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Tory-Radical Feeling in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley, and Early Victorian England

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Tory-Radical Feeling in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, and Early Victorian England

Matthew Roberts

Shirley (1849) was Charlotte Brontë's second published novel. Named after the eponymous character who slowly emerges as the novel's heroine, *Shirley* is set in the Yorkshire textile districts at the time of the Luddite disturbances of 1812. It can be read, to some extent, as a contribution to the "condition of England" or social-problem genre, to be ranked alongside Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), each of which probed in their own ways the acute social conflict and poverty of the hungry forties. One of the central themes in *Shirley* is working-class poverty and protest, revolving around the Luddism of the machine-breaking croppers: the highly skilled workers who finished the cloth and whose labor was in the process of being displaced by mechanization. Although the plot is backdated to 1812, the novel was written in 1848-49 against the backdrop of the European revolutions which engulfed large parts of the continent and the dramatic climax of Chartism, the British mass movement for democratic rights. Irrespective of whether it was the Luddites or Chartists who were the real target of Brontë's novel, a number of scholars, notably Patrick

Brantlinger and more recently Ken Hiltner, have concluded that one of her main objectives was to ridicule both groups. While other critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Beth Torgerson, and Peter Capuano have rightly emphasized Brontë's sympathy for the plight of the poor, this did not extend to radical politics and violent protest. In Brontë's case, this hostility to protest has been interpreted as a manifestation of her Toryism. One would expect nothing less, so the argument goes, from an author who had been raised in the impeccably Tory household of her father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë. Charlotte's most recent biographer refers to her as "a rabid Tory" (Harman 66). Beyond this blanket labelling of Charlotte as a Tory, as Marianne Thormählen has recently observed in a suggestive essay, "It is remarkable that the huge body of critical and scholarly work on Charlotte's life and works says so little about" her politics (1).

In recent years, historians of popular politics have begun to fill a lacuna in the historiography by devoting much more attention to popular Toryism, but much less has been written about the early Victorian period. While recognizing the diversity of the Tory social conscience, David Roberts's classic account of Victorian paternalism argues that Tories were agreed on fundamentals: "society should be hierarchic, authoritarian,

and organic, and that it should be based on land, church, and locality." Tory paternalists "were unabashed in demanding obedience, patience, submission, and dutifulness" from those below (Roberts 1979, 64, 69). Much of what we know about Tory paternalism is derived from a metropolitan perspective based on the rich print culture and the underpinning Tory networks, the rural landed estate, or the factory towns of later nineteenth-century Lancashire. At a popular level, even in some of the most recent scholarship by John Belchem and Jörg Neuheiser there is still a tendency to characterize Tory ideology as largely untroubled, based on the timeless values of hierarchy, tradition, Christian pessimism, and pragmatic paternalism, leavened with popular monarchism, protectionism, religious sectarianism, patriotism, and xenophobia. In the urban and industrialized rural north, popular Tories espoused social reform, though this was often qualified by an aversion to centralization and an acceptance, in practice, of laissez-faire political economy. Ultimately, all that popular Toryism required was for it to be effectively organized with rather more attention to the electoral register and convivial dinners in which masters and men, lords and commoners, occasionally rubbed shoulders socially to raise a toast to king, church and country. Beyond this, the assumption is that popular Tories, including so-called Tory-radicals, knew little about the lives of the

working classes, and the same has been about Brontë by critics such as Eagleton and Ingham.

In practice, matters were rather more complicated in the provincial, industrialized north--Brontë's terrain--to the extent that popular Torysim was beset by tensions within itself. To some extent, the label "Tory-radical" is an apt characterization--and Brontë has occasionally been labelled as such--but it can obscure more than it reveals: Tory-radicalism and popular Toryism feature as brief and marginal digressions in histories of the ideology/party, not least because such concerns were remote from the concerns of the party leadership; is reclaimed as Tory paternalism for the Conservative party; or else is seen as little more than strategic co-operation between paternalist Tories and radicals in elections and campaigns which bore little fruit as the working-class supporters did not have the vote.[1] In what follows, the term Tory-radical is used heuristically to draw attention to the dilemma, tensions, and contradictions which faced popular Tories like Brontë as they tried to respond to working-class unrest and poverty in the 1830s and 1840s.

Although not used by its adherents, it is possible to discern a relatively discrete Tory-radical current in Toryism, the origins and nature of which are sketched in the first

section. While pigeonholing any novel or novelist in straightforward party-political terms is problematic, as this article suggests in the second section, the moral issues that Brontë addresses in *Shirley* can be read as an exemplary Tory-radical exploration of the tensions and contradictions in early Victorian popular Toryism. Freed from the constraints of formal party politics and the electoral imperatives of soundbite, Brontë was able to sketch out a moral vision of a local polity in all its richness and complexity. The Tory and radical strands, along with the problematic nature of paternalism, in Brontë's *Shirley* have not gone unnoticed in previous discussions of the novel, and neither has the contradictions between them. The purpose here is to build on these accounts by literary critics such as Bodenheimer and Collier to explore the Tory-radical dilemma, and--crucially--why, ultimately, the brand of popular Toryism promoted by Brontë and other "condition of England" had limited impact in the 1830s and 1840s. Comparison is made with other examples of Tory-radical fiction, mainly Disraeli's *Sybil*, but also Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1839-40) and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood* (1839-41). The final section draws on recent work on the history of emotions to cast new light on sympathetic feeling in Tory-radical fiction, which, it is argued, was key to its rise but also, ultimately, its failure as a subgenre and variant of

popular Toryism. Critics have long argued that one of the central goals of the condition of England novels was to elicit an emotional response from readers. Although more recent work by Audrey Jaffe has explored the complex ways in which sympathy functioned imaginatively, much less has been said about why and how that attempt to elicit sympathy in the reader sometimes failed. As historians of emotion have shown, sympathy is a complex and problematic feeling. By focusing on the problematic nature of sympathy and Thomas Haskell's concept of an "ethical shelter," this article suggests an additional reason for the failure of the condition of England novels in the 1840s.

I.

In strict party-political terms, there were no self-identified Tory radicals in the 1830s and 1840s. The label was originally coined as a term of abuse in the mid-1830s by Whig-Liberals to castigate those radicals who allied with Tories in the humanitarian campaigns for factory reform and opposition to the New Poor Law ("Portrait of a Tory Radical," "Whig Nullities"). From the perspective of the popular radicals outside of parliament, Tory-radicalism denoted little more than a strategic willingness to enter alliances with paternalistic and sympathetic Tory gentlemen. On the Tory side--the focus

here--there was more than strategy at stake. Some scholars have traced the origins of Tory-radicalism to the mid-1820s when an assorted fringe of traditionalists inside and outside of parliament, from Robert Southey to Michael Thomas Sadler and the young Disraeli, were in revolt at liberal Toryism and the emerging Peelite brand of modern Conservatism. But at this stage, the group is more appropriately and less anachronistically labelled Ultra-Tory, the label associated with those die-hard defenders of the Protestant constitution who opposed Catholic Emancipation (militant Protestantism being the real ideological bedrock of Ultra-Toryism). True, the Ultra-Tories bequeathed one of the core ideological beliefs of Tory-radicalism--the paternalistic and humanitarian critique of liberal political economy, as set forth in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine,* the London newspaper the *Standard*, and the *Leeds Intelligencer*. As Anna Gambles has shown, periodicals such as *Blackwood's* not only reflected but also molded a discrete and relatively coherent Tory worldview, an intellectual alternative to free-trade cosmopolitanism (932–33). *Blackwood's*, *Fraser's,* and the *Leeds Intelligencer* were the main sources of the Brontë family's political opinions. Also inherited from the Ultras was the dawning realization that neither of the two major parties as presently constituted could address the nation's ills. The bankruptcy of conventional party

politics was a cornerstone of Tory-radicalism: when the Tory-radical leaders Richard Oastler and the Reverend Joseph Rayner Stephens stood for parliament in 1837 they both fought under the banner of independence rather than Toryism. Some Tory-radicals went even further by allying themselves with radicals, appearing alongside them on the public platform--evidence also of their willingness to sink party differences in the pursuit of the common good. Partisan bickering and party-political point-scoring were anathema to Tory-radicals. Appearing alongside radicals went considerably beyond the remit of Ultra-Toryism. Above all, what distinguished the Ultras of the 1820s from the Tory-radicals of the 1830s and 1840s was the aversion of the former to extra-parliamentary politics and a refusal to develop a popular politics of their own, which some of the leading Tory-radicals did with gusto.

While there were few, if any, MPs in parliament who could be classified as Tory-radicals, beyond Westminster the movement was bigger, though still ambiguous. It first emerged in northern England as part of the highly emotive extra-parliamentary campaign for factory reform in the early 1830s. With its epicenter in Brontë's native West Riding of Yorkshire, Tory-radicalism brought together a group of Tory gentlemen who for some time had been growing uneasy about the destructive social

consequences of industrialization and urbanization which they

attributed to a cluster of dangerous values and assumptions:

free-market economics, individualism, utilitarianism,

centralization, each of which sapped the local and communal

bonds which held society together.[2] Society was organic, not

mechanistic as the disciples of liberal political assumed,

hierarchical, and was bound together in closely-knit communities

based on a reciprocal relationship of paternalism and deference:

"the altar, the throne, and the cottage," and "a place for

everything, but everything in its place," as Richard Oastler put

it, the West Riding land steward who was *de facto* leader of

Tory-radicalism outside of parliament (Driver 1946, 428). Those

with wealth had a responsibility to the less fortunate who

needed protecting from the selfish pursers of wealth; hence

popular Tory support for factory reform, opposition to the

centralizing and stigmatizing New Poor Law, and even

occasionally support for trades unionism. Workers had a right to

protect their skill, which was a form of property, from

depredation by avaricious capitalists. In contrast to

liberalism, Tory-radicalism addressed workers primarily as

producers rather than consumers. Hence their defense of the Corn

Laws, and the protectionist system more generally as this

guaranteed a basic level of income for vulnerable workers such

as agricultural laborers. Free trade, so the argument went, would mean lower wages.

Thus far, there is little here that any Tory backwoodsman or backbencher would have dissented from, though it was a cluster of assumptions which were falling out of favor with the Conservative frontbench under Peel, wedded as they increasingly were to the nostrums of liberal political economy. But Tory-radicals felt compelled to go further, to such an extent that in some cases the boundaries of Toryism were breached. Inheriting some of the histrionics of their Ultra forebears, and taking them to new heights in their various campaigns, a number of Tory-radicals came to the view that if neither rapacious capitalists nor governments would mend their ways--by conceding factory reform and repealing the New Poor Law, for example--then the working classes were in their rights to protest. To some extent, Tory-radical sympathy for working-class protest movements like Chartism--such as Disraeli's famous parliamentary speech in response to the first Chartist petition--was political point-scoring against the Whigs who were in power for much of the 1830s and later 1840s, but this was only part of the story. Oastler was quick to reprimand those in his own party who were abdicating their responsibilities to the poor. If property refused to carry out those duties, "the constitution of this

country is destroyed," then the poor were in their right to
dispossess property. As Oastler threatened the Duke of
Wellington: "My Lord Duke, if you pass that law [the new poor
law], Apsley House is yours now, but it may be mine hereafter."
(Oastler 9, 20, 23). Even when allowance is made for Oastler's
invective and intimidating rhetoric, these are not the
sentiments of a conventional Tory. Thus, what really disturbed
Tory-Radicals was that even within the Conservative party,
paternalism was declining.

There were other notable differences between Tory-radicals
and mainstream popular Tories. The evangelical strain made them
much less tolerant of popular pleasures and sins, such as
drinking than was the case with Tories who wore their religion
much more lightly: Oastler and Rayner Stephens, for example,
lost no opportunity to berate workers for their moral laxity.
The moral intensity which underpinned their politics also made
Tory-radicals much less amenable to the kinds of compromises and
alliances that were necessary in parliamentary politics. Both
the hard exterior of Wellingtonian reaction in the face of
protest--reactivated against the Chartists in the 1840s--and its
soft-center of compromising moderate Conservatism were equally
repugnant to Tory-radical feeling with its high-principled
stance. Even more repellent was the progressive Conservatism of

Sir Robert Peel which in the view of Tory-radicals was little different than Whig-liberalism. Such views were, no doubt, shared by many Tory backbenchers in the 1830s and 1840s, but what distinguished Tory-radicals was their rebuke to these same backbenchers for their complicity in supporting Peel. Even the protectionists who split from Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 proved disappointing. In short, Tory-radicals were ill-at-ease in the Conservative party in the 1830s and 1840s, and thus it comes as no surprise that some advocated new political realignments.

But what to do? While few went as far as Oastler and his friend Rayner Stephens in urging workers to take up arms against the recalcitrant millowners and the state, he nevertheless voiced a tension that was at the center of the Tory-radical predicament which Brontë would wrestle with in *Shirley*: what happens when elites renege on the fundamental Tory axiom that "Property has its duties, as well as its rights"? Oastler included this declaration as part of the masthead of his periodical the *Fleet Papers* (1841-44). For Tory-radicals there were, essentially, two options which involved opting for one side of the Tory-radical hyphen. The first, cross the threshold of Toryism into radicalism, as did Oastler and Rayner Stephens, and declare all-out assault on the establishment. The second,

which is the one Brontë ultimately opts for in *Shirley*, is a revivified paternalism in response to the breakdown of social order. For Tory-radicals this was no abstract issue, to be debated in the calm and smug atmosphere of the burgeoning Lit. and Phil. Societies in the towns; it was a matter of good versus evil, responsible versus criminally negligent government, of God versus Mammon. Oastler, Sadler, and the young Lord Ashley, like Brontë as we shall see, each brought an evangelical Christian intensity to Tory-radicalism, a major wellspring of their sentimentalism which dealt in such Manichean opposites. The complicit and directly culpable needed jolting out of their complacent and negligent exploitation of the working classes if society was to survive, a Carlylean corrective for the sins of a materialistic society and the dereliction of duty by the wealthy. Thus, it followed that protest movements like Luddism and Chartism were both symptoms of a dysfunctional society and a necessary warning. The violence might be regrettable, even deserving of punishment, and though they firmly rejected the means employed to remedy popular distress, Tory-radicals nonetheless sympathized: "He was not ashamed to say, however much he disapproved of the Charter, he sympathized with the Chartists," Disraeli informed the House of Commons in July 1839 (Hansard's 49 [1839]: 250—51).

Such, then, was the cluster of assumptions and beliefs which constituted Tory-radicalism. One further force which gave a measure of coherence to this amorphous movement was an underpinning network that linked together like-minded individuals.[3] If we take Charlotte Brontë as an example, she was loosely connected to Tory-radical networks in her native West Riding. As far as we know, the Brontës did not know Oastler personally, though they certainly knew people who did. Charlotte's father, as an evangelical clergyman believed in the imperatives of Christian social action. Amongst other interventions, he supported factory reform, petitioned against the New Poor Law and he also campaigned for the funding of apprenticeships for orphans. Patrick was also on friendly terms with the Tory-Radical clergyman *par excellence*, parson Bull of Byerley, whose parish was on the other side of Bradford. Byerley was a short distance from Hartshead where Patrick had been a minister in the 1810s, during which time he had witnessed some of the Luddite disturbances. Bull, the "Tory demagogue," in the words of the hostile *Bradford Observer*, was a guest of the Brontës at Haworth during one of his lecturing tours ("Original Correspondence"). Patrick was also close friends with William Morgan, another Bradford clergyman who was a keen supporter of factory reform, though he appears to have rebuked his more militant Tory-radical bedfellows which incurred Oastler's ire.

Brontë was the officiating clergyman at Morgan's wedding, and vice versa. Morgan also baptized the Brontë daughters.

II.

One of the central themes developed in *Shirley* is a characteristic Tory-radical attack on avaricious manufacturers like Gérard Moore, supposedly based on William Cartwright, the pugnacious millowner who defended his West Riding mill at Rawfolds against Luddite attack. Charlotte seems to have shared some of the Tory-radical anxiety that industrialization was spiraling out of control, and thus *Shirley* cannot be read as a straightforward apology for liberal individualism and capitalism. To these Tories, it was the parvenu, unscrupulous, and usually liberal-nonconformist manufacturers who were responsible for "factory slavery" and urban squalor. These irresponsible members of the middle classes were destroying the social fabric that bound communities together. As Brontë writes at the beginning of chapter 10, the British mercantile classes "certainly think too exclusively of making money" (183). Hinting at the affective consequences of a disturbed social equilibrium, Brontë declares "Misery generates hate." (62). The novel can be read as a cautionary tale of the selfish pursuit of wealth: Moore's life is a lesson for the new breed of northern

manufacturers who, armed with the doctrines of Adam Smith and the Manchester school of economics, will let nothing stand in their way. Moore is so relentless in his pursuit of profit that he is "taciturn, phlegmatic and joyless" (99) and in the end this almost costs him his life. He is the victim of an assassination attempt by Mike Hartley, one of the Luddite leaders. Moore is also willing to marry solely for money, which leads him to propose to Shirley Keeldar, the heroine of the novel, even though he does not love her. Moore even describes himself as a "human mill" as if to underline his oneness with his precious machines (496). Moore's mill is called "Hollow's Mill" (the original title of the novel), or even more prophetically "Hollow's End," and his residence "Hollow's Cottage" is described by Caroline Helstone as "narrow and dismal" (110). Brontë has Moore learn the error of his ways by the end of the novel, partly because of the assassination attempt--the necessary Tory-radical jolt--Shirley's rejection of his marriage proposal, and through his engagement to the woman he really loves, Caroline.

By the end of *Shirley* Moore is no longer the hard-nosed, profit-obsessed manufacturer. Although it is the altered economic circumstances that brings about this transformation from factory tyrant to factory paternalist, Brontë does not

reduce this shift to the vagaries of the trade cycle; she has

Moore learn an important lesson so that should hard times

return, he will not regress. As he tells Caroline: "Now, I can

take more workmen; give better wages; lay wiser and more liberal

plans" (594). When asked rhetorically by Caroline, "If you get

rich, you will do good with your money, Robert?," he replies, "I

will do good; you shall tell me how: indeed, I have some schemes

of my own, which you and I will talk about on our own hearth one

day. I have seen the necessity of doing good: I have learned the

downright folly of being selfish" (596-7). In a similar moment

of contrition with his fellow manufacturer Hiram Yorke, Moore

admits that "To respect himself, a man must believe he renders

justice to his fellow-men" (506). Moore, the Whig-liberal

avariste, has learnt the Tory-radical lesson that with wealth

and position comes responsibility just as Lord Egremont does in

Sybil. Now Hollow's Mill is a legitimate enterprise based on a

happy fusion of land (owned by Shirley) and industry (brought by

Moore and his workmen), and the newfound harmony is centered on

the house, estate, and factory. Caroline would have Moore play

the part of the traditional Tory paternalist: traditions are to

be respected, organic entities such as localities and regions

provide the glue for social bonds and communal ties. Indeed,

early on in the novel when Caroline steals one of her cherished

private moments with Moore she muses, in a way that would have

made Edmund Burke glow, that "it would be pleasant to go back to the past; to hear people that have slept for generations in graves that are perhaps no longer graves now, but gardens and fields, speak to us and tell us their thoughts, and impart their ideas" (114). The (re)generative power of the past is a major theme in Tory-radical fiction, especially in *Sybil*: Egremont's transformation begins appropriately in the grounds of a ruined abbey.

The emphasis on organic communities and tradition forms part of conventional Tory ideology, and in this respect Brontë is no different. But, contrary to what several of her biographers have argued, by the 1840s Charlotte's Toryism was not akin to the reactionary kind identified with the Duke of Wellington, whom Charlotte had admired when she was young (and, in any case, as has been noted already, this is a caricature of Wellingtonian Conservatism). It is the brash character of Shirley, not the incipient Tory paternalist Caroline, who admires the Duke of Wellington. On the surface Brontë's Toryism looks Peelite in its desire for a fusion of landed with mercantile wealth--a plot resolution, it could be argued, that emerges in the closing pages of *Shirley*--in its valorizing of public service and in its moderate evangelical tone (as revealed in her portrayal of the Anglican clergy). Yet beneath this hard exterior was a soft

center, and one that was ill-at-ease with the prevailing liberal political economy of Peelite Conservatism. On the occasions when Brontë appears to state the naturalness of political economy, she is almost invariably discussing the point of view of millowners like Moore. Clearly, Brontë believed in a hierarchical society, but this was conditional on each class performing its allotted role: a place for everyone, but everyone in their place. Deference had to be earned and was the product of negotiation. Brontë shows very clearly the dangerous consequences of ignoring the concerns of the workers; this is the significance of the scene in which the moderate, pleading worker Joseph Farren's entreaties fall completely on the deaf ears of Moore: "By speaking kindly to William Farren … Moore might have made a friend. It seemed wonderful how he could turn from such a man without a conciliatory or a sympathizing expression" (157–58).

Philip Rogers has recently argued that "implicit in Robert Moore's defense of the mill against Luddite rioters" is Brontë's approval of "Wellington's Tory hostility to Chartism and his strategy for repressing the Chartist demonstration of 10 April 1848" (145). Bodenheimer makes a similar argument which she attributes to Brontë's "zest for chivalric warfare" (44). Charlotte's stance is more ambiguous than this straightforward

reactionary reading suggests. First, it is important not to confuse her responses to the continental waves of revolution in 1848 with British Chartism. While Brontë unreservedly condemns recourse to revolutionary violence, she does not respond to Chartism in the same way. Protesting peacefully against hardship is an action that she is willing to accord a measure of legitimacy. Even when it came to revolution on the continent, Brontë had initially expressed some sympathy; hardly the sentiments of a reactionary Tory. Secondly, Brontë's Toryism was always tempered by an evangelical outrage at slavery in all its forms, which comes through powerfully in *Shirley*. Moore's overseer Joe Scott, we are told, was strict but not cruel like the "Child-torturers, slave masters or drivers" (90). Brontë mocks the "hang-em', 'flog-em" mentality through her caricatured curates who make their appearance in the opening of the novel, and through her less than favorable portrait of the rector, the Reverend Matthewson Helstone. Though Reverend Helstone is without the haughtiness and vulgarity of the curates, he is nonetheless aloof and wooden; they are all reactionary. It is also noteworthy that Brontë does not give credence to some of the more exaggerated loyalist claims at the time of Luddism, that it was financed by Napoleon and organized by French soldier-spies. Like Oastler and his father at the time, Brontë

sympathizes with the Luddites, just as Disraeli did the

Chartists.

There is not the baying for Luddite blood that supposedly

took hold of real-life characters such as the Reverend Hammond

Roberson, the Incumbent at Hartshead Church in 1812, or more

famously William Horsfall. Luddites were objects of pity not

ridicule, just as Chartists were for Disraeli and Thomas

Carlyle. If Brontë's main objective had been to vindicate the

manufacturers and the authorities, or even create some sympathy

for their position, one would have expected a much fuller and

more intimate portrayal of the psychological terrors experienced

by fictional proxies of those like the millowners Cartwright and

Horsfall, and the Huddersfield magistrate Joseph Radcliffe. The

latter was so ground down by the numerous death-threats he

received from the Luddites that he developed a tremor in his

writing hand, with each letter throughout the disturbances

almost registering his declining mental health, however much he

tried to keep up appearances of robustness. True, Brontë was not

privy to these details, but for a novelist of her stature, had

she wanted to, she would have been equal to creating such a

psychological profiling of these character-types. In the

aftermath of the Luddite attack on Hollow's Mill, the narrator

observes "some of the magistrates are now well frightened, and

like cowards, show a tendency to be cruel" (354), a rebuke to
those like Radcliffe: "desperate diseases, I must allow require
desperate remedies," he had confided (WYAS, RAD 1/4, Radcliffe
to General Maitland, 4 July 1812). Certainly, Brontë is of the
view that tumult and riot were to be put down, and by force if
necessary, but the grievances which had led the masses to riot
were also to be redressed, mainly by paternalistic individuals
in the localities, but also possibly governments, too. As she
wrote in a letter to her literary advisor in April 1848:

> Your remarks respecting the Chartists seem to me truly
> sensible: their grievances should not indeed 'be
> neglected, nor the existence of their sufferings
> ignored'. It would now be the right time, when an ill-
> advised movement has been judiciously re-pressed [sic.]
> to examine carefully into their causes of complaint and
> make such concessions as justice and humanity dictate. If
> Government would act so, how much good might be done by
> the removal of ill-feeling and the substitution of mutual
> kindliness in its place! I seem to see this fact plainly,
> though politics are not my study; and though political
> partisanship is what I would ever wish to avoid as much
> as religious bigotry (Smith 51).

The final sentence here is telling: Brontë disdains the narrow bigotry of conventional party politics, and here she may have been reflecting something of her father's disdain for "party violence," an evil "signs of the times" he had singled out in one of his few published sermons (P. Brontë, 28). This also comes through in *Shirley* where Tory and Whig are equally lambasted (321). Noteworthy is the way in which Brontë contrasts Moore unfavorably with Hiram Yorke, a fellow cloth manufacturer, whose politics are above conventional party labels and in several respects is the exemplary Tory-radical. While Brontë ridicules on the one hand, blind "Church-and-King" Tory reaction through the portraits of the clergymen, and on the other hand the canting Whig-liberal Moore, Yorke comes across as the bountiful country squire: interestingly, his occupation as a cloth manufacturer is barely mentioned and unlike Moore, his role as a mill owner is almost incidental to his character. Later we learn that he also owns land. He is "very friendly to his workpeople, very good to all who were beneath him" (545). Yorke occasionally lacks veneration for those above him: "he spoke of 'parsons' and all who belonged to parsons, of 'lords' and the appendages of lords, with a harshness, sometimes an insolence, as unjust as it was insufferable" (79). He was

nonetheless hierarchical: as his was "the first and oldest"
family in the neighborhood he was, in a sense, lord of the manor
(though strictly speaking Shirley Keeldar was Lord of the Manor
of Briarfield). In contrast to the cant of the clergymen, Yorke
also wears his religion lightly, but has a partiality for the
sermons of John Wesley who, "being a Reformer and an Agitator,
had a place" (217) in his favor, an identical view shared by
Oastler. Yet "while disclaiming community with the
establishment" he never failed to attend the parish church every
Sunday (546). The moral bankruptcy of the Church of England, its
plundering origins and abdication of its responsibilities to the
poor, is present in *Shirley* and even more so in *Sybil*.

From a strictly party-political point of view, Yorke is a
contradiction. Equally disdainful of Tory and Whig he was cut in
the mold of the eighteenth century "country party" ideology
which was distrustful of both court and city, which to his Tory
and Whig neighbors made him appear radical. Not content to
sketch Yorke as a caricature of the philistine country squire,
Brontë has him speaking French and Italian, and appreciative of
Italian art. In his home, there was "no splendour, but there was
taste everywhere--unusual taste,--the taste, you would have
said, of a travelled man, a scholar, and a gentleman" (73).
Yorke becomes the vehicle for Brontë's attacks on new money

personified by Moore. Having come to the assistance of Moore in his attempts to track down the machine breakers, Yorke invites the search party in to his home to partake of refreshment so that he can round on Moore for having "Made thyself enemies on every hand" (83). When confronted by the reactionary rector who prescribes "vigorous government interference, strict magisterial vigilance; when necessary, prompt military coercion," Yorke "wished to know whether this interference, vigilance and coercion would feed those who were hungry, give work to those who wanted work and whom no man would hire" (355-6). Later in the novel, Yorke is rebuked by Shirley Keeldar for his outspoken attacks on Moore and the rector for their brutal treatment of the Luddites who attacked Moore's mill. Even Yorke is one of *Shirley*'s imperfect characters (90). He is one of the first to send medical assistance to the Luddites who were wounded in the attack on Hollow's Mill. In a fitting resolution that once again hints at the Tory-radicalism of the novel, harmony if not quite unity between Yorke and Moore is achieved when Yorke takes in the dangerously wounded Moore (from the assassination attempt on his life) and has his wife nurse him back to health.

Much of the discussion of community in *Shirley* takes the form of pride in Yorkshire identity. Pam Morris has identified Yorkshire as the real hero of *Shirley*. While none of the other

Tory-radical novels considered here had the regional and specifically Yorkshire credentials that Brontë and her novel enjoyed, a defiant northern provincialism pervades Tory-radical fiction, not just in their settings but also in their attempts to engage the attention and sympathy of oblivious metropolitan audiences. It is no coincidence that the West Riding of Yorkshire and north-west England were the heartlands of Tory-radicalism. Like all good Tories, and many radicals, Brontë was suspicious of outside interference. Moore is half-foreign, and the threats to the social fabric are invariably external forces: war, unpopular clerics, machinery made overseas--in Belgium--which Moore imports. While Moore is half-foreign, the quintessential Yorkshire gentleman is appropriately named Mr. Yorke: "the harshness of the north was seen in his features, as it was heard in his voice" (79). Thoroughly English, with not a trace of a "Norman line anywhere," Yorke spoke in Yorkshire dialect and was disdainful of refined vocabulary. Tellingly, Disraeli gives Sybil noble Anglo-Saxon blood and uses this to mount, much more explicitly than does Brontë, a Cobbettite critique of the "Norman Yoke," which traced the origins of the people's woes to the dispossession wrought by the Norman Conquest and their descendants, the post-Reformation nobility. There is little of the imagined, social medievalism in *Shirley* compared with *Sybil* or Carlyle's *Past and Present*, and as the

satirical portrait of the clerics suggests, Brontë clearly had less faith in the healing powers of religion than did Disraeli, Tonna, and Carlyle even though she remained loyal to the Church. Nevertheless, the emphasis on place also reinforces Brontë's Toryism; those without organic connections to localities are potentially dangerous and subversive individuals, whether half-foreign manufacturers or itinerant radicals. This is the parable of Moore's life. As she explains: "Not being a native, nor for any length of time a resident of the neighbourhood, he did not sufficiently care when the inventions threw old work-people out of employ" (61). Moore's only saving grace is that he is half-Yorkshire, and after a period of residency he mends his ways and roots himself in the community as a paternalistic employer, his journey towards Tory paternalism now complete. Thus, in resolving the Tory-radical dilemma, the radical part of the hyphen is jettisoned as Tory paternalism reigns once again.

III.

"What interests Charlotte about Luddism," Terry Eagleton argues, "is hardly at all the nature of working-class protest but its effect on the complex alignment of interests within the ruling class." For Eagleton, the working-class presence in *Shirley* "is distinguished primarily by its absence" (47).

Eagleton's interpretation has cast a long shadow, elements of which can still be found in more recent reassessments of Brontë and *Shirley*, notably in Patricia Ingham's scholarship. Yet Brontë's Luddite leaders *are* politically aware and motivated, which tallies with some of the suggestive evidence that we have of the Luddite croppers. Mike Hartley is not just a machine breaker he is also a Jacobin, a leveller, and a republican. Along with Moses Barraclough, Hartley is a local Luddite leader, and presenting them as such belies Brontë's assertion, made elsewhere in the novel, that Luddite leaders were shadowy, national figures who had no intimate connections with the communities in which they were active. Hartley and Barraclough form a sort of intermediary layer of leadership between the national leaders and the rank and file, a group variously defined as "organic intellectuals" or plebeian intellectuals, and Brontë obviously knew enough about popular movements to recognize the pivotal role played by such figures.

Brontë has not been given enough credit for the way she distinguishes between working-class types; the working-class presence in *Shirley* is not an homogenized caricature as some critics have alleged. Perhaps most significantly of all, Caroline Helstone muses to Moore that: "I cannot help thinking it unjust to include all poor working people under the general

and insulting name of 'the mob,' and continually to think of them and treat them haughtily" (118). Dismissing protest as the work of the mob was one of the most favored ways in which the upper classes sought to discredit popular politics. Even Moore, whose hostility to the Luddites is second to none, inadvertently gives them credit for being well organized and strategically shrewd: "The subalterns received orders from their chiefs; they are in a good state of discipline: no blow is struck without mature deliberation" (289). This contradicts the notion that machine breaking was the product of momentary madness--another way in which the elite sought to discredit Luddism. In making Barraclough a tailor and Hartley a weaver, Brontë displays an awareness here that Luddites were not always croppers. One of the few extensive lists of Luddites that we possess for the West Riding--the names of those who came forward to take the oath of allegiance to the crown as part of the government's offer of amnesty--numbered 3 coal miners, 3 woolen spinners and 1 shoemaker, the remainder (the vast majority) being cloth dressers/clothiers (WWM, F46/127). Several commentators have drawn attention to what they perceive as Brontë's hostility towards the kind of worker personified by Barraclough, but again the portrait is more ambiguous. True, his physical imperfections and vulgarity are emphasized, but then Brontë goes on to present him as a man with a keen sense of justice for his fellow

workers. After accusing Moore of destroying what was once a happy and contented community, Barraclough declares: "Now, I'm not a cloth-dresser myself, but by trade a tailor; howsiver, my heart is of a softish natur': I'm a very feeling man, and when I see my brethren oppressed like my great namesake of old, I stand up for 'em'" (153).

Further evidence of Brontë's attempt to distinguish between different currents within the working class, and in Luddism in particular, is the way she juxtaposes the uncompromising stance of Barraclough with the more moderate and pleading William Farren who begs Moore to introduce his machinery gradually, so as to allow the cloth dressers time to adjust. Neither are Joe Scott or William Farren quite the manikins they have been presented as by some critics. Scott is Moore's overlooker who is proud of his position above the other workers and though he is strict he is not cruel. Brontë has him side with Moore against the Luddites. Farren is the moderate, pleading worker who addresses Moore after the physical-force Barraclough. As with all Tory-radical fiction, one of Brontë's key objectives in *Shirley* is to ridicule the sweeping generalizations that people make about classes and groups, whether that be clergyman (not all the curates are bad in *Shirley*) mill-owners, or workers. This is one of the poignant criticisms that Shirley makes of

Hiram Yorke: that for all his virtues he is too quick to condemn individuals based on their occupation or class belonging. The fundamental message of *Shirley* is not merely that there is good and bad in every class, but that such clear-cut distinctions are naïve, a message that is also emphasized in *Michael Armstrong*, *Helen Fleetwood*, and *Sybil*. As Robert O'Kell has argued in relation to *Sybil* (though he rejects the notion of Tory-radicalism), Disraeli sets out to challenge the simplicity of, and in the process to transcend, the dichotomy of the "two nations." Social hierarchies, though real and valid, are much more complex (229).

These kinds of distinctions are necessary for facilitating what is, arguably, the central function of Tory-radical fiction: the fostering of sympathy for the plight of the poor, to remove "ill-feeling" between the classes in Brontë's words (Smith 51). A product, in part, of the vestigial romanticism that continued to shape literature and culture into the 1840s and beyond, feeling was the plane on which rich and poor could reunite. Tory-radicalism proceeded on the assumption that all, rich and poor, had the same capacity for feeling. This assumption contrasted with more mainstream Tory and elite views that the working classes did not have the same affective capacity; rather, the masses were portrayed as either unfeeling brutes or

creatures of base passion. When Mrs. Pryor rebukes Caroline for being friendly with the worker William Farren, Caroline retorts that "William has very fine feelings" (421). The Tory-radical critique of liberal political economy was grounded in the assumption that it was cold and unfeeling. In revolt, the Tory-radicals urged sympathy, not for radical politics but for the working classes. Disraeli also emphasized feelings in his famous passage about the "Two nations" in *Sybil*: "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings" (83). Disraeli was quick to demonstrate his own "softish natur'" by juxtaposing his refined feelings of sympathy with the negative feelings he associated with the Whigs, and in particular Lord John Russell, then Home Secretary and leader in the Commons. Sympathy was a feeling with potential to heal the class divide, to bridge the chasms between the two nations.

The novel was a form ideally placed to foster sympathy, and indeed to rouse feelings of any kind, through plot and character development which, in the hands of the successful novelist, draws the reader into the affective realm of the characters. The original Greek definition of the word sympathy meant to suffer with (Boddice 3), and the Tory-radical novels aimed to exploit and deepen the dialogic nature of sympathy. As early as the

dedication in Disraeli's *Sybil*, he not only signals the overarching importance of sympathy, but also its dialogic nature: "I would inscribe this work to one whose noble spirit and gentle nature ever prompt her to sympathise with the suffering … a perfect wife," a reference with a double meaning to Disraeli's own wife and to Sybil (5). Brontë also hints at another dialogic aspect of feelings when Caroline rebukes Moore for maltreatment of his workers, warning him that negative feelings rebound on themselves. To give the homily added force, Caroline personalizes the issue: "When you are cold to me, as you *are* sometimes, can I venture to be affectionate in return?" (118). Tory-radicalism contested the purely radical, class-based assumption that only the poor could fully sympathize with their own. Thus, one of the main plot lines developed by Disraeli in *Sybil* is to demonstrate through the development of Sybil's character the error of this assumption, a powerful instance marking the boundary between Tory-radicalism and working-class radicalism. Sympathy also legitimated hierarchy and rule by elites, a cardinal principle of the Tory-radical worldview, by supplying the means to revivify and strengthen the bonds between rich and poor.

Yet sympathy would prove a problematic basis for Tory-radicalism, especially when conjoined with the sentimentalism

and melodrama which was thought to characterize these novels. For all their professed realism, there can be no doubt that Tory-radical fiction often reached for the graphic and occasionally the melodramatic to draw attention to the poverty and misery of the working classes. Disraeli was arguably more aware than other Tory-radical authors about the potential pitfalls of this. As he stated in the "advertisement" at the beginning of *Sybil*, "while he hopes he has alleged nothing which is not true, he has found the absolute necessity of suppressing much that is genuine" (6). His reason for doing so was because he feared that it might enable some of the intended audience to dismiss the work with an "air of improbability." Even more telling was Trollope's explanation of why she had reneged on her promise to write a sequel to *Michael Armstrong* (and in doing so confirmed the Tory limits of her own Tory-radicalism): "When those in whose behalf she hoped to move the sympathy of their country are found busy in scenes of outrage and lawless violence … the author feels that it would be alike acting in violation of her principles, and doing injury to the cause she wishes to serve, were she to persist in an attempt to hold up as objects of public sympathy, men who have stained their righteous cause with deeds of violence and blood" (iv). In other words, the violence of Chartism--Trollope was writing in the aftermath of the Newport rising when thousands of armed Chartists men had

marched on the Welsh town in South Wales--had given the properried classes a pretext for subordinating their sympathy to fear. To explain how this happened we can draw on Thomas Haskell's concept of an "ethical shelter," which he developed to explain why humanitarianism developed in response to chattel slavery but not wage slavery after 1750.

Haskell defines an ethical shelter as a mental space which "enables us all … to maintain a good conscience, in spite of doing nothing concretely about most of the world's suffering" (352). Rob Boddice has refined Haskell's concept by highlighting the affective basis of an ethical shelter which is central to its success and failure. This enables Boddice to build an explanatory model of an ethical shelter that foregrounds the conditions under which failure to elicit sympathy can occur. One of the factors that Boddice cites for the failure of sympathy is a perception that "the sufferer's lamentations [were deemed] to be disproportionate," to the actual suffering, especially where those trying to elicit sympathy resorted to the tactic of trying to shame the culpable and complicit out of an ethical shelter (8-10). There is no doubt that shaming was a favorite tactic of Oastler's and Rayner Stephens, but unfortunately it was a tactic that tended to rebound on itself as the accused retreated even further into their ethical shelter. In addition to the recoiling

in disgust at the attempt to shame the propertied classes into ameliorative action, this flight from action to inaction was further facilitated by the complicity of Tory-radicalism in working-class violent protest, and, worst still, its ambivalence towards working-class protest--of abetting violence, and then backing away, and even disowning it, when hostilities broke out.

This ambivalence towards violence is yet another characteristic of Tory-radicalism, and points to the contradiction at the heart of the ideology, caught between the two poles of revolution and reaction (or inaction, to be more precise). This helps to explain why some reviewers blamed Tory-radical authors for inciting the masses to violence. In a review of Trollope's *Michael Armstrong*, the *Athenaeum* lambasted Trollope for her disproportionate attacks on the factory masters ("Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy"). This lack of restraint--a favorite charge levelled against political foes in early Victorian England--was compounded by her lack of propriety in various other ways, from the inclusion of graphic illustrations to her depictions of the sexual dangers of factories, as argued by Susan Walton. Similar criticisms were levelled at *Shirley*: "Its faults--arising, perhaps, from a desire to express strongly rather than delicately, what was strongly felt," was the judgement of one reviewer ("Shirley").

The *Athenaeum*, though far more restrained than in its review of *Michael Armstrong*, "protest[ed] against the tone and temper of the author of 'Shirley,'" ("Shirley: A Tale"), while the *Edinburgh Review* complained of its "over-masculine vigour" (Jan. 1850)--and this despite Brontë's assurance that she would refrain from "harrowing up my reader's soul, and delighting his organ of wonder" by not resorting to the worst excesses of the factory movement's sensationalism and melodrama (90). A related problem for Tory-radical novelists, and indeed condition of England authors more generally, in trying to enlist the compassion of the upper classes is the predicament of what might be termed "cathartic sympathy." Elizabeth Gaskell was acutely conscious that this might be the response to her novel *Mary Barton*. As Margaret Loose puts it, Gaskell was anxious "lest her novel act as a kind of emotional pressure-valve to readers, giving them the cathartic satisfaction of having felt sympathy for her working-class characters without necessarily motivating … to ameliorate the conditions" of the workers (7).

It is noteworthy that neither *Sybil* nor *Shirley* attracted anything like the reactionary criticism heaped on Trollope, perhaps because they were both published during periods when social tensions were lessening, Disraeli in the mid-1840s during Chartism's lean years, and Brontë in 1849, when Britain had

weathered Chartism *redivivus* and escaped the continental waves
of revolution. *Michael Armstrong* made its first appearance
during the crisis year of 1839, as did Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*
but that may have been saved by its more overt evangelical
prescriptions and respectability. But perhaps the main reason
why *Helen Fleetwood*, *Sybil*, and *Shirley* were spared such
conservative savaging was because all three, unlike *Michael
Armstrong*, pointed more unambiguously towards a Tory
paternalistic resolution in which elites mended their ways and
ruled humanely and were met with contentment from below. To put
it another way, Trollope did not get the Tory/radical balance
quite right and veered towards radicalism--the charge also
levelled at Oastler and Rayner Stephens. This emphasis on
paternalism also marked out Tory-radical fiction as a discrete
subgenre of the condition-of-England novels, as well as an
incarnation of popular Toryism. For all their radical aspects,
neither Tonna, Disraeli nor Brontë were willing to jettison
paternalism as Gaskell did in *North and South* (1854), and
Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *The Chimes* (1844).

But it was not just her advocacy of paternalism that saved
Brontë from a full savaging by the critics. Arguably, it was
also because she qualified some of her sympathy for the
Luddites. For all Brontë's compassion for the plight of the

workers, the mood shifts from pathos to disgust in the account of the assassination attempt on Moore's life--thus facilitating the reader's further retreat into their ethical shelter. In the description of the Luddite attack on Moore's mill, there are no courageous heroes amongst the attacking crowd only the mob led on by designing outside agitators. Through the characters of Caroline and Shirley who observe the attack incognito, Brontë clearly registers a vicarious satisfaction that the mob are repulsed (335-37). Again, the cumulative effect of this qualification of her sympathy lands *Shirley* on the Tory side of the Tory-radical hyphen.

IV.

In *Shirley,* the reader is presented with a microcosm of the body politic, a comprehensive diagnosis of its ailments and a salve--paternalist sympathy--to heal the wounds from the perspective of popular Toryism. Hierarchy, inequality, tradition, Christian pessimism, and pragmatic paternalism are all present in the portrait of the local community. What makes *Shirley* a Tory-radical novel, and by extension what characterizes the sub-genre more generally, is an acute awareness of the ills afflicting the body politic, and of the tensions that were rising and the contradictions that this posed

for the would-be Tory paternalist. But Tory-radicalism was about more than just the contradictions that were facing the socially responsible provincial, grassroots Tory who knew the importance of securing the support of the working classes. In signaling a profound discontent with mainstream Conservatism ideology, it presented the disenchanted popular Tory with a choice: radicalism or a revivified Toryism. Some--Oastler and Rayner Stephens--opted for the former, becoming radicals in all but name. Others such as Brontë plumped for the latter, but this did not represent a retreat on their part--of a grudging acceptance that Peelite Conservatism, or even Protectionist Toryism, was the less of several evils. And neither did it represent a retreat into the social medievalism of "Merrie England" associated with Young England in the 1840s. Brontë's vision of popular Toryism was meant to be much more no nonsense and practical. The radicalism and associated violent protest (or the threat of) served as a jolting corrective for selfish and irresponsible wealth to mend its ways. Seen from this perspective, Tory-radicalism was a device for restoring equilibrium to the popular Tory worldview of paternalism and deference. Although Brontë ultimately opts for Tory paternalism, this was no mere retreat into Tory reaction.

The problem was that because much of its value rested on shock, Tory-radicalism was unstable, a perception that was not helped by either some of the sensationalism of the sub-genre (though this was less evident in *Shirley*) and its adherents on the public platform (Oastler and Rayner Stephens); and the ongoing threat posed by Chartism. All these factors served to mitigate the sympathy that Tory-radical authors and activists sought to inculcate in the upper classes. This was one of the reasons why Tory-radicalism failed to gain much traction in the 1830s and 1840s; only at the most generalized level can we point to the influence of Tory-radicalism as a background factor in prompting the political redress of social grievances, the redressing of which, in any case, proved limited and disappointing for Tory-radicals as demonstrated by factory reform. The Tory-radical novels mirror the fate of Oastler and Rayner Stephens whose own melodramatic, affective politics proved self-defeating. Contrast the political success of Disraeli from the 1840s when he increasingly left behind the sentimentalism and skewed politics of his youth. The excess of feeling which was at the heart of Tory-radicalism played into the hands of the advocates of liberal political economy who claimed that such sentimental outpourings on behalf of the people were misguided, dangerous, and misplaced as politics was meant to be an arena free from feeling.

True, its excess of feeling was not the only reason why the Tory-radical variant of popular Toryism went into decline-- another reason is surely that many millowners like Moore *did* mend their ways as Patrick Joyce has shown in his study of later Victorian factory paternalism. Yet it is suggestive that this healing took place *after* the febrile atmosphere of the hungry forties abated and Chartism declined, at which point Tory-radicalism could be safely appealed to as a legitimating political tradition for later variants of popular Conservatism. One of the ironies of the Tory-radical subgenre and the condition of England novel more generally was that, for all its claim to be real, cool and unromantic as Monday morning (as Brontë claimed *Shirley* would be in its opening pages), it was unable to free itself from the long reach of the age of romanticism with its sentimentalism and melodrama.

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NOTES

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1. For a summary of the literature and debate on Tory-Radicalism, see Driver (1991), Roberts (2007).

2. In the West Riding the epicenter of Tory-Radicalism was in Bradford, and included the Bradford manufacturers John Wood, who first drew Richard Oastler's attention to the employment of children in factories, William Walker, and John Rand, the clergymen Matthew Balme and George Stringer Bull, the printer and civic leader Squire Auty, and the Bingley landowner William Busfeild Ferrand. For these networks, see Koditschek (1990).

3. As Youngblood has shown, Tory-Radicalism was underpinned by a network of politicians, pressmen, publishers, and novelists. For example, the Tory-Radical journalist Robert Benton Seeley, a contributor to Fraser's, was the biographer of Sadler, advisor to the humanitarian Tory Lord Ashley, and the publisher of Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's periodicals and books, including Helen Fleetwood. Frances Trollope interviewed Oastler and Rayner Stephens as part of her research for Michael

Armstrong, with Oastler giving Trollope access to his papers. Youngblood does not include Brontë as a Tory Radical.

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