

“THY WORD IS ALL, IF WE COULD SPELL”:
ROMANTICISM, TRACTARIAN AESTHETICS
AND
E.B. PUSEY’S *SERMONS ON SOLEMN
SUBJECTS*

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TITLE : “Thy Word is all, if we could spell”: Romanticism, Tractarian
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ABSTRACT

The influence of Romanticism on nineteenth-century aesthetics has been well documented. Less well researched, however, has been the significant contribution of the Romantic Movement to the religious discourse of the Victorian church. Focusing on the movement commonly called the Oxford, or Tractarian, Movement, I examine the religious significance of the Romantic discourse inspired by the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. Specifically, I outline the importance of the Romantic sensibility for nineteenth-century preaching, focusing on the works of E.B. Pusey. Pusey has often been neglected in studies concerning the aesthetic aspects of the Catholic Revival in the Church of England, and though his sermons and theology demonstrate a notable Romantic influence, critics have favoured those members of the Movement who produced explicitly aesthetic works (such as John Keble and his book of verse, *The Christian Year*). In contrast, this Thesis locates Pusey in relation to nineteenth-century aesthetic concerns.

The sermon occupied a place of central importance in the religious and literary discourses of nineteenth-century England. Attendance at sermons was both a religious obligation and a cultural activity. The pulpit functioned as a source of moral pedagogy and social commentary, and the century's famous pulpiteers were the objects of considerable public attention. As a leader of the Oxford Movement, Pusey was at the forefront of one of the most significant cultural events of the nineteenth century, and it is in his sermons that the aesthetic and theological vision of that Movement can best be located. To that end, this

This thesis elucidates the characteristics of nineteenth-century pulpit oratory and the indebtedness of the Victorian sermon to the aesthetic theories of the Romantics. Pusey's sermons, particularly the *Sermons on Solemn Subjects* delivered at St. Saviour's, Leeds, are considered in relation to these issues.

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Finally, I dedicate this Thesis to my father, Allan Snook, who first taught me the Faith in both word and deed.

Deo Gratias.