

Victorian Reformations: Historical Fiction and Religious Controversy, 1820–1900. By Miriam Elizabeth Burstein. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2014. Pp. x + 300. \$39.

Burstein provides the reader of Victorian literary criticism a thorough study of popular historical novels from 1820 to 1900 with regard to their portrayal of the Protestant Reformation and its effects on the 19th century. Most of these novels were published by evangelical presses in inexpensive formats that aimed at converting the reader to the author's views on Protestantism. The majority of those studied were by evangelical Anglicans and Presbyterians, but a few were by Anglo-Catholics or Roman Catholics. All of them are now obscure examples of what was a popular Victorian pastime—debating the issues of the Reformation and its relevance to the variety of sects in 19th-century England. B.'s study touches on two novels by Walter Scott, Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, and George Eliot's *Romola*, but focuses primarily on close reading of the religious controversies woven through the pages of noncanonical popular novels by proselytizers and their theologies of history. This theology finds in these stories a "providential, eschatological framework" in the lives of their characters (3). Thus, B.'s book provides an unusual alternative to the secularist readings of canonical Victorian novels by 20th-century critics like Georg Lukács that interpret the Reformation as the beginning of modernism and the decline of religion.

B. finds these pro-sectarian or pro-Catholic novels to be influenced by four major Victorian movements: the Catholic Emancipation of 1829, John Keble's 1833 sermon "On National Apostasy" and the rise of the Oxford Movement, the influence of Anglo-Catholic ritualism, and the 1850 restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England. These events, which made Protestants anxious, were balanced by tercentenaries of the Reformation translations of the Bible into English and the building of a memorial to the Protestant martyrs of 1555–1556. Both types of events also sparked the evangelical novelists' imagination to create plots and dialogue embodying the Reformation debates about *sola scriptura*, the role of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical authority. Among the more popular novels embodying these debates were *Father Clement* by Grace Kennedy (1823) and *Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta Family*, by Elizabeth Rundle Charles (1863).

B. finds in Walter Scott's 1920 novels, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot*, examples of a popular writer avoiding controversial theology by assuming but not debating the decline of Catholicism and affirming the rise of Protestant modernity. More actively engaged Reformation proselytizers appeared to create novels about the pre-Protestant life of John Wycliffe and the Lollards (1328–1384). More typical evangelical novels throughout the Victorian period dealt with the Bible and its centrality to Christian life, but such fiction avoided dramatizing the difficulties of building consensus entirely from reading Scripture. Other novels focused on the struggle during 16th-century England that led to imprisonment and even martyrdom for advocates of both sides of the Reformation. Many of these novels celebrated the Protestant martyrs under the reign of Mary Tudor, but these eventually evoked narratives of recusants who risked their lives to reject biblicism in favor of the sacramental historical Catholic church,

previewing what was to become a “new Counter-Reformation” (143). Some of these latter novels portrayed the struggle during the rule of Henry VIII, but most focused on the Elizabethan regime as a time of Catholic martyrdom. Beneath these Catholic counternarratives (such as *Geraldine* by E. C. Agnew in 1839), as well as some by Anglo-Catholic writers, was an argument for the historical continuity of the Roman tradition.

B.’s study ends with a chapter on Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), set during the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780. In this novel, Dickens avoids arguing the usual Protestant or Catholic histories of the Reformation in order to avoid fragmentation among his Victorian society readership. For Dickens, it was time to forget the legacy of the English Reformation. A similar effort to avoid historical controversies marked George Eliot’s *Romola* (1863), based on the life of Savonarola in pre-Reformation Florence, by revealing the self-contradictions, failures, and ambiguities of this so-called “proto-Protestant Great Man” (215). Overall, B. provides Charles Laporte and other revisionist historians of 19th-century literature with convincing examples that religious debate and practice were alive and well among the Victorians. Along with Pericles Lewis and other revisionizers of religion in the modernist novel, B. bolsters the challenging work of Charles Taylor on the sacred side of *A Secular Age* (2007).

David J. Leigh, S. J.
Seattle University

Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought. By Torstein Theodor Tollefsen. New York: Oxford University, 2012. Pp. viii + 229. \$125.

Tollefsen is the author of *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (2008) and numerous articles on philosophy and Christianity in Late Antiquity. In his recent book, he examines the philosophical concepts of “activity” and “participation” in early Christian theology. Although he mentions Augustine in passing, T. focuses on the thought of the Cappadocians, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor. Yet, these figures are not the most important for the work, even though they do most of the heavy lifting. Instead, the two central thinkers are the philosopher Plotinus and the monk Gregory Palamas.

T.’s stated purpose is to demonstrate that Gregory Palamas “was a traditional thinker and no innovator” (vi), especially in his distinction between God’s essence and energies. The essence–energies distinction is a core concept in Orthodox theology, helping explain how Christians can be deified. Following Irenaeus’s assertion that “God became what we are so that we might become who He is” (*Adversus haereses* V, [Irenaeus’s preface]) or Athanasius’s better-known version, “God became human, so that we might become God” (*De incarnatione* 54), Orthodox theology has sought to articulate how exactly humans can become God. The essence–energies distinction allows true participation with God while also providing the necessary limits.