its consumerist morass.

At the 1893 World Parliament, Vivekananda spoke to attendees about Hinduism, facilitating the spread of Vedic teachings of the Far East to the West. This same parliament also marked the first recorded mention of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States, which occurred in the closing statement of Reverend Henry Jessup's speech on "The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations." Jessup, a Presbyterian missionary who helped found the American University of Beirut, alluded to Bahá'ís, "who regard all natives as one, and all men as brothers." Unsurprisingly given his missionary purpose, of particular interest to Jessup was the Bahá'í acceptance of Christ and respect for the New Testament.

Today, 125 years after Jessup, Vivekananda, and other religious representatives conferenced in Chicago, intercultural, international, and interfaith collaborations face hostility from nationalistic movements in the United States and Europe. Thus, it is exigent that we study discursive flows of theology from the Middle East to the West. To demonstrate the fruitfulness of such study, I take as a case study the influence of an Iranian exile, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on an American

expatriate, Laura Clifford Barney. Scholars more often study flows of knowledge from the Western metropolis to “the periphery.” This is not just a flaw of academia. Reflecting historical inequalities, knowledge and theories travel more easily from the Global North to the Global South than vice versa (Thayer 229). This tendency is especially troubling when applied to the Middle East, a region with which the United States has engaged in an endless battle, because perceiving it as a mute container for Western development justifies its exploitation. Nearly forty years after Edward Said’s scathing critique of Western writers processing the Middle East for their own self-aggrandizement, the United States has yet to find the humility needed to enter into productive intellectual engagement with this region (Abu-Lughod 247). Due to my focus on communication, I situate my study in the field of rhetoric, which typically investigates how humans shape public discourse. Viewing religion through the lens of rhetoric renders perceptible the features of social discourse that affect its development. Globalizing our point of view—the challenge for the contemporary study of social discourse—entails shifting “rhetorical studies away from traditional, imperialist perspectives of rhetorical performance and knowledge to a more democratic and more inclusive one that recognizes *transnational constructions of rhetorical enterprises*, not just Western ones” (Royster and Kirsch 111; emphasis added). There have

been significant rhetorical enterprises constructed in the East and translated to the West in recent times, which are obvious to Bahá’ís, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and other followers of Asian religions residing in the West. Yet, studies of Eastern religious rhetorics (e.g., Lloyd on Hinduism; Stroud on Buddhism; You on Daoism and Confucianism) tend to focus on their influence within Asia rather than on their global circulation (see Wenger for an exception). Little has been done to trace such rhetoric’s infiltration into Western discourse. If scholars overlook these East-to-West flows, we miss an opportunity to explore a rich discourse that often employs words to induce spiritual awakening and the transcendence of materialism, ultimately for civic progress.

The discipleship of Barney to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in the earliest years of the twentieth century resulted in one such East-to-West flow. After several years of intense engagement with her teacher, Barney sought to disseminate in her Western homelands what she had learned. Her private and public writings demonstrate how she employed ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s teachings—in particular, His teachings about spiritual communication—in her efforts to influence social discourse by promoting the Bahá’í Faith in Europe and the United States. Examining these teachings and Barney’s rhetorical applications thereof allows us to witness how a transnational channel of theological knowledge developed.

A PERSIAN RELIGION MAKES
LANDFALL IN THE UNITED STATES

In the years following that first mention of the Bahá'í Faith on American soil, the new religion began to attract converts there, a development guided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), son of Bahá'u'lláh and leader of the Bahá'í community. One such convert was Laura Clifford Barney (1879–1974), daughter of the artist Alice Pike Barney and sister of the writer and salonist Natalie Clifford Barney. Laura Barney's deep-seated feminist beliefs and devotion to social causes—commitments she had formed in childhood and developed in adolescence (Jay 2; Rodriguez 63)—resonated with the progressive teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, which include eliminating divisions based on race, religion, and sex. Converting to the Bahá'í Faith around 1900, she became the object of public scrutiny due to her family's prestige in Washington, DC; one newspaper derided her decision as a mere “fad” for Oriental mystique (*Washington Mirror* qtd. in Kling 169). For the majority of her post-conversion life, she lived in the more tolerant environment of Paris, making several extended visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Palestine and occasional global travels.

Barney arguably became 'Abdu'l-Bahá's most prominent Western disciple, working to collect His spiritual guidance and make it accessible to other Westerners. Her most crucial visits to Palestine, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was imprisoned in the penal colony of Acre

(also spelled 'Akka), occurred between 1904 and 1906. 'Abdu'l-Bahá became her spiritual mentor, and according to one witness of their conversations He “greatly favoured her,” complimenting her zeal by joking, “In the heat of this summer season you should be living in the beautiful mountains of Switzerland in a palace or a mansion. What are you doing in this dilapidated city of 'Akka spending time with us prisoners?” ('Abdu'l-Bahá qtd. in Afroukteh 315). Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family were natives of Iran, they spoke Persian, which Barney learned. At mealtimes she conversed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, collecting His responses to her queries about diverse religious topics and publishing them in 1908. Barney prepared the Persian volume and the English translation of this collection, titled *al-Núr al-abha fí mufáwádat 'Abd al-Bahá* and *Some Answered Questions*, respectively. This book entered the canon of sacred Bahá'í literature, so Bahá'ís remember Barney primarily for her work as its compiler. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá was released from imprisonment following the Young Turk Revolution, He traveled to Europe and North America to solidify the nascent Bahá'í communities there. Barney and her husband, Hippolyte Dreyfus, supported legs of His European travels by interpreting and hosting talks. Barney assisted with the 1912 publication, as well as the later French edition, of a resulting compilation, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (Khademi 24).

Barney's discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá is worth studying from a rhetorical perspective for several reasons. The influence of His teachings—a westward flow of knowledge—can be studied in the texts she composed during her early stage of discipleship. These texts, which include speeches and plays, have been nearly forgotten, yet they furnish a unique record of the thoughts and aspirations of a convert to a new religion because she was actively writing during her time of conversion. Thus, Barney's texts serve as a case study of a key moment for the diffusion of a set of spiritual teachings beyond their birthplace in the Middle East. To reveal the foundation of Barney's discipleship, *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*—explored in the next section—furnish Bahá'í tenets as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Although these two books do not provide a complete picture of Bahá'í theology, they encapsulate and clarify key objectives of the young religion in a style aimed at an audience hailing from Western Christendom.² At the time of Barney's conversion, few Bahá'í scriptures were available in English, so the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá assumed great weight for her and other Western adherents. It seems safe to surmise that her

involvement in the production of *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks* influenced her religious development. The best instruments for tracing this influence are her own writings from that period, so several sections are devoted to analyzing these works in conjunction with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rhetorics for spiritual communication.

RHETORICS FOR SPIRITUAL
COMMUNICATION:
THE TALKS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Miss Barney said she had met pilgrims from all the countries, all the different stations of life and all the different religions, but she had never seen or heard Abdul-Baha speak exactly the same way to any two persons. By that way He seems to illustrate that beautiful Oriental saying, "that the roads to God are as many as there are souls." And He always takes a person's attitude where they are standing.

—Letter to Corinne True dated
11 July 1909

In calling *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks* 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "rhetorics," I point to their practical purpose: like handbooks of rhetoric, they intend to guide the reader through the process of improving their communication. The communication 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends is spiritual, concerning both the individual's interactions with the indwelling spirit and with other people. Since these two compilations

² A full overview of Bahá'í spiritual rhetoric would necessarily examine texts by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh too—not to mention their uptake by adherents worldwide who have delivered talks and written books inspired by this scripture—but that is not my purpose here.

cover many of the same themes, I will discuss them together, sampling from a large number of the short talks each contains. In order to detail the teachings in these two collections that Barney likely knew most intimately, this section diverges from the essay's overall focus on transnational flow to pause upon the theme of communication in *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*. First, I explicate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concept of the human spirit (i.e., the soul) and its relationship with the Holy Spirit as the bedrock of communication. Next, because humans must acknowledge the spirit as their fundamental identity to attain the ideal orientation to communication, I turn to the basic method of reforming the spirit—the independent search for truth. Finally, I sketch the ultimate social purpose of such reform, which is to move humanity from material community to spiritual communion. Simply put, the soul's necessary evolution toward becoming a catalyst for unity involves recognizing the link between itself and the Holy Spirit, realizing that the Holy Spirit has many manifestations, and becoming freed from self-righteous prejudice and thus gaining the capacity to unite other spirits regardless of superficial differences. Although I narrate this process sequentially in an effort to maintain the pragmatic style of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance, the spirit's evolution, in the Bahá'í perspective, actually is eternally unfolding after physical birth. This section primarily synthesizes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ontology,

offering a summary of His teachings.³

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the spirit of the individual is transcendent of time and place and deathless in nature, but it must work to realize its divine nature and overcome its attraction to worldly pleasures. A human being's true nature is the spirit (*Some Answered Questions* 16:3). In a human's earthly life, the spirit associates with a body, but the body is not true existence because the spirit persists and continues to develop after bodily death (chapters 60 and 61). The spirit, with its "power of discovery," distinguishes humankind from animals, which lack eternal souls (48:7). Every human has a spirit, and all enjoy that power of discovery through extrasensory faculties of imagination, thought, comprehension, and memory (56:2). Every spirit seeks the truth (which "has many aspects, but . . . remains always and forever one" [*Paris Talks* 15:9]) and experiences "spiritual longing and perception" (*Paris Talks* 23:7). However, human nature also incorporates animalistic features: the material side desires only things of the material world, while the spiritual side aspires toward God (18:2). Indulging in the brute aspect causes the spiritual errors of humanity; the dual spirit "is capable of both the greatest perfection and the

3 Ontology, the theory of being, has some overlaps with epistemology, the theory of knowledge. For a useful overview of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epistemology, see Mikhail Sergeev's "Reflections on the Epistemological Views of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

greatest deficiency" (*Some Answered Questions* 36:5). The spirit is thus *divine* in nature, but the human must work on the spirit for it to become *good*; such development is the purpose of physical existence.

The instrument through which humans sense their connection to God is the spirit. The more progress made toward their development of godly attributes, the clearer this connection becomes. Individual spiritual progress is the only true distinction between one human and another; all physical differences are spiritually irrelevant (*Paris Talks* 40:10). Spiritual maturation cannot occur independently; humans require divine education (*Some Answered Questions* 3:7). The "Holy Spirit" is this instrument of divine guidance, which guides individuals on their spiritual evolution: "Man cannot free himself from the onslaught of vain and selfish desires save through the confirming grace of the Holy Spirit" (19:7). Yet humans might not naturally recognize the presence or need of this divine intermediary. Spirits that perceive their divine nature intuit the existence of the Divine, but others stand in need of persuasion: "when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the grace of the spirit, it is necessary to set forth external arguments" (2:8). Certainly, humans can experience material success without opening themselves to the Holy Spirit, utilizing the spirit's perceptive powers to investigate phenomenal reality. Perceiving "the divine

mysteries and the heavenly realities," however, requires cooperating with this intermediary (55:5).

Recognizing the necessary reliance on the Holy Spirit does not excuse humans from conducting work on their own spirits. Rather, the two are collaborators, and humans need to make their spirits receptive to the Holy Spirit: "Men should hold in their souls the vision of celestial perfection, and there prepare a dwelling-place for the inexhaustible bounty of the Divine Spirit" (*Paris Talks* 31:10). Preparing this spiritual dwelling place entails developing divine attributes. Raising thoughts toward the divine is a crucial method toward this end, which can be accomplished through inward contemplation and silent meditation (54:8). Indeed, thoughts should be realigned away from the "finite" self: "We must look higher than all earthly thoughts; detach ourselves from every material idea, crave for the things of the spirit; fix our eyes on the everlasting bountiful Mercy of the Almighty" (51:14, 9:27). Concentrating thoughts on the future instead of present problems and on "the unity of mankind" are routes toward such reorientation (53:5, 42:2). Transcendent thoughts like these influence earthly action through a kind of positive contagion: "If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men" (6:11). Indeed, like a virus,

“character [is] highly communicable in the realm of hearts and spirits” (*Some Answered Questions* 57:8)—for better or worse. For this reason, spiritual communication has a significant influence on society. Through the transmission of attributes from spirit to spirit, it can uplift or degrade communities. If people reorient their spirit toward divinity through the careful direction of thoughts, they will form an alliance with the Holy Spirit and, with this collaborator, work more effectively toward social transformation.

A critical method of reforming the spirit posited by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the search for divine truth. Although seeking the truth should constitute a constant practice, it also forms a first step toward spiritual action. This search is the pursuit of the oneness of divine truth and thus the unity of human spirits: “If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united” (*Paris Talks* 40:8). In one of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá distilled the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh into eleven principles, beginning with “The Search after Truth,” which mandates the renunciation of all superstition and prejudice:

If five people meet together to seek for truth, they must begin by cutting themselves free from all their own special conditions and renouncing all preconceived ideas. In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice

is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is *one*. (41:6)

The most problematic “special conditions” are religious prejudices, arising when any sect boasts that they are “the only guardians of the truth, and that every other religion is composed of errors” (41:2). This prejudice is endemic in members of all the major religions. Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims all suffer the bondage of “tradition and dogma,” depriving themselves of finding truth in other traditions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá critiques the faulty logic underlying the belief in an exclusive truth: “All contradicting one another, all cannot be true” (41:3). Are all religions false? No; rather, the premise is incorrect, and the corrected enthymeme is, *all religions agree; therefore, they can all be true*.

This universalist tenet relies on the belief that religions all share a fundamental purpose. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly stresses in other talks, this purpose is achieving spiritual unification. If, however, religion becomes a cause of division, then its followers have perverted its intent. The tendency of religions to accumulate distinctive rituals and rites disguises the oneness of truth by training adherents to venerate these accretions.

Clergy sometimes contribute to this divisive process by becoming involved in politics when they should instead “endeavor to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice” (*Paris Talks* 49:11). Religion is useful insofar as it supports the spirit’s progress toward truth, to which ossified “customs and traditions” are irrelevant (*Some Answered Questions* 14:9), but it can prove detrimental because these “outward practices” distract followers from the “simple, underlying truth” of spiritual oneness (*Paris Talks* 39:13). Similarly, reading scriptures only yields spiritual meaning when conducted “with a clean heart and a pure mind” (16:8). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognized every “Manifestation” of God—the divine messengers to humanity who arrive in times of spiritual famine—as sharing the same purpose, but He critiqued the followers of the religions they founded for deviating from the original intent.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains in “The Search after Truth,” the truth seeker must release all the distracting trappings fastened to religions over the ages. Only then, detached “from the external forms and practices of religion,” will the seeker realize the fundamental agreement of all religions (*Paris Talks* 41:3). The trope of detachment recurs throughout this talk, accentuated through verbs such as “abandon,” “relinquish,” “cut free,” “renounce,” “give up,” and “clear away.” As this trope indicates, the search after

truth depends on discernment. To detect spiritual reality, seekers must use their mind to distinguish the truth from convention: “Unless we make a distinction in our minds between dogma, superstition and prejudice on the one hand, and truth on the other, we cannot succeed” (41:9). Making such a distinction could entail releasing “all that we have previously learned,” potentially even “beginning our education all over again” (41:10). Although this radical departure from comfortable routine might be alarming, the alternative is worse—to remain shackled. Discernment frees the seeker to discover the truth everywhere, finally perceiving “truth in all religions, for truth is in all and truth is one!” (41:11). Aware of this fundamental truth, the seeker’s inward vision effects societal transformation.

Perceiving the oneness of truth—that adherents to all creeds actually pursue the same divine purpose—enables humanity to realize its spiritual oneness. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, although human spirits are individual, they are “mutually connected” and “mutually influence one another” in an “intimate relationship” (*Some Answered Questions* 69:4). While oneness is the spiritual reality, divisive opinions and feelings occlude it (83:3). Indeed, humans have the potential to achieve love for family, nation, race, party, and community of interest—yet, unaided, they cannot accomplish the ultimate step to universal love “for humanity . . . bounded by none of these imperfect, semi-selfish bonds” (*Paris Talks*

9:15). To experience this all-embracing, selfless love, they must recognize the Holy Spirit, for “[n]o worldly power can accomplish the universal love” (9:15). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elucidates the spiritual nature of oneness thus: “We should rise from the individual to the whole. The [Holy] spirit is as one great ocean and the waves thereof are the souls of men” (28:2). So, to see their unity with other waves, their fellow humans, people must realize their true nature as single waves in a vast ocean. Humans must utilize the Holy Spirit to execute their mission during their physical lifetime—working toward the unification of humanity.

Although this theory resembles that of cosmopolitanism, defined by Martha Nussbaum as the understanding that one’s “primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world,” it differs in hinging the success of the universalist project on the recognition of the Holy Spirit (3). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s philosophy detailed in this section claims that without recognizing that oneness has a spiritual source, cosmopolites will struggle to transcend the myriad material distinctions between humans in developing their universal love. Nevertheless, most secular cosmopolites and spiritual universalists would likely concur on the necessity of applying their global outlook in their actions.

The ultimate outcome of spiritual realization is active involvement in the life of society. Returning to the nature of the spirit, its progress toward divinity requires both a reorientation

of thought and the expression of this spiritualized thought in action. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, if thoughts are communicated only in words, “these alone are without effect” (*Paris Talks* 9:2). Moreover, “[i]f actions took the place of words, the world’s misery would very soon be changed into comfort” (1:11). Intriguingly, He even suggests that for true Bahá’ís, “speech is not needed” because “patient lives of active service” furnish a convincing example (26:6). To say, “I love all of humanity” while avoiding relationships with people unlike oneself, for example, would not suffice to create social change. Instead of announcing principles without enacting them, people should quietly make efforts in their daily life toward eliminating prejudices and fostering unity. This would more likely result in awakening the spirits around them to their oneness with all other humans, creating a ripple effect of recognition and action. Rhetorical efforts, I argue, constitute a valid form of action when combined with a rhetor’s constant work toward promoting oneness. In short, integrity of ethos matters.

CHANNELING KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE NOVICE WEST

A thing that struck Miss Barney in a most marked way was Abdul-Baha’s absolute wish to make a person understand what He is saying. When she first began to know Persian, her vocabulary was very limited. It was very difficult

for a man of such wonderful scope of language as He had to confine Himself to the few words she knew, but He was perfectly willing to express what He wanted to express in these few little words to get it clear, straight and direct.

—Letter to Corinne True dated
11 July 1909

If one compares the impressive record of public service performed by Barney to her short list of publications, it appears she followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's directive to prioritize action over words. In the civic sphere, she won acclaim in her lifetime for her humanitarian work and her efforts on behalf of women. For example, she was rewarded for her service to France during World War I—including volunteering with the American Ambulance Corps, the American Red Cross, and the Refugee and Repatriation Service, and helping found a children's hospital (Rodriguez 219)—with induction into the Légion d'Honneur. In the interwar period, she served the League of Nations on its Commission of Intellectual Co-operation. During World War II, she was the convener of the International Council of Women's Peace and Arbitration Committee. After the war, she participated in the United Nation's Economic and Social Council (Giachery 538). She further engaged in civic discourse through public addresses. In 1909, she delivered lectures on her experiences in the Middle East, and later she undertook travels "lecturing on the impelling necessity of a united

world," drawing material from her global experiences (Giachery 535). In 1932, her lecture topics included "The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments," "Co-operation of Nations or World Disaster," "Constructive Uses of the Cinematograph and Radio," "Intellectual Co-operation," and "Customs and Ideas of Other Lands" (Flyer)—subjects that demonstrate her globalist values.

Barney was surely consistently creating texts to serve the demands of her various posts, but besides the compilations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks, she published only one other work. This was the script for her play *God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts* (1910), printed as a lushly illustrated volume. Her second play, "The Opium Pipe—in the Land of Persia" (1912), was staged but not published. A book-length travel memoir, "From the Peace of the East to the War of the West" (1916), and an undated collection of short stories and poems, "Outlines and Shadows," apparently remained in her private papers. While all these works bear the imprint of her religious beliefs, the speeches she delivered in 1909 provide the most direct evidence of her uptake and diffusion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance. She delivered these speeches during a period of intense engagement with the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, after completing *Some Answered Questions* and before assisting with *Paris Talks*. Because of the expository nature of the speeches, which resemble brief memoirs, they most explicitly describe her observations as a disciple. In this

section, I will discuss her speeches; the next section provides an overview of the other works she composed during her early period of discipleship because they disclose her powerful sense of purpose as a writer—a purpose impelled by her spiritual mission.

Barney delivered a series of lectures in the United States in 1909, temporarily returning from her home in Europe and giving talks in New York City and Chicago and perhaps in other cities; a few of these talks were preserved and are held in the US National Bahá'í Archives. Their preservation results from their circulation among the network of early Bahá'ís, indicating that Barney served as a significant conduit of knowledge from Acre to the West. Two speeches delivered on May 16, apparently in New York, were transcribed, passed from friend to friend, and eventually entrusted to an archive.⁴ According to a note on the first page, the transcript was given to one “L. C. Sweden by Julia Grundy October 1933”⁵; eventually it ended up with the papers of Frank Osborne (both Grundy and Osborne were American Bahá'ís). The scribe indicates that these speeches were

4 The second speech was recorded at “Lockwood Academy,” presumably the small school in Brooklyn, New York, operating from approximately 1870 to 1926 (Spellen).

5 This note’s handwriting differs markedly from the more legible cursive of the speech transcripts. Due to the note-writer’s penmanship, the name before “Julia Grundy” is difficult to distinguish, so “L. C. Sweden” is a guess.

among “Miss Barney’s First Talks” (1)—implying that she delivered others.⁶ According to a letter addressed to the prominent Bahá'í Corinne True, Barney arrived in Chicago on July 8 and immediately commenced giving talks. The unnamed writer attended one talk by Barney that day, which she or he summarizes in the letter, beginning with the following reflection:

It was suggested that Miss Barney tell us about Abdul-Baha and Acca and she complied with the request most beautifully. She is a very fine speaker and spoke with much earnestness and power. She has a fine intellect and is without a doubt a powerful instrument in this great Cause. There is a great work for her to do and she is doing it. She has a broad view of the Revelation and is practical, sensible—not emotional. (Letter to Corinne True dated 11 July 1909, 1–2)

From this description of Barney, the inference can be drawn that she took seriously her responsibility to convey ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s spiritual guidance to her compatriots. The letter, which is typewritten, appears to have been designed for distribution beyond its stated recipient, given its dittoed appearance and lack of signature. Again, this indicates that Barney’s

6 The scribe could have been Julia Grundy, an early American Bahá'í; in any case, the notes were certainly not written by Barney—her sharply italic handwriting is distinctive.

talks circulated beyond the confines of her original listeners.

In the summary of the July 8 speech and the fuller transcriptions of the May 16 speeches, the freshness of Barney's contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá is apparent. She relates various anecdotes of His friendliness toward all in Acre—especially to those who spurned Him, including everyone from governors to nuns—and provides her own observations. These observations come across more completely in the May 16 speeches; it appears the scribe attempted to record Barney's original words, and it is from this transcript of talks that the following quotations are drawn. Barney's introductory remarks indicate that she was addressing audiences of Bahá'ís and their friends—listeners who already “know much of the Bahá'í cause” (9). In the first talk, Barney reflects on her 1906 visit to Persia; in the second talk, she describes 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In the first talk, Barney praises the Bahá'ís of the Middle East, who have, she contends, undergone a spiritual revolution because of their adherence to the young religion. After she came to Acre, she explains, 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed that she had much to learn about the Bahá'í Faith, and “little by little [she] received a fuller realization of his teachings” (1). Apparently, part of her education involved becoming “familiar with the past and existing conditions of Persia” in preparation for visiting that country, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá hoped she would “see how the love of Bahá'u'lláh had enkindled the hearts of men” (1). So, her visit to Persia, which had the

largest and oldest Bahá'í community, would permit an empirical study of the spiritual transformation wrought by the religion. According to her talk, her trip served its intended purpose. She felt moved by visiting the sites of her religion's early development, including sites associated with prominent figures, such as the “sacred ground” of the Báb's martyrdom in Tabriz and the birthplace of His apostle Táhirih in Qazvin (6). Reflecting on another martyr, she remarked, “The lesson teaches us the reasoning of the minds of these simple people, how they are filled with spiritual illumination” (4). Although her comment on “simple people” could smack of condescension, her attitude toward working-class Persians is primarily admiring:

It was also wonderful to find these people so advanced in the great economical and ethical questions of the present day. Such as universal Peace and other social problems which proves that they are more advanced than we are in social conditions. This proves how great the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh [are] to them to turn these people into true philosophers and religious men. (6)

She finds Persian Bahá'ís “more advanced” than Westerners—progress she credits to the universalistic orientation promoted by their religion. After she and her fellow travelers return to “our home Acca” and debrief on the visit with 'Abdu'l-Bahá (7),

Barney asks Him when the United States would become like Persia and when there would be world peace. He responds that it would happen when people of West and East unite, which will occur “when love and unity is established in the hearts of the People” (8). As Barney’s question reveals, she views Persia as the United States’ superior—even role model—in spiritual advancement.

While Barney’s vision of Persian Bahá’ís might seem naively utopian, she does acknowledge some special challenges in the region. When she visited Ashgabat (in what is now Turkmenistan), she observed that the women of the community did not participate much in public affairs: “The Persian women have had very little opportunity to understand the principles of our day” (2). Barney makes a comment that she repeats later in the talk about the pragmatism of the Bahá’í Faith, through which “we are not only practical but spiritual,” and then describes how she “asked the men to have a real large meeting at the Temple to have their wives and daughters and children attend” (2). They obliged, and of the ensuing meeting she says, “I will never forget the love witnessed there” (2). Because this transcript sometimes lacks transitions, some guesswork must be done to piece together her reasoning: What is the connection between her advocacy of spiritual practicality and her decision to intervene in the Ashgabat community? Taken together, the two comments imply that her request for gender mixing

represents a practical application of a Bahá’í spiritual principle—in this case, the equality of women and men. In a similarly abrupt digression later in the talk, she remarks, “I am now beginning to realize the wonderful love that Abdul Bahá reflects for humanity” (5). Was this statement an unplanned outburst of devotion? That this statement is found in her memoir of her journey to Persia suggests that Barney’s interactions with the Persian community enabled her to perceive ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s universal love—a model of the kind of love He asked Bahá’ís to cultivate.

Such an inference would align with the warm observations of her teacher related in the second talk, in which she places herself more in the background because, as she says, “It is not what I think, [that] is of much importance but what I saw” (9). Bahá’ís understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as exemplifying ideal conduct; this concept arises in Barney’s speech, as she explains that Acre serves as a spiritual nexus “owing to the Example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life which radiates to all Bahá’í centers in all parts of the world” (9). As He shows qualities including “toleration and vigilance,” so should the Bahá’ís “be tolerant to all mankind and vigilant not to harm” (14). His followers reflect His qualities, as “He seems to focus all that is in us so that we are a mirror to him” (11). According to the letter passages used as epigraphs above, in her July 8 speech, Barney explains how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accommodates His speech to each listener—a point she also makes in this May 16

talk. It seems that in modeling universal love, He draws attention to the significance of caring for diverse individual needs, particularly in spiritual communication:

When he is about to answer a question he is calm and meditative, and seems to be looking out on nature. He seems to forget your presence, and by and by when he answers all that which seemed difficult [for] you to comprehend becomes easy to understand. All mysteries are imparted unto you. (13)

Yet, despite this illumination, other meanings remain “for you to investigate and discover” (13). He advises His followers “to reflect deeply and all meanings will become clear” (13). It appears that even in receiving His messages, His followers still must search after truth to arrive at spiritual comprehension. Perhaps ‘Abdu’l-Bahá frames His responses inconclusively to train His interlocutors to consistently investigate, rather than unthinkingly accept, messages—even those from a revered source.

Returning to the concept of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s universal love, Barney explains that although His love is given to everyone, it is still the duty of the individual to accept it. If individuals disconnect themselves from divine love, then they become stagnant like still water; instead, they must keep the channel open, to “be connected with God and always fill that Connection

and then we will always be attuned with the infinite” (12). This simile of ocean, channel, and pools was apparently a favorite trope, as Barney used it also in the July 8 talk. Growing in spiritual love will enable the Bahá’í community to develop, continuing to find unity in diversity. “Not only [in Acre] do we feel that bond of unity. It is everywhere we meet the Bahá’ís. They are all connected with one another and like one great happy family. This bond of sympathy creates beautiful actions” (14), Barney comments, reflecting on the diverse backgrounds of Bahá’ís.

In these speeches, Barney depicted her experiences in the Middle East through the lens of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance on spirituality. His teachings on the divinity of the spirit, the need for divine education to guide the spirit, and the impetus provided by such education toward universal love are markedly apparent in her addresses, which underscore the oneness of the multicultural community convening around the spiritual teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Moreover, by addressing American Bahá’ís—in 1909, still a very young community struggling to organize itself and to fulfill the religion’s teachings on racial and gender equality—Barney propelled the circulation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance into the West, as she had already done through her work compiling and preparing the English translation of *Some Answered Questions*, published the previous year. Her encomia to her Middle Eastern coreligionists furnished a role model

for the American converts, demonstrating to them that achieving similar progress is indeed possible, pending reforms that would promote love, unity, and transnational collaboration. As she noted in the July 8 talk, “The Orientals have such a strong love for us. They look upon us as younger children” (6). If these younger siblings—Western converts—imitated the Middle Eastern Bahá'ís, apparently more practiced at spiritual discernment and connecting with the Holy Spirit, they could mature spiritually. Although Barney was typically ensconced in Paris, she kept Persia consistently at the forefront of her texts, both rhetorical and literary, reaffirming her admiration of its Bahá'í minority.

SOCIAL REFORM RHETORIC:
“BRINGING PEACE AND HOPE TO
EXPECTANT HUMANITY”

The year after her United States lectures, Barney published her first play, *God's Heroes*, with a clear purpose—to broadcast the news of spiritual revolution. This drama and “The Opium Pipe” are openly didactic, seeking to inspire the audience to search after truth. *God's Heroes* attempts to awaken readers to the new revelation, while “The Opium Pipe” evinces concern for addiction. Barney had a history with performing arts; she had studied dramatic arts, as well as sculpture, in Paris, and occasionally participated in shows orchestrated by her mother. *God's Heroes*, which portrays episodes from 1848 to 1852 in the life of

Táhirih, was presumably inspired by a similar play, Isabella Grinevskaya's *Bab: A Dramatic Poem of the History of Persia* (1903), first performed in Russia in 1904.⁷ This play was translated into French (Hassall 6), and it is possible that Barney encountered the translation. *God's Heroes* was published in London and Philadelphia, but I have found no evidence that it was staged, although it had a readership for a number of decades.⁸ Neverthe-

7 The inspiration of *God's Heroes* emanates from Persia in 1844, the year when a young man named Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, titled “the Báb,” claimed that He had brought a new revelation from God. He attracted followers among Shia Muslims, including a woman, Fátimih Barágháni (c. 1814–52), who came to be known by the titles Qurratu'l-'Ayn and Táhirih. This poet and theologian zealously advocated the Báb's cause and gained notoriety for her “heretical” act of publicly appearing unveiled in 1848.

8 Some evidence for the play's circulation comes from Martha Root, who twice cites *God's Heroes*, “the beautiful drama,” in her 1938 biography of Táhirih (83). She relates her interaction with a German scholar who requested a loan of the play and was “delighted” with it (84). While this reception history is admittedly meager, it indicates that Barney's play had a readership for at least a few decades after its publication. In fact, the play appears to have been translated into Persian and published in Iran in 1977 as *Daliran-i Rabbani* (“Those Possessed of Divine Courage”), testifying to its staying power and its international appeal.

less, Barney's purpose was explicitly evangelical—to convey “a glimpse of Eastern glory, and to awaken your interest in this great movement, the universal religion—Baháism, which is today bringing peace and hope to expectant humanity” (*God's Heroes* viii). In the preface, she tries to whet her readers' thirst for spiritual knowledge, encouraging them to assume the role of “heroic investigator” over “reader of little patience” (v). For the latter, she synthesizes her objective, enticing them to keep reading by underscoring the superlative nature of her subject: “this work portrays but a fragment of one of *the most dramatic periods* in history, and is but a limited presentation of *the most vast philosophy* yet known to man” (v; emphasis added).

It is worth lingering on the preface, because here Barney explains her choice of drama as the instrument for awakening. Theater, “a mighty instrument for spreading ideas broadcast,” is a uniquely effective tool for bringing “before the public some of the most inspiring events of our epoch” (*God's Heroes* vi). Therefore, she decided, “the wave of regeneration, which is sweeping over the world, should take form also on the stage” (vi). Looking back to antiquity, she explains that two types of theater have coexisted since then—sacred theater and theater of passions. She favors sacred theater of the sort that “contributes . . . to the moral development of society,” although today the latter predominates, irresponsibly prettifying vice (v). Conversely, she aims to hold up “the mirror of truth”

to the onlookers to stir them into seeing the truth of human faults (vi). She praises playwrights, who serve as “true psychologists” and “genuine moralists” (vi). The audience should relate to her drama (despite cultural difference) because of a uniting spiritual impetus: the characters' “aspirations . . . are of all ages and of all lands” (vi). Táhirih “stands forth in history as an example of what the disciple of truth can accomplish despite hampering custom and violent persecution”: she embodies the search for truth, with the play depicting her defying family and religious mores to support a new message from God (viii). The play's preface thus constitutes an invitation to transformation: to mirror the characters like Táhirih who threw away social convention—and ultimately life—in pursuit of transcendent truth.

There are, however, states that might feel like transcendence but contain no spiritual truth—states like intoxication, which Barney decries in “The Opium Pipe.” The drug-related death of her sister's former lover Renée Vivien may have provoked Barney into writing this play (Kling 244).⁹ Staged in 1915 to an enthusi-

9 The Barney sisters, Laura and Natalie, lived near each other in Paris for decades, with Laura's home at 74 rue Raynouard and Natalie's at 20 rue Jacob. Similarly modern blood flowed through their veins, driving them both to spurn convention: Laura in her embrace of feminism and the Bahá'í Faith, Natalie in her devotion to lesbianism and a Sapphic ethos. They share a headstone in their adopted hometown's Passy Cemetery.

astic reception in Washington, DC, the drama traces a Persian king succumbing to drug addiction and its fatal consequences for his marriage and sovereignty (Kling 246–47). After the king starts using opium, he adheres to an intense individualism in which he chases desires, sweeping duties aside and declaring, “Seek not the illusive, beware of idealism. . . . Grasp life in its fullness” (“Opium” 5). He falls in love with “the world of the senses” and believes he merely obeys the “decree of Fate” (16). At the end of the play, following his wife’s suicide, he rejects his addiction, throwing his pipe down and proclaiming, “I know now whither my unbridled senses can lead me; through the fumes of opium I have seen my vanquished self” (32). Sensuality, he finally realizes, brought transient pleasure and lasting failure. The play’s message seems simple: substance use demoralizes even the most powerful. It is easy to overlook Barney’s nuanced diagnosis of the spiritual etiology of addiction. There is, first, the spiritual sterility of the king’s treacherous regent, who induces him into using opium: a social illness ensnares the victim. Once he is trapped, the king’s animal nature seals his fate, relishing its release: “It is natural; in the opium den he met his lower self, and his lower self pleased him; and when man is pleased, conscience may go a begging, and never gratification will it receive to keep it alive” (12). With the lower spirit unleashed and fed, the higher spirit wilts. Barney’s analysis hearkens directly to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings

about the dual nature of the human spirit and the abhorrent results of letting the animalistic element lead.

Barney’s moralistic plays attempt to guide the audience toward the principles expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *God’s Heroes* is clearly evangelical in intent, but even “The Opium Pipe,” which never explicitly mentions the Bahá’í Faith, expresses certain teachings found in *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*. Although her plays never seem to have reached as massive an audience as she hoped, they still influenced some readers and viewers, extending the scope of her work as a disciple to reach audiences ranging from Washington theatergoers to a German scholar. Her choice to dramatize her spiritual beliefs indicates that she viewed theater as an effective medium for conveying a message to a receptive audience—indeed, she says as much in the preface to *God’s Heroes*. But what would make a theater audience particularly receptive—and what were they to receive, besides entertainment and perhaps intercultural empathy with the Persian characters?

Barney’s plays also seek to attune the viewers to the Holy Spirit by inducing contemplation. Recall that in *Paris Talks*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes meditation as a method for raising thoughts toward the divine, thus preparing the human spirit to host the Holy Spirit. In the talk in which He describes such contemplation, delivered in London in 1913, He opens with the story of a mystical congregation in Iran, “who gathered together for silent

communion with the Almighty" (*Paris Talks* 54:1). At these silent gatherings, "their leader opens with a certain proposition, and says to the assembly 'You must meditate on this problem'" (54:3). Turning themselves toward the Holy Spirit, the meditators seek and receive the solution to the spiritual question at hand. Concluding the story, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that meditation must be done without speaking aloud because "while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit" and "you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed" (54:9). Moreover, this communion is not only internal but also involves receiving the Holy Spirit's inspiration: "Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation" (54:11). 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares meditative reflection to a mirror, which spirits should keep "rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects" (54:19). A mirror metaphor also appears in Barney's preface to *God's Heroes*. Commenting on the moral lessons taught by drama, she writes, "[W]hen the mirror of truth is held before the gaze, he is blind indeed who can turn away uninfluenced by the sight of a disorderly reflection" (*God's Heroes* vi). In her plays, Barney tries to stimulate reflection in the audience. Empathizing with the characters onstage, the theatergoers would be prompted to examine their

own spirits for resemblances. Barney envisioned theater as mystical, harkening back to Greek drama staged "in antiquity at the foot of the altar of the Gods, whose will was there shown forth to mortals in sacred performances" (*God's Heroes* v). She connects this ancient drama to Christian mystery plays, thus constructing a lineage of sacred theater—to which she affixes herself. Admittedly, the sensory intake of viewing a play does not allow for the silence 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises for meditation. However, the theatergoers are unspeaking, provided by the play with a prompt to consider spiritual dilemmas rather than their daily affairs. Thus, I suggest that Barney positions herself as the meditation leader in a mystical circle of theatergoers, leading them gradually into opening their spirits to the Holy Spirit.

BARNEY AS TESTAMENT TO
RELIGION'S TRANSNATIONAL
PERSUASIVE POTENTIAL

Women must make the greatest effort to acquire spiritual power and to increase in the virtue of wisdom and holiness until their enlightenment and striving succeeds in bringing about the unity of mankind.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*

There is no better evidence of the effect of Barney's spiritual investigations than her own testimony. Turning to Barney's experiences aligns with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's firm emphasis on the

importance of *living* the message, not just speaking it. So, in this final section, I examine Barney more closely, employing her memoir, titled “From the Peace of the East to the War of the West,” which documents a journey from New York to East Asia that she undertook with Hippolyte in 1914 and her experience with the outbreak of World War I that year. Her purpose in composing the memoir, beyond preserving her memories, is unstated; it was never published.¹⁰ Perhaps freed by its private nature, Barney reveals her opinions and reactions, permitting some insight into the way she viewed the world.

The desire to travel permeates the manuscript, as she reflects on her attraction to diverse countries. In the foreword, she writes:

Can one really know any man?
Can one really know any country?
I am drawn to nations as others
are attracted to individual beings.
I find them complex, both lovable
and imperfect, and I am made to
realize that alone an intermingling
of certain racial customs,
of certain social aspirations can
form a civilization worthy of life
and of the genius of man. (“From
the Peace” 3)

Although she does not mention religion here, the relinquishment

10 Copies of this memoir are held by both the Smithsonian Institution Archives and the Bibliothèque Baha'ie de France.

of divisive prejudice advocated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to motivate her approval of “intermingling.” This is not to say that Barney had ascended above all prejudice; her memoir occasionally reflects prevalent stereotypes, and sometimes the foreignness of her surroundings overwhelms her, as in a noisy Chinese city when she longs to escape “this strangeness” (99). Overall, though, her memoir demonstrates her enjoyment of travel: “What is this craving for distant lands which urges me away from the known and the loved?” (12). She asserts that tourism that fails to spend time in a locality lacks purpose, critiquing several Western travelers for their attitude toward seeing Japan and China, wondering, “Why . . . had they left their homes at all?” (30). To have a valid experience, “one must live on the soil to hear the voice of Japan. . . . listen to all these sounds foreign to your ear, and rejoice in your experience” and “linger on, become absorbed by the mysterious influence of the threefold walled city [of Peking]” (31, 71). She proclaims, “Let every man who feels cramped individually stretch out, let the globe be his home” (112). Moreover, she celebrates the unifying benefits of international travel, praising, for instance, an arrangement to have Chinese students study in the United States. As she asks a Chinese interlocutor, “Don’t you think that intercourse between nations brings understanding?” (73). (Little surprise that she later served with the League of Nations and the United Nations.)

As much as her memoir is an encomium to the beauty of unfamiliar locales and cultures, it is also a critique of human folly, taking Western society as its primary target. Even before her chapter on World War I—the most condemnatory section of the manuscript—she comments on the misplaced egotism of warfare. Visiting Mexico during its civil war, she contemplates the peasants willingly going to fight, reflecting, “[T]hey do not know that brains, and not gunpowder, can best solve national and interstate problems” (8). She also reproaches Western powers for the imperialism she witnesses from Hawai‘i to China, repeatedly pointing out the irony of calling colonialism “civilization” given its deleterious social effects such as industrial thralldom and addiction (20, 22, 74, 52, 77). Denouncing the cupidity of factories in Osaka, she laments that Japan “is invaded by our [Western] social and economic difficulties” (50). Missionary work to her seems hypocritical; Christians have not demonstrated their spirituality in their imperial actions, and she commends the Chinese person who, confronted by competing sects, “does not take the trouble to decide” (89). Commenting on concessions China made to compensate for missionaries’ murders, she notes sarcastically, “No wonder that Christian countries encourage foreign missions; they are certain of material success, even if they fail in spiritual results” (100). To discomfit a French “bigot,” Barney declares, “I had lived long in Islamite countries,

and . . . loved them best where the missionaries were excluded” (126). She repeatedly identifies hypocrisy in Westerners who claim to be religious and civilizing.

Barney brooks no ethnocentrism or religious bigotry; she critiques people who lack the desire to “know”—presumably, to know the truth—observing that “few people know, and even fewer care to know!” (“From the Peace” 11). In her chapter titled “Turning Backwards,” her disgust with the ills of Western civilization bursts forth as she recounts her journey to France to aid its defense efforts by nursing soldiers. The chapter churns with her revulsion at the absurdity of the war—how it artificially generates “irreconcilable enemies” by nationality (105–06); how “flesh and nerves were given as targets to copper and steel” (117); how merely at “the lifting of an imperial degenerate shriveled little arm . . . these millions of splendid beings are being crippled and killed!” (120); how massacres result from “the willful work of man!” (122); how “the many have to suffer for the criminality of the few” (125); and how “our civilization has been too sluggish to find a peaceful solution to national problems” (128). Her litany of woes for her adopted homeland and anger at the aggressors demonstrates that although she abhorred the injustices of Western powers, she did not reject fellowship with her compatriots; rather, she embraced it, throwing herself into the French war effort—though she could have waited out the war in the United States.

Barney's meditation in this memoir on establishing peace demonstrates her effort to apply the teachings she learned from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the current situation, because her proposal for social reform conforms closely to His guidance on spirituality. She perceives the war as a blight with spiritual causes, such as selfish leaders manipulating people's lower natures into antagonism: "There is no such reality as 'race hatred'; it is a fabrication made and exploited by the vampires of greed" ("From the Peace" 125). Quoting Woodrow Wilson's 1914 plea to pray for European peace, she remarks that, facing such madness, "a greater power was needed to check oppression, to stay suffering" (113). This comment on the needed "greater power" aligns with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition that only in collaboration with the Holy Spirit can humanity experience universal love. Moreover, her valuation of women's role in peacemaking conforms with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's praise for the spiritual qualities of women (e.g., "She is more tenderhearted, more receptive, her intuition is more intense" [*Paris Talks* 50:6]). Barney comments frequently on the maternal, life-giving nature of women, with proclamations such as, "Can not woman, who brings forth life, exterminate war? . . . let her join in directing the affairs of State" ("From the Peace" 8). In her conclusion, she appeals to soldiers, asking them to help heal society, establish "obligatory arbitration," and collaborate with women: "Let women have the stimulus of responsibility, let her influence spread beyond the family circle, beyond

the town, beyond the country, into the whole world!" (130). Her support for women's leadership echoes her choice to place Táhirih at the center of *God's Heroes*. The peacemaking proposals she lays out in her memoir—written as she labored to defend France—indicate her active application of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings to civic life in both her intellectual and physical contributions.

In the speeches Barney delivered several years earlier, she presents herself as a woman learning about the world, both phenomenal and spiritual, from Middle Eastern coreligionists, especially from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Through her plays, she demonstrates her desire to spread what she learned as a disciple to wide audiences in need of spiritual growth. Her memoir portrays an active woman still learning, shocked by the violence of her fellow humans but confident that the solution to social ills would come through spiritual transformation. I have employed Barney as a case study because her texts shed light on the transmission of concepts from one continent to another—demonstrating in particular how religious belief can activate and facilitate transnational flows in directions that might be unexpected and certainly are underrepresented in existing scholarship. Barney is just one Western disciple in one Eastern religion. Much work remains to be done to trace the purposeful diffusion of universalistic concepts through rhetorical discipleship.

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