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## Will Drew and Phil Crewe & Frank Fane: A Swinburne Enigma

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WILL DREW AND PHIL CREWE & FRANK FANE:  
A SWINBURNE ENIGMA

Few people perhaps noticed a tentative entry by Cecil Y. Lang in his Swinburne entry in volume 3 of the 1969 *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, an item that had escaped earlier bibliographers: 'Will Drew and Phil Crewe & Frank Fane [1962?] priv prtd.'. In the 1999 *CBEL*, volume 4, I was more precise: '[Ed. J. S. Mayfield, Bethesda MD: 1962]. (priv ptd)'. Yet this brochure might mystify anyone, for it looks to date from much earlier than 1962. The Pierpont Morgan Library catalogues its copy as '18—', and others may have assumed an equally early date. The true story behind the pamphlet manifests the impish wit of two Swinburne enthusiasts, Lang and John S. Mayfield, and their bemusement at all the forgeries and manufactured rarities that attach to Swinburne (Mayfield in the latter category guilty and never repentant).

John Mayfield told me the whole story: that he and Lang collaborated to produce this brochure in 1962 as a curiosity that they were each to slip on to booksellers' shelves as they could. They wanted, John told me, to see how it was discovered, described, and accounted for (I mention this briefly in my *Uncollected Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 3 vols [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005], I, 15–16n.). Central to the pranksters' plans were the obfuscations of another pair infamous in Swinburne studies, Thomas James Wise and H. Buxton Forman. Mayfield and Lang too set out to print something that seemed older than it was. They printed the title on the cover, with its vaguely Victorian colour of dullish green, in a type reminiscent of an earlier era and with an old-fashioned double box of a thick and a thin line. Below is their quaintly worded attribution, 'By a Great English Literary Figure'.

Echoes from Wise's limited printings reverberate from the title-page itself. Below the title and attribution, repeated from the cover, is another clue: 'Now First Printed from the Original Manuscripts for Private Circulation among the Friends of J. A. S. and W. M. H.'. The intimations of antiquity continue in the introduction by 'W. M. H.', headed 'By Way of Explanation.'. Here 'W. M. H.' describes how 'not long ago', he acquired 'a mass of original manuscripts' of 'a great English literary figure, then only recently deceased'. The implied date is,

perhaps, 1910, just when many manuscripts were coming from Swinburne's estate into the hands of Wise, one of whose customers was J. Alexander Symington, the bookseller and later librarian to Lord Brotherton. 'W. M. H.' duly mentions the 'excellent library of rare books and valuable manuscripts' formed by 'J.A.S.' (Rutgers University bought Symington's collection).

The initials 'W. M. H.' suggest Walter M. Hill, a bookseller in Chicago who in July 1910 circulated a catalogue offering 103 manuscripts, *List of the Original Manuscripts of A. C. Swinburne* (Thomas James Wise, *A Swinburne Library* [London: Printed for Private Circulation Only, 1925], pp. 279-80). 'W. M. H.' slyly never names Swinburne, but suggests that collectors of this author may be 'connoisseurs of the bizarre' and relates the name 'Fane' to 'several of the poet's easily identified pieces of this nature' in *The Whippingham Papers* (1888). The delicacy seems Victorian. Identifying Swinburne as the author depends not wholly on interpreting these obscure hints, but also, unexpectedly, on recognizing his distinctive hand, for at the end of 'Will Drew and Phil Crewe' are four lines in facsimile (the holographs, from Mayfield's collection, are now at Syracuse University).

Of the four copies of *Will Drew and Phil Crewe & Frank Fane* that I can locate, three come directly from Mayfield or Lang, though one has a mysterious bookplate. One copy was given to me by John Mayfield in 1975. Two copies owned by Jerome McGann came to him from Cecil Lang, one in the summer of 1964, and the other after Lang's death. McGann's second copy has a bookplate in it, 'Fred R. Ripley'. McGann observed to me that the name 'Ripley' hints at 'Ripley's "Believe it or Not"'. Neither of us knows who 'Fred R. Ripley' is or how he might have acquired a copy of the pamphlet, nor why it returned to Lang's collection (if it ever left). I think the bookplate false, part of the hoax.

The Morgan copy at first glance appears to have passed through a bookseller's hands. Part of Gordon N. Ray's bequest to the Morgan in 1987, it has inside the back cover a clipping for an item 149, £10 10s., with, immediately at the bottom of the page, 'W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., Cambridge' followed by the word 'Catalogue'. When Inge DuPont, at the Morgan, described the copy as including this clipping, I thought it proved that Mayfield and Lang had implemented their plan. Neither Mark Samuels Lasner, T. A. J. Burnett, nor I had ever seen a copy for sale, but Ray seemed to have acquired *Will Drew and Phil Crewe & Frank Fane* in the trade.

I hesitated, however, for the description of the item could not be read, having, Ms. DuPont told me, been obliterated by a tearing or abrading of the paper. All that could be read was the initial letter of a title or date and the description 'New copy'. Thinking that both Mayfield and Lang knew Ray, I could not still my suspicion that they (or he) might have outfitted this copy to further the game. David J. Holmes, and James Green helped me discover a run of Heffer catalogues at the Temple University Libraries. The Head of Special Collections there, Thomas M. Whitehead, generously gave of his and his staff's time to work through five boxes of catalogues, seeking an item 149 at the bottom of a page and priced at £10 10s.

They succeeded. In a 1962 catalogue, no. 739 (the number erased on Morgan clipping), they found the description that had been rubbed out - 'W. G. Constable *Canaletto: Giovanni Antonio Canal, 1697-1768*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962'. The match is perfect. I can even make out what was before obscure, '17', the first part of Canaletto's death date, as printed in the catalogue.

Other copies of *Will Drew and Phil Crewe & Frank Fane* probably exist in other collections. Some may well hint in slightly ambiguous terms at a provenance or sales history.

It was a good joke.