

CHAPTER TWO NINETEENTH-CENTURY PULPIT ORATORY: OUTLINING A HOMILETIC THEORY

In this chapter I will briefly consider nineteenth-century sermons, focusing both on their cultural status and on theories of homiletics expounded during the century. After outlining the lineaments of Tractarian homiletic theory, I will consider ways of reading sermons in order to articulate a theoretical framework for the third chapter’s reading of Pusey’s *Sermons on Solemn Subjects*. But in order to establish clear lines of continuity between this and the preceding chapter, and with a view to the third and final chapter of this thesis, it is perhaps useful to begin with some general comments on the ideas framing this investigation of nineteenth-century pulpit oratory.

Nineteenth-century religious discourse is no less inflected by contemporary contestations over the status of language than any other discourse. Indeed, it might even be argued that religious discourse in the late-Romantic and Victorian periods is more thoroughly (and anxiously) engaged with the problems of language than any other field. The Romantic “liberation” of the subject through the emancipation of feeling (so important to Coleridge and the Tractarians) carried within it the seeds of both a rampant subjectivism and anthropocentrism (intolerable to both Coleridge and the Tractarians). Moreover, because the subjective turn in Romanticism valorized subjective religious sentiment without erasing the susceptibility of subjective experience to misinterpretation, fears arose over the legitimacy of religious experience: might it not, like other forms of knowledge, be subject “to delusion, sin, and self-interest”? (Zemka 15). A great

deal of nineteenth-century religious discourse negotiates these tensions inherited from Romanticism. These tensions evince the embattled status of language in the nineteenth century amidst increasing concerns over its ability to adequately represent the Divine and religious experience (or, for that matter, nature: witness the proliferation of competing scientific discourses throughout the century). Significantly, within the context of religious discourse there was by no means consensus about the status of religious language. Though Coleridge's linguistic theories were taken up by the Tractarians, they represent only a fraction of the ever-expanding theories of religious discourse throughout the century. These theories, of course, are intimately connected to the religious dogmas they expound, and the explosion of religious sects and quasi-religious organizations is a peculiarity of the Victorian age which left its traces on nineteenth-century language, particularly in its literary, scientific and social texts. As J. Hillis Miller notes, the "battle among various forms of belief and unbelief was fought ... within each individual text" (281). One need only note in Pusey's *Sermons on Solemn Subjects*, for example, the repeated references to Christ as the Pattern and Redeemer of humanity. This insistence stands in sharp contrast with (and as a challenge to) the rising tide of British intellectuals for whom, in the wake of German higher criticism, the life of Christ becomes exclusively a *pattern* of virtuous living, stripped of dogmatic and theological significance. George Eliot is one of the most notable members of this group, and contributed to the propagation of its views through her translations of works such as David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. As well, Charles Marriot's contribution to the *Sermons* explicitly censures the liberalism of those such as J.S. Mill for whom sin, he argues, is "no more than a putting things out of a certain order which is best for the *happiness* of

all” (22-23; my emphasis). These debates were in large part facilitated by the rise of literacy and the easy dissemination of printed material throughout the century, which led to an “increased visibility of religious debates” (Zemka 27).

It is not within the purview of this investigation to examine at length the conflicts that informed nineteenth-century theories of language. What is essential, however, is a brief articulation of the Tractarian position. As is to be expected, it is deeply influenced by Coleridge. As I have suggested, religious discourse in the nineteenth century is a contested site, and attempts at articulating a theory of religious language and experience are marked by a series of oppositions and contradictions that attest to the embattled state of language: interiority versus exteriority, orality versus literacy, symbol versus allegory. But within both Coleridge’s writing and Pusey’s *Sermons on Solemn Subjects*, there is a dialectic that can account for these multiple oppositions. I began to explore this dialectic in the preceding chapter when I considered Coleridge’s epistemology in the *Biographia Literaria*, in which the condition of possibility for subjective consciousness is located in the prior existence of God. This sort of dialectical opposition is characteristic of Coleridge, in which a finite category is positioned in relation to an infinite, or supernatural, category. (For example, his discussions of the Church set in dialectical relationship the divinely constituted Church [infinite] and the National Church [finite]). However, Coleridge’s proof of God’s existence is as much a source of anxiety as of comfort, and the curious corollary of Coleridge’s discovery of God and the imaginative liberty associated with it is an increased disciplining and surveillance of the self (Zemka 25-26). As Sue Zemka notes, Coleridge’s religious writing embraces both a rhetoric of freedom and one of discipline. It is

evocative at times of the sensations that connect his consciousness to timeless forces both natural and supernatural, [and] is also evocative of the power and necessity of taming his consciousness, of bending it to the will of an abstract necessity. In his later life Coleridge discovered in Christian theology a suitable narrative for the process of expanding and disciplining consciousness. The creation and the interrogation of interior spaces were projects shared by British Romantic and Protestant thinkers; Coleridge was a master in both movements because the creative discomfort he experienced in the former was allayed by the structure, logic, and purpose he found in the latter. (Zemka 26)

What I want to suggest, then, is that out of the dual impulses of Protestant theology and Romantic sensibility Coleridge devises a dialectic characterized by both a disciplining function and encounter with God, respectively. The Protestant impulse gave Coleridge a means of redressing the powerful liberatory discourse of Romanticism. Where the will is liberated, on the one hand, it is tempered and “tamed” on the other. But why should the will need to be tamed? Quite simply, because of sin.¹ For Coleridge, as for Pusey, the dialectic in which he operates is one of lack and fulfilment. Where the will is afflicted by sin (lack), it is disciplined by preaching and Scripture in an unfolding progression towards God (fulfilment). In this way, Coleridge recapitulates his fondness for dialectics between finite (lack) and infinite (fulfilment) categories. But note that God is involved dialectically every step of the way, in the awakening of a sense of sin, in the means of correction, and in momentary feelings of improvement. Zemka notes that in Coleridge’s religious writing this dialectic is never fully synthesized (32-33). Rather, the constitutive elements progress by an “unfolding deferral” in

¹ Though it should also be noted that Coleridge’s increasingly conservative politics justify the suspicion that the need for discipline also arises from his fears about the *undirected* liberatory power of Romanticism. Coleridge seeks for a means of harnessing and tempering the energy of the free will in institutional structures such as the Church and the State. Part of his desire for discipline is certainly the result of his reactionary politics.

which the soul ever more closely conforms to God (Zemka 65). Notably, this is precisely the dialectic that is constitutive of Pusey's preaching, as I will show in chapter three. His sermons also employ a "negative" dialectic of lack and fulfilment, whose constitutive elements are never synthesized. It is this dialectic that is fundamental to the ensuing discussion of nineteenth-century homiletics. The various oppositions and tensions discussed will be situated in relation to the broad categories of lack and fulfilment, especially the problem of orality and literacy for nineteenth-century homiletic theory. As will be shown, the traditionally privileged place occupied by orality in Christian discourse, particularly strong in Evangelical circles at this time, becomes untenable with the rise of literate classes and the proliferation of print culture. Rather, the literary and the oral become inextricably linked, both in terms of sermon style and, particularly in the case of Pusey, content.

I. NINETEENTH-CENTURY PULPIT ORATORY: AN OVERVIEW

In October 1853, Edward Burne-Jones commented: "I heard Pusey on Sunday, a magnificent sermon, profound and exhaustive, on Justification. He came out now and then gloriously, full of liberality. It lasted close to two hours" (cited in Cruse 109). Burne-Jones's rhetoric is surprising. His thoroughgoing aesthetic appreciation of the sermon (it was "magnificent"), the fact that the sermon's subject matter is significant enough to warrant mention (as if the topic lends the sermon-hearing experience added significance), and his "critic's eye" for the details of Pusey's oratorical skill, all seem rather out of place when we remember that he is recounting a moment in a Sunday morning at Church. Moreover, it is difficult to know how to read his final comments. Are they simply

a reflection on the length of the sermon, or is there a hint of ecstasy in Burne-Jones's comment that it "lasted close to two hours"?

If I am guilty of deducing too much from this short comment on a mid-nineteenth-century sermon, my reading nonetheless provides a starting point for considering the status of the sermon in nineteenth-century British culture. With their curiously mixed tone of adulation and critical perspective, Burne-Jones's comments emphasize the position of the nineteenth-century sermon as an object of considerable public attention and evaluation. Not only was the pulpit the locus of pastoral pedagogy, but throughout the century it was an arena for the promulgation of widely differing world views, and for political, theological and social commentary. Attendance at sermons was not only a religious obligation; the sermons themselves had the character of a spectacle, leading Horton Davies and Lewis Drummond to describe the Victorians as "'a nation of 'sermon tasters,'" people for whom church attendance was an intellectual and aesthetic delight as well as a religious duty" (Ellison 43).² Indeed, cults of personality grew up around the famous preachers of the day such that attendance at their sermons not only drew crowds from the immediate area, but from the whole country as well. The famous pulpiteers' sermons were "regarded as essential components of any tourists or businessman's itinerary" (Ellison 55). Amy Cruse recounts the story of Lady Frances Balfour's father who was "denominationally indiscriminant" in his attendance at services, his intent being to hear and consider the sermons of England's greatest preachers. Lady Balfour commented that her

² This perhaps explains why Burne-Jones mentions the topic of Pusey's sermon. Justification was a central area of contestation between Tractarian and Evangelical Anglicans and attendance at a sermon on this topic, delivered by the leader of the Tractarians no less, lends a certain amount of cultural capital to the experience.

father's love of sermons almost constituted a "pastime" (cited in Cruse 108). Sermon-hearing, then, was not only a duty, but a pleasure, an aesthetic event and, at times, a leisure activity.

If Cruse is correct when, in her 1935 text *The Victorians and their Books*, she writes that the Victorian age was "the age of the preacher", then the paucity of recent critical commentary on nineteenth-century homiletics is striking given the large amounts of energy devoted to sermon production and consumption (108). Not only was attendance at sermons popular in the nineteenth century, but the publication and consumption of sermons in print was a thriving business.³ Indeed, it was estimated at the end of the century that "English Anglicans alone were publishing over a million sermons each year" (Ellison 46). This in turn spawned an inordinate number of books, pamphlets and articles on homiletic theory (theories of composition and delivery), as well as regular reviews of printed and orally delivered sermons. The curious status of the sermon in the nineteenth century as a participant in both oral and print culture has significant ramifications. One of these is that the sermon became increasingly subject to the dictates of literary composition. If the principles of Ciceronian rhetoric had to varying degrees governed the art of pulpit oratory in England from the time of the reformation (as well as prior to it), then by the nineteenth century, as Robert Ellison points out, sermons were being constructed "with the techniques governing the written, rather than the spoken, word" (18). But the "literary turn" in nineteenth-century homiletics was by no means an abandonment of oral tradition. Rather, it was a conflation of the two. Where the Victorians rejected the elevated

³ Cruse notes, interestingly, a connection between sermon reading and the rise of the novel. The latter, she argues, replaces the former as the most popular form of literature as the century progresses (119). Work has yet to be done on the reasons behind the cultural shift away from sermon to novel reading.

forms of Ciceronian rhetoric associated with verbosity and ornamentation, they emphasized that aspect of traditional rhetoric that focused on *persuasion*. The sermon was meant to convict and to compel. The purpose of preaching for the Victorians was “not to bring the congregation to assent to a theological theory or set of propositions, but rather to persuade – indeed, to compel – men and women to embark upon a spiritual course of action” (Ellison 19). The conflation of oral and literary cultures in the sermon marks it as a form of what Ellison calls “oral literature” – those forms of discourse that exist between the “poles” of orality and literacy (14-15). The sermon, for example, is either written with the intent of oral delivery (and therefore often stylistically unique in its use of grammatical structures associated with speech), or is delivered extemporaneously with a view to its later publication (and therefore with attentiveness to literary form). In either case, the printed sermon appears as a sort of “extemporaneous writing”, a mixture of oral and literary styles (Ellison 39). By the close of the nineteenth century,

[s]ermons were no longer regarded primarily as orations, but rather as ‘written pieces’; consequently, they were expected to ‘follow the rules of all other writings’. Rather than eliminating the practices of orality from Victorian homiletics, however, these reforms, instead, led to a conflation of the oral and written traditions, as preachers were expected to employ literary means – a simple, conversational rhetorical style – to accomplish an orality-based end – persuading the members of a congregation to embark upon a specific, spiritually beneficial course of action. This conflation is one of the most prominent elements of the theory of Victorian preaching. It is also ... the theoretical concern that first identifies the sermon as an important contribution to the “oral literature” of the British Isles. (Ellison 31-2)

But if Ellison is correct that literary and oral qualities become enmeshed in the development of the sermon during the nineteenth century, he nonetheless oversimplifies the role of the literary in sermon writing. The proliferation of

competing theories of language mentioned above, and any brief survey of Victorian literature, attest to the period's widely divergent "literary styles", few of which are "simple" and "conversational". As Elizabeth Jay notes, even among like-minded individuals such as the Tractarians, the imprecision of stylistic generalizations becomes apparent (18). The "comparative modernity" of Newman's prose is widely divergent from the "impersonal formality and reverence of a religious register aimed at by Pusey's archaizing style" (Jay 18).

If it is difficult to distinguish between the "literary" and "oral" qualities of any particular sermon, Ellison's appellation of "oral literature" for nineteenth-century homilies is nonetheless useful. Perhaps the largest lacuna in Ellison's discussion of Victorian pulpit oratory is his ellision of the *cultural* significance of oral and literary forms of communication. As Sue Zemka makes clear in *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth Century British Culture*, Victorian religious discourse privileged orality (14-15). It associated speech, particularly in Evangelical circles, with divine "presence"; and, as religious and millenarian sects proliferated throughout the century, there was a rise in incidents of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) that again highlighted the valorization of speech. There was a sense that the spoken word could communicate God with minimal mediation, even be directly inspired by God. As Coleridge maintained, the Preacher is the "sensible voice of the Holy Spirit" (Drummond 68). Even accounts of John Henry Newman's preaching emphasize the significance of speech, or the voice. In his discussion of Newman's preaching, Ellison notes that it was Newman's *voice* that "overcame the distance a manuscript imposes between preacher and audience and touch[ed] the souls of those who heard him preach" (90). John Campbell Shairp wrote a

poem about Newman in 1873 that appeared in *Macmillan's* magazine in which he lamented the silencing of Newman's oratory in St. Mary's, the church of which he was Rector, after his secession to Rome. According to Shairp, Newman's voice was "as from the unseen world oracular", a voice that could "win" or "repel" men, and that was "piercing yet tender" and that, most importantly, elevated people "higher than they were" (376). But it is Charles Kingsley's assessment of Newman that is perhaps the most striking account of his oratorical power and of the significance attributed to the voice. Kingsley wrote for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1859:

twenty years ago when there were giants on the earth, among the Tractarians as among others, stood in that pulpit a great genius and a great orator, who knew how to use his voice. Perfectly still he stood, disdaining the slightest show of passion, trusting to eye and voice alone – to the eye, which looked through and through every soul with the fascination of a serpent; to the voice most sweet and yet most dreadful, which was monotonous indeed; but monotonous with full intent and meaning, carrying home to the heart, with its delicate and deliberate articulation, every syllable of words which one would have too gladly escaped; words which laid bare the inmost fibres of the heart, and showed to each his basest and his weakest spot, and with their passionless and yet not untended cynicism, made the cheeks of strong men flame, whom all the thunders of a Spurgeon would only have roused to manly scorn. (13)

Similar comments were made of Pusey, who similarly avoided oratorical pomp: "when it came to practical exhortation – to the searching of the heart's secrets, and the enforcement of repentance – [his voice] was like the voice of a god" (G.W.E. Russell cited in Rowell 72). To invoke the dialectic that introduces this chapter, the emphasis on orality as fulfilment (or presence) was always subtended by an anxiety over the validity of oral discourse's content, and this demanded alternative forms of verification. For Coleridge, this form of verification is

Scripture. The significance of this is its intermingling of orality and literacy: attendant on every oral discourse is a *literary* validation. Oratory vivifies the lessons of Scripture, but any claims for the priority of the oral are undermined by “the fact that what is spoken is also a substitute for what is written” (Zemka 35). For Coleridge, as Zemka notes, the *written* word of Scripture proceeds out of the *mouth* of the preacher, so “the mediums of voice and text are, in their religious experiences, inextricably interwoven” (40). This tension between the word spoken and the word written was implicit in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century English Protestantism, which both emphasized the significance of God’s “call”, heard in the soul, and the confirmation of every call through the examination of Scripture. Orality and literacy, then, stand in a complex relationship to one another throughout the nineteenth century. And significantly they partake of that dialectic between lack and fulfilment, or absence and presence, previously discussed. If orality is a site of presence, giving life to the written text of Scripture, then textuality is a necessary absence that both informs and determines the content of oral discourse.

J.M. Neale was one of the first of a series of Anglican priests to extend the devotional and theological implications of the Tractarian ideal to liturgical renewal and the revival of Religious life in the Church of England. In 1856 he published an anthology of medieval sermons. Neale’s introduction to it provides a very useful starting point for considering the characteristics of Tractarian, or Anglo-catholic, preaching. It reads less as a commentary on medieval preaching than as a diagnosis of and prescription for nineteenth-century sermonizing. Whether one favoured preaching extemporaneously or from a manuscript, a

subject of debate throughout the nineteenth century, Neale confirms the general consensus that one must preach “from the heart and to the heart”, which is to say, persuasively (xv). Neale gives content to what persuasive preaching might look like when he outlines characteristics of the great medieval preachers. Their simplicity of expression, as well as their use of familiar illustrations, anecdotes and stories, give to the medieval preachers (and their nineteenth-century counterparts) the tools of persuasiveness. But Neale identifies a number of specific ways by which the preacher can most ably affect his congregation. The first is “earnestness”, followed by a series of three properties belonging to the great sermonizers of the middle ages: a thorough knowledge of Scripture; the ability to adapt to the requirements of a congregation; and an emphasis on the contemporary significance of the Church’s history as expressed in the feasts and fasts of the Church year (Neale xxix).

“Earnestness” is an ambiguous category at best, and it might appear initially to be difficult to engage with critically. However, Neale’s emphasis on earnestness is by no means novel in the nineteenth century. If it is difficult to locate “earnestness” in a text, the emphasis on its importance for Victorian homiletics is nonetheless culturally significant – and telling. Neale’s emphasis on earnestness is symptomatic of the Tractarian concern with religious feeling, and is also related to the Oxford Movement’s overarching concern with personal sanctity. Like Keble’s poetry that is to be the product of a heart overflowing with religious feeling, Neale’s sermon is the product of the abundance of the preacher’s heart, both because of the disciplined habits of the preacher’s spiritual life and his openness to the experience of profound emotions. Sanctity is

composed of discipline and vulnerability. As he writes, comparing two styles of preaching,

The one priest speaks because it is Sunday morning, because the congregation are waiting for him, and because the publication of his sermons may possibly add to his fame or to his convenience. The other, because his heart is full of his subject, – because in Advent-time he can manifestly think of nothing but the Advent, and therefore out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. (xxix)

Interestingly, many *responses* to the great preachers of the nineteenth century echo Neale's observation. Faithful earnestness (a congregation's sense of the preacher's honesty and religious integrity) was central to a sermon's success, and could even compensate for a lack of oratorical skill – as some claimed it did for Pusey (Cruse 109; Rowell 71-72). As an anonymous author wrote in *The Congregationalist* in 1878, "How many of the greatest preachers are great not by virtue of great sermons, but by reason of great souls" (cited in Ellison 90). Newman also argued that the earnestness and sanctity of the preacher were constitutive of good preaching. For Newman, the bearing of the preacher confirmed the authority and authenticity of the words spoken. He even asserts that Truth "has been upheld in the world ... not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power" but by "*the personal influence*, direct and indirect, of those who are commissioned to teach it" (*Belief* 65, 77; Newman's emphasis).⁴ But earnestness is not, for Newman or for Neale, a rhetorical strategy. Rather, it is the

natural fruit of the genuine Christian life. It is present in preachers 'according to the measure of their faith and love,' and it is as central to

⁴ Note that Newman's privileging of the immediacy and efficacy of the oral is, as in the discussion of voice and orality above, accomplished in relation to and in a sense as an extension of, a textual source.

effective preaching as the content of the discourse itself. As Newman puts it, the preacher ‘persuades by what he is, as well as by what he delivers.’ (Ellison 86)

Again, however, Ellison ellides the cultural significance of the occurrence he is describing, as well as the tension between a *preacher’s* sense of his earnestness and the *congregation’s* perception thereof. Jay Fliegelman has traced the history of this emphasis on earnestness in public discourse to a shift that took place in the eighteenth century. Public oratory was “reconceptualized in the mid-eighteenth century as an occasion for the public revelation of a private self. Such a private self would then be judged by private rather than public virtues: temperance, self-control, honesty, and, most problematically, sincerity” (Fliegelman 24). The public revelation of a private self is evident throughout Pusey’s *Sermons on Solemn Subjects*. References to the spiritual struggles of the anonymous sponsor (in fact himself) who provided the funds for the building of the church in which the sermons were preached abound. Moreover, Pusey exercises throughout the sermons a rhetoric of private sin and of personal virtue. Witness his discussion of St. Mary Magdalene in the first sermon of the series, in which he speaks in detail of both her sin and conversion (*Sermons* 4). The sermons have a confessional quality, particularly Pusey’s discussion of the anonymous donor. His rhetoric at those times strains to avoid saying too much, to temper the acknowledgements of sin and avoid recounting details: “Ye know, my brethren, that this day’s offering differs from most beside, that it is the offering of a penitent. Ye know not from what sin recovered...” (*Sermons* 1). Moreover, one might argue that the inscription Pusey put in the church (the only condition the anonymous donor placed on the building of St. Saviour’s) is a radically public revelation of a private self (if not of his virtue than of his humility): “Ye who

enter this holy place, pray for the sinner who built it.” Pusey constructed St. Saviour’s as an offering to atone for his sins, both actual and perceived. Throughout his life he had a deep-seated sense of sin and felt that many of his trials, including the deaths of his wife and daughter, were the result of his transgressions.

The tension evident in Neale’s discussion of earnestness and in Ellison’s between a preacher’s private sense of earnestness and a congregation’s perception thereof is difficult to resolve. It is significant, however, that Newman’s and Neale’s comments on sincerity have a precedent in St. Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*, the most important text in Christian homiletic theory alongside Cicero’s work. Augustine elevates wisdom over eloquence in order of importance for Christian preaching, and revises Cicero’s theory of oratory to privilege on the one hand the centrality of Scripture to the homiletic enterprise, and on the other hand, the necessity of a heart prepared by prayer and charity for successful sermons. John D. Schaeffer writes in his article on orality and literacy in the *De doctrina* that wisdom

manifests itself as the sincerity, perspicacity, and doctrinal orthodoxy of the speaker whose words come directly from the heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells... The audience recognizes that the sermon’s fusion of content and style springs not from the conscious application of secondary rhetoric to a subject but from the interior of a speaker who is making these associations and that the speaker’s interior has been formed by prayer and reading Scripture. (Schaeffer 1137-38)

Here, then, we can note a few loosely defined characteristics of Tractarian preaching. The preaching emphasizes simplicity of style, practical religious counsel, and the sanctity of the preacher. But it also has, or should ideally

possess, the three most important qualities that Neale finds in medieval sermons. The first two are of less immediate interest than the third. They are, firstly, “an immense, almost intuitive knowledge of Scripture” (as seen above in reference to St. Augustine), and secondly, “their power of adapting themselves to the wants and requirements” of their congregations (Neale xxv; xlii-xliii). The first of these will be well evidenced in Pusey’s sermons in the next chapter, and the second is a reflection of the Tractarian ideal of Reserve, in which the communication of religious truth is tempered in accordance with the ability of the recipient, or recipients, to receive it.

But the third is perhaps the most striking and the most peculiarly Tractarian. It asserts that the parts of the liturgical year (for example, Lent, Advent, the Feast of the Annunciation) are not to be remembered as histories “of the past” but actions “of the present” (Neale lx-lxi).⁵ That is to say, as Neale writes concerning the medieval Church, but clearly as a counsel for the contemporary one,

the events the Church was setting before her children were spoken of as present, or as future; the hearers were not called on, as so often now, to remember that the Church sets before them this, or that the Church would have them remember that; but whatsoever it might be, feast or fast, season of joy or season of sorrow, they were taught to feel that the sorrow or the joy was, and ought to be, as real a matter to them, as to those to whom the events actually first occurred. (lviii-lix)

For Neale, then, the sermon is to be understood, in some sense, as sacramental, a re-presentation of an aspect of the life of the Church, not as a past moment, but as

⁵ It might be argued that Pusey’s first contribution to the *Tracts for the Times*, on the discipline of fasting in the ancient Church and the Church of England, in part attempts to assert just this – that the Church’s fast at, say, Lent, is not simply in remembrance of Christ’s forty days in the wilderness, or of Israel’s forty years in exile, but is a constant re-living of those moments in the life of the Church – a participation. If the Church’s history is living, then it must be a lived history. In this way, the Church year itself becomes a catechetical instrument, but even more than this, almost sacramental.

a present action, just as the Holy Communion is a re-presentation, or re-
 membrance, of Christ's death on the cross – a “making present”.⁶ Thus Neale's
 homiletic theory reiterates the Tractarian theory of language. Language,
 specifically religious language, is “incarnational” in that through it events in the
 life of the Church are made present for participation.⁷ But if the sermon is “like”
 a Sacrament, it cannot take the place of a Sacrament, and it is characteristic of
 Tractarian sermons to both acknowledge the limits of language for discussing the
 Divine, and to gesture towards the Sacraments as the true, or archetypal, locus of
 encounter with God. In this sense, the Tractarians distance themselves from
 Evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters, for whom the sermon occupies a centrality
 in Divine Service that the Tractarians argue distracts from the worship of God.
 Preaching is never an end in itself, but always a means towards the union with
 Christ that is effected only in prayer and the Sacraments (Härdelin 303). As Alf
 Härdelin argues, for the Tractarians, to regard the sermon as the centre of worship
 makes people, and not God, the focus. It is “no mere theological mistake,
 subverting the sacramental system. It makes evident a misconception of the
 whole idea of worship, for it has put man in the centre and made the worship

⁶ As Thomas Cranmer, the compiler of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and father of the English Reformation writes concerning the Holy Communion: “Likewise, when [the priest] ministereth to our sights Christ's holy sacraments, we must think Christ crucified before our eyes, because the sacraments so represent him, and be his sacraments...” (366). Or, as David Haney remarks, “The celebration of the Eucharist is not simply a representation of Christ's action, but a repetition of that event, with an efficaciousness of its own, in which God is not represented but presented” (97-8).

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer locates in Kierkegaard's notion of “contemporaneity” a helpful way of conceptualizing the “incarnational” quality of the sermon. He writes: “Contemporaneity, for Kierkegaard ... is a formulation of the believer's task of so totally combining one's own presence with the redeeming act of Christ, that the latter is experienced as something present (not as something in the past) and is taken seriously as such ... Hence, contemporaneity is something that is found especially in the religious act, and in the sermon. The sense of being present is here the genuine sharing in the redemptive action itself” (113). Note that both he and Neale refer to the sermon as an “action”, lending it specifically sacramental overtones.

man-ward instead of God-ward” (Härdelin 305). William Oakely, a nineteenth-century Anglican clergyman, clearly articulates the Tractarian vision of the sermon. For Oakely, the sermon is not separate from the Sacraments, but is an integrated part of the liturgy, and so its sacramental character is in part attendant upon its position *vis-à-vis* the prayers, consecration and administration of the Sacrament in the service. As he writes, somewhat polemically: “The Protestant *preaches* the prayers; while the Catholic regards even the sermon as a part of the [Eucharist]” (cited in Härdelin 305). In this sense the words of the sermon are clearly understood in their proper relationship to their archetype – Christ and his sacramental presence in the world. Thomas Cranmer, the sixteenth-century English Reformer, clearly articulates this vision of the sermon as sacramental word in relation to the Holy Communion as real and efficacious Sacrament when he writes, “as the word of God preached *putteth Christ into our ears*, so likewise, these elements of ... bread and wine, joined to God’s word, do after a sacramental manner put Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands, and all our senses” (41; my emphasis). For Cranmer, as for Neale, it is clear that the sermon actually communicates Christ to the listener, making present the works of redemption in the life of the Church.⁸ Language is an event which allows for participation in the

⁸ Citing Henri de Lubac, Andrew Louth gestures towards this idea of the multiple moments of Christ’s presence in the world (i.e. in both word and Sacrament) in his *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*. For Louth, Scripture is an instance of the mystery of God’s presence in the world, but that presence must be understood as ever new and re-newing itself, and in relation to the abundance of ways in which God manifests Himself in the world (for example, in preaching and the Holy Communion). He cites de Lubac: “Christianity is not, properly speaking, a ‘religion of the Book’: it is a religion of the word (*Parole*) – but not uniquely nor principally of the word in written form. It is a religion of the Word (*Verbe*) – ‘not of a word, written and mute, but of a Word living and incarnate’ (to quote St. Bernard). The Word of God is here and now, amongst us, ‘which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled’: the Word ‘living and active’, unique and personal, uniting and crystallizing all the words which bear it witness. Christianity is not ‘the biblical religion’: it is the religion of Jesus Christ” (Louth 101) And so Cranmer is able to recognize the presence of Christ in the words of the sermon *and* in the Sacrament of the altar.

mystery of God. It is a type that does not simply stand in for an absent anti-type, but which actually participates in it – putting Christ, for example, “in our ears”.

But, as will be explored at length in the following section, Tractarian homiletics have a more complex relationship to language than one might be led to believe. Language *is* a means of participating in the Church’s mysteries. But Pusey’s sermons also insist on their *inability* to communicate to a congregation the personal encounter with God that is necessary for their salvation, and so metaphorically “unwrite” themselves – the sermon succeeds precisely in the moment of its failure, which is to say, when it convinces us of its own insufficiency. As Pusey writes:

Whoever would meditate, speak, preach, on the Passion of our Lord, thinking that it alone could touch men’s consciences, would act, as if man could give himself love, or that unloving hearts must melt at once at the hearing of so great [a] love... Yet not the doctrine of the cross alone, nor its preaching, nor gazing on it, nor bearing it, but He himself who for us hung thereon must impart its virtue to us... (*Sermons* 180-81)

If we take Coleridge as our example, than we might argue that the symbolic structure of language that the Tractarians inherit from him comes with its own set of anxieties about the limits of language. Can language communicate interiority? How can the inexhaustible character of the words of Scripture and the Creeds be “policed” in order to ensure a correspondance with traditional doctrine? And by extension, what are “true” Scriptural exegeses in Sermons, and what false? These are the sorts of questions that problematize any overly simple assumptions about the status of language for the Tractarians, and lead to the tension-laden duality that characterizes Pusey’s sermons, in which words are both a means of coming to

God, and signs of their own failure (fulfilment and lack). As the third chapter of this thesis demonstrates, however, this is a productive tension.

Having considered briefly the place of sermons in nineteenth-century culture, and having traced the lineaments of a Tractarian theory of homiletics, I will now attempt to elucidate a methodology for reading Pusey's sermons, focusing on Stanley Fish's idea of "self-consuming artifacts" and the idea of "incarnational poetics" introduced in the previous chapter.

II. OUTLINING A THEORY FOR READING PUSEY'S SERMONS

In my attempt thus far to outline a theory of "incarnational poetics", I have relied upon both the work of David Haney and the poetic theory of the Tractarians. I have argued that Coleridge's notion of the symbolic and Wordsworth's conception of language as an incarnation of thought informed the Tractarian's sacramental view of language, in which words are "events" that allow the auditor to apprehend the realities they communicate (in the same way that a symbol both refers to and participates in what it symbolizes). But as I have suggested, multiple anxieties attend the incarnational theory of language. Coleridge's and Wordsworth's Romantic aesthetics invest language with an immense power. However, the susceptibility of language to misapprehension and misuse, and the need to ensure orthodox responses to religious teaching, were anxieties that accompanied the idealistic impulse of Coleridge's, Wordsworth's and the Tractarians' aesthetics. The insufficiencies of language connote a linguistic "lack", much like the lack characteristic of the sinner's relationship to God. But language's symbolic function connotes "fulfilment". It is the dialectic between these notions of language that can assist a reading of Pusey's sermons.

To that end I will outline in greater depth the meaning of “incarnational poetics” and look more closely at the status of the sermon as a literary genre. Stanley Fish’s notion of “self-consuming artifacts” offers a helpful means of negotiating one side of the tensions in Tractarian uses of language. In spite of the profound differences that mark Fish’s and the Tractarians’ linguistic theories (for example, Fish would categorically deny the symbolic theory of language), he does clearly articulate that aspect of Tractarian aesthetics concerned with language’s insufficiencies. Fish discusses the death of the word and I use his theories to elucidate the problem of language’s “mortality” implicit in an incarnational poetics.

As has been suggested, for a poetics to be properly incarnational the word that is spoken must be “mortal” (Haney 19). David Haney argues that this is a defining characteristic of Wordsworth’s poetics – that the incarnation of thought in language (of mind in the material) is a movement from immortality to mortality, with all of the attendant problems and tensions this entails. For Haney, and for my purpose in reading sermons, if the incarnation of Christ in the world is the model of language’s movement from thought to word, then this must include the fact that Christ’s incarnation entails his violent death. It is the condition of the word’s “death” which attends Haney’s idea of poetics that, I maintain, is in part constitutive of the experience of the sermon both as written and as spoken discourse.⁹ An incarnational poetics, then, is by no means an idealistic schema

⁹ It is interesting to note that both Haney and Fish fail to distinguish adequately in their work between the word spoken and the word written. Fish especially, in his work on Donne’s sermons, alternates without distinction between the auditor of a sermon and the reader of one. Though I will focus primarily on the sermon as a written text, I will give attention to first-hand accounts of Pusey’s oratorical skill, as I have already, and wish simply to highlight here the situational differences between one who reads sermons and one who is present at their delivery.

that effaces the problems of discourse (the relationship between word and referent) (Haney 19). Rather, an incarnational poetics is

a process of spirit becoming event, a process by which (by analogy with Jesus entering the world) words move from the ideality of thought to become – *for better and for worse* – things and events in the world which are not simply separable from thought, but which must enter the realm of mortality. (Haney 19; my emphasis)

I want to emphasize Haney’s “for better and for worse” because it reinforces the tensions inherent in this conception of language and because it resonates deeply with the other scholars whose work I will refer to in an attempt to articulate a version of incarnational poetics for reading Pusey. The “for better and for worse” of Haney is notably expressed by Stephen Prickett in his discussions of the divine Word and his relationship to poetic discourse. He argues that Coleridge’s notions of the symbol and the Imagination take as their model the Logos, Jesus, who is able to mediate such apparently diverse and unrelated concepts as materiality and immateriality, mortality and immortality. For both Prickett and Haney, however, that mediation is a source of tension. If nature is a symbol that allows the perceiver to participate in it through the exercise of the Imagination, it is by the same token a deep mystery, much of which is left inarticulate and inaccessible (Prickett, *Words* 144). The dialectic between what remains mysterious and what becomes apparent might be said to constitute the “incarnational” experience. Newman clearly locates this tension in religious language when he discusses its ability to both make present the mysteries of the faith and the simultaneous opacity of such presentations (*Via Media* 1: 254).

Stanley Fish, in his 1972 text *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature*, outlines a vision of two types of text – or rather,

of two types of *experience* one may have while reading seventeenth-century literature. The first is a *rhetorical* experience, occasioned by a text that affirms the prejudices of its readers. A rhetorical presentation “satisfies the needs of its readers ... The experience of such a form will be flattering, for it tells the reader that what he has always thought about the world is true and that the *ways* of his thinking are sufficient” (Fish 1). The second, and more significant for this study, is the *dialectical* experience of reading. This experience challenges the assumptions of the reader and demands a change of heart or disposition. A presentation is dialectical if it is

disturbing, for it requires of its readers a searching and rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by ... If the experience of a rhetorical form is flattering, the experience of a dialectical form is humiliating ... The end of the dialectical experience is (or should be) nothing less than a *conversion*, not only a changing, but an exchanging of minds. It is necessarily a painful process (like the sloughing of a second skin) in the course of which both parties forfeit a great deal; on the one side the applause of a pleased audience, and on the other, the satisfaction of listening to the public affirmation of our values and prejudices. The relationship is finally less one of speaker to hearer, or auditor to reader than of physician to patient, and it is as the “good physician” that the dialectician is traditionally known. (Fish 1-2)

But if the dialectical presentation intends a transformation in the auditor, it effects this transformation through, in a sense, its own death. That is to say, the text that aims at conversion is a text that functions on behalf of another authority, in the light of which it recognizes its own insufficiency. Inherent to the function of self-consuming artifacts is a movement from the dictates of rationalism, which for Fish is a faculty that divides and categorizes, to an “anti-rationalism”, which dissolves the distinctions accomplished “rationally” “in the light of an all-embracing unity”:

In a dialectical experience, one moves, or is moved, from the first to the second way, which has various names, the way of the good, the way of inner light, the way of faith; but whatever the designation, the moment of its full emergence is marked by the transformation of the visible and segmented world into an emblem of its creator's indwelling presence ... and at that moment the motion of the rational consciousness is stilled, for it has become indistinguishable from the object of its inquiry. (Fish 3)

How this is accomplished for Fish is unclear, though for both Pusey and Coleridge it is the result of a dialectic in which an inner and divided self is consistently vanquished and then strengthened by the Spirit through prayer, sermons, Scripture and the Sacraments.¹⁰ Significantly, it never has for Coleridge or Pusey the resolution that Fish implies. Rather, for them the religious life is agonistic, “comprising ongoing but on the whole ameliorative exchanges between sin and redemption, error and correction, ego and transcendence” (Zemka 32-33).

The notable difference between Fish and the Tractarians is that where language seems to fall away for Fish in the movement from text to God, for the Tractarians language is the means of that effect. Of course it is for Fish as well, but Fish does not articulate a theory of language *per se*, but rather of its effects, in such a way that the status of language and its importance is neglected once Fish convinces us that the text literally disappears in its consumption. This is clearest when Fish makes a strikingly Coleridgean comment, but without any elucidation. As has been noted, he argues that the visible world becomes “an emblem of its creator's indwelling presence” through the dialectical mode of presentation (Fish

¹⁰ It should be noted that one of the weaknesses of Fish's reading of sermons is his tendency to isolate them from the liturgical action of which they are a part, or, where the sermon was not preached at a communion service, in isolation from the sacramental doctrine attending it. There are numerous ways that people can encounter God. Fish misses the significant case of the Holy Communion, which for the Tractarians (and for John Donne's “high” doctrine of the Sacraments) was the archetypal moment of God's condescension to humanity, in which he gives himself wholly and entirely to be consumed by the faithful.

3). He does not, however, provide for the role of language in such a transformation of vision. For the Tractarians, on the other hand, the words which make possible this transformation are *themselves* sacred inasmuch as they participate in and are essential to it. As in the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism the material elements of Bread and Wine, and Water, respectively, do not disappear but are the vehicles of Divine grace, so too the event of language is not disposed of in the Tractarian model, but stands as the means of engaging with the mysteries of the Church.¹¹ For Keble and the Tractarians, the notion of participation is extended to all language, though in a particular way to religious discourse, and is of course defined by its symbolic structure which gives to words, as it gives to nature, an inexhaustible power of signification. The symbol “with its hidden meanings, is an expression of the inwardness of religious feeling” (Prickett, *Words* 48). The moment that a text betrays its insufficiency is indeed a death of the word, or of the work, but the life that this death engenders is accomplished only in and through the very Word that dies. In this sense, the Tractarian theory of language I am proposing is radically incarnational inasmuch as one and the same word is *both* death and life, just as Christ in one body both dies and rises again. In this, then, one may speak of Pusey’s sermons as self-consuming artifacts, but with the proviso here elucidated concerning the different status accorded to language by the Tractarians than by Fish.

¹¹ It is possible to read Fish’s thoughts on language as, in a sense, radically Protestant or hyper-Catholic – both positions that, ultimately, refute the importance of the material elements for the sacraments. Though this is not the place to show why such extremes should come to similar conclusions, one could argue that it is essentially the result of a misunderstanding of the Incarnation. Furthermore, Fish’s use of the term “emblem” as opposed to “symbol” to denote the way in which the created world intimates the presence of its Creator may betray a sympathy for the connotations of absence associated with the emblem (which stands in for something), as opposed to the notion of presence attendant to the symbol (as has been already discussed).

Neale's discussion of pulpit oratory emphasizes the role of Scripture for effective preaching, echoing St. Augustine's emphasis on the same in *De doctrina christiana*. Neale shows how the language of Scripture must become the language of the effective pulpiteer when he comments upon the medieval preacher Guarric:

He seems to quote the Bible because it is his own natural language, because his thoughts have been so accustomed to flow in Scripture channels, that they will run in no other; and it is sometimes difficult to tell, nor would he perhaps always have known himself, whether he were employing his own words or those of inspired writings. (xxx)

The emphasis on Scripture as the locus of authoritative teaching in Augustine becomes for Fish not simply another moment of a text's (in this case a sermon's) self-consumption, but also of the preacher's effacement/consumption in relation to the primacy of Scripture. For Augustine, wisdom increases in accordance with the degree to which a preacher's thoughts and words conform to the words of Scripture, and this conformity is more significant for preaching than eloquence. What one encounters, then, is a juncture at which the *orally* communicated ethos of the preacher (so important to nineteenth-century homiletics), who is someone exercised in the devotional life, meets the *literary* ground of that exercise, Scripture. Here we can recall the relationship previously discussed between orality and literacy. In this juncture can be located the authority of the preached word. If the word of Scripture consumes the preacher, such that "[e]loquence and wisdom [are] taken away from the orator-preacher and given to Holy Scripture" the preacher is not *simply* erased in the face of Scripture (Fish 32). Even though the preacher points towards Scripture as a more sure testimony of God than himself, the very place of Scripture in the preacher's sermons arises

from the intensity and familiarity of long association and study and prayer (Schaeffer 1141). Such is the situation with Pusey in his *Spiritual Letters* according to the editors J.O. Johnston and W.C.E. Newbolt (*Spiritual* vii). Pusey himself attests throughout his sermons to the limitations of the preached word and to the primacy of Scripture, reflecting his anxieties over the insufficiencies of language. The impulse of Protestant theology that I have suggested characterizes Coleridge's relationship to language is evident in Pusey's concern that language might betray its proper function (through the orator's sinfulness) and so must be monitored by the sacred text itself: "We dare not speak of these mysteries in other words than holy Scripture giveth us; we dare hardly clothe them in our own thoughts" (*Sermons* 243). So there is in conjunction with the death of the word also a death of sorts of the preacher, whose words and ethos aim at a transparency that reveals their author and guide: God. As Fish notes, by emptying his art of its claims to power, the preacher "acknowledges his own powerlessness, becoming like us and like the shell of his sermon a vessel filled by and wholly dependent on the Lord" (69).

There is also a third death – the death of the auditor or reader of the sermon. For Pusey this might also be called the death of the penitent. As will be shown, Pusey both preaches as a penitent and presupposes an audience of penitents, or at least of those desiring that state. In a certain sense, penitence is the condition of possibility for properly attending to the words of Pusey's sermons at all. Fish's reading of *Death's Duall* is extremely helpful in elucidating this "death" as it appears in Pusey. Put simply, the death of the auditor is that aspect of the dialectical experience that aims at, or occasions, conversion. The auditor dies in his or her prejudices and preconceptions – which is to say, at least in part, in his

or her sin – and this death is the means of new life. As Fish points out, this is a movement from self-dependency to dependency on God, and though we are “rendered powerless” in the process, “our powers are increased in the person of Him on whom we depend” (69). For Pusey, as for Fish’s reading of Donne, sin is pervasive, and a crucifying of sin

involves nothing less than the crucifying of the self. No way of ours can be the right way and all our ways are to be given up ... And yet this death and silencing of the self and its pretensions is paradoxically an entrance into a new and better life. For while we may be unable to conform ourselves to Christ, he has already (and literally) conformed Himself to us ... Our sins are utterly crucified in his crucifixion. (Fish 68)

This notion of the death of the subject and his or her subsequent re-birth will be dealt with further below. I want simply to emphasize that the death of the penitent is an integral theme in Pusey’s sermons, and that the ambiguity of death and new life characterizes his preaching – the ambiguity of the surrendered will and the will restored in Christ, which is to say, the complexity of the subject’s *participation* in Christ. As he writes : “It is the very joy of their Lord wherein they shall enter, to joy *not with their own joy*, but with His; to be themselves, *only to be not themselves*; to be, only to have within them the Being of God, which is His love” (*Advent 97*; my emphasis).

As I turn to a reading of Pusey’s *Sermons on Solemn Subjects* I want to emphasize again the dialectic central to Tractarian theories of language. The broadly conceived categories of lack and fulfilment typify the tensions in Tractarian linguistics. On the one hand, language incarnates religious mystery. On the other, there is an abiding sense of its insufficiencies. This chapter has

traced this tension as it appears in Coleridge's and Pusey's notions of redemption (an infinitely deferred progress from sin (lack) to salvation (fulfilment)) and in the relationship between orality and literacy in nineteenth-century homiletics. The following chapter begins with a brief history of the events surrounding the preaching of Pusey's sermons. I will then proceed with a close reading of them in an attempt to further articulate the Tractarian theory of language and homiletics I have posited thus far.