

In a footnote occurring late in his 1844 excoriation of the English bourgeoisie, Engels details a ‘few members... who have shown themselves honourable exceptions’ to his critique. These include the manufacturers Hindley of Ashton, Fielden of Todmorden, a few ‘Radicals’, and those who Engels calls ‘the philanthropic Tories’, consisting of Disraeli, Borthwick, Ferrand, Manners, Ashley and others. Styled as ‘Young England’, these Tories recognised ‘the vileness of our present condition’, which they sought ‘to resist’ through ‘a restoration of the old ‘merry England’ with its brilliant features and its romantic feudalism’. Engels found this absurd, ‘a satire upon all historic development’, but still ‘worth something anyhow’: unlike the bourgeois, who acts solely on the basis of self-interest, these radical conservatives perceive the depth of England’s ‘social disorder’, and in the case of Carlyle even demand the organisation of labour. If their prescriptions were wrong, Engels could yet appreciate their diagnoses.

Nostalgic and yet rooted, desiring an idealised past while witness to the sordid present, this Janus-faced radical conservatism issued also and specifically in the nineteenth-century’s poetry — in particular, in the thinking and verse to emerge from the Cambridge Apostles group. Traditionally Tory in its respect for cohesion but uneasily radical in its longing for change, this thinking and this verse, as Isobel Armstrong has previously noted, often appears in particularly neurotic shape, its attempts ‘to heal’ inversely ‘endorsing... fracture’: its longing for a future that is also the past, its desire for cohesion but also for change, cannot be willed into coherence.

Armstrong’s exemplary *Victorian Poetry* (1993) shows exactly how far poetry and politics interpenetrated through the period, but, as Herbert Tucker has suggested, does not so much provide an account of poetry’s political form as enable one (Tucker 1993). My research will take Tucker’s cue, finding in the nineteenth-century’s verse an intensified understanding of the interaction between aspects of poetic form and politics. In particular, I will look at Tennyson, Hallam, Carlyle, and Patmore, but my thesis also has the potential to extend to figures from different formations and periods: Charles Doughty, in particular his *Dawn in Britain* (1906—), is of great interest here, while Browning and Swinburne, though neither conservative, are likewise within the project’s scope. Much recent scholarship has dwelt on the question of form, but exuberant claims that literary forms exist in an inherently ‘destabilising relation to social formations’ (Levine 2006) miss what makes the politics of Victorian poetry’s formal properties so interesting: what might it mean for Levine’s claims, for example, if we also accept that Tennyson wrote poems which specifically sought to *stabilise* social formations, or when within his own oeuvre he sought to stabilise specific poems themselves?

A poem like ‘Locksley Hall’ is witness to what I will call a crisis of form, at once in its 1842 version, its later manifestation as ‘Locksley Hall Sixty Years After’, and also when the two poems are considered together, with the 1842 poem’s most minute prosodic aspects and metre suggesting something like the crisis at the heart of radical conservatism itself. This crisis of form occurs specifically in the poem’s metrical rigorousness: unlike Kirsty Blair, who has suggested recently that ‘when Victorian poetry speaks of faith, it tends to do so in steady and regular rhythms’, and that ‘when it speaks of doubt, it is correspondingly more likely to deploy irregular, unsteady, unbalanced rhythms’ (Blair 2012), I will contend that Victorian metres rarely respond mimetically to a supposed faithful or doubtful content. Steadiness *produces* anxiety in ‘Locksley Hall’, which the later poem seeks to displace with yet more steadiness. Rather than affirm faith in a particular content, the 1842 poem’s metre shrouds that content in doubt in such a way that making it sturdier will not do.

My research will consider the connection between radical conservatism and contemporary radical orthodoxy, finding latent continuities in radical conservatism’s faith in ‘merry England’ and radical orthodoxy’s in credal Christianity. While the aporia and equivocation which Gillian Rose productively embraces in *The Broken Middle* would seem directly to contradict this faith, it will be seen that aporia and equivocation are in fact what emerge most frequently in the poetics of nineteenth-century radical conservatives themselves. This thesis will in turn refuse the standard conjunction of metre with conservatism, rebutting the implication in Caroline Levine’s suggestion that ‘politically minded critics have felt uncomfortable with reading for form in poetry’ because ‘meter has often been likened to imprisonment and containment’ (Levine 2015), seeking instead to develop alternative models to account for metrical orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. The V21 Collective’s manifesto suggests that interpretation should involve ‘an awareness that our interest in the period is motivated by certain features of our own moment’: while this is all well and good, attending to metre as straightforwardly imprisoning and containing fails in advance the poetry at hand. A project such as this need not project ‘certain features of our own moment’ onto the poetry to prove relevant, but rather has the potential to contribute to discussions of poetics, Victorian literature, *and* the sustained reassessments of radical conservatism and other cognates taking place at present in the work of Simon During, Catherine Pickstock, and others.