

REVIEWS

The Victorian Serial by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund. Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1991. Pp. 354 + 16 illustrations. \$42.50 (cloth). ISBN 0-8139-1314-4.

This is a formidable study, its detailed scholarship and range showing triumphantly the possibilities of collaborative work in the monograph form which, unlike the "edition" or "letters," is most often a test of the virtuoso capacity of the individual author. This process of opening out the monograph is extended to the serial, whereby the authors' reading of Victorian fiction and poetry echoes and represents that of the early readers, whose interrupted periodic readings of serial texts are recorded in contemporary reviews. The whole of *The Victorian Serial* has an exploratory and provisional posture which involves its readers, just as the serial engaged Victorian readers. The book is part of, and a real contribution to, the history of reading.

Grounded in English as it is traditionally taught in the classroom, the definition of the serial derives from literature, rather than from popular literature, cultural or media studies, communications, bibliography or publishing history. All or any of these would include consideration of the press, on which this study heavily relies and in which the subject, even as defined, is implicated. One aim of the book is the dissemination of the notion that Victorian texts may be taught serially in our own classrooms. At the same time, it is just this desirable link of the book with teaching, in origin and outcome, that determines and overdetermines the way the subject is defined. The sixteen texts considered here are all mainstream and "literary," not only with respect to authors — Dickens (*Dombey and Son* and *A Tale of Two Cities*), Thackeray (*The Newcomes*), Trollope (*The Prime Minister* and *The Way We Live Now*), Meredith (*Diana of the Crossways*), George Eliot (*Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*), Hardy (*Hearts Insurgent* [later *Jude*] and *The Dynasts*), Conrad (*Lord Jim*), Patmore ("Angel in the House"), Morris (*The Earthly Paradise* and "Pilgrims of Hope"), Robert Browning (*Ring and the Book*), and Tennyson (*Idylls*

of the King) — but also with respect to genres. Sustained analysis is confined to serialized poetry and fiction, and it reproduces a hegemonic definition of literature which excludes non-fictional prose. Critical writing by well-known (serial) authors such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Pater, as well as that by authors still outside most literature courses (such as Leslie Stephen), is confined to the background, if it appears at all. Therefore, the book's contribution is to the reading of canonical texts: to root them in material culture (physically in parts, magazines, or volumes, mostly wedged between advertising); and to offer us an opportunity to simulate the reading process of their first readers. This perspective yields fresh meanings first hand, liberating us somewhat from dependence on editor's notes.

Initially (2) we are offered an apparently pluralist and expansive definition of the serial — "a specific literary form of a continuing story over an extended time with enforced interruptions;" "a body of work that appeared in the nineteenth century" and "a set of values bound up in the form and its traditions." The "body of work" and "the form" which figure in the second and third characteristics are governed by the "literary" and "story" that appear in the first. Non-fictional prose simply does not appear at all, except in the unproblematized but pervasive quotation of "reviews" of serial parts throughout the book. Reviews are consigned to periodicals similarly treated as transparent sources. That is, they are conscientiously named in full in the main text (and not in the notes), but they are not on the whole glossed themselves or contextualized. Reviews from a great variety of (mostly London weekly) periodicals and newspapers are loosely juxtaposed, with *Bell's Weekly*, the *Guardian*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Spectator*, and the *Sunday Times* presented without distinguishing their readers, politics, and cultural bases. An exception is the *Commonweal*, whose socialist character and publishing history are indicated. The task of setting Morris's serial poem in the context of the other contents of the periodical numbers in which it appeared is not attempted in this book which, in general,