

**The  
Victorian Studies Association  
Newsletter**



**Ontario, Canada.**

THE VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Edited for the Victorian Studies Association of Ontario

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## REPORTS OF CONFERENCES

Research Society for Victorian Periodicals

The annual meeting of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals was held at the Lamont Library and the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, on October 13-15, 1972. The Society's membership includes not only those whose research, whether literary or more generally historical centres upon the Victorian periodicals themselves, but also those--the great majority in fact--whose scholarly approach to the journals is that of the consumer seeking to exploit them as source materials. About seventy-five members were present, Canada and Britain as well as most parts of the United States being represented. Nine papers in three sessions focused on the following themes: a) the present and potential use of Victorian periodicals in teaching; b) the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals; c) architecture and aesthetics in the Victorian periodicals. An event of special interest at the second session was the appearance of the first copies of volume II of the Wellesley Index, published by the University of Toronto Press.

All of the papers delivered at this conference will be published in coming issues of the Victorian Periodicals Newsletter, a journal now entering its fifth year which has become indispensable to students of the Victorian Era. Subscriptions may be placed with Prof. James Ellis, English Department, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. (H.W. McReady, McMaster)

## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

Victorian Studies Association of Ontario

The Association's own annual conference will be held as usual at the Glendon College campus of York University (2275 Bayview Avenue, Toronto) on Saturday, April 7, 1973. The chief speakers will be Jack Simmons (Professor of History at the University of Leicester) on "The Impact of Railways on Victorian Society" and Michael Collie (Professor of English and Dean of Graduate Studies at York University) on "Pre-Freudian Psychology and the Naturalist Novel." We understand that the lecture on railways will be illustrated by slides and that Michael Collie will take most of his examples of the naturalist novel from the work of

George Gissing, especially The Nether World. The Conference will also provide the occasion for the Association's annual meeting, for an exhibition of nineteenth-century printing machinery, and possibly for another film or videotape showing.

Members of the Association automatically receive full details of the Conference. Anyone else interested in attending should write or telephone Professor Michael Laine, Department of English, Victoria College, University of Toronto, Toronto 5 (928-4028), as soon as possible.

#### James and John Stuart Mill Centenary Conference

Speakers at this conference, which will be held at the University of Toronto on May 3-5, 1973, include Edward Alexander, K.W. Britton, J.H. Burns, L.S. Feuer, Joseph Hamburger, Samuel Hollander, J.M. Robson, J.B. Scheenwind, and G.J. Stigler. Enquiries should be addressed to: Dean Frances G. Halpenny, Faculty of Library Science, University of Toronto, Toronto 5.

#### Northeast Region of the Modern Language Association

The meeting to be held in Boston on April 6-8, 1973, will include a Victorian Literature section and other sections of possible interest to members (e.g., "Victorian Studies: Humor and Satire in Popular Fiction," "Women in Literature," and "The English Novel"). For details write Arthur Kinney, English Department, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. 01002.

#### Anglo-Irish Conference

This annual conference, which has in the past been held at St. Michael's College, Toronto, will in 1973 be centred on McGill University, from March 21 to 26. Victorian items include a paper by Norman MacKenzie on "Hopkins, Yeats, and Dublin in the Eighties" and another by Kate O'Brien on "Imaginative Prose by the Irish, 1820-1970."

## MEETINGS, LECTURES, EXHIBITIONS

### Toronto Group

There were three meetings of the Toronto Group during the 1972-73 academic year. At the first of these, on 28 October, Norman Feltes was the host and Peter Allen and Polly Winsor considered Edmund Gosse's Father and Son, arguing respectively that its literary value was high and its scientific interest low. Although this apparently remained the consensus of the meeting as a whole, the father did find his defenders in the subsequent discussion and the son his (more numerous) detractors. On 30 November the group gathered at the Principal's Residence, Glendon College (at the invitation of Albert Tucker), to hear David Shaw and Jim Conacher talk about Tennyson's political poetry; there was again a lively discussion from which neither Tennyson's politics nor the chosen poems emerged unscathed. At Jack and Anne Robson's on 8 February John Unrau gave an illustrated lecture on Ruskin's views on contemporary architecture, and while the greater length of the paper left relatively little time for discussion it provided rich food for reflection and much stimulation to further reading.

## COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

### Toronto-York M.A. (Victorian Studies Option)

The basic pattern of the Option in 1973-74, its second year of operation, will remain unchanged (three courses plus the interdisciplinary seminar), but the seminar next year will focus on "Religion in Victorian Culture and Society" and be conducted by Norman Feltes of the York English Department and Richard J. Helmstadter of the Toronto History Department. Intending students should apply in the normal way for admission to the department of their major discipline at one of the two universities, mentioning their interest in the Option. Further information about the Option itself may be obtained by writing to Professor Feltes at 125 Atkinson College, York University, Downsview, Ontario, or to Professor Michael Millgate at F303 University College, University of Toronto, Toronto 5.

## NEWS OF MEMBERS

Robin Biswas (York) has recently published Arthur Hugh Clough: Towards a Reconsideration, with the Clarendon Press.

Maurice Elliott (York) gave a lecture, "A Conversation between Uncle William and the Greybeard Loon," at the 13th Yeats International Summer School in August 1972 and published an article, "Yeats and the Professors," in Ariel 3, iii (1972), 5-30.

Arline Golden (Buffalo) reports that her paper, "'The Game of Sentiment': Tradition and Innovation in Meredith's Modern Love," will be delivered at the Northeast Modern Language Association meeting in April 1973 and published in the Spring 1973 issue of ELH. She is currently working on other Victorian sonnet sequences, including Rossetti's House of Life and little-known sequences by Hardy and Hopkins.

Donald S. Hair (Western) has recently published with the University of Toronto Press, Browning's Experiments with Genre. For a review of this volume see p. 15.

Bruce Lundgren (Western) sends a footnote to the Middle-march Conference held at the University of Western Ontario in March of 1972: "Arrangements have now been made for the publication of the papers delivered at the Conference by Barbara Hardy, Gordon S. Haight, Ulrich C. Knoepflmacher, John Robson and Earle Sanborn. The volume will be published by the University of Toronto Press under the editorship of Earle Sanborn."

Royce MacGillivray (Waterloo) published an article, "Dracula: Bram Stoker's Spoiled Masterpiece," in the Winter 1972 issue of Queen's Quarterly.

Norman MacKenzie (Queen's) writes: "During December I spent some time in the National Library of Ireland working on the interconnections between Yeats and Hopkins and their contemporaries, Katherine Tynan and Fr. Matthew Fussell, S.J. The value of Victorian journals and newspapers in such work cannot be exaggerated. It was pleasant to meet Professor Bob O'Driscoll, and hear progress reports on his research into one of the leading Irish Victorian poets, Sir Samuel Ferguson."

Jane Millgate (Toronto) had an article, "History and Politics: Macaulay and Ireland," in the Winter 1973 issue of the University of Toronto Quarterly.

Michael Millgate (Toronto) is collaborating with Richard L. Purdy in a complete edition of Thomas Hardy's letters for the Clarendon Press and writing a biography of Hardy for the Oxford University Press.

David Shaw (Toronto) reports the appearance of his article, "Tennyson's 'Tithonus' and the Problem of Mortality," in the Spring 1973 issue of the Philological Quarterly.

Neville Thompson (McMaster) is currently writing a biography of the Duke of Wellington tentatively entitled Wellington After Waterloo: A Fourth Estate in the Empire.

#### REQUESTS, QUERIES, COMMUNICATIONS

##### The Picturesque

Marcia Allentuck (City College, City University of New York), the Senior Research Fellow in Landscape Architecture at Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard University, is completing a book on the Picturesque in Britain from 1750 to 1900. She would be most grateful to receive from readers of VSAN references to Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. (Address: 5 West 86 St., Apt. 12B, New York, NY 10024).

##### Thomas Hardy

Michael Millgate (University College, University of Toronto, Toronto 5) would be glad to hear of the whereabouts of Hardy letters in private hands or in small institutional collections; he would also be interested in any unpublished biographical references to Hardy which members may come across in the course of their own research.

##### The Preservation of Victorian Buildings in Canada

Mrs Edward Fawcett, Secretary of the Victorian Society and a leading authority on Victorian and Edwardian architecture and its conservation, will be visiting Canada again in October 1973 and is eager to lecture to Victorian groups or to give advice on the ways in which British experience in

campaigning and, especially, legislating for the preservation of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture might be applied to the Canadian situation. Additional information may be obtained from the Editor of the Newsletter at Victoria College, University of Toronto, but members might prefer to write directly to Mrs Fawcett at The Victorian Society, 29 Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2AS.

#### THESES ON VICTORIAN SUBJECTS

##### Toronto: Recently Completed Phil.M. Theses

Forbes, G.H. On Nature and the World, Sons and Lovers, and Related Fictions in Some of Arnold's Poems. 1971.

Kays, N.L. George Meredith on the Art of Fiction. 1971.

##### Toronto: Recently Completed Ph.D. Theses

Fothergill, N.A. English Diary-Writing: Critical Approaches to the Genre. 1972

Hayes, William A. The Background and Passage of the Third Reform Act. 1972.

Nicholson, Francis, Jr. The Politics of English Metropolitan Reform: The Background to the Establishment of the London County Council, 1876-89. 1972.

Noel-Bentley, P.C. Religious Symbolism in the Poetry of James Thomson (B.V.). 1972.

Phillips, Paul T. The Sectarian Spirit: A Study of Sectarianism, Society and Politics in the North and West of England, 1832-1970. 1971.

Smith, David F. Sir George Grey at the Mid-Victorian Home Office. 1972.

Sturgis, James L. British Parliamentary Radicalism, 1846-1852. 1972.



## VICTORIAN NOTES

"Maurice's Subscription No Bondage"

by  
Peter Allen

Subscription No Bondage (1835) is one of the more curious productions of that most curious Victorian prophet--Frederick Denison Maurice, whose reasoning often baffled his followers and simply infuriated others. In writing this pamphlet Maurice apparently hoped to act as a mediator, at a time when conservative dons at both universities, offended by the liberal notion of a pluralistic society, were much concerned to protect their traditional rights and especially the right to demand that undergraduates subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles on matriculation (at Oxford) or graduation (at Cambridge). At Oxford the Tractarians had begun their well-publicised attack on the creeping liberalism of the age. At Cambridge, just the year before, Connop Thirlwall had lost his job and fellowship for having said in print that subscription was unnecessary, that compulsory chapel attendance did not edify the undergraduates, and that the lectures of the Regius Professor of Divinity were, as regards Christian instruction, "perfectly harmless." Moreover the issue had great significance for Maurice himself. As a Cambridge undergraduate his reluctance to subscribe had cost him his LL.B. and the likelihood of a fellowship. But he later changed his mind and went up to Oxford, where he not only subscribed but was baptised as an Anglican and persuaded to become a clergyman. Subscription No Bondage was his first direct statement of faith since his days as the acknowledged leader of a predominately liberal, not especially orthodox group--the Cambridge Apostles--and one suspects a need to justify his new position to this group and to such related figures as Thirlwall (never an Apostle himself, though often wrongly called one).

Whatever its personal meaning, the pamphlet must first be judged in terms of the precise issue it tries to face, that is, whether the national universities of England should be opened to Dissenters, Roman Catholics, Jews and men of no religion at all. Maurice's intention was to take an independent, conciliatory stand, but in effect he

supports the liberals, without immediately appearing to do so. He claims that persons of any or no religion may subscribe on entering the universities, for they merely assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles as the "conditions of thought" imposed on them by the fact that their teachers believe what is expressed in the Articles. Since anyone wishing such an education may subscribe to the Articles in this sense, subscription is plainly no bondage.

The reaction of Maurice's Apostolic friends to this extraordinary sidestep was mixed. Subscription No Bondage arrived at James Spedding's home while he was writing to J.W. Blakesley; he stopped to read it and then resumed in some agitation:

If I write incoherently, excuse me--and attribute it to the "conditions of thought" which have been "imposed" on me. My dear Blakesley, what is to be done? This is a stranger theory than any thing in Greek. If the 39 Articles would clear up this mystery too--if they would explain the coexistence in the same mind of these two Principles--the Principle of Bad Logic and of Good Logic--or reconcile them into harmony with each other and with the original laws of human thought--I would not only consent to be taught by them as conditions of thought--I would even subscribe them. What do other people say? Is there anybody that is not struck dumb? Say and what do the Oxford Dons say? Will they accept their champion? Pray God they may, that the measure of their follies may be full.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, it does not appear that Newman and Pusey, although they read the pamphlet in proof, were much bothered by the questionable nature of Maurice's support. But the Apostles took it very seriously. Blakesley tried to defend the pamphlet and wrote about it to another Apostle, W.H. Thompson, who in turn asked Spedding for a further, more considered opinion. "Surely it is a production about w<sup>h</sup> there can be only one opinion," rejoined Spedding; "or, to speak more correctly, about w<sup>h</sup> there must be exactly two: one entertained by the author himself, the other by all his readers without exception. Mine is, that it meets nobody, that it proves nothing, and, generally, that it is beside itself."<sup>2</sup> Spedding professed himself "lost & utterly bewildered" to know what Maurice could be thinking of. If the Thirty-Nine Articles are only "a prospectus of

the theological opinions maintained and recommended by the University," then the "simplest & best way would be to present every student at Matriculation with a copy of the 39, headed with a notice that such were the theological opinions of his future teachers--and therefore, that, whatever he might think of the opinions, he must not after such fair warning, quarrel with tutors and lecturers for holding & teaching them." "If there must be a ceremony," Spedding concluded reflectively, "let him [the student] kiss a rod (by way of type) or any thing else that might happen to be turned towards him."

But Spedding's devastating attack on Maurice's argument ends with an important qualification: "I ought by the by to add that, in spite of my perplexity touching his intellectual organization, my reverence for the earnestness & simplicity of Maurice's character is increased rather than diminished by 'Sub. no Bon.'" Spedding's sympathy for the author of the pamphlet seems to me as well founded as his contempt for its argument. However inadequate as an answer to a specific social problem, Subscription No Bondage is a most important document in recording the nature of the uneasy reconciliation Maurice had achieved with the established order of his time. Towards the end of his life, Maurice claimed that, despite its practical ineffectiveness, "no book which I have written expresses more strongly what then were, and what still are, my deepest convictions."<sup>3</sup> The subject of Maurice's conversion from critical outsider to defender of the faith is too complex even for mere summary here, but the psychological steps leading to Subscription No Bondage may perhaps be guessed at from an admission he made shortly after his baptism as a member of the Church of England: ". . . I have been driven to ask myself what I am myself, and I find that all the mischiefs I discovered in others and in the age were really rioting in myself. Of all spirits, I believe the spirit of judging is the worst, and it has had the rule of me I cannot tell you how dreadfully and how long."<sup>4</sup>

University College  
University of Toronto

## NOTES

1. Spedding to Blakesley, 10 June 1835, quoted by kind permission of Mrs C.G. Chenevix-Trench.
2. Spedding to Thompson, 15 June 1835, quoted by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.
3. Life of Maurice, rev. edn., I, 174.
4. Ibid., I, 129.

## Thackeray and the Firm of Bradbury and Evans

by

Peter L. Shillingsbury

Thackeray's connection with Bradbury and Evans began, of course, with his contributions to Punch in 1842 and included occasional pieces in such Punch Office publications as George Cruikshank's Table-Book (1845) and Punch's Pocket Book for 1847. But the first number of Vanity Fair, published on January 1, 1847, was the first Thackeray title published separately by Bradbury and Evans, and it marked the beginning of the eighteen and a half years during which they were Thackeray's primary publishers. The heyday of this relationship ended in 1859 with the financial failure of The Virginians<sup>1</sup> and that wooing away of Thackeray's talents by George Smith (of the firm of Smith, Elder) which bore fruit in the success of the Cornhill Magazine. But Bradbury and Evans continued to exercise publication rights in the majority of Thackeray's work until July 1865, when Smith, Elder and Co. purchased the unsold stock, stereotyped plates, and copyrights.<sup>2</sup>

Thackeray's business association with Bradbury and Evans can be detailed rather fully because the firm's account books are still extant, and while one cannot always depend upon the accuracy of a particular figure--the various records seem incomplete and do not always agree on amounts, especially in accounting for the distribution of copies printed--the archive does provide what

is in the main a faithful picture of the relationship between author and publisher. Sales figures provide a clue to the circulation of Thackeray's works; the size and number of printings suggest the development or decline in the popularity of individual titles; a clearer view is gained of the financial failure of The Virginians; and a previously unknown and still undistinguished edition of one of his books is revealed.

Although Vanity Fair (1847-48) earned Thackeray less money than any of his other parts-issued novels (£3006/3/3 compared with £3207/18/1 for Pendennis and £4561/3/9 for The Newcomes),<sup>3</sup> it was his most widely circulated book. Of the two editions published by Bradbury and Evans, 32,500 copies were printed and only 931 of these remained in stock in June 1865. Most of the sales were of the cheap edition which was printed eleven times to produce 22,000 copies. Aside from the fact that Thackeray received only £60 per number as initial payments for Vanity Fair, production costs kept it from earning much on the profit-sharing system, and although the total number of copies of the first edition (10,500) exceeded that for Pendennis (9,500), it required twice as many printings to reach that figure. The obvious reason for this was that Vanity Fair was written by a relatively unknown author for whom no publisher would be likely to risk large printings; whereas Pendennis (1848-50) was written by the author of Vanity Fair--a fact which had a considerable bearing on the size of the initial printings (9,000 per number compared to an average of 4,500 per number for Vanity Fair).

After Vanity Fair Thackeray's most purchased books were Pendennis and The Newcomes (20,000 copies printed of each with only 500 copies of The Newcomes and 423 of Pendennis left in stock in 1865). For both publisher and author The Newcomes (1854-55) was a bigger money-maker than Pendennis because it sold more copies in the expensive first edition and because production costs were slightly lower (larger and fewer reprints); for Thackeray himself The Newcomes had the additional advantage of initial payments £50 per number higher than those for Pendennis. The Book of Snobs also had a large circulation. In separate editions (1848, and as an "off-print" of Miscellanies I in 1855) the Snobs circulated 11,750 copies. When this figure is added to the 10,000-copy printing of the first volume of Miscellanies which contained it, it appears that the Snobs may have reached a higher circulation

figure than Pendennis. However, the records do not clearly indicate how many copies of each volume of the four volume Miscellanies comprise the total of 1,600 copies left in stock or unaccounted for in 1865.

Though The Virginians (1857-59) was a financial failure for Bradbury and Evans, it was Thackeray's greatest financial success while with that firm. The publishers agreed to give Thackeray £250 per number and, according to the records, paid it regularly. Thus, though no profit-sharing funds accrued from the sale of the first edition, it netted the author £6000 while the publishers were still showing a deficit of £3257/2/3 in 1865. Two reasons for the publishers' predicament emerge from the records. First, they grossly overestimated the sale of the book: of the first number, 20,000 copies were printed; this was immediately reduced to 16,000 copies each of numbers 2 and 3, but reductions continued until, finally, only 13,000 copies each were printed of numbers 18-24; even this was too many, for in 1865 there were still 16,000 numbers left in stock. Secondly, they agreed to pay more for the novel than Thackeray ever earned from a single title during the entire period of their connection with him. The Newcomes (1853-55), the second highest money-maker for Thackeray, had netted him only £4561/3/9 by 1865, but it was a far more satisfactory bargain for the publishers, showing a profit within a year of its completion in July 1855.

The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond (circulation about 15,000) almost equalled the sales of The Virginians (about 15,500), but both lagged behind the Ballads, a sleeper of which 18,000 copies were printed (8,000 in a separate edition requiring 9 printings and 10,000 as part of the first volume of Miscellanies). The History of Samuel Titmarsh is, however, the subject of the most startling bibliographical information in the publisher's records. The first edition of this book, dated 1849, is in fact two editions. No bibliographer has noted this, though variant bindings are known. The records show that a printing of 2,000 copies of the book in January 1849 was immediately exhausted and that an entire resetting of type was required for the second edition printed the following month. The second edition did not fare as well as the first, and of 2,000 copies printed 1,035 remained in stock in 1865. Ironically, stereotyped plates were cast of the second edition but were never required. The 3,000 copy "off-print" edition from Miscellanies IV (1857) sold all but 469 copies.

The relationship between author and publisher was for the most part a pleasant and fruitful one. The records show the publisher always increasing the remuneration of the successful author: initial payments for parts-issued novels climbed rapidly from £60 per number for Vanity Fair to £100 for Pendennis, £150 for The Newcomes and finally to the disastrous £250 for The Virginians. Likewise, in profits, Thackeray's share, usually a half, became two-thirds for the Miscellanies (1855-57). To Charles Lever he commented in June 1859, "I leave them [Bradbury and Evans] (we remain perfect good friends) and go over to Smith & Elder. . . . [I]ndeed I have had every reason to be satisfied with both firms."<sup>4</sup> But Thackeray's profitable dealings with George Smith (£1200 initial payment for Henry Esmond, 1852)<sup>5</sup> and the fabulous offers made him by the firm of Smith, Elder to edit the Cornhill Magazine<sup>6</sup> doubtless made him eager to part company with a publisher who was losing money on his latest book.

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#### NOTES

1. Ms. records of the Bradbury and Evans Company. Acknowledgement is gratefully made to Bradbury, Agnew, Ltd. for permission to use the Bradbury and Evans records housed in the Punch Offices.
2. [Leonard Huxley], The House of Smith, Elder (London, 1923) and ms. records of the Smith, Elder Company. Thanks are due to John Murray (Publishers) Ltd. for permission to use the Smith, Elder records.
3. Amounts earned by particular titles include all printings and editions by Bradbury and Evans until 1865.
4. Gordon Ray, ed., The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946) IV, p. 144.
5. Spencer L. Eddy, Jr., The Founding of the 'Cornhill Magazine' (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State Univ. Monograph, 19, 1970), p. 5.
6. See Letters, IV, p. 130.

## BOOK REVIEW

Donald S. Hair, Browning's Experiments with Genre (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 204 pp.

This recent study makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Browning's continuous experiments in a great variety of poetic kinds. Professor Hair is a skilled workman; when his generic postulates combine with a sense of the poet's language and form, he is unusually sensitive to what Browning is doing.

The treatment of Paracelsus in the first chapter is one of the best I know. Hair intelligently applies Browning's own comments about the experimental qualities of the poem, and convincingly associates the preface to Paracelsus with Taylor's preface to Philip Van Artevelde. The main contribution of the section on Sordello is an explanation of Browning's curious choice of a narrative mode, given the poet's interest in "the development of a soul." If the Sordello Hair presents is finally alien to the poem most readers have known and struggled with, it is partly because he decides not to grapple with the language, surely one of the poem's most tortuous and difficult elements.

In a chapter on the plays, Hair defends the lack of plausibility in A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, and he skillfully relates the use of fantasy in Luria to Browning's moral neutrality. The third chapter is devoted to the shorter poems of Browning's middle period. The problem here is to reach a definition of romance, lyric, and dramatic monologue that is precise enough to be of heuristic value and yet not so rigid as to put the critic in a straitjacket. The definition of romance, for example, is more successful than the definitions of the other genres, simply because it is more flexibly precise. Hair's main concern with such fascinating pieces as "My Last Duchess," "The Last Ride Together," and even to some extent "Saul," is classification. He is usually more rewarding when he abandons the role of critical taxonomist and analyzes poems like "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" in their own terms. One of the best sections (pp. 90-100), apparently indebted to Frye's discrimination among specific thematic forms in his "Theory of Genres" (Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 293-303), views Dramatic Lyrics as a cycle that moves from dream vision,



through community songs, elegy and epitaph, back through poems of expanded vision to the starting point. The virtue of the method is that it allows Hair to fit widely divergent lyrics into a meaningful pattern.

In a final chapter, devoted entirely to The Ring and the Book, Hair shows how Browning combines narrative, dramatic, and lyric genres in each monologue. The progression of satire, comedy or romance, and a third less definable mode, throughout the three central triads of The Ring, introduces another design. Very seldom do the generic distinctions become a Procrustean bed into which the author has to force his evidence. Professor Hair generally applies the patterns with tact and flexibility; one commends the candor with which he concedes that a section which, according to his thesis, should be "lyric," does not appear to be (p. 178). Such candor makes his case all the stronger, for he is then able to show that "lyric elements" are present after all in Fra Celestino's sermon.

The generic critic who displays the proper humility toward the intangibles and imponderables of Browning's most successful poems, in which there is always something unknowable, will resist, like Professor Hair, the rigidities of critical taxonomy. But he will succeed only to the extent that he follows Hair's lead; only to the extent that he can fit together the particulars of a poem like The Ring and the Book, which accepts and celebrates confusion, and the frames of reference implied by such a poem, which provide a lucid commentary on its own disorder.

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