

## THE DIVINE IN THE COMMONPLACE

Realism has long been associated with the secular, but in early nineteenth-century England a realist genre existed that was highly theological: popular natural histories informed by natural theology. *The Divine in the Commonplace* explores the “reverent empiricism” of English natural history and how it conceives observation and description as a kind of devotion or act of reverence. Focusing on the texts of popular natural historians, especially seashore naturalists, Amy M. King puts these in conversation with English provincial realist novelists including Austen, Gaskell, Eliot, and Trollope. She argues that the English provincial novel has a “reverent form” as a result of its connection to the practices and representational strategies of natural history writing in this period, which was literary, empirical, and reverent. This book will appeal to students and scholars of nineteenth-century literature, science historians, and those interested in interdisciplinary connections between pre-Darwinian natural history, religion, and literature.

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THE DIVINE IN THE  
COMMONPLACE

*Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain*

AMY M. KING  
*St. John's University, New York*



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*For my family,  
especially Jeff & Linda King,  
and always, Stephen and Steve*

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## *Acknowledgments*

“We do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual,” the narrator of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* somewhat disingenuously suggests. For Eliot knew that the ordinariness of experience rarely impedes our caring about it, and I am no exception as I do what many have done before: finish a book and remember the people who have provided the “commonplace” gifts of friendship and support. To two friends of long-standing that I made in academic settings, and whose friendship and confidence in the ideas of this book have sustained me across the years of its writing, I owe a debt that far exceeds these acknowledgments: to Noah Heringman, for his love of nature, abiding friendship, and his kindness in always making me feel that I cannot bore him in talking about natural history; and to G. Gabrielle Starr – always Gabi to me – for her fierce loyalty and enduring friendship, and especially for her laser-sharp formulation of a key idea when I was most confused by this project.

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