

“LISTENING FOR THE VOICE OF GOD? AN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY FEMALE PROPHET AND HER REVELATORY EXPERIENCES.”



Jane Shaw
Stanford University
April 12, 2017, 5:30-7:00
Building 50, Room 51A

In 1919, a vicar’s widow named Mabel Barltrop founded a millenarian community in Bedford, England, based on the truths that she and some of her followers believed they had received from God. She was considered a prophet, re-named Octavia and also declared to be the daughter of God. Octavia sat down at 5 o’clock every afternoon to receive God’s word via ‘automatic writing’; these revelations were published as the Writings of the Holy Ghost and guided all aspects of community life. This paper will analyze the process by which Octavia and her followers believed they heard the voice of God, and what shaped their understanding of it. It will also consider whether Octavia’s diagnosis of melancholia, and the records of her eighteen months of hospitalization for that, help or hinder our understanding of her capacity for such revelatory experiences.

Jane Shaw is Professor of Religious Studies and Dean for Religious Life at Stanford. Her most recent book is Octavia, Daughter of God: the story of a Female Messiah and her Followers (Yale 2011), and she is currently writing a history of modern mysticism. Prior to coming to Stanford she was Dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and before that taught at Oxford University for many years where she was a Fellow of New College.

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