

Coventry Patmore's Journalism: The Interface between Conservative Politics and Social Justice

Lesa Scholl

Coventry Patmore is a difficult figure to address in literary and historical criticism. Part of this difficulty lies in the feminist response to his work that emerged primarily in the late-twentieth century, but it is also due to his (self-enforced) marginalisation as a poet, and, to a lesser extent, literary critic. A more encompassing view of his work as a social and political commentator is needed to broaden our understanding of Patmore. His poetry is both diverse and divisive, with some critics celebrating and mourning the perceived materiality or immateriality of his verse, and others focusing on the evasive meaning behind it, most controversially in *The Angel in the House* (1854-1862). This was co-opted in the late-twentieth century as an example of Victorian patriarchy, but it has also been meaningfully read throughout its history as “the Angel”, metaphorically representing love, or poetry itself, rather than the domestic figure of the woman. Others have avoided Patmore entirely because of the way in which his poetry was engaged with in the scholarship and teaching of the 1980s and 1990s. Patmore is being revived in the twenty-first century; however, he is still being positioned primarily as a difficult, marginal, abstract poet, albeit more interestingly through his networks with other key poets of the nineteenth century, such as Tennyson, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Alice Meynell. This essay seeks to take Patmore studies in a different direction by focusing on his little-known career as a political commentator and journalist. Patmore himself would have preferred to be known as a poet, even a marginal one, rather than a hack freelance writer. Yet it is crucial to examine his contribution to the periodical press to gain a clearer, and more grounded image of his political and social views. This, in turn, creates a very different picture of the Coventry Patmore who has been read—or, more commonly, *not* read – due to ambivalence toward his perceived views of women. In the 1990s, Benjamin Fisher somewhat optimistically noted that “[many] recent readers have come to realize that Patmore is far more complex than the unyieldingly ‘patriarchal’ figure drawn all too facilely and dismissively, often by cursory readers” (“Teacups and Muffins” 440). More work is needed, though, to recover the nuance of Patmore’s vision, as well as his significant contribution to intellectual history beyond his poetry.

It is necessary to contextualise Patmore in relation to his Tractarian social vision and interest in Roman Catholicism, which remained marginalised in nineteenth-century Britain. The Tractarians, the name given to those who wrote and adhered to the *Tracts for the Times* (1833-42), essentially the manifesto of the Oxford Movement, were not just concerned about doctrinal and theological issues within the Anglican church, but were deeply engaged with the failures of government to address social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and social disaffection. For the Tractarians, poverty was constant and pervasive in their communities. Alongside the growth of “industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization [...] which tended to isolate the individual psychologically, if not physically” (Dieleman 128), the Victorian age was marked by persistent economic devastation that overwhelmed the social consciousness:

By 1841, industrial Britain was deep in a serious economic crisis and this was contributing to growing social misery and unrest. Beginning in 1837, there had been a series of four poor harvests, which drove bread prices to famine levels. Rising food

prices had been combined with a trade recession, which was connected to an economic downturn in the United States. From 1838 to 1842, tens of thousands were thrown out of work, while for those in work wages fell sharply. Conditions for many labouring people grew desperate—their gaunt faces, emaciated bodies and rages haunted the landscape—and there was a growing popular rage over the condition of England. (Brown 108-09)

The problem for the Tractarians was that the state interventions were incontrovertible failures. Lauren Goodlad argues in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* (2003) that Victorian Britain was a liberal society in that “throughout the century, centralized institutions and statist interventions were curbed to preserve the ‘self-governing’ liberties of individuals and local communities” (vii); it could be further argued that the Tractarians were on the forefront of this social mission. Fighting throughout the century against the dehumanising effects of the 1834 New Poor Law, as well as the growing impetus of political economy, the Tractarian vision resisted centralisation and institutionalisation as mechanisms that distanced people from each other, and isolated individuals within communities. Simon Skinner argues that this vision was directly connected to the Tractarians’ concern for the poor and vulnerable in communities: “Tractarians’ fatalism towards the efficacy of human legislation, and their sense of opposition to the world’s oppression of the poor [...] patently inhibited them from engaging with secular notions of social or political equality” (“Social and Political Commentary” 345). He further suggests that the “church’s special responsibility to the poor ... was, therefore, bound to embitter its relations with a secular state whose development was the historical expression of the powerful” (*Tractarians* 121). Skinner observes, that the main criticism of the Poor Law was that “the revision to the law had made the provision of poor relief a tax rather than a charity” (229), which meant helping one’s neighbour was moved away from a community duty based on human connection to an institutionalised, faceless – and thoughtless – penalty. One did not have to think about the poor, except as an abstract incumbrance on one’s income, like any other tax.

Patmore’s social vision was formed within this context, as a High Churchman, or Anglo-Catholic, which is what those who followed Tractarianism became known as throughout the Victorian period and persisted after his middle-aged conversion to Roman Catholicism. This conversion is worth noting because in some ways it can be seen as a radical conservatism. As Anglo-Catholicism became more mainstream, he converted to a more stringent form of belief, one that maintains a marginal position. It is from his marginality that he can be reinvented as a social prophet, a conservative who criticises the actions of a conservative government, and who resists the complacency of political dominance. Patmore was a reserved person in many ways (except, perhaps, when effusively appreciating the opportunity to meet with Tennyson), and therefore his reserved nature resists the public display of protest and subversion. However, in his journalism he finds an appropriate form that acts as a mediatory space in which he can critique and challenge political stasis. In this way, he resembles the political mode of his close friend, Alice Meynell, herself a political commentator and journalist as well as poet, who, while supporting suffrage, was suspicious of the emotional excess and demonstrativeness of her Suffragette colleagues. She preferred to write and publish her protest, rather than become a spectacle at public events that detracted from the cause. Meynell, too, interestingly, was a High-Church convert to Romanism, but in her early adulthood. Both writers displayed a similar attitude of reserve that in no way compromised their dedication to social action and reform. Indeed, their focus was more on the cause itself than their personal positioning within its historical moment. Within this context, I will examine Patmore’s journalism as an interface between conservative politics

and social activism. In this way, both Patmore himself and nineteenth-century conservatism are being reimagined in order to acknowledge a space for genuine concern for social justice.

The Erasure of Coventry Patmore

Coventry Patmore has received little critical attention since the late-twentieth century when he was maligned by feminist critics citing Virginia Woolf's famous declaration of having "killed" the Angel in the House:

It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by The Angel in the House...She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (Woolf 141)

This appropriation of Patmore's poem proliferated feminist criticism of the late-twentieth century, with influential works emerging such as Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987) and Judith Rowbotham's *Good Girls Make Good Wives* (1989), but these examples barely suggest the way in which Woolf's interpretation both infused feminism and drove literary history's dismissal of Patmore. Although some critics, like Benjamin Fisher, have argued that "[Patmore] does offer far more than *The Angel in the House*, long, and erroneously, thought of his only work and repeatedly given off-the-mark interpretations" ("Teacups and Muffins" 440), Patmore has remained a marginal literary figure, a poet who few know beyond half-read lines of his now most (in)famous poem. More recent work has sought to recover Patmore's poetics through concepts of immateriality, from Meredith Martin's *The Rise and Fall of Meter* (2012) and Jason Rudy's *Electric Meters* (2009), alongside work positioning him specifically in relation to Gerard Manley Hopkins and materiality. Joshua King argues that both Hopkins and Patmore "faced the ghostliness of metrical law precisely because they did *not* wish meter to transmit their personal voices and feelings" (31, emphasis orig.), while Ewan Jones argues alternatively "that Patmore not only did treat of the body, but did so with an obsessiveness and excessiveness that shocked many of his contemporaries" (839), and goes on to discuss the materiality in both poets' work. Amidst such controversy, Natasha Moore writes astutely of the afterlives of poetry having more traction than the original, tied by the "assumptions and concerns of [the] critics", and states, "[y]et to simply equate *The Angel in the House* with the oppressive idealisations later encompassed by its title is to fail to engage with the scope of Patmore's project as a whole" (41-4).

While Patmore holds on to minor literary fame as scholars persist in trying to unpick or dismiss his meaning in *The Angel*, or his lesser known *The Unknown Eros* (1877), his witty, often acerbic, political journalism remains almost entirely neglected. Yet a new Patmore emerges through an engagement with both his poetry and prose, one that is often radically conservative in politics but deeply socially engaged. Early in the twentieth century, John Freeman wrote that "Patmore was isolated alike by his genius and the intense arrogance of his regard of a world surging turbulently beneath him", and while "[he] expressed his time in

The Angel in the House, he transcended it in *The Unknown Eros*, standing scornfully or sorrowfully remote in the many odes in the latter, consciously and even proudly alien in certain prose essays” (221). Freeman mourns,

He is celebrated but as a lonely hill in a quiet land, shown on the map but visited only by those to whom hill air, and its solitude, are a stimulation and a delight. The greatness that his admirers have never ceased to claim for him may have been silently acknowledged, but has never been widely felt; and for most readers he remains a name in a catalogue, an illustration, a cipher, a shade. (221)

Yet much later in the twentieth century, John Maynard observes that Patmore himself, along with his original editors, contributed to his own marginalisation and suppression: he “Submitted to a self-censoring and self-repressive spirit that made that work conform to the more conservative standards of what historians have termed respectable Victorian sexual and gender morality” (444). Indeed, the neglect of Patmore’s journalism as unworthy of scholarly criticism perhaps honours Patmore’s own desire to be seen as a poet. However, with the recent rise of interest in the popular press, there is the opportunity to reconsider Patmore in relation to his journalistic output, which directly challenged the complacency of politics and government in late-nineteenth-century Britain. Indeed, by returning to a mid-nineteenth-century understanding of Patmore’s position in intellectual and literary engagement, a more balanced image emerges. In appraising Patmore’s prose in 1860, Richard Garnett wrote:

Mr. Patmore is after all essentially a poet, [but]...when he temporarily ceases to be such, he does but substitute one kind of excellence for another. His ethics and his social delineations are as good in their way as the inspirations of his loftier mood—his precious metal has some alloy, but little dross. It requires, we are sensible, a much finer analysis than ours to discriminate with perfect accuracy between his poetry and his prose; and unlike most treasure-seekers, we are in much greater danger of parting with the object of our quest than of retaining what we do not want. (125)

Importantly, while balancing poetry and prose, Garnett draws out the importance of social ethics within all of Patmore’s work, a factor that has diminished in later criticism of his work.

By examining Patmore’s political commentary, primarily written for the conservative *St James’s Gazette*, I not only seek to show how a new Patmore emerges from the unnuanced misogynist of the late-twentieth century academic space, but also crucially the way in which his journalism reveals the interface between conservative politics and social justice at the end of the nineteenth century. I will argue that rather than promoting the ideal of pre-modern feudalism, as has been claimed by some,¹ Patmore was engaging with a distinctly Victorian Catholic social vision (Anglo-Catholic as well as Roman Catholic) that was predicated on community responsibility. Within this vision, entrenched in the Oxford Movement of the 1830s and then translated through the Catholic Revival in the middle of the century, the broad social and governmental institutions established to contend with problems such as poverty and homelessness—such as the Vagrancy Acts, the New Poor Law, and the workhouse—are acknowledged as failures, while local communities are challenged to stop abdicating their responsibility to care for their neighbours. In this way, Patmore becomes, at best, broadly conservative, but most importantly, rather than being the isolated “lonely hill”, he becomes

¹ See, for example, E.J. Oliver, who argues that Patmore was the kind of conservative who assumed “that all change is for the worse” and “that the historic past was also better than the present” (146).

an active participant in a social conversation, and one who is deeply engaged in confronting the hypocrisies of governance that affect the vulnerable within the nation.

“Courage in Politics” and the Disease of the Nation

Patmore’s journalism provides a crucial context for his poetry in the way in which his social vision impacted on and entered into dialogue with his creative output. He freelanced as a journalist from 1844 to 1846, and then between 1885 and 1888 contributed over one hundred articles to *St James’s Gazette* (Reid 15-16; 173). The articles are simultaneously personal and politically focused, as Patmore seeks to address the heart of what he saw as late-nineteenth-century Britain’s moral, social and economic depression. In “Manifest Destiny”, first published in *St James’s Gazette* on 26 December 1885, he writes:

Everyone must have experienced seasons of depression of spirits, during which the smallest cloud of threatening adversity seems to blot out sun, moon, and stars, and weigh down the soul as with a spiritual malaria. Whole nations, it appears, are subject to these periods of depression, as much as individuals’ and there is nothing out of which crafty politicians may obtain more fatal advantages. It is vain that persons or peoples are reminded how such ghosts have been driven back to limbo by the exorcism of a single bold deed. (9)

This reference to ghosts recalls Fisher’s observation that “Patmore typically interjects into his poems terse, light touches of the supernatural to add point, especially to intensify psychological depth or to enliven a fantasy” (“The Supernatural” 545); yet, it is in his prose that Patmore uses such a terse touch to provoke the political conscience of his reader. The essay observes the complacency of the nation toward church, government and society as evidence of Britain’s inability to act with moral conviction and decision. “The country is ready to fall into this fatalistic stupor about everything which the Radicals assert ‘must come’”, which is, in Patmore’s view, evidence of the mindlessness and self-focus he sees as the disease of the nation (Patmore, “Manifest Destiny” 10). Furthermore, it is the apathy of individualism and complacency of capitalism that Patmore sees as potentially leading to a civil war:

This emasculate condition of the national mind is probably due in great part to our long-continued and unparalleled material prosperity. It would disappear at once at the tonic touch of a great misfortune. There are not a few, and those not among the least wise and patriotic among us, who begin to look forward to some such misfortune with hope, and in whose eyes few calamities can be more terrible than the panic apathy under which a great part of their fellow-countrymen are content to be led by ambitious knaves and giddy fools towards a clearly discerned destruction. The Radicals are counting too much upon this apathy if they imagine that it would continue after the first blow had been struck in the civil war they seem so anxious to figure in, after the manner of the heroes of the French Revolution. (10-11)

Importantly, the emasculation of society is due to the loss of community feeling. The “material prosperity” he refers to is, of course, not for every individual, but the blindness created by statistical economic thinking, that grew to dominate the field in the nineteenth century, washes over the very real poverty experienced by many. By evoking the French Revolution, just as members of parliament and journalists had done frequently throughout the century, Patmore uses the culturally embedded fear of the Terror crossing the Channel and

invading Britain to draw attention to the callousness of ignoring the poor for the sake of one's own comfort and ambition and the dangers of social and political instability, or even insurrection, that can result from such wilful lack of interest.

This critique of political and economic ambition is even more explicitly expressed in a later essay, "Courage in Politics" (19 March 1888). Criticising William Gladstone's conservative government, Patmore suggests that had they "shown themselves above being frightened by a temporary loss of office, they would now, almost beyond doubt, have been in a strong and independent majority, with no necessity for adopting pillage as a principle", and that "Men lose the power of seeing the truth when they drop the custom of obeying it—that is to say, when they cease to be ready, if called upon, to make personal sacrifices for it. The habit of courage, once lost, is very hard of recovery, and the loss of reputation for it is still more difficult to overcome" (14-15). This attitude is what undergirds the death of the nation in his poem "England" (1896), which opens with the nation lying feverishly near death, "with hasty pulse and hard, | Her ancient beauty marr'd" (*Poetry of Pathos and Delight* ll. 2-3), recalling the nostalgia for England's medieval Catholic past. The conceit of the fevered nation continues:

Sole vigor left in her last lethargy,
Save when, at bidding of some dreadful breath,
The rising death
Rolls up with force;
And then the furiously gibbering corse
Shakes, panglessly convuls'd, and sightless stares,
Whilst one Physician pours in rousing wines,
One anodynes,
And one declares
That nothing ails it but the pains of growth. (ll. 6-15)

The irregular metre expresses a nation in chaos, emphasised through the enjambment; yet even more disturbing than the feverish state near death is the ignorance and complacency of the physicians, as well as the excess of self-indulgent, useless treatment. The dulling effects of multiple dosages of alcohol and painkillers, most likely opiates, suggests a covering over of the symptoms rather than addressing their cause; yet most troubling is the grossly inaccurate diagnosis: instead of seeing the approach of inevitable death, one physician declares the nation to be growing. Who the physicians represent in the poem are not made clear, but read alongside Patmore's journalism in the same time period, it is reasonable to see them as the key defining social and intellectual structures of church, government and political economy, all of which can be seen to embody compromised principle, and therefore compromised social health, for the sake of individual political and economic gain.

Failures of Modern Democracy

Patmore is not without hope that the nation's leaders "might learn to face, for honour and patriotism, the reality of risk, and become worthy to govern in times when real and enormous risks have either to be faced or ruinously ignored" ("Courage in Politics" 16). As it stands, however, the nation is being led down a path of mercenary selfishness that has little connection to standing by established principles of moral and social benefit. He writes that "[m]odern democracy means nothing but the possession of the elective power by ignorant

aristocrats: by those who desire that the best should govern, but who have no sufficient means of discovering the best” (11). Patmore sees this mode of ignorance, wrapped up in selfishness, as the core of political corruption:

They make him the master of their persons and purses, and let him deal with laws and constitutions as if none before him had ever been wise; and even the grossest self-contradictions, perpetrated, as seems to the less simple, with the most manifestly selfish motives, fail to shake the confidence he has once secured in the minds of those whose more or less conscious weakness and ignorance render them, as a rule, ridiculously suspicious. (11)

In a kind of self-cannibalism, the result of such selfish ignorance is the abdication of one’s own freedom to those political powers. Greed and ambition, whether for money or power, are the manacles of late-Victorian society.

The antidote to this self-destructive attitude lies within the emotional moderation that Patmore found within the ethos of reserve found within English Catholicism, a reserve that recognises God’s provision in terms of gratefulness, rather than being absorbed into a scarcity mentality of never having enough. In “Heaven and Earth” (1896),² Patmore writes:

How long shall men deny the flower
 Because its roots are in the earth,
 And crave with tears from God the dower
 They have, and have despised as dearth,
 And scorn as low their human lot,
 With frantic pride, too blind to see
 That standing on the head makes not
 Either for ease or dignity!
 But fools shall feel like fools to find
 (Too late inform’d) that angels’ mirth
 Is one in cause, and mode, and kind
 With that which they profaned on earth. (ll. 1-12)

Patmore addresses the inability of humans to recognise the wealth they have, and the inclination in the capitalist narrative to see wealth as “dearth”: they never have enough. The reference to the wealth on earth as “the dower” is a reminder of the Church as the Bride of Christ, and the imperative to acknowledge the responsibilities to the earth as designated by that position. The world is out of order – “standing on the head” – because of the preoccupation with gaining more wealth for oneself, rather than looking outward to the vulnerable in one’s community. The final lines, in their expression of the disorder on earth as a profanity, suggest that heaven will be hell for those who live on earth in self-serving “frantic pride;” what is enjoyed and revered by angels is the opposite of what has been valued by those men on earth, who tell themselves they are seeking higher purposes.

Sympathy and “Minding One’s Own Business”

² In *The Poetry of Pathos and Delight* (1896).

Patmore was heavily influenced by Anglo-Catholicism before his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and much of his social vision adheres closely to the Tractarian vision of individuals being actively engaged and responsible in their local community or neighbourhood. Although Patmore's biographer J.C. Reid suggests that Patmore was caught up in the "Golden Age" imagined in eighteenth-century social theories (Reid 216), Patmore's vision is not for a return to an idyllic Tory feudalism, but for liberal small government. Although he had converted to Roman Catholicism by the time he was writing for the *Gazette*, his social and political vision remained very much influenced by the ideals of Tractarianism in his views of charity and the ways in which he grappled with ideas of community interdependence. In "Minding One's Own Business" (21 April 1886), Patmore expresses the general need, and failure, to "know one's own business, with quiet persistence to forward it, and to mind nothing else", which he affirms as "the true way to carry on the work of life" (17). Yet his idea of minding one's own business is not simply to ignore the plight of others as *not* one's own business – that it is their problem, or even their fault, in the persistent narratives of the undeserving poor. He does talk about "wasting sympathy", but sympathy is defined as wasted when it is exhausted "upon sorrows and evils which it cannot remove or alleviate. Ills, either in his own condition or in that of others, which his conduct cannot affect, are really no business of his" (17-18). Patmore's appraisal of such wasted emotion goes further:

Sympathy which does not mean action of some sort is not much of a virtue in any man; while in those humane persons who habitually indulge in sympathy for its own sake, it is apt to become nauseous and vicious effeminacy....In proportion to a man's good sense will be his readiness to confess that his sphere of direct and real usefulness—which is his business—is, as a rule, extremely limited. The old-fashioned limitation of usefulness, that of neighbourhood, is a sound one. (18-19)

Patmore's extreme parochialism is problematic in the way that he argues that it is better to give "a five-pound note" to someone of his acquaintance who he knows will use it well, than ten times that amount to strangers in need because of the risk of use. But from his perspective, he is attempting to rebuild the idea of neighbourhood or community.

Rather than reading his dismissal of charity toward the stranger as a personal affront to unknown vulnerable people, Patmore's view could be read as an attack on the governmental systems and institutions put in place with the (failed) purpose of alleviating poverty. His views are easier understood in relation to his scepticism of organised charity, seen in "A Safe Charity", published in the *Gazette* on 27 August, 1887: "hundreds of thousands of pounds are annually subscribed to 'institutions' by which the 'secretaries', 'matrons', and other functionaries are chiefly benefited, and, perhaps, were chiefly intended by their founders to be benefited" (46). He goes on to say that the "really poor are seldom those who participate" in these kinds of institutional charities; they are, instead, a matter of "the rich helping the 'poor rich'". He goes on: "Idleness, humiliation, hypocrisy, and ingratitude are the principal fruits which the rich man sows by the more or less indiscriminate dispersion of guineas, which is the commonest form of 'charity'" (46-47). In "A Safe Charity", Patmore is criticising the "private" charities set up by wealthy benefactors; yet these organisations are merely a smaller scale version of governmental relief. He suggests ironically that these charities are "forbidden...to help the really poor very effectually in their material necessities", and that they are misfocused because they seek to "[give] them *pleasure*, which, for the most part, the poor are curiously ignorant of the modes of obtaining" (47).

Patmore's ironic tone complicates the reading of "A Safe Charity", but does bring to the fore the inability of those who have means to meaningfully connect to and understand the needs of those who lack. He writes, "In vain do preachers 'Talk of marriage-feasting to the man | Who nothing knows of food but bread of bran'" (49). The well-meaning charitable institutions become a barrier to effective relief of poverty, instead maintaining a focus on the known, smaller community of one's own class, who, perhaps, have fallen on hard times, rather than extending charity to the chronically poor within the same locale. Patmore, if read in terms of the influence of Tractarianism, seeks to create a broader class cross-section in sympathy. Furthermore, he suggests it is safer for individuals to cut out the political, institutional middleman. While this move would seem to be limiting, his argument resonates with the Tractarian social vision, which sees the consistent small giving of all within the community as a more affective means of alleviating social distress than pouring funds into ineffectual administrative institutions.

Effecting Social Change

Patmore used his literary reach in an attempt to effect social change. He saw the need for courage in politics—the need to maintain principle and a moral conscience, rather than giving way to self-indulgence and complacency. The lack of leadership he saw in Britain is indicative of a nation in which capitalist individualism was extending its ground, and politics seemed increasingly morally fluid. Patmore uses his journalism primarily to critique this lack of leadership, and the way it legitimated the abdication of individual human responsibility, which he saw as contributing to the destabilising of the nation. However, at the same time, true to his Tractarian roots, Patmore looks to the local community as the nexus for actual social reform. Reid suggests that Patmore "stood aloof" in the age of humanitarian reforms, concluding that his "chief blindnesses in social matters were a certain lack of compassion, and a disbelief in the value of active works of benevolence" (218). However, his further observation that Patmore's "friends and family unite in asserting, he was *personally* the most charitable of men" hints at a different picture (218, emphasis added). While Reid judges according to institutional reforms, he ignores the Catholic ethos that focused on individual action, which was the narrowing criticism that condemned the Tractarian focus on the local community. Elliot Oliver shows a more nuanced understanding of Patmore's social stance when he acknowledges Patmore's criticism of political structures in general. In terms resonant with the early Tractarians, Oliver recognises Patmore's emphasis on the need to reform individuals rather than trying to change faceless institutions: "More than most of his contemporaries he foresaw that the coming crisis would be one of conviction rather than political or social organization" (Oliver 145). Through his journalism, Patmore sought to challenge political structures on moral and ethical grounds that were entrenched in a small government, local community philosophy. Thus, the conservative poet is re-visioned as a proponent of liberalism: a liberalism that demands an awareness of social inequity and individual social action.

Lesa Scholl is Master of Kathleen Lumley College, the postgraduate college of the University of Adelaide. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on representations of hunger and poverty in nineteenth-century Britain, and her publications include: *Translation*,

Authorship and the Victorian Professional Woman (Ashgate, 2011), *Hunger Movements in Early Victorian Literature* (Routledge, 2016), and *Hunger, Poetry and the Oxford Movement* (Bloomsbury, 2020). Lesa was the editor of *Medicine, Health and Being Human* (Routledge, 2018) and co-editor of *Place and Progress in the Works of Elizabeth Gaskell* (Ashgate, 2015). She is also the editor-in-chief of Palgrave's *Encyclopedia of Victorian Women Writers*.

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