

The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Poetry and Fiction

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In the twentieth and twenty-first century, the Oxford Movement has received a very substantial amount of attention as a literary movement, not simply a historical or theological phenomenon. It is difficult to study the politics or theology of Tractarianism without taking into account that of the three men most generally associated with it, Keble was primarily famous as a poet rather than for any of his prose works, and Newman had a substantial if not equal reputation for poetry and fiction. More importantly than their own literary productions, the leaders and followers of Tractarianism in its early days placed an extremely high value on literature – the right kind of literature – and never lost sight of its importance as a means of disseminating ideology. Private reading, as Joshua King’s recent study demonstrates, would become a means of imagining ‘participation in a national Christian community’, created and sustained by the circulation of ideas in Victorian print culture (King 2015: 14).

That Keble and Newman’s own publications, such as *The Christian Year* or those they edited or oversaw, like *Lyra Apostolica* and Charlotte Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe* (written, like her other novels, under Keble’s supervision), were successful in this respect is indicated by the tremendous influence that they had on later Victorian literature and culture. In relation to Victorian poetry, Stephen Prickett has commented that in market terms, ‘Tractarian poetry was (after Shakespeare’s) the most successful ever written in English’ (Prickett 2002: 279). It is also not an exaggeration to say that every major Victorian poet had a significant relationship with

Tractarian poetics. As Lizzie Ludlow discusses in this volume, the Pre-Raphaelites and Christina Rossetti were profoundly influenced by Tractarian ideals. While the Tennysons' copy of *The Christian Year* probably belonged to Emily rather than to Alfred, *In Memoriam*, the period's greatest religious poem, has been strongly linked to Keble's volume by Marion Shaw and Patrick Scott. Matthew Arnold was Keble's godson, and Arthur Hugh Clough was influenced both by the Arnolds at Rugby and by the lingering Tractarianism of Oxford. Raymond Chapman notably described him as 'one of the castaways of the Oxford Movement' (Chapman 1970: 220). Thomas Hardy knew many poems from *The Christian Year* by heart (Gittings 1975: 48-9). Gerard Manley Hopkins has also attracted substantial critical work on his pre-conversion Tractarian leanings and its influence on his Catholic poetics (see Johnson 1997). Critics such as Emma Mason, F. Elizabeth Gray and Emma Francis have, moreover, argued convincingly that Tractarian poetics provided a productive model for women writers as a group, particularly in its high valuation of reserve and emotional containment. Even Victorian poets who were actively hostile to the Oxford Movement, like both Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, used their work as a critique and commentary upon it. When Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh complains about being forced to read 'the Tracts *against* the times' (Barrett Browning 1996: 394), or the speaker of 'Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister' congratulates himself on how devotion permeates his daily routine to the extent of drinking his juice 'in three sips' to illustrate the Trinity (Browning 2005:39), readers are expected to get the reference and the joke, and to understand the speaker's and author's perspective on developments within British Christianity accordingly (Blair 2012: 129-42).

In literary criticism, poetry has dominated discussions of the influence of the Oxford Movement, which is unsurprising given that not simply Tractarian writers, but

nineteenth-century literary critics in general, regarded poetry as the most fitting genre for the expression and creation of faith and devotion. Yet within the last decade, the recovery of popular fiction by women in tandem with the broader religious turn in literary studies has led to a notable resurgence of scholarly interest in religious fiction, and particularly in Charlotte Yonge, the leading Tractarian novelist (see Wagner 2010; Sturrock 1992; Budge 2007; Colón 2012). Other overtly Tractarian novelists (F. E. Paget, William Gresley, W. E. Heygate, Georgiana Fullerton, Elizabeth and William Sewell, Elizabeth Harris and others) still remain firmly in the ‘minor’ – and with the possible exception of Newman’s *Loss and Gain*, generally unread – category, though historians such as Simon S. A. Skinner have made a strong case for the significance of the ‘Gresley and Paget school’ in disseminating the social doctrines of the Movement (2004: 65-83). Among the ‘canonical’ novelists of the Victorian period, perhaps only Hardy and Charles Kingsley could be read as writers who engaged deeply, if largely negatively, with the impact of Tractarianism. Charles Dickens, George Eliot and others, however, certainly expect their readers to appreciate the ways in which contemporary religious debates form a backdrop to their fiction. Dickens, who ‘abhorred’ Tractarianism, makes this particularly evident in his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, where the tormented leading character and possible murderer is a cathedral chorister (Walder 2007: 2). In Eliot’s novels, ‘remnants of the sacred Roman Catholic past are frequently significant’ (Lovesey 1991: 104), making direct allusion to Victorian anti-Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism (Blair 2001). When the leading characters in *Daniel Deronda* tour an ancient cloister, now a stable-block, at Mallinger Abbey, for instance, Deronda involuntarily takes off his hat in reverence. His sensitivity to the grandeur of the ruined abbey; directly references contemporary discourses on Gothic architecture,

within a context that very strongly recalls didactic Tractarian novels and pamphlets about church restoration and the appropriation of ancient abbeys, such as John M. Neale's *Aytoun Priory*, discussed below (Eliot 1967: 476). Both Deronda and Savonarola in *Romola*, as intensely religious heroes who attract (unwanted) romantic devotion from Romola and Gwendolen, can plausibly be read as references to an important character type, the sensitive, refined, quietly passionate Anglo-Catholic priest who appears in various guises, ~~and as~~ either as hero or villain, in works as different as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (Wright 2001) and Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*.[‡]

As this brief overview suggests, there is vast scope in studying the literary influence of the Oxford Movement, and indeed a number of seminal studies already exist which attempt to survey the field, including Joseph Baker on the novel, G. B. Tennyson on poetry, and Chapman on both. This chapter does not attempt either a comprehensive overview, or a reassessment of the major figures in this field, as substantial criticism on Tractarianism in the works of writers such as Keble, Newman and Hopkins can easily be found elsewhere. In terms of poetry, I have instead chosen to show just how pervasive Tractarianism was by focusing here on three 'minor' poets. The first is a writer whose output has never been discussed, since we know him only as an anonymous contributor of poems to the *British Magazine* and author of a recently discovered manuscript volume. This fascinating manuscript, by a clergyman who presents himself as an isolated champion of Tractarian truths in a hostile parish, stands here as indicative of how Tractarian ideals inspired men (and women) whose lives and work have left little trace to produce devotional literature. My second poet, Arthur Cleveland Coxe, was well-known in his day but is now completely forgotten. Yet the fact that Coxe produced one of the most influential collections of Tractarian

verse as a student at the Episcopal General Theological Seminary in Chelsea, New York, indicates the reach of Tractarianism across the Atlantic. As I have discussed elsewhere, Coxe was one of a group of American Tractarian poets who richly deserve recovery (Blair 2013). My final poet, Cecil Frances Alexander, has a wide reputation as a hymn-writer. I use Alexander here because as an Irish woman writer (her husband William Alexander eventually became Archbishop of Armagh) she similarly stood at a distinct geographical and cultural remove from the Oxford centre.

Alexander's poetry is also crucial in terms of audience. A very substantial and little-examined body of Tractarian literature was aimed squarely at child readers, and while fiction such as Yonge's has been re-examined from a children's literature perspective, poetry has only recently begun to attract critical attention (Clapp-Itnyre 2010, 2012; Blair 2016). Alexander is one of many poets (Rossetti is, of course, another) who saw that the carefully designed and ruthlessly controlled simplicity of Kebleian poetics could be linguistically and formally adaptable for child readers.

In my discussion of representative fiction, I use one of Yonge's lesser-known novels, *The Trial* (1864), as an example of how she situates her fiction in relation to both the realist and sensational genres of the 1860s, comparing it to another highly popular 1860s novel from an author with Tractarian leanings, Felicia Skene's *Hidden Depths* (1866). As representative of the earlier strain of didactic Tractarian fiction, which took remarkably little account of plot or character, I have selected Neale's *Aytoun Priory* (1843): Neale is also a good example of someone who, like Newman, wrote fiction in support of the Tractarian cause but without ever considering himself a novelist. Lastly, I consider Margaret Oliphant's *The Perpetual Curate*, also from 1864. Oliphant's novel features a ritualist Anglo-Catholic clergyman as the romantic hero and focus of the plot. While making it clear that her work is not specifically a

‘Tractarian’ or indeed a religious novel, Oliphant self-consciously positions *The Perpetual Curate* in relation to both these genres.

I

The *British Magazine* was founded by Hugh James Rose as an organ for disseminating High Church principles. A glance at its pages shows that literary criticism and original poetry played a major part in this aim. Keble and Newman, among others, were frequent contributors. One poet published there from September 1837–November 1838, who chose to identify himself with a Greek letter, was inspired by his inclusion to try his hand at producing a poetic collection. Whether it was rejected by a publisher, or whether the author never submitted it, is unclear, but there is certainly no evidence that it ever appeared in print. What we have, however, is a fair copy, marked with corrections and additions, of a manuscript entitled *Thoughts in Solitude*, discovered as part of a lot from a post-Second World War house clearance near Monmouth. We know, from the poems themselves, that the author was a highly-educated and well-read Anglican clergyman, who had been resident in his current parish at least since July 1833, and who turned to poetry in the mid-late 1830s. Many of his poems attack the forces of dissent and political radicalism, and represent the poet as persecuted and distressed in his pastoral role.

Thoughts in Solitude is a test-case for how we might identify poetry as ‘Tractarian’, especially since the *British Magazine*, while very definitely High Church in the late 1830s, is less specifically Tractarian than the *British Critic* under Newman’s editorship. The author acknowledges a debt to *The Christian Year* in his Advertisement, but then Keble’s volume was very widely read and admired beyond Oxford Movement circles. The poems here also differ from the work of Keble, and of

Tractarian poets such as Frederick Faber, in that there is very little celebration of the natural world and of the sacramental meanings contained in nature, an important part of Tractarian poetic theory inherited from Wordsworth, Coleridge and others. Of course, the fact that the Advertisement is dated ‘The feast of St John the Evangelist, 1838’ is strong evidence of the author’s loyalties, given the Tractarian revival of Church feasts. Even before we read this, however, the title page of the manuscript, which the author designed as a Gothic window-frame enclosing the title in Gothic font with a cross and Biblical motto beneath it, instantly suggests Tractarian leanings, since the emphasis on the book as a carefully designed devotional object in itself was characteristic of Anglo-Catholic publications in this period. The title, *Thoughts in Solitude* (a possible allusion to Isaac Williams’s *Thoughts in Past Years* (1838)), serves to suggest that the author is withdrawn from the world and perhaps also that the poems are products of private meditation rather than works intended for an audience. Keble’s literary criticism famously suggests that poetic production operates as a form of relief from oppressive thought and emotion, a controlled release, and thus primarily a private act: he himself shrank from publishing *The Christian Year* and disliked the fame and attention it brought. By suggesting that his poems are passing ‘thoughts’ or ‘effusions’, penned for his own benefit, the author of this collection places himself within this tradition. Even more notably, the Advertisement apologizes for the ‘considerable monotony, both of thought and expression’ in the collection. Tractarian poets used such apologies to highlight the fact that aesthetic accomplishment was not their primary aim. Indeed, in his sonnet collection, *The Altar*, Williams made a specific defense of monotony in religious poetics, comparing himself to a dove singing ‘in one same measured plaint’, and forestalling criticism of

his repetitiveness by arguing that ‘ordered sameness in variety’ reflects Nature’s seasonal repetition (Williams 1847: 106-7).

The themes and preoccupations of *Thoughts in Solitude* are primarily ‘Tractarian’ in that they place a very high emphasis on the importance of the priesthood and ‘The ancient, Catholic, & public Creed!’ (Anon 1838: 61). They are deeply political poems, political in the same way as Keble’s ‘National Apostasy’ sermon of 1833, in that they are vehemently opposed to radicalism and the ‘schism’ of dissent. ‘The Pastor’s Resolution’, one of a lengthy set of poems on the minister’s role, is a sonnet that opens:

The people have brought forth an image vain

From the old pagan shrine of Liberty (Anon 1838:83)

and closes with the pastor being charged to ‘Stand all undaunted, though ye stand alone’. This group of poems seem particularly concerned that the Anglican pastor should not fall prey to the temptation to please his people through ‘excitement’s hollow aid’, but rather should ‘speak with power, & soberness, & love’:

A diction natural, & grave, & staid,

Above all popular arts & vain parade,

Yet sweet & gentle as the dews distil

On tender grass that waves on Sion’s hill;

Plain as truth’s self, yet never mean or low;

Candid as daylight, yet discreetly so. (‘The Pastor’s Qualifications’, 61)

The exhortation to avoid enthusiasm and popularity and replace these with sober calmness again echoes Keble's emphasis in the Advertisement to *The Christian Year* on the need to uphold 'a sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion' in a period when 'excitement of every kind is sought after with a morbid eagerness' (1827: i). The emphasis on truth handled with discretion also speaks to the influential Tractarian poetic and theological doctrine of reserve. Awareness of the centrality of reserve was current in Kebleian poetics well before Williams codified it in Tracts 80 (1838) and 87 (1840). 'The Decrees of God' in *Thoughts in Solitude*, for instance, opens with the line 'Darest thou to search the secret things of God?' and exhorts the reader instead to 'seek a humbler way;/ Choose to believe, to love, & to obey' (Anon 189, 191). Reserve indicates that the individual should not seek to discover truth, but trust in God's discretion, and similarly that he or she should be cautious about openly expressing faith to others, lest sacred truths should be exposed too lightly. 'Unfathomed deeps are often still;/ And mighty streams in silence flow,/ While brawls each shallow rill', as the author of *Thoughts in Solitude* puts it in 'Love Without Excitement', using standard Tractarian imagery (Anon 1838: 215).

Thoughts in Solitude is an absorbing example of how Tractarianism inspired nineteenth-century Anglican ministers to cast themselves as beleaguered heroes, to agonize over their pastoral role and defend its continued relevance in a dangerously populist and secular age. Turning to my next example, Coxe's *Christian Ballads*, it is clear that it was not only in place in the depths of an English country parish, probably less than a hundred miles from Oxford, but over three thousand miles away in the rapidly expanding metropolis of New York. As historians have examined in detail, there was strong mutual interest and affection between British Tractarians and High Church Episcopalians, enhanced by the circulation of poems (Nockles 2012; Blair

2013). Coxe, who later became a personal acquaintance of Keble and others as the Bishop of Western New York, wrote his collection as one of the young men at the General Theological Seminary who were fired with Tractarian zeal.

Coxe's 'Nashotah', added to *Christian Ballads* in the revised edition of 1847 (published in England by the leading Tractarian firm of J. H. Parker), is a particularly strong example of how Tractarian ideals were adapted to an American context. The foundation of Nashotah House in Wisconsin in 1842, by several enthusiastic young men from the General Theological Seminary, was the high point of the Oxford Movement in the United States. Indeed, Coxe noted that Nashotah was also a familiar name in Britain, commenting that on his British tour in the 1850s, a parishioner asked him out of the blue about the mission (1856: 204). 'Nashotah' argues for the value of Anglican ritualism in the comparative wilds of America:

But how it makes my heart of hearts upswell

To see our English ritual planted there,

Where walks his round Nashotah's sentinel,

And breaks its daily service on the air! (Coxe 1865: 160-1)

The reference to daily service immediately identifies the religious principles of this mission, since its adoption was one of the cornerstones of Tractarian worship. 'Our' English ritual ambiguously references a religious and national community: is Coxe referring to his wider readership, imagined as members of the worldwide Anglican community, or to American Episcopalians? 'Nashotah' describes a fantasy of inclusiveness in services held in the 'wildwood', attended by various Europeans and Indians (the 'sad Oneida' and 'bloody Osage'), black and Jewish outsiders

(‘Rebecca’s child and Isaac’s homeless son’) and, for a final touch, exiles from England (Coxe 1865:162). This scene of Anglicanism amid the forest primeval was already a cliché in Anglo-American discourse. Henry Caswall, for instance, an Englishman who trained as an Episcopal minister at Kenyon College, Ohio, in an oft-quoted passage from his influential *America and the American Church*, described the ‘noble aboriginal forest, the tall and straight trees appearing like pillars in a vast Gothic cathedral’, and observed that ‘the admirable prayers of our liturgy are no less sublime in the forests of Ohio than in the consecrated and time-honoured minsters of York or Canterbury’ (1839: 35, 38-9).

After celebrating the forest service, ‘Nashotah’ turns in its second half to addressing an English readership, berating England for neglecting its Church:

And you, ye clerks, neath Oxford’s glorious domes

That kneel, full oft, too listless at your prayers.

Think of the rites that bless these forest homes,

And yours, perchance, shall be as blest as theirs. (Coxe 1865: 164)

This reverses the relationship between Oxford and the American wilderness, with the former looking to the latter for inspiration rather than vice versa. As in several of Coxe’s poems, ‘Nashotah’ explicitly argues that since the ‘catiff sons’ (163) of England are no longer fully appreciative of their (Tractarian) heritage, Anglicanism will find a new and better home abroad. This poem and many others in Coxe’s collection wed the ‘rude’ American Church, as it takes shape in the wilderness, to the civilization of historic Anglican forms, suggesting that the two together produce a new stock that is stronger than the original. Formally, Coxe signals this by calling his

Church poems ‘ballads’, linking them to a literary tradition including Wordsworth, Scott, and popular song, and arguably implying that they are the unstudied productions of a newly developing culture. His 1847 preface argues that *Christian Ballads* exhibits ‘more of Gothic rudeness than of *Doric delicacy*’, ‘like a pointed arch that delights in the moss and ivy which would spoil a Grecian column’ and hence is ‘in keeping with the architectural symbolism of the holy Faith’ (Coxe 1847: xv). In the terms in which Coxe understands Gothic, its characteristic naturalism is appropriate for New World Anglo-Catholic poetics, as exemplified in the simplicity of poems like ‘I love the Church’:

I love the Church – the holy Church

That o’er our life presides,

The birth, the bridal, and the grave,

And many an hour besides (Coxe 1865: 202).

The slight variation in the final line – where 7 rather than 6 syllables create a little irregularity that gives the lines a more casual, spoken, air – is the kind of potentially asymmetrical and consciously clumsy effect that Coxe has in mind when he compares his verse to the freedom of Gothic. Such admittedly trite lines caused one British critic to describe Coxe’s poems as ‘a feeble echo of the high-church party on this side the Atlantic’, ‘miserable little sing-song rhymes’ inspired by Keble’s dignified ‘pious melody’ (‘Recent Recollections’ 1863: 175-6). The use of ballads, and the tone of self-conscious naïveté that Coxe frequently deploys, mark an important formal and tonal difference from *The Christian Year* and *Lyra Apostolica*, which tended (with some key exceptions) to deploy more complex language and metrical forms, and

eschewed Coxe's first-person approach. Yet Coxe's verses are consciously childlike because he knowingly writes as a representative of a Church that is, comparatively, childish, 'in all the vigour of youth, adapting itself to a fresh state of society' (Coxe 1847: viii). They are unquestionably in the Tractarian tradition, but they also deliberately signal differences from it.

Cecil Frances Alexander's poems, written in Ulster in a period of mass emigration from Ireland, are also deeply engaged with how High Anglican principles might endure outside their English strongholds. In 'Praise and Intercession', a traveler in the wilderness hears a lone voice singing the familiar service:

Here are no old collegiate walls,
No mighty minster fair and strong; -
Whence caught this wild north-western waste
The Church's evensong?

Sleep, wanderer, sleep! thy mother's hand
Is stretch'd to guard each wandering child,
Her shepherd waketh for the flock
Far scatter'd in the wild.

'Tis meet his deep, unwearied voice,
Still, night and day, her songs renew,
Like strain thrice echoed from the hills,
Whose every note is true.

It dies beneath the wide grey Heaven,
It dies along the silent plain,
No answering flock, no deep-voiced choir
Take up the solemn strain.

Yet patience, strong and holy heart,
Nor fear the full response shall come; (Alexander 1859: 158-9)

A footnote gives the context:

A traveller in North America, while resting at a lonely Inn, was roused at night by a voice chanting the Psalms; on inquiry, he found that it was the Bishop of Newfoundland chanting, alone, the Evening Service. (158)

The fact that the Bishop is *chanting*, not reciting the Psalms, marks him as part of the High Anglican revival. Alexander follows Coxe and many other religious poets in this tradition in viewing Tractarianism as a (literal) voice crying in the wilderness, and then using this trope to move towards a recognition of a global church united across time and space by its shared language and ritual. Again, Alexander's poems emphasize repetition, familiarity that breeds not contempt but contentment. Poems such as this have added resonance given ongoing debates over the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland. Fanny Alexander was fifteen in 1833, when the Irish Church Temporalities Bill caused a storm that effectively set in motion the Oxford Movement, and in 1869 when disestablishment finally occurred, she was married to the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. To Anglo-Irish Protestants like Fanny and William Alexander, who had very strong connections with British Tractarianism, disestablishment was a devastating blow (Wallace 1995: 51-6. 89-92). Like the poems by Coxe and the *Thoughts in Solitude* author, Alexander's work is arguably so firmly

invested in an imagined Tractarian community because she was not, strictly speaking, part of it.

Alexander's poems were vital to the Tractarian movement both because they provided some of the best-known Victorian hymns, including 'Once in Royal David's City', 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' and 'There is a Green Hill Far Away', and because they reached a very wide audience of children as well as adults. They disseminate Tractarian ideals through their emphasis on church ritual and community, as in 'Praise and Intercession', their conservative vision of social order, and in their emphasis on reserve. 'There is a Green Hill Far Away', for instance, published in *Hymns for Little Children* (1848) as an illustration of the lines in the Creed, 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried', turns our attention both towards and away from the Crucifixion, inviting us to picture a concrete landscape but distancing it in time and space:

There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified
Who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us,

He hung and suffered there. (Alexander 1871: 31-2)

When the poem turns in its second stanza to the actual event, it deliberately espouses a willed ignorance and reserve. 'May' carries the sense of 'are not permitted to' but also of 'might'. What cannot be told is not just the history of Christ's sufferings, but

whether the worshipper does or does not ‘know’ his pain, because even to reveal the existence of this knowledge would threaten reserve. Christ’s body, often the focus of Crucifixion hymns from dissenting and Roman Catholic traditions, is absent. But its absence makes the poem more powerful: simplicity of language and form act, in Keble’s terms, as a container or channel for strong emotions. Alexander is more like Rossetti here than has perhaps been appreciated. Her poetry does not seek to reveal God to man, it seeks to act in the same way as church ritual and song does, to create a community devoted to worship, and to help believers into the right attitude of trusting and dependent faith.

II

Tractarian fiction shared with poetry a decided emphasis on the holiness and importance of the priesthood, Church and sacraments, an inclination towards reserve and dislike for emotional excess, and a strongly ideological bent. George Herring has recently suggested of Tractarian fiction, in re-examining the novels of W. E. Heygate, that ‘The subject matter of the fictional works was invariably formulaic, and the precise plots often contrived and laboured’ (Herring 2012: 267). While this is undoubtedly true of many novels, especially in the earlier period, written with straightforward ideological aims with little attention to aesthetic quality, the field of Tractarian fiction is diverse and ambiguous. Like Tractarian poetry, it could be divided into two periods: the early, polemical literature of the 1830s and 1840s, and the more mature and reflective literature of the 1850s and 1860s. Just as Rossetti emerged in this period as the leading exponent of the next generation of Tractarian-influenced writers, so did Yonge, whose works were overseen by Keble and who

acted as ‘the daughter that he never had’ (Dennis 1992: 39). Early Tractarian fiction is represented here by Neale’s *Aytoun Priory* (1843). Written while he was embroiled in controversy and excitement as a leading member of the ecclesiological Cambridge Camden Society, it is a thin veneer of fiction overlaying a polemical treatise on church-building and the restoration of the monasteries. The action is set in two stereotypical English villages. While various skirmishes between Dissent, Evangelicalism, an old-school laissez-faire Anglican minister and a heroic young Tractarian play out, most of the novel is taken up with long dialogues between Sir John Morley (whose second son George is the Tractarian minister in question) and various others, in which Sir John ponderously explains the case for returning to the Church the revenues stolen from it in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, defends the role of monasteries, and discourses with an astonishing amount of learning for a country squire on various other points of Oxford Movement doctrine. Sir John’s foil is his neighbor Colonel Abbersley, the unfortunate owner of lands incorporating Aytoun Priory. Sir John refuses to let his daughter marry Abbersley’s son, Charles, because Abbersley will not return his lands to the Church – and secondarily, because this means that he is cursed: ‘Who can doubt that a particular curse has attached itself to abbey lands?’ (Neale 1843: 86) Abbersley’s recalcitrance is punished, and this curse manifests itself, when Charles has a riding accident and almost dies: his lesson learnt, he decides to restore Aytoun Priory and endow a new monastery. Meanwhile Sir John has built a new church, and the novel ends, like a great many Tractarian fictions, with its dedication.

Neale has almost no interest in the psychological motivations of his characters. He does not wish readers to feel sympathy and indignation on their behalf, but on behalf of their ideals. Sir John, for example, expresses no feeling for his

daughter's predicament, while assuring us that 'I quite trembled as I turned page after page of Sir Henry Spelman's "History of Sacrilege": a comment which also provides the reader with suggested further reading (Neale 1843: 24). Situations which, written by Yonge, Trollope, Oliphant or the Eliot of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, would furnish material for high drama and emotional investment fall very flat in Neale. But if *Aytoun Priory* fails as a novel, it is politically fascinating. What Neale proposes is no less than a wholesale redistribution of land and money belonging to rich landowners, and he is entirely supportive of an episode – strongly recalling Chartist occupations of churches in the late 1830s – in which a gang of working-class characters show up to disrupt a charity concert in their parish church, on the grounds that it is illegal to charge parishioners to enter the church (which, of course, should not be being used for sacrilegious entertainments). By assuming the guise of fiction, Neale clearly felt that he could get away with more radical proposals than in his polemical prose works.

Neale's Sir John builds a church out of religious duty. Yonge's Ethel May in *The Daisy Chain* (1856) builds it out of religious passion. What Yonge does so brilliantly in her fiction is to make politics personal, and to show how Tractarian ideology plays out in the lived day-to-day experience of her characters. Her imagined audience primarily consisted of readers that we would now call young adults, but which she called 'the young', though, as she famously noted in the Preface to *The Daisy Chain*, her books were cross-audenced, 'neither the "tale" for the young, nor the novel for their elders, but a mixture of both' (Yonge 1988: xi). Set in small-town England and usually centred on the travails of large middle-class families, Yonge's novels show that the minutiae of family life can be vital to a life-and-death struggle between salvation and damnation. As Gavin Budge and Susan Colón have argued, Yonge's novels are important in terms of realist fiction because she uses realism not

to counter a theological and eschatological perspective but to enhance it: ‘realism replicates the ordinariness of incidents in which sacramental moments or teachings more or less unexpectedly occur’ (Colón 2012: 16). The greatest moments of trial or of Christian sacrifice for her characters often occur in seemingly trivial incidents. Guy Morville, the pattern hero of *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), for instance, is anxious that his enjoyment of social events may cause him to lose his focus on self-discipline, and thus takes no pleasure in the thought that as the young, attractive heir to a substantial estate, he is in much demand in society. His hostess and adoptive parent, Mrs Edmonstone, advises him that:

[Y]our position in society, with all its duties, could not be laid aside because it is full of trial. Those who do such things are fainthearted, and fail to trust in Him who fixed their station, and finds room for them to deny themselves in the trivial round and common task. It is pleasure involving no duty that should be given up, if we find it liable to lead us astray. (Yonge 1870: 46)

This is, of course, direct allusion to some of Keble’s most famous lines, from ‘Morning’:

The trivial round, the common task
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God. (Keble 1827: I, 4)

Neither Mrs Edmonstone nor Yonge need to reference Keble explicitly. Guy would recognize the quotation, and so would the Victorian reader, and thus Mrs Edmonstone’s advice is quietly backed up by a leading male Churchman without the need for direct reference. Again and again, Yonge’s novels make it clear that the road to holiness lies in an ability to retain Christian principles amid the pettiness of the

everyday. Hence Norman May, who sets off at the end of *The Daisy Chain* in a blaze of glory to become a missionary in New Zealand, is found at the start of *The Trial: More Links of the Daisy Chain* (1864) as a minister to middle-class white colonists, a seemingly ignominious fall from his ambitions. But having disappointed the reader, Yonge tells us:

Ethel could trust that this un murmuring acceptance of the less striking career, might be another step in the discipline of her brother's ardent and ambitious nature. It is a great thing to sacrifice, but a greater not to consent to sacrifice in one's own way. (Yonge 1908: 5)

Unlike other religious novelists of the period, Yonge never steps forward as narrator to deliver her own opinions. This deliberate reserve, on the part of author and of characters, leaves the reader to do some of the work: she must learn, through reading Yonge, to identify the emotional backdrop to statements such as this. Readers of *The Daisy Chain*, for instance, will know that behind Ethel's comment on sacrifice lies her own hard-won acceptance of her position as her father's helpmate and the carer for her younger siblings; in the final line here we see Ethel's – half-rueful, half-content – look back at her previous, now quelled, ambitions, but also Yonge's consolatory commentary on her position. As Margaret Mare and Alicia Percival observe in their early study of Yonge, 'we need not look in her books for exposition of the teaching of the Movement from the lips of its protagonists. Such characters are rather the fruits by which it should be known' (1970: 103).

Yonge's novels, which attained their greatest success in the 1860s, act as a significant commentary on the developing genre of sensation fiction. *The Trial* in particular includes a deliberately sensational event in which a young man, Leonard Ward, is falsely accused of murder. But Yonge flouts the conventions that would

decree a dramatic trial scene, or an account of the detective work undertaken to save him. Instead, Leonard is convicted and spends several years in prison, before his friend Tom May discovers the evidence that will save him almost by chance. For Yonge, the excitements of an actual trial are far less important than the longer trial of Leonard's Christianity, and that of his siblings, during his imprisonment, when his turbulent emotions and resentment are chastened into acceptance. This novel in particular seems like a deliberate response not simply to sensation fiction, but to religious sensationalism, marked in works like Felicia Skene's popular, influential and scandalous *Hidden Depths* (1866). As Lillian Naydar has observed on *Hidden Depths*, 'Skene's piety enables her to extend the moral boundaries of sensation fiction, using it to convey an orthodox Christian message. At the same time, the sensational mode allows her to overstep the social and political confines of Tractarian fiction' (Naydar 2004: xii). Skene knew Pusey in Oxford and was deeply attracted by his emphasis on religious sisterhoods, she later became an important social reformer and prison visitor. If Yonge inherited the conscience of early Tractarian social-problem fiction, Skene's novels have a militant fervor for the idea of religious heroes and heroines who work with the poor to remedy social evils – in this case, prostitution – and she was prepared to go to any lengths to win the reader over. *Hidden Depths* concludes with a long, impassioned plea by the narrator:

Shall it be ever thus? Shall this dread evil slay its thousands and ten thousands year... while ever it cries to God for the vengeance that shall surely come at last?... Is it to be always so, that in the realm which calls Christ, master, the crime He denounced in awful terms is to be held by men, and *for men*, as scarce a sin? (Skene 1866: II, 222)

As this suggests, Skene's novel anticipates New Woman fiction in its emphasis on the

disasters caused by male sexual conduct. In the plot, the heroine, Ernestine, begins the novel by learning that her adored older brother is responsible for the suicide of a girl he had seduced, and ends by discovering that her fiancé is responsible for the descent into prostitution and early death of the girl's sister, whom Ernestine has found and rescued. Meanwhile, her other brother has been led into skepticism by the intellectual culture of Oxford, and consequently dies from consumption in a state of agony about his eternal soul. Ernestine is left, suffering but free, to devote her life and fortune to the care and rehabilitation of fallen women. Skene's novel is 'Tractarian' in its inclusion of a heroic, self-denying minister (Rev. Thorold), its denunciation of inactive clergy, its emphasis on purification through suffering, its horror at the idea of intellectual inquiry into the bases of faith, and perhaps most significantly, in its insistence that Christian women have important work to do in society (Sturrock 1992). It is, however, markedly different to Yonge and other Tractarian writers in that the Church itself – its services, its rituals, its sacraments – is largely absent. Yonge's novels invariably reach an emotional climax in a church service, where affect can be controlled as part of communal worship; Skene's characters lack this sense of community.

Skene's sensationalism and Yonge's domestic realism and interest in Church affairs are also evident in Trollope's novels, though while Trollope's characters see their religio-political affiliations as matters of life and death, they are seldom matters of life after death. Mr Arabin in *Barchester Towers* (1857), Trollope's most notable Tractarian, a former Professor of Poetry at Oxford who sat at Newman's feet and 'concocted verses' (Trollope 1980: 188), is the romantic hero but is also gently satirized, and forced to come to terms with his own fallibility (Durrey 2002). Margaret Oliphant's Frank Wentworth, in *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), is another

such type. But Oliphant's novel is harder to categorize, shifting from a small-town chronicle featuring a stock Tractarian character, the young, well-bred, devoted and ascetic clergyman, to a novel with discreetly Tractarian leanings. The hinge of the plot turns on Wentworth's refusal to defend himself from the charge of seducing a young girl and his determination to preserve secrets entrusted to him even at the expense of his own romantic and personal happiness. Oliphant is sardonic on the trappings of 1860s ritualism. When Wentworth realizes that his Evangelical aunts, who have the right to bestow the rich living that would permit him to marry, are watching his ritualistic service with horror:

It suddenly flashed over him that, after all, a wreath of spring flowers or a chorister's surplice was scarcely worth suffering martyrdom over. This horrible suggestion, true essence of an unheroic age...disturbed his prayer.

(Oliphant 1987: 33)

This sounds very like Trollope. But on the other hand, Oliphant is wholly sympathetic to Wentworth's efforts among the poor, and he emerges from the trials of the novel as a more genuine Christian hero than any of her other clerical characters, primarily due to a practice of reserve that is conditioned by both his religious ideals and his class status. As in the famous case of Yonge's Guy, false accusations leave the hero struggling against resentment, anger and passion, and the reader is privy both to these struggles and to the successful outcome of a hard-won calmness. In his first service after he has finally been exonerated and rewarded, with all Carlingford watching, Wentworth reads the service 'with more than ordinary calmness' and preaches 'with clear and succinct brevity', 'displaying that power of saying a great deal more than at the first moment he appeared to say' (Oliphant 1987: 533). *The Perpetual Curate* emerges as a proto-Tractarian novel almost despite itself, because while Wentworth

learns that the outward shows of Anglo-Catholicism are less important than he believed, the reader and other characters are shown that Wentworth's faith as a 'young Anglican' gives him heroic stature.

As Budge argues, Tractarianism made Yonge an 'outsider' to the mainstream of popular Protestantism, enabling 'the religious elements of her fiction to take on a critical relationship to Victorian culture' (Budge 2007: 11). To a certain extent this could be said of all Tractarian writers, whose support for religious ideals in fiction or poetry often lent their works a radical edge, even while the ideals they espouse stem from conservative nostalgia for an imagined vision of the Church, and even while they achieved mainstream popularity. By the mid-Victorian period, few educated readers, in Britain and well beyond, would have been entirely unfamiliar with Keble and Alexander's hymns, or with Yonge's novels, whatever they might have thought of them, and the content, form and style of these writers had a marked impact on the literature of their period, whether later writers were following them or reacting violently against them. In the words of an 1892 American reviewer, 'The history of the Oxford Movement is written well nigh as indelibly into the Victorian literature, as that of the Reformation into the literature of Elizabeth' ('Poetry of Tractarian Movement' 1892: 239). Literary Tractarianism had a thriving life for nearly a century, and the full extent of its influence still awaits re-examination.

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