

Thomas James Wise and the Trial Book Fallacy by Roger C. Lewis. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995. xxiii, 244 pp. \$74.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-85928-036-6.

Sixty years after the publication of John Carter and Graham Pollard's groundbreaking work, *An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth Century Pamphlets* (1934), the tangled web of forgeries, piracies, and other deceptions woven by T.J. Wise and H. Buxton Forman continues to be unravelled by scholars. Lewis's book is unique in the large body of Wise-Forman literature in that it concerns a previously neglected genre of fake, the "trial book," a term invented by Wise to describe what was purported to be a preliminary printing of the first edition prepared for the author. In reality, these trial books were proofsheets, often with authorial corrections, that were acquired, bound, and falsely dated by Wise and Forman. While not in the same criminal class as the outright forgeries, the trial books have nevertheless complicated and distorted the publishing histories of some of the major literary works of the nineteenth century. Like the forgeries, they devalued the genuine first editions in the volatile post-World War I book market. The nefarious activities of Wise and Forman left nineteenth-century bibliography laden with snares for the unwary, and Lewis demonstrates that the trial books continue to be sources of confusion even in recent scholarly studies.

Wise's ability to promote false editions and his reputation as a bibliographer were inextricably intertwined. In the epilogue to the second edition of *An Enquiry* (1983) Carter and Pollard remind the reader that "in 1934 Wise was, and had been for thirty years, the most influential book collector, and in his wide field the most powerful and prolific bibliographical pundit in the English-speaking world" (19). Wise's reputation owed much to his "discovery" of "first editions" of famous nineteenth-century poems and other short works that predated the previously established firsts. He then legitimized these editions by including them in his bibliographies of their authors and in the sumptuous catalogue of his own Ashley Library. His growing fame lent credibility to his finds and persuaded other collectors, most notably the American John Henry Wrenn, to invest what were then significant sums in the bogus works that he sold them. The trial books, as Lewis points out, were the "ultimate form" of Wise's "bibliographic fantasy" that "always, prior to the alleged first edition, there may be an earlier, rarer and more valuable state of the text" (xvi).

Wise and Forman apparently turned to the fabrication of the trial books around the turn of the century, after they ceased manufacturing the actual forgeries. The authors that they exploited in this manner habitually had proofs of works in progress printed both for their own use and to distribute to others for comments. Acquiring such proofs was not difficult, and Wise and Forman could then manipulate the publishing histories of the works involved, usually by distorting the facts after the authors' deaths. Lewis discusses works by Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw, Alfred and Frederick Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Robert Louis