

Caring for Far-Extended Interest?: Creating Local Pasts in the Work of Victorian Women Writers

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... he [Daniel Robson] had a true John Bullish interest in the war, without very well knowing what the English were fighting for ... Sylvia and her mother did not care for any such far-extended interest; a little bit of York news, the stealing of a few apples out of a Scarborough garden that they knew, was of far more interest to them than all the battles of Nelson and the North.¹

Thus Elizabeth Gaskell in *Sylvia's Lovers* (1862-63), summarising the attitudes of the Robson family – father, mother, and daughter – to the historical events which provide the context for Gaskell's historical tale of star-crossed lovers. This paper will explore two historical texts – one fictional, one non-fictional - by two Victorian women writers, Elizabeth Gaskell, and the less celebrated Charlotte Mary Yonge. It will compare and contrast their use of the history of locality as a means of writing alternative historical narratives, and reassessing and challenging dominant ideas about historical significance and causation.

This is part of a broader project which will utilise a broader range of texts by these two authors. In the case of Gaskell, the key texts will be *Sylvia's Lovers* and *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857), as well as some of Gaskell's short stories: all texts which explore the northern recent past – and particularly the history of Yorkshire. In the case of C. M. Yonge, her historical novel *The Carbonels* (1895) and her local histories, including *John Keble's Parishes: A*

History of Hursley and Otterbourne (1898), which focus on the historic past of her native Hampshire and neighbouring counties, will inform the analysis. These case-studies will be briefly placed within the broader context of women's local history-writing in the nineteenth century, such as their contribution to *Victoria County Histories*. Here, the analysis will focus on *Sylvia's Lovers* and *John Keble's Parishes*.²

In particular, this paper will focus on Gaskell's and Yonge's use of the history of a particular region or *locus* as the means of exploring both the interconnection and interaction of national and global events – but also the fractures and dissonances revealed by the representation of regional historical experience, of the history of the urban and the rural. As such, both Gaskell and Yonge offer critical reflections on the degree to which national and global narratives can suffice to explore human historical experience, as well as testimony to the value of an emphasis on the local, the domestic, and the personal as legitimate areas of historical exploration.

Sylvia's Lovers: The Tale of a Troubled Town

Sylvia's Lovers, set in the 1790s in Whitby, a coastal Yorkshire fishing community, offers an immediate challenge to conventional local and urban history-writing of the kind practiced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Britain. We know that one of Gaskell's resources for the historical background was George Young's *A History of Whitby*, published in 1817, a key example of the urban and county history-writing which served provincial and civic interests from the seventeenth century forward.³ Reading Gaskell's novel against this history, it is possible to see *Sylvia's Lovers* as an appropriation, a subversion, and a complication of Young's text. Young's *History* is essentially celebratory, promoting and shaping a sustained civilised civic identity for the town: consequently, he focuses on such themes as an impressive local heritage,

archaeological and historical, but also progressive and prosperous developments in the more recent past and the present.⁴ The negotiation of a reputable and impressive identity for Whitby connected the town to the broader national context, but it also separated from the rest of the country, presenting it as a discrete and self-contained entity in its own right and asserting its independent development.

Gaskell, however, disrupts this project. Young presents the people of Whitby as largely civilised, ordered, progressive and prosperous, frequently focusing on the elites to create this positive image of an integrated and homogenous civil community.⁵ But Gaskell chooses to focus on the lives of the common working people, borrowing names from Young's text and appropriating them to fictional characters who are small farmers, shopkeepers, and sailors working in the whaling industry.⁶ While Young created an official, optimistic 'Establishment' history of Whitby, Gaskell wrote a local history which was generically divergent – a historical novel, not a history – and which presents a dissonant narrative, a narrative of potential class conflict, a 'history from below'. Take, for instance, the two writers' contrasting presentation of the religious history of the town. When Young discusses the religious history of Whitby, he focuses primarily on the establishment religion – on the abbey of Whitby and Whitby parish church.⁷ Gaskell includes a scene set in the local Anglican church (and even a sympathetic portrait of the presiding clergyman, Dr Wilson),⁸ but presents the episode from the perspective of the working –class congregation: the sailors who 'mostly slept through the sermon' and Sylvia and her friend Molly, who are there primarily to view the latest fashions in cloaks.⁹ She gives us a far more extended and impressive account of the interior religious and daily lives of the Quaker community – the marginalised non-conformists of the novel - and their fellow-travellers, who include major and important secondary

characters in the book such as the Foster brothers, Philip Hepburn, and Alice and Hester Rose.¹⁰

Similarly when it comes to regional identity and national and international contexts, Gaskell reconfigures Young's tidy and conventional model. We do not have a progressive and contained local town, situated tidily on a conventional map of national and international history.¹¹ Whitby relates the broader national and international context in dynamic, messy, emotional, complex, and disruptive ways. In Gaskell's account, it does not simply mimic the national narrative of progressive and civilised development, as Young would have us believe. This is most obvious in the case of the public event which forms the climax of the novel. As other critics have pointed out, the raid on the Mariners' Arms public-house, which Daniel Robson, Sylvia's father, leads, only features as a footnote in Young's *History*, where it is included as a marginal qualification to the statement that the people of Whitby are largely law-abiding. Young writes with evident civic pride:

The inhabitants of Whitby are not much given to riot, but are in general peaceable and loyal; and in seasons of danger have been ready to stand forth in defence of their country.¹²

He follows this statement with two pages describing the volunteer regiments formed in Whitby in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries, only admitting to the riot as a qualifying coda to a history of local loyalism to the national government. Throughout the novel, Gaskell challenges Young's picture of Whitby in the 1790s, which he presents as a town largely committed to the national governmental agenda of patriotic defence against the threat of France. Gaskell, by contrast (and by drawing on contemporary newspapers) presents a town which is highly ambivalent about the French War, being particularly vulnerable to the activities of the Royal Navy's press-gangs.

As critics before me have pointed out, Gaskell ultimately does not take sides, appreciating the arguments of both the national government and the local community.¹³ But what she does most definitely do is challenge Young's assumption that Whitby's history can be seamlessly mapped on to that of the nation. It clearly can't: by giving the local community a distinctive and disruptive working-class mouthpiece, Daniel Robson,¹⁴ and by several times presenting Whitby in a state of riot, she subverts the Enlightenment civility of Young's portrait of the town (besides the central episode, the raid on a local public-house where press-ganged sailors are being held, the novel opens with a fight between the press-gang and the crew of a returning whaling ship).¹⁵ Robson's discourse in particular embodies a highly ambivalent relationship to the national political narrative. While he shares in a national prejudice against the French, this does not make him accept the government's wartime policies. When he and his nephew Philip – who represents the emergent commercial lower-middle classes - debate the justice of the forcible conscription enacted on sailors by the press-gangs, Philip articulates the government's nationalistic position:

... if sailors cannot pay in taxes, and will not pay in person, why they must be made to pay ... I'm thankful to be governed by King George and a British Constitution.¹⁶

But Robson refuses to accept this compliant attitude, arguing (in notably broader dialect) that:

... I only ax'em to govern me as I judge best and that's what I call representation. When I gived my vote to Measter Cholmley to go to t'Parliament House, I as good as said, 'Now you go theer, sire and tell'em what I, Dannel Robson, think right, and what I, Dannel Robson, wish to have done' ...

To Philip's insistence that 'laws is made for the good of nation, not for your good or mine', he opposes an individualistic and divisive vision:

Nation here! Nation there! ... nation's nowhere ... I can make out King George, and Measter Pitt, and yo' and me, but nation! Nation go hang!¹⁷

Of course, ultimately, it is not the nation which goes to be hanged, but Daniel Robson, for following up his critique of the national government with seditious action. But – as Gaskell notes – his dissonant voice, his opposition to the press-gangs stands for the local community's resistance to simplistic conscription into the national narrative. Ironically, even Philip – the voice of national civility in the debate with Robson – is complicit in this resistance: while he justifies the activities of the press-gangs, his trade and that of his employers rests partially on smuggled goods, as both Sylvia and her creator, Gaskell, point out.¹⁸

Ultimately, of course, the men of Whitby cannot avoid being drawn into the national and international conflict of Britain's war with France: Robson's involvement in the raid on the Mariners' Arms means that he is convicted and executed at York.¹⁹ Both of Sylvia's lovers – Charley Kinraid and Philip Hepburn – are forced further afield, ending up fighting for their country at Acre.²⁰ But Gaskell makes it clear to her readers that this involvement in the broader context is not straightforward or uncontested. It represents a dissonance, a disruption, in local, national and international relationships: as she points it in her introductory chapter, 'the southerners took the oppression of the press-warrants more submissively than the wild north-eastern people'. This is, Gaskell opines, partly because of their existing engagement with the international trade of whaling, which 'bound the inhabitants of the line of coast together in a strong tie'.²¹ Their very localism, which makes them resist national government policy is, therefore, paradoxically as much a matter of internationalism as provincialism. From the very start of the novel, Gaskell has

resisted the temptation to see Whitby as entirely isolated from the broader geographical and historical context, suggesting instead that ‘the great Greenland trade’ connects the town with the world and is a source of progressive development. While this is an analysis with which Young essentially agrees, Gaskell’s introductory portrait of Whitby – which shows the socially mobile whaling community of the town at odds with the less prosperous gentry of its surrounding hinterland, as well as the national government – presents a disruptive narrative in which conflict and complications are rife.²²

Gaskell has exposed the potential class complications and divisions of Whitby; when it comes to gender, she is again disruptive and subversive, avoiding the straightforward categorisations of Young. At times, the novel suggests that it is men who have been the greatest experience and the greatest interest in the national and international scene, who go beyond the local and the domestic in their activities and their sympathies. This is certainly what Gaskell seems to suggest earlier on in the novel, when Philip reads the newspaper to Daniel, in the quotation with which this chapter opens. The male characters certainly seem to journey out of the locality more frequently than the female ones too, largely because of their employments: Daniel, despite being a farmer, travels around the county in his capacity as a horse-trader. Philip is sent to London by his employers, the Foster brothers, to invest a fellow Quaker to whom they have made a loan, while Charley Kinraid, like Robson before him, has travelled to Greenland on the whaling ships. But that does not necessarily make them any less provincial in their attitudes than the female characters: when Philip travels to London, Gaskell makes sure that the reader is aware that this is seen as an adventurous undertaking by both Philip himself and Daniel Robson: Robson tells his nephew that ‘when I were a young fellow, folks made their wills afore goin’ to Lunnon’. Philip points out revealingly that Daniel probably didn’t make a will before going to sea, which reveals quite how complex the inter-

relationship of local, national, and international is in the novel. For Robson agrees: international travel by sea ‘comes natteral to a man, but [not] going to Lunnon’.²³

When it comes to women characters, Gaskell again disturbs what seems like a straightforward picture: for Sylvia does care ‘for far-extended interest’ after all, as we find out when she discusses learning geography with Philip:

Greenland’s all t’geography I want to know. Except, perhaps, York. I’d like to learn about York, because of t’races, and London because King George lives there.²⁴

When Philip returns from London, her first and only question to him echoes this statement: ‘And didst ta see King George and Queen Charlotte?’.²⁵ If her interest in national and international places is driven by idiosyncratic personal interests, it must be noted that Daniel’s interest is no less idiosyncratic and personally-motivated: when he finds that Philip is to travelling to London, he commissions him to make enquiries about ‘t’newmak’ of pleugh’ in Newcastle.²⁶ His critique of government policy, quoted above, is entirely rooted in his own personal concerns and experiences.

It is also evident that the female characters are not as static as we may first think. Here again Gaskell challenges Young’s assumption that it is Whitby *men* who are mobile: when he discusses the population of Whitby, he assumes that numbers of male inhabitants are alone affected by emigration, for instance.²⁷ But for Gaskell, it is obvious that marriage, above all, has made women migratory: Gaskell distinctly shows us how complicated and fluid the regional identities we are presented with are, through the character of Bella Robson, who is first, foremost, and always a ‘Cumberland woman’, rather than a Yorkshire wife of Whitby. Gaskell makes a point of constantly reminding us of her sustained regional identity, fracturing any simplistic conceptualisations of ‘the

North'. Bell Robson is 'a cleaner housewife than the farmers' wives of that north-eastern coast'; she makes sausages to 'an old Cumberland receipt, as is not known I'Yorkshire'; after Sylvia falls in love with Kinraid, she warns her against becoming too fond of him with the story of a Cumberland lass, Nancy Hartley, who loses her wits over a sailor from Whitehaven; Daniel's imprisonment brings up memories of 'our wedding in Crosthwaite Church', near Keswick; Philip, as her nephew, inherits a little fortune from a 'Cumberland statesman'.²⁸ This portrait in particular disrupts Young's simple binary of Whitby and the national and international other: we get a clear sense of a range of regional identities beyond East Yorkshire, interlinked and interacting, within the North of England. Of course, Bell is not the only woman to move between the different northern regions because of marriage: Sylvia herself moves rather unhappily from Haytersbank, her parents' farm near Whitby, into the town itself, while her friend Molly Corney 'is wed beyond Newcassel'.²⁹ At the very last sentence of the novel, we find out that Sylvia's daughter, Bella, has married a distant cousin of the Foster brothers, and 'went off to settle in America many and many a year ago': a sudden widening of both time and space which adds a final flourish of complication to the history of locality in the novel.³⁰

C. M. Yonge and *John Keble's Parishes: Making a Model Rural Community*

While Gaskell's radical re-writing of local history and its relationship to the national and international context takes place in her fictions, Charlotte Mary Yonge produces both fictional and non-fictional historical accounts of her native Hampshire. Prominent among the latter is her *John Keble's Parishes: A History of Hursley and Otterbourne* (1898), a short history of her immediate locality. Just as Gaskell had a source in for the history of Whitby in Young's account, so Yonge had a predecessor who had written an early nineteenth-

century history of Hursley, the Rev John Marsh, Anglican curate at Hursley. As a Tory Anglican herself, Yonge is much more respectful of Marsh's version of the local past: indeed, she adopts substantial parts of it into her text. Rather than simply revising Marsh's account, however, she deliberately chose to write a new history: partly because the coverage of Otterbourne was limited, and partly for the obvious reason that Marsh's 1808 *Memoranda* had naturally failed to cover the nineteenth century, when much of significance to Yonge at least had taken place in her native community.³¹

But this was not the only reason for the rewriting and expansion of the text. Yonge also alters the emphasis of Marsh's predominantly antiquarian and dynastic account of the locality, which laid its primary emphasis on the substantial properties and buildings of the area and the descent and inheritance thereof through leading gentry families. While still including details from Marsh's account of both properties and owners, Yonge increasingly humanises the gentry as part of a Tory Romantic agenda, making an emphatic statement about the significance of paternalistic endeavour at the local (rather than the national or international) level. More radically, however, she also assigns far more significance to the lives, culture, and experience of the working-classes of Hursley and Otterbourne, who are integrated into the community through the paternalistic activities of their betters. A Tory paternalistic landlord or clergymen, after all, needs a community of social inferiors in which to exercise his benevolence. Yonge's exploration of the connections to, and impact of, national events, on the local scene suggests – as I have argued elsewhere – that local history offers 'a picture of gradual and peaceful progress far more edifying and possibly more significant than that offered by the national narrative',³² as long as members of all classes and both genders perform their 'natural' roles.

A striking exemplar of this approach forms a key passage in the preface. Here, Yonge apologises that:

... there is no incident to tempt the reader – no siege of one castle, no battle more important than the combat in the hayfield between Mr Coram and the penurious steward, and, till the last generation, no striking character. But the record of a thousand peaceful years is truly a cause of thankfulness, shared as it is by many thousand villages ...³³

Later in the main body of the text, Yonge covers the Coram episode in more detail, offering an expansion and glossing of Marsh's account of this confrontation. It began with a dispute between the tenants of Sir Thomas Clarke of Hursley and his steward, caused by the inadequate provisions offered whilst they were performing feudal duties by working on his land. Marsh recounts the episode and its resolution, through the timely intervention of another local gentleman, Roger Coram, via a citation of a contemporary source; he then moves without comment to discuss Clarke's sale of his land in 1606.³⁴ By contrast, Yonge lingers over the incident. She offers a commentary which explains how the tenants should have been rewarded with good food and a subsequent evening of merry-making, and emphasizes how Coram's intervention, supporting the tenants' cause, leads to a satisfactory resolution. She laments the decline of paternalistic care by alluding to the 'good old days of the bishops and the much loved and lamented John Bowland', an allusion to the medieval manor and its practices, and concludes with the pointed reflection that 'No doubt such stout English resistance saved the days of compulsory labour from becoming a burden intolerable as in France'.³⁵ This is obviously an allusion to the French Revolution of 1789, and the subsequent downfall of the *ancien régime*. The message is clear: local gentry and clerical paternalism is an

obligation of rank, and failure to perform this duty will lead to social anarchy. But the interplay of national and local here is really rather subtle. The ‘combat of the hayfield’, although a localised episode, proves to be of national significance – it can prevent revolution – but it is also a call to prioritise local paternalism rather than national and international activism.

The paternalistic duty owed by the *local* gentry and clergy to the *local* people of their estates and parishes is, indeed, the major theme of the history. Coverage of the pre-Reformation period early hints at Yonge’s sense that the overly ambitious members of the elite who aim to shape history at a national and international level are at risk of neglecting their local responsibilities where their real historical significance may be found. When discussing the Romano-British period, she comments that ‘The masters of the world have left us few traces of their possession’, suggesting how the local perspective queries the achievements of imperial Rome.³⁶ Similarly, the Anglo-Norman kings seem to have little impact: while the churches of both parishes were built during this period, the only Anglo-Norman king to figure in the locality is the already dead William Rufus, whose corpse (according to local legend) passes through the villages.³⁷ A similar sense of the irrelevance of national figures to the life of the local community is apparent in her comments on William of Wykeham, the celebrated medieval Bishop of Winchester, in whose diocese the parish of Hursley is situated: Yonge comments sadly that ‘among his wider interests, [he] seems to have had little concern with Hursley or Otterbourne’. She then moves on to describe in loving detail an imaginary vision of a medieval episcopal visitation, dwelling on the bishop’s retinue, performance of religious duties such as confirmation, settling of local disputes, reception of respectful clergy and social interaction with the local gentry.³⁸ It is an evocative portrait of the medieval performance of clerical paternalism similar to Thomas Carlyle’s much more extended account of Abbot Samson in his *Past and Present* (1843). But

the crucial difference here is, as Yonge concludes, that that ‘greatly courtly bishops’ such as William of Wykeham would never have performed these duties, sending instead their suffragans.³⁹ William, unlike Samson, is no local hero.

Yonge’s endorsement of local paternalism is, however, at its strongest in her coverage of the life and career of Richard Cromwell, the unfortunate son of Oliver Cromwell who eventually succeeded him as Lord Protector. Like Marsh, Yonge records how the young Richard marries Dorothy Maijor [sic] of Merdon, using his marriage as means to flee the national political scene as he had ‘no turn for politics or warfare, [and] preferred to live a quiet life with his father-in-law’.⁴⁰ She also follows Marsh’s account of Richard’s relieved retirement from the public scene within a year of his inheritance of his father’s office. Both Yonge and Marsh, as Tory Anglicans, would of course endorse Richard Cromwell’s decision to stand aside and allow the succession of Charles II, from the Tory point of view the rightful king. But Yonge dwells on Cromwell’s departure from political power to an extent that Marsh does not, making far more of his retreat from the national scene. She quotes at length Francis Turner Palgrave’s poetic tribute to this ‘unconscious hero’ who chose to live ‘from blame of tongues and fame aloof’.⁴¹ This choice of a quotation from Palgrave’s *The Visions of England* (1881) is significant, for - as Herbert Tucker has pointed out - Palgrave’s celebration of the ‘progressivist’ sweep of English history is a decidedly ambiguous one: ‘Where ... other nationalist historians wore their colors on their sleeve ... Palgrave kept ranks with the poets in preferring a complex maneuver of disownment’.⁴² Thus Yonge celebrates Richard Cromwell’s retreat from national politics not only because it allows the return of monarchy, but because it represents the endorsement of the significance of living an unsung local life within a particular community. This chapter concludes rather oddly with the contrast of the family burial monument in

Hursley church and Richard's alleged responsibility for the planting of the lime tree avenue in the churchyard, and the die of the seal of the Commonwealth which he appeared to have hidden in the walls of the old lodge at Merdon and which 'has since disappeared':⁴³ this seems like a coda endorsing Cromwell's neighbourly and discreet life and his rightful rejection of a national role.

The portrait of Richard Cromwell as a local hero presages Yonge's celebration of the two local paternalists active in the parishes in her own day, whom she sees as the drivers of gradual advancements in religious and social affairs: one is a local gentleman, Sir William Heathcote of Hursley Park, and the other, a local clergyman, John Keble, the vicar of Hursley, both of whose activities were supported by Yonge's own father, William Crawley Yonge. In her coverage of the nineteenth century, of course, the text is all Yonge's own work, and reflects most clearly her own agenda. In her account, Heathcote, Keble, and Yonge introduce 'a new era', a 'new state of things', building and rebuilding, setting up schools, running daily church services, and administering charity and justice to their inferiors.⁴⁴ Yonge indicates that, in the case of both Heathcote and Keble, her local heroes are individuals with national profiles and influence, but she presents both as primarily parochial paternalists. Keble's decision to minister quietly in a country parish, rather than remain as a national leader in the Oxford Movement, is clearly documented: while she notes that Keble remained the 'prime counsellor and assistant' to many prominent figures in the Anglo-Catholic movement, she represents him more as 'the personal minister to each individual of his flock'.⁴⁵ In the case of Heathcote, she quotes a tribute which commented that 'none outside his own country and society can fully appreciate the remarkable influence which his name and character ... exercised on all with whom he connected'. Again, he is represented primarily as a provincial hero, 'a perfect specimen of the old-fashioned, high-bred, highly cultivated *county* gentleman [my italics]'.⁴⁶ As Susan Walton has pointed out:

Contemporaries [of Yonge] ... embraced the new thrusting metropolitan world of the mid-nineteenth century with its individualistic notions of self-advancement ... For such people, the pastoral and the parochial were acquiring a feminized sense of otherness ... To be content with the small affairs of the parish rather than crave the achievement of high office came to be seen as a failure of nerve, as womanish, as choosing the soft female rural spaces over the tough masculine urban arenas.⁴⁷

Yonge was thus challenging and redefining contemporary models of masculine identity in her portraits of Tory and Anglican paternalistic gentry and clergy – the local heroes of her parochial history.

In *John Keble's Parishes*, Yonge has revised Marsh's elitist and dynastic account of local history by humanising the local elites and embedding an endorsement of local paternalism. She also challenges it by including and assigning value to the lives of the lower classes, but always as part of a paternalist social order governed by the local gentry and clergy: she lacks Gaskell's sympathy for any opposition to authority at a local or national level. Her attempt to preserve and cement the traditional hierarchies of her rural community is reflected in the final chapters of *John Keble's Parishes* – as well, of course, as the impact of folklore studies. Here she gives a glossary of local dialectic words and phrases in chapter XV, followed by some village folk cures, a description of the Christmas mummers' plays, an account of a local character, and a poem about Otterbourne recalling the days of the stagecoach. While describing the traditional Christmas performance of St George and the Turkish knight, she comments that 'political allusions are sometimes introduced which spoil the simplicity', a phrase which seems to me to suggest her discomfort with any more radical expressions of lower-class dissent. It is clearly not the case

that *any* contemporary political allusions disturb Yonge, but merely ones which might disrupt class order and harmony: elsewhere in this same section she comments, without disapproval, that a particular speech ‘may have been added after the Crimean War’.⁴⁸ Yonge further harmonises the relationship of social superior and inferior by the contents of the surrounding chapters: chapter XIV, for instance, is a geographical and botanical survey of the parishes, which establishes their boundaries and character by interweaving references to churches and gentry properties and improvements with (for instance) descriptions of Otterbourne village green, and its continuing ‘right of common’, and the plants native to each environment: this accomplished piece of prose presents the reader with a landscape which naturalises and normalises paternalistic and hierarchical social structures.

Conclusion

What then are we to conclude? Both women writers in their different ways have rewritten existing local histories to present the history of locality as a valid category of historical representation - one which reflects complex and interesting relationships between the local, the national, and the international contexts. Gaskell’s mid-Victorian account is more radically disruptive, the work of a middle-class Nonconformist writer with a strong social conscience. She challenges Young’s harmonious portrait of a progressive Whitby by narrating the lives of ordinary people at odds with the national government’s agenda and engaged in complicated relationships with the regional, national and global scene. Yonge’s late-Victorian narrative, the work of a Tory Anglican gentlewoman who resisted the temptations of a metropolitan literary life, appears more straightforward. But, while she obediently incorporates rather than resists the local history source she utilises, she presents a call to her peers to adopt the values of local paternalism, to serve the common people of the communities in which they live - rather than seek to figure on a national or

international stage. By doing so, paradoxically, she suggests, they will preserve national and international stability and social order.

It would be both foolish and inaccurate to suggest that women writers necessarily write a different sort of local history to male ones. But the amount of local history written by women – and this was increasing by the close of the nineteenth century, as they began to play a major part in the writing of the *Victoria County Histories* – suggests that women writers of history, increasingly marginalised within the emergent historical profession, found the now less prestigious arena of local history a congenial place in which to explore, more or less radically, the nature of historical significance and experience. And they found in the local, in complex and intriguing ways, the history too of the national and the global, and of town and country.

¹ E. Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers*, ed. A. Sanders (1862-63; this ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 95.

²*Sylvia's Lovers*, although by no means the best known of Gaskell's novels, has attracted a good deal of critical attention: useful readings include chapters in W.A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975); N. Rance, *The Historical Novel and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (California: Vision Press, 1975); A. Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel, 1840-1880* (London: Macmillan, 1979); H. M. Schor, *Scheherazade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), D. d'Alberty, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (New York, St Martin's Press, 1997); and P. Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). Significant articles include J. M. McVeagh, 'The Making of Sylvia's Lovers', *The Modern Language Review* 65/2 (1970), 272-81; J. M. Rignall, 'The Historical Double: Waverley, Sylvia's Lovers, and The Trumpet-Major', *Essays in Criticism* 34/1 (1984), 14-32; and T. Eagleton, 'Sylvia's Lovers and Legality', *Essays in Criticism*, 26/1 (1976), 17-27. Recently, the novel has attracted some interest as a maritime novel, see eg B. S. Lawson, 'From Moby-Dick to Billy Budd: Elizabeth Gaskell's Sylvia's Lovers', *South Atlantic Review* 64/2 (Spring, 1999), 37-57. Yonge's work is now attracting considerably critical attention, from scholars including Barbara Dennis, Gavin Budge, Susan Walton, and Talia Schaffer, although her historical and non-fictional works tend to receive less attention. See my own work, 'Charlotte M. Yonge: Reading, Writing, and Recycling Historical Fiction in the Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 31/1 (March, 2009), 31-43; 'Healing the Wounds of War: (A)mending the National Narrative in the Historical Works of Charlotte M. Yonge', *Women's History Review*, 20/5 (November, 2011), 785-808; and 'Faith and the French:

Anglo-Catholicism in the Anglo-French Historical Novels of Charlotte Mary Yonge', in R. A. Mitchell, ed., *Mutual (In)Comprehensions: France and Britain in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 150-78, as well as Susan Walton, 'Charlotte Mary Yonge and the 'historic harem' of Edward Augustus Freeman', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 11/2 (2006), 226-55. My monograph, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, c. 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), includes brief analyses of both Sylvia's Lovers and Yonge's historical fictions in chapter 8.

³ The full title of the work is *A History of Whitby and Streonshalh Abbey, with a statistical survey of the vicinity to the distance of twenty-five miles*, 2 vols. (Whitby: Clark and Medd, 1817). For urban and county history-writing in the early modern period, see John Beckett, *Writing Local History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) and Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon, 2004).

⁴ For instance, Young includes a substantial chapter in volume two on Whitby as a port which is highly celebratory of modern developments: he records that 'our harbour was wonderfully improved', and that the new west pier 'may vie with any pier in the kingdom, either for strength or beauty' (Young, *Whitby*, II, 534-35), adding that Whitby seamen have 'long been distinguished by their courage, activity, skill and experience' (II, 547) and that shipping in the town has made 'astonishing progress during the last two centuries' (II, 535).

⁵ This is not to say that he does not offer any critical comments on its fellow townspeople: after praising the advancement of learning in Whitby through the development of schools and libraries (II, 637-39), he comments that in terms of religion and morality, there is 'much room for further improvement' (II, 640). Among the customs and practices he laments are non-attendance at public worships, pilfering and petty thieving, and resort to the pawnbroker's: in other words, the moral failings of the working classes, as he sees them (II, 639-43).

⁶ The name of Robson is deliberately taken from a list of names which Young describes as used for 'distinguishing persons, especially those who have no lands, by adding the name of the father'. He adds that it is the most common name in Whitby (II, 523, 527, note 1). Other names are also co-opted – for instance, the name of Coulson is borrowed from a shipping clerk (II, 570) and the names of ships, such as *The Aimwelland The Resolution*, are also authentic (II, 566-67).

⁷ The first volume of Young's *History* is almost entirely a history of the Abbey (I, 103-470); in the second volume, in Young's discussion of the religious complexion of Whitby, the parish church and its appendages receives the largest wordage (II, 607-618). The Quakers receive only a page of discussion (II, 618-19), with other non-conformist sects claiming a further three pages (II, 6-19-22). The language of the *History* affords Anglican both primacy and greater visibility: we are told that 'the parish church naturally claims first place' (I, 607) and its clergy and inscriptions (all monuments to local elite families) are recorded in detail. By contrast, Young tells us little about individual Quakers, and adds that 'No sculptured monuments decorate the enclosure [of the Quaker burial ground]' (II, 619). While Quaker religious practices do make such an historical omission understandable, Young does seem to endorse rather than challenge the effacement of this faith community.

⁸ Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers*, 66-68.

⁹ Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lovers*, 60, 64.

¹⁰ See, for instance, 22-24, 79-84, 128-130, 133, 154, 153-175, for instance, in the early part of the novel.

¹¹ The arrangement of Young's *History* reflects this tidy arrangement of Whitby's history and identity within a regional and national context: for instance, in volume II, Young neatly

divides an account of modern Whitby (Book 3 of his *History*) from coverage of the antiquities, natural history, and current condition of the surrounding vicinity (Book 4).

¹² Young, *History*, II, 605. The footnote on this page records the riot in question.

¹³ This is certainly true of, for instance, Craik, Schor, and Stoneman: see, for example, Stoneman, *Gaskell*, where she argues that, for Gaskell, ‘neither side is wholly admirable’, because both government and Whitby people resort to violence (96).

¹⁴ Eagleton’s ‘*Sylvia’s Lovers and Legality*’ effectively presents Robson as the voice of an ‘authentic democracy’ in rebellion against legal conventions.

¹⁵ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 28-32, 51-56.

¹⁶ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 40.

¹⁷ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 41.

¹⁸ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 22-23, 43.

¹⁹ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 307-14.

²⁰ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 424-34.

²¹ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 7.

²² Young in his *History* describes the whale fishery as the ‘most lucrative branches of our trade’ and ‘of immense benefit, not only to the owners [of whaling ships], but to the town at large’ (II, 562, 568). For Gaskell’s account of the social mobility and divisions produced by whale fishery, see *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 1-8. Gaskell here cites a Yorkshireman who said to her, ‘My county folk are all alike. Their first thought is how to resist’ (8).

²³ Gaskell’s *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 206.

²⁴ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 108.

²⁵ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 233.

²⁶ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 207-8.

²⁷ Young, *History*, II, 521.

²⁸ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 35, 85, 187-88, 311, 357.

²⁹ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 336-37, 358-61, 374-76, 115-17, 132

³⁰ Gaskell, *Sylvia’s Lovers*, 503.

³¹ Yonge offers both justifications for her strategy in her preface: C.M. Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes: A History of Hursley and Otterbourne* (1898: United States, Dodo Press, 2007), i.

³² R. A. Mitchell, ‘Healing the Wounds of War: (A)mending the National Narrative in the Historical Publications of Charlotte M. Yonge’, *Women’s History Review* 20/5 (November 2011), 796.

³³ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, i.

³⁴ J. Marsh, *Memoranda of the Parishes of Hursley and North Baddesley* (Winchester: James Robbins, 1808)

³⁵ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 17.

³⁶ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 2.

³⁷ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 3.

³⁸ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 9-10.

³⁹ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 11.

⁴⁰ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 22.

⁴¹ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 23-25.

⁴² H. F. Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 487-89. Yonge’s quotation is from the poem ‘At Hursley in Marden’: Cromwell’s retreat from history was contextualised with celebrations of more conventional seventeenth-century heroes such as Prince Rupert.

⁴³ Yonge, *John Keble’s Parishes*, 25-27.

⁴⁴ Yonge, *JohnKeble’s Parishes*, 48-56, 60-65.

⁴⁵Yonge, *John Keble's Parishes*, 75.

⁴⁶Yonge, *John Keble's Parishes*, 66-71.

⁴⁷S. Walton, *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era: Charlotte Yonge's Models of Manliness* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 117. Walton's chapter on 'The Fatherland of Parish and Community', 99-120, also considers the local heroes – Keble and Heathcote – considered here, as too Yonge's own father, another local philanthropist in retreat from his earlier involvement in national politics.

⁴⁸Yonge, *John Keble's Parishes*, 96, 99. Several of Yonge's novels show her endorsement of the justifications for British involvement in the Crimean War, notably *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) and *The Young Stepmother* (1861).