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SIR THOMAS BROWNE · ANGELL

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SIR THOMAS BROWNE IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

By

Richard C. Angell

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

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1961

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Stuart A. Northrop
DEAN

DATE May 23, 1962

TWO CENTURIES OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE

Richard C. Angell

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PART I

SIR THOMAS BROWNE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

From his own day to ours, the works of Sir Thomas Browne were never more popular than in the nineteenth century. His influence was great on the English Romantics and Victorians alike, and even more profound on the American Transcendentalists. He did not fare as well in the eighteenth century. One reason was the preoccupation of his literary executor, Bishop Tennison, who became Archbishop of Canterbury and probably had little time for literary chores; another was that some of Browne's literary remains fell into the hands of the notorious publisher Edmund Curll, who published hastily and without selection; but perhaps the compelling reason for Browne's eclipse was the final triumph of the lucid style promoted by the Royal Society, represented by the prose of Dryden and Addison. Their style was expository and conversational, appropriate to the age of enlightenment; Browne's was dark, and, by comparison, orotund, thriving on mysteries.

It was perhaps inevitable that there should be a revival of interest in Sir Thomas Browne in the nineteenth century. Always paradoxical, frequently mysterious and exotic, Browne was now, in addition, remote enough in time to be particularly appealing to the romantic soul.

Browne's influence in the century began quietly enough. His work was publicly unnoticed umtil mentioned by Lamb in an Elia essay in 1821. It was a decade later that a nineteen-year-old Oxford sophomore, Thomas Chapman, brought out the first new English edition of Religio Medici in nearly a century,[1] an edition closely followed by the first in America published by Hilliard & Brown, Boston.

---

[1]The last previous English edition was that of Torbuck (London, 1738). A Scotch edition was published in Edinburgh in 1754. W. A. Greenhill, ed., "Bibliography," Religio Medici, Letter to a Friend, and Christian Morals, by Sir Thomas Browne (London, 1881).

CHAPTER II

BROWNE IN ENGLAND

Charles Lamb

Lamb, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and De Quincey all "discovered" Sir Thomas about the same time. Browne became a pet and a vogue. Lamb claimed to be the original discoverer and of this group of celebrities was certainly the most loyal to Browne, his most vociferous champion, and the most affected by him. Coleridge disputed the claim, but as the best of Coleridge on Browne appeared only in the margin of Lamb's Browne,[1] perhaps the claim of Elia may be allowed.

Certainly Lamb's works contain numerous references to Browne and quotations from his books, a number of them in Elia and The Last Essays of Elia. For example, in "The Old and New

---

[1] "Reader, if haply thou art blessed with a moderate collection, be shy of showing it; or if thy heart overfloweth to lend them, lend thy books; but let it be to such a one as S.T.C. --he will return them (generally anticipating the time appointed) with usury; enriched with annotations, tripling their value. I have had experience. Many are these precious MSS. of his--- (in matter oftentimes, and almost in quantity not unfrequently, vying with the originals)---in no very clerkly hand---legible in my Daniel; in the old Burton; in Sir Thomas Browne; and those abstruser cogitations of the Greville, now, alas! wandering in Pagan lands---I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S.T.C." The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1903-05), II, 26-27. Lamb quotations which follow are from this volume of this edition. Page numbers are in parentheses immediately followihg quotations.

Schoolmaster," Lamb freely quotes Urrn Burial: "Had he asked of me, what songs the Sirens sang, or wwhat name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, I mnight, with Sir Thomas Browne, have hazarded a 'wide solution.'"(50))

"Imperfect Sympathies" takes as a text a quotation from the Religio Medici which asserts Brownne's tolerance toward foreigners.[2] Lamb disapproves of thhis stand.

> That the author of the Religio Medici, mounted upon the airy sttilts of abstraction, conversant about national and conjectural essences; in whose categories of Being the possible tcook the upper hand of the actual; shoould have overlooked the impertinent indivi ddualities of such poor concretions as manhkind, is not much to be admired. (58)

In "My Relations" the direct quotation in the first paragraph is from Christian Morals.[3] In "Witches and Other Night Fears," Lamb, though he does not mentttion Browne, clearly defends his position on a very unpopular poinnt.

---

[2]"Those national repugnancies do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the French, Italian, Spaniard, or Dutch." Religio Medici and Other Writtings, ed. F. L. Huntley (New York: Everyman's, 1951), p. 67.. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent quotations from Browne reffer to this edition with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[3]"In such a compass of time, a man may have a close apprehension of what it is to be forggotten, where he hath lived to find none who could remember his ffather, or scarcely the friends of his youth, and may sensiblly see what a face in no long time OBLIVION will look upon himmself." This is a close paraphrase rather than an exact quotaation from Browne (p. 310) in Lamb (p. 70).

> Once assumed, I see no reason for disbelieving one attested story of this nature more than another on the score of absurdity. There is no law to judge of the lawless, or canon by which a dream may be criticised.
>
> I have sometimes thought I could not have existed in the days of received witchcraft; that I could not have slept in a village where one of those reputed hags dwelt. Our ancestors were bolder or more obtuse. (65)

Again in The Last Essays of Elia, Lamb soberly parodies the style and format of Browne's Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Vulgar Errors in a piece entitled "Popular Fallacies," in which he does away with his own set of old wives' tales including, "That a Bull Is Always a Coward," "That Ill-gotten Gain Never Prospers," "That a Man Must Not Laugh at His Own Jest," "That Enough Is as Good as a Feast," and "That Handsome Is as Handsome Does." (252-272)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Louis I. Bredvold believes that "The contribution of Coleridge, in spite of a definite theoretical bias and a conception of English literary history different from anything now current, remains to this day one of the most important."[4] Bredvold feels that there is something to be said for a

---

[4] "Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century," Introductory Essay in Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, edited by Roberta Florence Brinkley (Durham, North Carolina, 1955), p. xxi. Quotations from Coleridge which follow are from this edition with pages indicated in parentheses. The "Complete" Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, edited by Professor Shedd (New York, 1854, 1856) does not contain most of the margimalia quoted here.

philosophical approach to literary criticism (stemming from the Cambridge Platonists more than from Kant) as opposed to the modern psychological approach. Most of Coleridge's comments on Browne are marginalia, and while appreciative, unphilosophical.

> Sir Kenelm Digby's Observations were those of a pedant....He ought to have considered Religio Medici in a dramatic and not in a metaphysical view....The Religio Medici is a fine portrait of a handsome man in his best Cloathes...it is a most delicious book. [Of Browne's character, Coleridge writes] A fine mixture of humorist, genius, and pedant. A library was a living world to him and every book a man, absolute flesh and blood! And the gravity with which he records contradictory opinions is exquisite. (438-39)

Where poor Browne had been attacked for praying for the dead, by Ross and others in his own time, and by Digby for believing that God would release damned souls from torture, Coleridge is shocked that Sir Thomas should offer any apology for his position.[5] He writes in the margin: "To call that opinion an error! Merciful God! How thy creatures blaspheme Thee!" (440) Coleridge corrects some of Browne's word coinages. Stenography, he explains, means "shorthand" (440); Idio-syncrasie means "peculiar temperament" (443).

---

[5]"I must confess my greener studies have been polluted with two or three [errors]....The second was...that God would not persist in his vengeance for ever, but after a definite time of His wrath, He would release the damned Souls from torture.... A third there is...and that is, the Prayer for the Dead; whereunto I was inclined from some charitable inducements." Religio Medici (6-8).

Prompted by Sir Thomas Browne's "I never yet cast a true affection on a woman" (76), Coleridge inserts a page note in the Religio Medici:

> We can not love a Friend as a Woman, but we can love a Woman as a Friend. Friendship satisfies the highest part of our nature; but a wife who is capable of friendship, satisfies all. (444)

Thomas Browne wrote, "I thank God for all my happy dreams" (86); Coleridge's comment is, "I am quite different, for all or almost all the painful and fearful thoughts I know, are in my Dreams!"(446); but in spite of these differences, Coleridge can say at the end of the Religio Medici:

> This book paints certain parts of my moral and intellectual being, (the best parts, no doubt), better than any other book I have ever met with;--and the style is throughout delicious. (447)

Reacting with greater seriousness to the sensational views on procreation held by Browne than did James Howell[6] in the seventeenth century, Coleridge wrote, "I could not be content that we procreate like trees" (445). To Coleridge, the act of love is "but a language and conversation of united souls" (445).

---

[6]"But to pass from these moth-eaten philosophers to a modern physician of our own, it was a most unmanly thing in him, while he displays his own religion to wish that there were a way to propagate the world otherwise than by conjunction with women (and Paracelsus undertakes to show him the way), whereby he seems to repine (Though I understand he was wived a little after) at the honorable degree of marriage, which I hold to be the prime link of human society, the chiefest happiness of mortals, and wherein heaven hath a special hand." "Letter LX to Tho. Young Esq., 28 April 1645," Epistolae Ho-Elianae Boston & New York, 1907), II, 284-85.

In a letter to his friend Sara Hutchinson, Coleridge enumerates some of Browne's faults.

> [Browne is] too often big, stiff, and hyperlatinistic...[but] he has brains in his head, which is all the more interesting for a little twist in the brains. [Browne has the egotism of Montaigne but talks of himself with the license of one who loves others as himself.] His own thoughts and feelings...with a perfectly graceful and interesting ease...he puts them too into his Museum & Cabinet of Rarities. (447-448)

Coleridge, in spite of finding the style of the Religio Medici "delicious," did not admit in his more formal public utterances that Browne was a stylist. To Coleridge, the great prose stylists of the period[7] were Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, and Sir Francis Walsingham.[8] But, as reported in the Tatler of May 23, 1831, "Mr. Coleridge 'confessed' [in a lecture] that Thomas Browne, with all his imperfections, was a favorite of his--a sublime and quiet enthusiast [resembling] Montaigne but more [intense]." And of these two he said, "Their entireness and fullness of illustration is their only imitable quality."[9]

---

[7] "The period, to Coleridge, apparently extended from the reign of Edward VI to the Revolution of 1688," Bredvold, xxiii.

[8] "The great models...are Hooker, Bacon, Milton, and Taylor." "On Style" (413).

[9] Brinkley, p. 420.

Many have attributed Dr. Samuel Johnson's style to a conscious imitation of Sir Thomas Browne and indeed there are passages in Johnson recalling Browne.[10] Coleridge did not agree.

> It was not true that Sir Thomas Browne was the prototype of Dr. Johnson who imitated him only so far as Sir T. B. resembles the majority of his Predecessors—i.e. in the pedantic preference of Latin Derivatives to Saxon words of the very same force. In the balance and construction of his periods, Dr. Johnson has followed [Bishop Joseph] Hall: as any intelligent reader will discover by an attentive comparison.[11]

If Coleridge did not think Browne's style the best in its day, he had even less respect for that of Hall and Johnson.

William Wordsworth

Inspired by one of Browne's profundities, Coleridge penned in the margin of a page of Religio Medici, "O! the Depth! So say I: so says dear W.W."(440). A study of Wordsworth's critical writings discloses but ome comment on Browne. It was included in an answer to a letter from J. Place in 1844.

> You have gratified me by what you say of Sir Thomas Browne. I posess his Religio Medici, Christian Morals, Vulgar Errors, etc. in separate publications, and value him highly as a most original

---

[10] For example, "Walls supply stones more easily than quarries, and Palaces and Temples will be demolished to make stables of Granate and cottages of porphyry." Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose, ed. B. H. Bronson (New York, 1960), p. 585.

[11] Signed: "S.T.C." from the flyleaf of The Life of William Bedell by Gilbert Burnet (London, 1692), (371-2).

> author. I almost regret that you did not add his treatise upon Urn Burial to your publication. It is not very long and very remarkable for the vigour of mind that it displays.[12]

Robert Southey

Coleridge's friend and fellow Pantisocrat, the laureate Robert Southey, was another fervent Browne devotee. His intention to write an article on Browne in the Quarterly Review was never fulfilled, however. A modern French biographer of Browne, Olivier Le Roy, quotes Sir Geoffrey Keynes, editor of the definitive Works of Browne, as stating that Southey, like Coleridge, found Sir Thomas "one of the most delicious authors in the English language," and put all of Sir Thomas Browne on his list of the world's twelve best books.[13] Sir Leslie Stephen notes that Southey found a striking resemblance to Browne in the character of Charles I, "Always cheerful but never merry."[14]

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[12] Markham L. Peacock, Jr., The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth (Baltimore, 1950), p. 190.

[13] Geoffrey Keynes, "Wilkin, Southey, and Sir Thomas Browne," A Bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne (Cambridge, England, 1924), Appendix IV. Cited by Le Roy's bibliography. Le Roy (p. 311) states that the quotation is to be found in Robert Southey, Life and Correspondence (London, 1850), V. None of the above works are at this date in the University of New Mexico library nor does our Southey collection yield these quotations. The application of the adjective "delicious" to Browne is an echo of Coleridge (see page 7 supra).

[14] "Sir Thomas Browne," Hours in a Library, 2nd ed., (New York, 1904), II, 31.

William Hazlitt

When Hazlitt was a boy, Coleridge was his hero, but the mature Hazlitt was dry and acerbic and thought nothing of exposing the feet of clay of any idol. While Hazlitt, too, admired Browne, his verdict on the poet's understanding of Browne's works was caustic. Coleridge had written ecstatically to his friend Sara Hutchinson on the subject of Urn and Garden; Hazlitt objected.

> [Browne] chose the subject of Urn Burial because it was one of no mark or likelihood,...totally free from romantic prettiness and pleasing poetical common-places with which Mr. Coleridge has adorned it....To speak of Browne in his own language, 'he saw nature in its elements of chaos, and discerned his favorite notions in the great obscurity of nothing!' [Hazlitt concludes icily] I do not think [Coleridge's] account of Urn-burial very happy.[15]

Hazlitt believed that Browne and Jeremy Taylor compare with Bacon in "pomp and copiousness," but that the three differ widely in focus of interest and subject matter.

> Bacon seemed to bend all his thoughts to the practice of life....Sir Thomas Browne seemed to be of the opinion that the only business of life was to think....[Jeremy Taylor]had less thought, less 'stuff of the conscience' less to 'give us pause' than Browne ...but he had equal fancy....Sir Thomas Browne talks in sum totals; Jeremy Taylor enumerates particulars.[16]

---

[15]"Character of Sir Thomas Browne as a Writer," Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth, in Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1931), VI, 341,n.1.

[16]Ibid., 333-341.

Thomas Browne "pushes a question to the utmost verge of conjecture that he may repose in the certainty of a doubt."[17]

Thomas De Quincey

De Quincey did not agree with Coleridge that Milton was a prose stylist superior to Browne.

> Milton, however, was not destined to gather the spolia opima of English rhetoric. Two contemporaries of his own, and whose literary course pretty nearly coincided with his own in point of time, surmounted all competition and in that amphitheater became the Protagonistae. These were Jeremy Taylor and Sir Thomas Browne, who, if not absolutely the foremost in the accomplishments of art, were undoubtedly the richest, the most dazzling, and with reference to their matter, the most captivating of all rhetoricians.[18]

While Lamb quoted and borrowed from Browne, and Coleridge claimed that Browne portrayed his inner soul, perhaps the student of Browne would find a stronger parallel between the work of Browne and that of De Quincey. If De Quincey did not consciously model his style after Browne's, at least the "Cadenced antithesis, the balanced phrases and clauses, the cycles and epicycles of verbal elaboration,"[19] are heard in both.

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[17] Ibid., 341.

[18] "Rhetoric," The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, ed. David Masson (London, 1897), X, 104.

[19] Samuel C. Chew, "The Nineteenth Century and After," A Literary History of England, ed. A. C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 1191.

Like Lamb, De Quincey quoted Browne from memory, not always correctly.

> With the exception of the fine extravaganza on that subject in "Twelfth Night," I do not recollect more than one thing said adequately on the subject of music in all literature. It is a passage in the "Religio Medici" of Sir T. Browne, and, though chiefly remarkable for its sublimity, has also a philosophic value, inasmuch as it points to the true theory of musical effects. [Here he adds a note] I have not the book at this moment to consult, but I think the passage begins, "And even that tavern music, which makes one man merry, another mad, in me strikes a deep fit of devotion." &c.[20]

Thomas Carlyle

The historian, Thomas Carlyle, is quoted as having been generous in his praise of Browne and Urn Burial.

> The conclusion of the essay on Urn Burial is absolutely beautiful: a still, elegiac mood, so soft, so deep, so solemn and tender, like the song of some departed saint--an echo of deepest meaning from the great and mighty nation of the dead....Sir Thomas Browne must have been a good man.[21]

---

[20] De Quincey, III, 390. This is close; the quotation actually reads: "For even that vulgar and Tavern musik, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me---" Religio Medici (82). (Italics mine.)

[21] Marion Troughton, "Sir Thomas Browne," Contemporary Review, CXC (August, 1956), 109-12. I could find no Browne listing in the Carlyle index (to Works).

Walter Pater

Another great stylist, Walter Pater, was interested in Browne. Almost alone among the critics, Pater considered Letter to a Friend almost the greatest of Browne's works, sharing the honors with Urn Burial, which he considered the most eloquent, but not without reservations.

> That eloquence is attained out of a certain difficulty and halting crabbedness of expression; the wretched punctuation of the piece being not only the cause of its impressing the reader with the notion that he is but dealing with a collection of notes for a more finished composition, and of a different kind; perhaps a purely erudite treatise on its subject, with the detachment of all personal color now adhering to it.[22]

Olivier Le Roy commented on Pater's opinion.

> Pater did not play with a perfect abandon the Brunonian music. He is too sensitive not to apprehend the charm, but too intelligent not to count the cost. Indeed, he loves rules too much--clarity, good sense, Greek sanity--to give himself up without remorse to the deliciousness of Gothic romanticism. There is in Browne a superfluity, a chance, and a dark light to which he cannot, physically, abandon himself. Pseudodoxia which Saintsbury calls 'one of the most charming books existing or conceivable' appeared to Pater a crabbed enough work and of a style that made him sigh for Dr. Johnson's rod.[23]

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[22] Walter Pater, "Sir Thomas Browne," Appreciations (London, 1889, 1920), p. 155.

[23] "Les Critiques," Le Chevalier Thomas Browne (1605-1682), Sa Vie, Sa Pensée et Son Art (Paris, 1931), pp. 285-370.

Francis Thompson

The unfortunate poet Francis Thompson, who, like those other admirers of Browne, De Quincey and Coleridge, was addicted to drugs, was perhaps the first critic to recognize formally "Silver-Latin" imitation in Browne:

> Browne was more idiomatic in structure than the Ciceronian Hooker. But the admirable knitting of his sentences was not due merely to a better study of English idiom. He was steeped in classic models more compact and pregnant than Cicero. Like his French contemporaries, he was influenced by the great Latin rhetoricians, Lucan, Ovid, and Seneca; whose rivalry it was to put an idea in the fewest possible words..... This style is a far better foundation for a general style than the ponderous structure which Johnson reared upon it. Nor, with all his latinities (the supposed excessive proportion of which is greatly exaggerated), was Browne to seek in the vulgar tongue. On the contrary, he blends it in his prose with an excellent mastery.[24]

Leslie Stephen

Perhaps the best sketch of Browne in the century and one of the most sympathetic and penetrating ever written on him was by Sir Leslie Stephen, son and grandson of distinguished men of letters and civil servants and father of the novelist Virginia Woolf. Stephen was the first editor of the Dictionary of National Biography and its star biographer. Oddly enough, though B's were one of his better letters--he wrote memorable

---

[24]"Seventeenth Century Prose," Works (London, 1913) III, 166-67.

lives of Bolingbroke, Burns, Charlotte Brontë, Byron and others for that famous publication--Stephen did not contribute its biography of Browne. His own "Sir Thomas Browne" was published in his Hours in a Library, Series 2, in 1876.

He quotes a suppressed passage from Religio Medici wherein Browne states he is "the happiest man alive." Stephen counsels us not to take this too seriously as Browne is a "humorist to the core."[25] Bearing on this point is the opinion some have held of Browne as conceited.

> If we are to interpret his language in a matter-of-fact spirit, it must be admitted that a gentleman who openly claims for himself the virtues of charity, generosity, courage, and modesty might not be unfairly accused of vanity. To no one, as we have already remarked, is such a matter-of-fact criticism less applicable. If a humorist was to be denied the right of saying with a serious face what he does not quite think, we should make strange work of some of the most charming books in the world.[26]

Stephen did not think as highly of Browne as a scientist as do some modern critics.

> He persuaded himself, and...some of his editors that he was a genuine disciple of Bacon [yet] "Vulgar Errors" is to some extent a misnomer....There are [in this book] errors that require much more learning and ingenuity than are necessary for discovering the truth.[27]

---

[25]Stephen, p. 1.

[26]Ibid., p. 27.

[27]Ibid., p. 10.

> He was not insensible to the growing influence of the scientific spirit, though he believed implicitly in witchcraft, spoke with respect of alchemy and astrology, and refused to believe that the earth went round the sun.[28]

Of Browne's style, Stephen writes "that power of extracting deep devotion from 'vulgar [and] tavern music' is the great secret of Browne's eloquence."[29] To Stephen, Browne's imagination was the catalyst of his humor and his humor the key to his philosophy.

> What, after all, one is inclined to ask, is the secret to the strange charm of Sir Thomas's style? Will you be kind enough to give us the old doctor's literary prescription, that we may produce the same effects at will? In what proportions shall we mingle humour, imagination, and learning? How are we to select the language which will be the fittest vehicle for the thought? or rather, for the metaphor is a little too mechanical, what were the magic spells with which he sways our imaginative moods? Like other spells, we must reply, it is incommunicable: no real answer can be given even by critics who, like Coleridge and DeQuincey, show something of the same power. Coarser observers can only point to such external peculiarities as the Latinisms in which he indulges even more freely than most of his contemporaries. To Johnson they seemed "pedantic"; to most modern readers they have an old-world charm....The perusal of a page will make us realize what could not be

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[28] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[29] Ibid., p. 26.

> explained in a whole volume of analysis....The imagination of Sir Thomas, of course, shows the generic qualities roughly described as Northern, Gothic, Teutonic, or romantic. He writes about tombs, and all Englishmen, as M. Taine tells us, like to write about tombs. When we try to find the specific differences which distinguish it from other imaginations of similar quality, we should be inclined to define him as belonging to a very rare intellectual family. He is a mystic with a sense of humour, or rather, his habitual mood is determined by an attraction towards the two opposite poles of humour and mysticism.[30]

Reverence blended with skepticism is self-contradictory "but the essence of humor is to be contradictory,"[31] writes Stephen. This particular paradox was to intrigue Basil Willey later.[32] Browne looked "rather with the eyes of a Cervantes than a Milton."[33] Stephen concludes with a final line from Hydriotaphia, "One face of Janus holds no proportion to the other."[34]

John Addington Symonds

John Addington Symonds has written one of the clearest and most comprehensive short studies on Browne.

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[30] Ibid., pp. 34, 35.

[31] Ibid., p. 38.

[32] "Sir Thomas Browne," The Seventeenth Century Background (New York, 1953), pp. 49-54.

[33] Stephen, p. 41.

[34] Ibid.

This was a preface to a Browne edition published at a time when at least twenty editions of Browne were in print, reprinted in the anthology Modern Essays (New York: Everyman's, 1923). Symonds begins with the biography, briefly epitomizes each of the works, then suggestively considers the style, the spirit, and the cast of mind of Browne. The success of the essay is not dependent on brilliant passages but on cool objectivity, limpid clarity, and balance. Symonds raises pitch slightly in the conclusion, which is poetically suggestive rather than completely analytical. The condensation is masterly and the tone is modern.

Symonds avoids a nineteenth century tendency in writing about Browne to ape his style. In considering the works, he probably underrates the Pseudodoxia in terming it "the sweepings of its author's note books," his concern being for literary values rather than for science or the history of ideas. He is not as pithy as Pater in characterizing Letter to a Friend. Christian Morals he dismisses as inferior without qualifying it as unfinished work published posthumously. But, in the main, his evaluations are just, sympathetic, and highly perceptive.

The only mark of "commissioned job" in the essay, at least in the Everyman's reprint, is some poor proof reading which allows Shipden Hall, where Religio Medici was written, to become "Shipley"; adipocere, the grave tallow the definition

of which was Browne's original scientific contribution, to become adipocene; and, most serious, the famous "five ports of knowledge" in the conclusion of the Garden, to become parts, a flat note in the coda.

Henry Hallam

In the general paean to Browne raised in England in this century, there was one cool voice of rather tempered praise, that of the famous historian, Henry Hallam, father of Arthur, who was eulogised by Tennyson in "In Memoriam." The elder Hallam, active in Whig politics, sniffed out a Tory in Browne. He wrote in his Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Centuries,

> Superior genius to that of Feltham is exhibited in the Religio Medici of Sir Thomas Browne....Yet Browne is no great thinker. He seldom reasons; his thoughts are desultory; sometimes he appears sceptical or paradoxical; but credulity and deference to authority prevail. He belonged to the class numerous at that time in our church who halted between Popery and Protestantism, and this gives him on all such topics an appearance of vacillation and irresoluteness which probably represents the real state of his mind.[35]

On style, Hallam writes a fair paraphrase of Johnson's criticism.

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[35] III, 151.

> His style is not flowing but vigorous; his choice of words not elegant and even approaching barbarism as English phrase: yet there is an impressiveness, an air of reflection and sincerity in Browne's writings.

Hallam calls Hydriotaphia Browne's best and notes that it is concerned with graves, yet "The same taste for the circumstances of mortality leavens also the Religio Medici."[36] In fact, "'Let's talk of graves and worms and epitaphs' seems his motto....He was an egotist like Montaigne but unlike him, he was melancholy."[37] One gathers that the untimely loss of both sons did not make Hallam as friendly to the melancholy spirit as was Browne, who lost ten of his twelve children, nor as were most of the romantics.

Henry Thomas Buckle

One champion for the Pseudodoxia as Browne's best was Henry Thomas Buckle, English historian, chess champion, and author of the impressive but never finished History of Civilization (1857-61). Buckle died in Damascus in 1862. He used Browne's work in his History as an example of seventeenth century skepticism. Yet in Religio Medici he discerned evidences of

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[36] III, 152.

[37] Ibid.

medieval credulity absent in Vulgar Errors. He saw a conversion in a decade which Gosse later challenged.[38]

Minor Writers on Browne

Typical among minor writers who wrote favorably and enthusiastically on Sir Thomas Browne were the Right Hon. Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton[39] and Covington K. D. Patmore.[40]

Some Major Writers Influenced by Browne

John Keats: We learn from Ernest Bernbaum's Guide through the Romantic Movement that Keats studied Browne to great advantage.[41]

John Henry Newman: Cardinal Newman is said to have been "a consistent reader of seventeenth-century minor lay philosophy."[42] Alexander Whyte wrote that it was to Religio Medici that Newman owed so much for his Grammar of Assent.[43]

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[38]"He didn't read Browne carefully enough." Edmund Gosse, Sir Thomas Browne (New York, 1905), pp. 99, 100.

[39]"Sir Thomas Browne's Works," Quarterly Essays by the Right Hon. Lord Lytton (London, 1875).

[40]"Sir Thomas Browne," Courage in Politics, pp. 54-59.

[41]"John Keats," (New York, 1949), p. 216.

[42]Margaret L. Wiley, "Sir Thomas Browne and the Genesis of Paradox," JHI (1948), IX, 303-23.

[43]Sir Thomas Browne, an Appreciation (Edinburgh, 1898), quoted in the Le Roy Chevalier "Les Critiques" chapter and the Bibliography.

John Ruskin: In the thirty-nine volumes of Ruskin's collected writings there are but a few references to Browne, all favorable. He quotes from Religio Medici, hardly in the tolerant spirit of Browne's intent, in his Stones of Venice, "From that pure reverence in which Sir Thomas Browne wrote 'I can dispense with my hat at the sight of a cross, but not with the thought of my redeemer,' to the worst superstition of the most ignorant Romanist, there is an infinite series of subtle transitions."[44]

Robert Louis Stevenson: According to Stuart Robertson, Stevenson had strong, studied, stylistic affinities with Browne, although Stevenson did not write about him or acknowledge the alleged debt.[45]

A Note on the English Publishing History

While it remained for the twentieth century to publish the definitive works in six volumes with Sir Geoffrey Keynes as editor, many of the individual works were revived and went through numerous editions, and excerpts appeared in anthologies. In order of popularity, while Pseudodoxia had been close second

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[44]The Works of—, ed. E. T. Cook and W. Wedderburn (London, 1912), X, 451.

[45]"Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Louis Stevenson," JEGP, XX (July, 1921), 371-84.

in Sir Thomas Browne's time, it was no longer a poor third, Religio, at least partly because of its subject matter, was still in first place. Judging from books in print, Urn Burial seems to have been definitely second. The U.S. Catalog of Books in Print, 1902 lists seven editions of Religio Medici ranging in price from ten cents to a dollar; three of Religio Medici bound with Urn Burial; one of Urn and Garden together; and one three-volume edition of the works. In England that year, according to the Reference Catalogue of Current Literature (London, Whitaker, 2 vols.) , there were in print four editions of Religio Medici alone; one of Religio with Urn and Christian Morals; one of Religio with Urn and Letter to a Friend; and one of Urn with Garden and some notes and letters on the natural history of Norfolk. Wilkin's Works was still offered for sale by George Bell and Sons.

Simon Wilkin, among noteworthy editors of Browne, edited the superb four-volume 1835 edition of the Works, including Whitefoot's Minutes and Johnson's Life. Wilkin has been praised for remarkable editing for his time and has been a prime source, particularly for facts of the earlier publishing history in which Wilkin himself is a milestone.[46] Another good editor of Browne was W.A. Greenhill, M.D., Oxon., who, in 1881, edited an edition of Religio Medici which also included, besides Letter to a Friend and Christian Morals, a valuable bibliography of Browne and a good preface shedding some light on the publishing history.

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[46] London. At this writing, this is the only edition of the works in the University of New Mexico. The modern definitive edition of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (which does not include the bibliography published in 1924) generously acknowledges a debt to Wilkin.

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[46] London, At this writing, this is the only edition of the works in the University of Tex Austin. The modern definitive edition of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (which does not include the publication published in 1929) erroneously acknowledges a debt to Gilkin.

CHAPTER III

BROWNE IN AMERICA

Until F. O. Matthiessen in his American Renaissance made the fact abundantly clear, it was perhaps not so generally realized what furor Browne created on our side of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century.[1]

Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is in Emerson a mystical and metaphysical strain that a great many of his contemporaries, in tracing its source, attributed to Sir Thomas Browne. Longfellow, in 1846, in returning from a lecture by Emerson, wrote that he had heard the "Chrysostom and Sir Thomas Browne of the day."[2] Bronson Alcott wrote in his journal a year later, "I am often reminded of Sir Thomas Browne as well as Quarles when reading Emerson and this not because of any striking resemblance of thought or diction, but chiefly, I believe, from like tendency."[3] Melville, after

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[1] F. O. Matthiessen, "Metaphysical Strain," American Renaissance (New York, 1941), pp. 100-132.

[2] The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed. S. Longfellow (Boston, 1891), XIII, 30.

[3] The Journals of Bronson Alcott, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston, 1938), p. 193.

first hearing Emerson in 1849, stated, "Lay it down that had not Sir Thomas Browne lived, Emerson would not have mystified."[4] F. O. Matthiessen believed Emerson's contemporaries saw in their representative man a reincarnation of Sir Thomas.

> Emerson rejoiced...that Browne did not insist on a practical use for his meditations, but entertained them, as he declared, for "variety and delight." What drew Emerson most to Renaissance individualism was its increased awareness of the self...what did speak to his own experience is what made him declare about Browne "How inward he is." (106-7, Matthiessen)

Henry David Thoreau

Emerson's tenant of Walden Pond, Thoreau, also owed a great debt to Sir Thomas. Thoreau copied into one of the commonplace books he kept in college this passage from Sir Thomas Browne:

> We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece of endless volume.[5] (100, Matthiessen)

Thoreau's friend Sanborn stated that the Hermit of Walden "had so high an opinion of Sir Thomas Browne that he told me in his last illness that he thought Emerson would stand a century or two hence as Browne did then in the spring of 1862." (101, Matthiessen

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[4] Matthiessen, p. 107. Further page references will be indicated in parentheses immediately following quotations.

[5] Religio Medici (16).

Thoreau commented in the Week,

> That is a superfluous wonder which Dr. Johnson expresses at the assertion of Sir Thomas Browne that his "life has been a miracle of thirty years, which to relate were not history but a piece of poetry, and would sound like a fable." The wonder is rather that all men do not assert as much.[6]

Browne's microcosmic theories of man and fascination with the circle are echoed in "Thoreau's doctrine of the individual's 'sphericity,' and to his habit of seeking the most profound laws of nature by contemplating the smallest fact."

> In desiring to push as near as possible to the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, to reassert the primitive quality of wonder, Thoreau again approached Browne.... He was nearest the practice of the seventeenth century poets when he insisted on the use of all materials that experience affords....One of his chief distinctions, and again he shares this with Browne, is the infusion of his reading into his perception, as in the last paragraph of "The Pond in Winter." He has given us a detailed account of the work of the ice company, which engaged in the export trade to the East Indies, and concludes, "Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well....The pure Walden water is mingled with the Ganges.... With favoring winds...it is landed in the ports of which Alexander only heard the names."[7]

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[6]"Sunday," A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers from The Writings of David Thoreau (Boston, 1906), I, 69.

[7]Matthiessen, p. 111.

If one cannot hear overtones of Browne in this, he must needs change his hearing aid.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne was not immune to the Browne influence. One of the most affecting of all Hawthorne's fantasies, Rapaccini's Daughter, a blood-curdler about a science-mad father who slowly poisoned his daughter, who became conditioned to the poison but became herself lethal, was suggested in part by a passage in Vulgar Errors:

> A story there passeth of an Indian king that sent unto Alexander a fair woman fed with Aconites and other poysons, with this intent, either by converse or copulation complexionally to destroy him.

Hawthorne's wife expunged the phrase, "by converse or copulation" from her husband's note book.[8]

Herman Melville

Great as the debt of all these nineteenth century Americans was to Browne, the greatest debt, openly and bountifully and most gratefully acknowledged, was that of Herman Melville. Melville visited England the year before writing Moby Dick, and among his purchases were the 1686 folio of Browne and Confessions of an English Opium Eater. It was

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[8] Ibid., p. 256.

De Quincey and Coleridge, whom he admired, that brought him to Sir Thomas Browne. Melville had borrowed an epigraph from Fuller in his White Jacket "but Browne's effect upon him had been far more manifold. Indeed, in the extraordinary transformation of Melville's aims from the two straightforward accounts of adventures in Typee and Omoo to the philosophic ambitions of Mardi, Browne's speculations operated as one of the strongest agents." (122, Matthissen)

Everet Duykink, a shoreside friend of Melville's, writing to his brother George in 1848, said,

> By the way, Melville reads old books. He has borrowed Sir Thomas Browne of me and says finely of the speculations of the Religio Medici that Brovne is a kind of "crack'd Archangel." Was anything of this sort said before by a sailor? (122, Matthiessen)

When embarking on a new voyage, Melville announced, "Be Sir Thomas Browne our ensample; who, while exploding Vulgar Errors, heartily hugged all the mysteries of the Pentateuch." (122 Matthiessen) Melville was an enthusiast who went all the way.

> The books that really spoke to Melville became an immediate part of him....His first intense response to Browne went to the length of ventriloquism. This can readily be seen in Moby Dick in such lines where the Browne influence is strong as "What shaft has yet been sunk to the Antipodes? What underlieth the gold mines?...Who can show a pedigree like Leviathan? Ahab's harpoon had shed older blood than Pharao's. Methuselah seemed a school boy. I look round to shake hands with Shem." (122-3, Matthiessen)

Through Browne, Melville gained the secret of the metaphysical style. Moreover, "Browne had taught him that musical qualities of prose could help increase its symbolic richness." (424, Matthiessen). Melville wrote to his friend Duykink that he had just bought a set of Bayle's Philosophical Dictionary and intended on his return to New York "to lay the great old folios side by side and go to sleep on them through the summer, with the Phaedo in one hand and Sir Thomas Browne in the other." (439, Matthiessen).

With or without Browne, Matthiessen does not find the transcendentalist style of Melville all good.

> The transcendentalists' destruction of
>
> the divisions between poetry and prose came out of their robust assurance that all divisions were out of date. ~~That~~ That this assurance could cause severe confusions in the craft of writing is witnessed by Melville's vertiginous floundering even in Moby Dick, between verbal harmonies that can excell the diapson of Thomas Browne, and the fulsome rhetoric of ham Shakespeareanism, not very clear in his own mind whether he was pursuing the disciplines of verse or prose . . . .(584, Matthiessen).

Nevertheless, "The nineteenth century vogue for Browne results more in imitation in De Quincey, than in the authentic inspiration of much of Moby Dick."[9]

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[9] Ibid., p. 119.

Emily Dickinson

In 1862, Emily Dickinson, then a little girl, wrote in answer to a query from a distinguished editor to whom she had previously written a fan letter submitting some samples of her verse,

> You inquire my books. For poets I have Keats and Mr. and Mrs. Browning. For prose, Mr. Ruskin, Sir Thomas Browne, and the Revelations.[10]

Whether or not there is in this a little youthful self-dramatization, it is quite true that parallels can be drawn between Emily Dickinson's verse and the prose of Browne and "the Revelations." George E. Whicher states in his biographical study of Emily Dickinson that Thomas Browne was obviously her spiritual kinsman.

> Parts of his far plan
> That baffled me - the underside
> Of his divinity[11]

These lines are compared with a similar line in Religio Medici, "We are ignorant of the back parts or lower side of his divinity." While the original source is the Bible, Exodus: 33:23, "--and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen," the words divinity, lower,

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[10] "First Letter to T.W. Higginson, April 16, 1862," The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (Boston, 1894)

[11] Poems of Emily Dickinson (Boston, 1937).

Poems of Emily Dickinson (Boston, 1937).

10 Print letter to T. W. Higginson, April 15, 1862, The Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Mabel Loomis Todd (Boston, 1894).

and underside are not found in Exodus and the affinity of the Browne-Dickinson treatment is too obvious to labor.

Both Browne and Emily Dickinson have certain favorite words in common that they use in the same special senses. Circumference, for example, means to them area at times. Hermetic is never used in the modern sense of a sealed vessel but refers directly to Hermes Trismegistus. Miss Dickinson uses hermetic in a Brunonian sense uncommon in the nineteenth century in the poem "Strong Draughts" which ends, "How powerful the stimulus of an hermetic mind," which meant of course not a closed mind but one atune to magical stimuli. South American place-names hold a peculiar fascination for them, notably Peru and Potosí. They are both partial to an ecstasy; both used the article with nouns not usually so accompanied. Browne asks in Religio Medici, who could ~~not~~ hear the "Ave Mary" bell without "an elevation," or think of eternity without "an Extasie." Thomas Browne's "This speckled face of honesty" becomes in Miss Dickinson "freckled human nature." Finally, Emily Dickinson's brand of New England transcendentalism is not too far from Browne's metaphysics.[12]

James Russell Lowell

Another New Englander, Lowell, was a confirmed Brunonian.

> Sir Thomas Browne, our most imaginative mind since Shakespeare, found breathing room for a time among the "O altitudines!"of religious speculation but soon descended to occupy himself with the exactitudes of

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[12]George F. Whicher, This Was a Poet (New York and London, 1939), pp. 211-223. H.E. Childs, "Emily Dickinson and Sir Thomas Browne," AL, XXII(January, 1951), 455-65. Religio Medici, pp. 15, 11.

and *undertide* are not found in Knowlton and the elderly of the Dickinson household is too obvious to labor.

Both Browne and Emily Dickinson have certain favorite words in common that they use in the same special senses. *Circumference*, for example, means to them *area* or *realm*. *Fervid* is never used in the modern sense of a sealed vessel but refers directly to Persian flames. Miss Dickinson uses *horrendous* in a Brownian sense to denote in the nineteenth century in the poem "Strong Draughts" which ends, "How powerful the stimulus of so horrendous kind," which means of course not a closed mind but one alive to magical stimuli. South American place-names hold a peculiar fascination for them, notably *Peru* and *Potosi*. They are both partial to *er* contrary both used the article with nouns not usually so accompanied. Browne cites in *Pseudoxia Epidemica* who could not bear the "Ave Mary" bell without "an elevation," or think of eternity without "an Exhaust." Thomas Browne's "This speckled face of nonsense" becomes in Miss Dickinson "freckled human nature." Finally, Emily Dickinson's brand of New England transcendentalism is not too far from Browne's metaphysics.[12]

James Russell Lowell

Another New Englander, Lowell, was a confirmed Brownian.

> Sir Thomas Browne, our most imaginative mind since
> Shakespeare, found browsing room for a time among
> the [illegible] of religious speculation, but soon
> deserted to occupy himself with the eccentricities of

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[12] George R. Whicher, *This Was a Poet* (New York and London, 1939), pp. 221-223. H.R. Childs, "Emily Dickinson and Sir Thomas Browne," *AL*, XXII (January, 1951), 455-65. *Pseudoxia Hesperi*, pt. [illegible], 77.

> science....As purelly poet, Shakespeare would have come tooo late had his lot fallen in that geneeration...his imagination could not haave at once illustrated the influencce of his epoch and escaped from it, liike that of Browne.[13]

While this quotation dissplays Lowell's enthusiasm and grasp of Browne's ambivalence, iit is a very debatable point whether Browne ever deserted mettaphysics for the exactitudes of science. There is a tendency today rather, to accept Browne's own dictum, that he livved simultaneously "in divided and distinguished worlds." Againn, in My Study Windows, Lowell speaks of "This sober gold of Siir Thomas Browne."[14]

American Versus English Reaction to Browne

One reason for the revivval of interest in the metaphysical style of the seventeenth century,, Matthiessen feels, is that "Reading Herbert or Browne, thesee transcendentalists were affected not only by ideas or by form as an abstract pattern, but also by qualities of their owwn language which the eighteenth century had allowed to decay, andd which they were determined to renew."[15]

But the real difference bbetween the reactions to Browne in nineteenth century Englland and America was in the

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[13] Among My Books (Boston,, 1870), pp. 152, 153.

[14] (Boston, 1886), p. 292..

[15] Matthiessen, p. 584.

realm of ideas. Contrasting the Yankee of his day, whom he dubs "Johnathan," with the Englishman, "John," Lowell says in the Biglow Papers :

> Yet, after all, thin, speculative Johnathan is more like the Englishman of two centuries ago than John Bull himself is . . . .He feels more at home with Fulke Greville, Herbert of Cherbury, Quarles, George Herbert, and Browne, than with his modern English cousins. . . .To move John, you must make your fulcrum of solid beef and pudding; an abstract idea will do for Johnathan.[16]

16.Series I (Boston, 1885), p.24.

CHAPTER IV

BROWNE ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

In Germany, after the theological furor subsided in the eighteenth century, Browne was generally ignored. The slight references to him there displayed neither insight nor familiarity.[1] This was not the case in France where opinion was both favorable and voluble. In the wake of the English revival of interest, French critics extracted new values from Browne.

Browne in France

Hippolyte Taine: In 1863, Hippolyte Taine published his monumental History of English Literature, and submitted it in competition for a prize to the French Academy. The work was violently attacked for its deterministic views, and since it was out of the question to award the prize to Taine, the awards were suspended that year.[2] Taine has a penchant for the pigeonhole; he deals at times brilliantly with perhaps

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[1] Olivier Le Roy, "Les Critiques," Le Chevalier Thomas Browne (1605-1682): Sa Vie, Sa Pensée, et Son Art (Paris, 1931), pp. 285-370.

[2] Maurice Baring, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., XXVI, 360.

too sweeping generalizations. In this case, he packages our author neatly with a ribbon around him. If some essentials parts of Browne are missing from the package, the writing is both intuitive and suggestive, illuminating an aspect of Browne the scientist and Browne the metaphysician.

Taine is prone to overemphasize extrinsic factors: the historical, political, and social forces that constitute the milieu, with too little emphasis on the obverse, the fact that men, especially great individuals, play an important part in shaping the times. This reciprocity he seemingly ignores.[3] But admitting his bias, he is because of it sensitive to the intellectual ambient. Taine anticipates modern critics in writing of the paradox of the relatively complete concurrence of science and religion in Renaissance English thought.

> Even the believers, sincere Christians like Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne, discard all oppressive sternness, reduce Christianity to a sort of moral poetry, and allow naturalism to subsist beneath religion. In such a broad and open channel, speculation could spread its wings.[4]

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[3] "In Hegelian criticism and that of Taine, historical or social greatness is simply equated with artistic greatness.... A harmony between genius and age is postulated." René Wellek and Austin Warren, "Literature and Society," Theory of Literature (New York, 1956), p. 83.

[4] H. A. Taine, History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Loun (London, 1897), I, 335-36.

Taine observes that exuberance, vulgarity and lack of restraint are characteristic of the English Renaissance temper:

> With some as Overbury or Sir Thomas Browne, prose is so much run over by poetry, that it covers its narrative with images, and hides ideas under its pictures. They load their style with flowery comparisons, which produce one another, so that sense disappears and ornament only is visible. In short, they are generally pedants, still stiff with the rust of the school; they divide and sub-divide and propound theses, definitions; they argue solidly and heavily, and quote their authors in Latin and even in Greek; they square their massive periods and learnedly knock their adversaries down, and their readers too, as a natural consequence. They are never on the prose level but always above or below - above by their poetic genius, below by the weight of their education and barbarism of their manners. But they think seriously for themselves; they are deliberate; they are convinced and touched by what they say....We find a force and loyalty of spirit which give confidence and cause pleasure. Their writings are like the powerful & heavy engravings of their contemporaries, the maps of Hofnagel, for instance, so harsh and so instructive; their conception is sharp and clear; they have the gift of perceiving every object, not under a general aspect, like the classical writers, but specially and individually....Imagine the disturbance that such a disposition produces in a man's head, how the regular order of ideas becomes deranged by it; how every object with the infinite medley of its forms, properties, appendages, will thenceforth fasten itself by a

> hundred points of contact unforseen to other objects, and bring before the mind a series and a family; what familiar, picturesque, absurd words will break forth in succession; how the dash, the unforseen, the originality and inequality of invention will stand out. Imagine at the same time, what a hold this form of mind has on objects, how many facts it condenses in each conception; what a mass of personal judgments, foreign authorities, suppositions, guesses, imaginations it spreads over every subject; with what venturesome and creative fecundity it engenders both truth and conjecture. It is an extraordinary chaos of thoughts and forms, often abortive, still more often barbarous, sometimes grand. But from this superfluity something lasting and great is produced, namely science, and we have only to examine more closely into one or two of these works to see the new creation emerge from the blocks and debris.[5]

Taine uses Browne as his example in developing this paradoxical thesis of science emerging from an ambience of exuberant superfluity and lack of restraint:

> But what completes his picture, what signalizes the advance of science, is the fact that his imagination provides a counterbalance against itself. He is as fertile in doubts as he is in explanations. If he sees a thousand reasons which tend to one view, he sees also a thousand which tend to the contrary....Having made a guess, he knows that it is but a guess; he

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[5] Ibid.

> pauses, ends with a perhaps, recommends verification. His writings consist only of opinions given as such...; in the main, he proposes questions, suggests explanations, suspends his judgments, nothing more; but this is enough: when the search is so eager; when the paths ...are so numerous; when it is so scrupulous in securing its hold; the issue of the pursuit is sure; we are but a few steps from the truth.[6]

Like Lowell, Thaler, and others, Taine compares Browne's mind to that of Shakespeare:

> Like Shakespeare, [Browne] applies himself to living things, penetrates their internal structure, puts himself in communication with their actual laws, imprints in himself fervently and scrupulously the smallest detail of their outward appearance; at the same time [he] extends his penetrating surmise beyond the region of observation, discerns behind visible phaenomena some world obscure yet sublime, and trembles with a kind of veneration before the vast, indistinct, but peopled darkness on whose surface our little universe hangs quivering. Such a one is Sir Thomas Browne, a naturalist, a philosopher, a scholar, a physician, and a moralist, almost the last of the generation which produced Jeremy Taylor and Shakespeare. No thinker bears stronger witness to the wandering and inventive curiosity of the age. No writer has better displayed the brilliant and sombre imagination of the North....No one has revealed, in more glowing and original expressions, the poetic sap which flows through all the minds of the age.[7]

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[6] Ibid., 343-44.

[7] Ibid.

J. A. Milsand: Taine was not the first Frenchman of his century to write on Sir Thomas Browne. Several years earlier, in 1858, J. A. Milsand wrote an enthusiastic appreciation for the Révue des Deux Mondes, a long article appearing in two issues. To Milsand, Browne is a symbol:

> In part, the reflection of an epoch: he sums up a phase of transition marked by rationalism crossing the current of the hereditary imaginative luxuriance of the middle ages. He is perfectly imaging. His taste for criticism and reflection is not just his own. He was in the right atmosphere for full-flowering.[8]

Uniquely, Milsand admires most of all Browne's works Christian Morals:

> Assuredly it is here where he shows his superiority the most constantly and the most incontestably. Never has his style been more inspired than in these pages; never have his imagination and memory been so pressed to put all their treasures to the service of his thoughts.... We find in him again the double current which carries us toward scientific intellectualism and at the same time transcends it by recourse (or abandon) to intuitive understanding ....[Yet] Browne's place in our library is not on the shelf with the philosophers, but with the 'charming authors.' We can disagree with him in detail but altogether, he pleases us. We forget the irritation and boredom he causes at times. Il inspire l'affection.... There is in him something of the chameleon; he changes completely

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[8]"Thomas Browne le médecin philosophe de Norwich," XIV (April, 1858), 665.

> in aspect according to the point of view from which one regards him.[9]

Joseph Texte: It eludes Joseph Texte, the last French critic of this century ~~we know~~, what there is about Browne precisely that reminds him of Montaigne. "It may be his eternal curiosity; it may be the allure of his style which is yet a form of thought." He does point out that Browne is one of the first English humorists and also a combined sceptic and mystic, and, with anachronistic confusion, a savant in the most unfavorable sense, addicted to discussing absurdities which "Newton did not deign to refute."

Yet Texte found Erreurs Vulgaire chock full of Rabelaisian gaiety:

> He cheers to the absurdities of man and has dipped full hands in Pantagruel or in the Essais. The influence of Montaigne is visible on each page of Religio Medici. His scepticism is from Montaigne and Bayle. He is not always tongue-in-cheek. He can be reverent and is especially moving on death, yet melancholy does not lead him to irremediable pessimism, for in him, it is not the sceptic who has the last word; it is the believer.[10]

Browne in Scotland

Alexander Whyte: At the turn of the century a Scot, Alexander Whyte, Principal and Professor of New Testament

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[9] Ibid., 649.

[10] Joseph Texte, Études de littérature européene: La descendence de Montaigne, Sir Thomas Browne (Paris, 1898).

Literature at New College, Edinburgh, published a book there on Browne, of which Le Roy says, "An intemperate panegyric... his admiration's lack of reserve and nuance balances the peevish partiality of Hazlitt....On la comparé à Montaigne. Quelle calomnie!"[11] Le Roy does not explain which writer is defamed thereby. Charles E. Raven comments on Whyte's statement that Pseudodoxia is the "best analysis and exposition of the famous Baconian idols" but there seems no clear proof that Browne drew his impulse from Bacon.[12]

To Whyte, Browne is a symbol of religion, piety, and sainthood. He says that Browne triumphed over his doubt on his two knees. He fearlessly opines that Browne's best work was not Christian Morals but the Religio Medici. To Whyte's belief that Newman's The Grammar of Assent "would also seem to have its deepest roots in the same powerful, original and suggestive book," Le Roy answers, "The reader of the Newman tract is not permitted to perceive between the two spirits other similarity than a common tendency to defend the supernatural."[13] Thus modern critics give short shrift to this good man.[14]

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[11]Le Roy, pp. 285-370.

[12]"Coming of Modern Man: Religio Medici," English Naturalists from Neckham to Roy (Cambridge, England, 1947), pp. 339-47. Yet there is "clear proof" in the preface to the Pseudodoxia where the Lord Verulam is credited regardless of how Browne deviates thereafter.

[13]Le Roy, pp. 285-370.

[14]Alexander Whyte, Sir Thomas Browne, an Appreciation from the Le Roy "Bibliography."

Browne in Brazil

Machado de Assis: Machado de Assis, the distinguished Brazilian novelist, quoted Browne in his As Memorias de Bras Cubas, 1880,[15] although he attributed the source merely to "an Englishman." There is some point to this as it is quite probable that he was quoting Lamb quoting Browne. Machado is known to have modelled his style after Lamb and Sterne. The quotation, a reflection on the ephemeral aspect of fame from Christian Morals, employs the word oblivion as Lamb did, in upper case, and not in small letters as did Sir Thomas Browne.[16]

Browne in Japan

Lafcadio Hearn: At the turn of the century, the American essayist Lafcadio Hearn was lecturing on English literature to Japanese university students in Tokyo, lectures he had no intention, he stated in a letter of 1899, of publishing. "They are only dictated...—dictated out of my head, not from notes even." However, they were carefully transcribed by several of his Japanese students and published posthumously.

In his lecture on Browne, Hearn absolves Sir Thomas of the charge of pedantry owing to his heavy documentation in spite of which, perhaps because of which, Urn Burial, for an

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[15]Published here as Epitaph of a Small Winner (New York, 1952).

[16]B. M. Woodbridge, Jr., "Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb, and Machado de Assis," MLN, LXIX (March, 1954), 188-189. See p. 4 n.3.

outstanding example, moves so freely. He regrets that short quotations out of context fail to reveal Browne's splendour. He pays tribute to Browne's erudition, greater than his pupil, Johnson's, and to his influence on later prose stylists like Gibbon and Macaulay.

Hearn does not feel that Browne is prolix. "On the contrary, he presses his facts together so powerfully as to make one solid composition of them." Yet ultimately he believes a style like Browne's finds in its artificiality the elements of its dissolution, the reverse of those simple Anglo-Saxon works whose natural purity preserves them from decrepitude.

"If we have to make a choice at all," Hearn warns his Japanese, "between a perfectly plain style and the gorgeous music and colors of Sir Thomas Browne, I should not hesitate for a moment to tell you that the simple style is much the better."[17]

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[17] "Studies in Extraordinary Prose - Sir Thomas Browne," Interpretations of Literature, ed. John Erskine (New York, 1916), II, 50-89.

PART II

SIR THOMAS BROWNE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

CHAPTER V

THE EDWARDIAN PERIOD

Even before the beginning of the century, Sir Leslie Stephen had sensed a decline of interest in Sir Thomas Browne.

> We have an appetite for useful information and an appetite for frivolous sentiment or purely poetical musing. We cannot combine the two after the quaint fashion of the old physician; and therefore these charming writings have ceased to suit our modern taste; and Sir Thomas is already passing under the shadow of mortality which obscures all, even the greatest, reputations, and with which no one has dwelt more pathetically or graphically than himself.[1]

Yet the decline of interest was not immediately apparent judging from editions in print and the available literature devoted to Browne. The decline was greatly accelerated after the first decade, largely owing to one critic. For this reason, the Edwardian period merits a separate chapter.

Edmund Gosse

Gosse's Little Book

In the eighteenth century, Johnson was unable to revive much popular interest in Sir Thomas Browne. Yet

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[1] Hours in a Library, p. 45.

early in the twentieth century, Edmund Gosse was tremendously effective in killing what considerable popular interest there was then in Browne with the publication of a little book in Macmillan's English Men of Letters series.[2]

The manuals of this series were good secondary sources, very useful to teachers and students of English literature, but no one expected them to be monuments of scholarship. Thomas Huxley's Immanuel Kant, for example, did only what it set out to do: offered a brief biography and a little précis of Kant's philosophy; then cautioned the student not to think he had stormed a position when he had, in effect, captured but a straggling section of the baggage train. Sir Leslie Stephen, whose appreciation for Browne was deep, wrote several well-received titles in the series.

How Gosse's Sir Thomas Browne differed is that it became the prime source on Browne, the first full-scale critical biography since Johnson's Life, then only easily available in Wilkin's Works, a formidable multi-volume edition. Moreover, the biographical background is more complete than in Johnson's, and the book is well-written, extremely dense in texture, and covers the subject economically with authority and precision.

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[2]Sir Thomas Browne (New York, 1905). Unless otherwise noted, all Gosse quotations are from this book with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

But the fact begins to emerge, through choice of words primarily, that Gosse's admiration for his subject is not unmixed.

The Basis of Dissatisfaction

The essence of Gosse's stated dissatisfaction with Browne's character and abilities is that he was less a philosopher than Bacon, a sly, slippery, and essentially hypocritical theologian, and, as a naturalist, too limited and timid.

No one could seriously object to the first allegation. Bacon's position in "natural philosophy" is unchallenged. Browne attempted, as he states in the preface to Pseudodoxia, to follow the Lord Verulam's order, who outlined the task in his "Kalendar."

The second argument, that Browne was a slippery theologian, was a revival and variant of the German atheistic imputation that died in the eighteenth century.[3] Although psychologically, as Le Roy believes, this may have been the burr under Gosse's saddle, it would not be an argument of wide popular appeal today. In fact, even then, Gosse's position might be said to have been unique.

The third argument, that as a naturalist Browne was too limited and timid, can only be maintained by comparing him with the moderns. Browne does not quite scotch the cockatrice,

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[3]Wilkin, Works, I, lxviii ff.

for example, and Gosse jumps at this. Browne, he writes, "found difficulty in believing that the visible ray might carry forth the subtlest part of a poison...Browne's conception of optics was still in its infancy." (90)

In optical physics, corpuscular versus wave theory is still an issue. In Browne's day, the corpuscular theory was popular. Locke was also, like Bacon, a greater natural philosopher perhaps than Browne and he was a younger man, yet his conception of optics too was "still in its infancy."

> I cannot (and I would be glad anyone would make intelligible that he did) conceive how bodies can any ways affect our senses, but by the immediate contact of the sensible bodies themselves, as in tasting, feeling, or the impulse of some sensible particles coming from them as in seeing, hearing, and smelling." [italics mine][4]

However, what Browne actually wrote in Book III, Chapter 7 of Vulgar Errors did not hinge upon antique optics primarily:

> For if Plagues or pestilential Atoms have been conveyed in the Air from different Regions, if men at a distance have infected each other, if the shadows of some trees be noxious, if Torpedoes deliver their opium at a distance, and stupifie beyond themselves; we cannot reasonably deny, that (beside our gross and restrained poisons requiring contiguity unto their

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[4] Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Mary W. Calkins (Chicago, 1927), IV, 281.

> actions) there may proceed from subtiller seeds, more agile emenations, which contemn those Laws, and invade at distance unexpected.

Thomas Browne does give up the basilisk in its ancient mythic sense, though perhaps reluctantly. Gosse grudgingly admits that Browne "faced the necessity of asserting that...the ancients were wrong" (on occasion). (98)

Gosse vs. Whitefoot on Browne's Loquacity

Gosse adopts a patronizing attitude toward Browne, referring to him as "our medicus" (36). Browne's pastor, the Reverend Whitefoot in his Minutes, gives us the only eye-witness description of the writer:

> His modesty was visible....They that knew no more of him than by the briskness of his writings, found themselves deceived in their expectation when they came in his company, noting the gravity and sobriety of his aspect and conversation; so free from loquacity....[5]

Gosse, on the other hand, refers to the conversation of "our medicus" as "prattle" (31).

Gosse vs. Evelyn on Browne's Garden

In writing of Browne as a horticulturist and of his friendship with the Norfolk squire, Sir Nicholas Bacon, Gosse writes that Browne had no "considerable garden attached to his

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[5]Whitefoot, "Minutes on the Life of Sir Thomas Browne," Wilkin, I.

house at Norwich" but that Bacon had "wisely ordered his vegetable delights at Gillingham and Browne was always a welcome, and we may be sure, a garrulous visitor there." (122) He speaks too of Browne's "accustomed effusive courtesy." (137)

If we are to believe Whitefoot's observation of Browne's diffidence, we get an unpleasant picture here of a little snob insincerely singing for his supper, emphasizing that Janus aspect of truth quoted from the conclusion of Urn Burial. But Gosse consciously intended to leave this unpleasant picture with us as he was aware of the only comment extant on Browne's garden which is in the Evelyn diary and which he quotes in another context (p.162). An unbiased reading of that diary quickly convinces that Browne had some "vegetable delights" of his own.

> "Next morning I went to see Sir Thomas Browne (with whom I had some time corresponded by letter, though I had never seen him before); his whole house and garden being a paradise and cabinet of rarities, and that of the best collection, especially medals, books, plants, and natural things." October 17, 1761, The Diary of John Evelyn, William Bray (London, 1906), II, 333-5.

Perhaps "the old school tie," the fact that Browne's friendship with Bacon dated from Oxford days, that they had been neighbors, physician and patient since, may have had something to do with those visits besides the chance for an outing in the park and a glimpse of high life, which Gosse would insinuate.

Gosse vs. Dr. Johnson on Edward Browne as a Writer

Though as Le Roy alleges, Gosse may not have read the correspondence closely, he may be excused for finding his glance at it exasperating. Here are no purple patches which to Gosse were the only excuse for Browne, and, as Johnson remarked earlier, very little meat for the biographer. Browne, whom Gosse found such a showoff in the Religio Medici, does not write about himself in his letters. His correspondence with scientists is on science; with his family, about each member and about family affairs, never his own. Browne will never rank among the great epistolaries and diarists of his century, though his letters do display a gentlemanly reticence and a fatherly and avuncular altruism and interest. References to current events are extremely rare, and, to reiterate, an excusable discussion of himself or the state of his health, nonexistent. Nevertheless, the following Gossism is hard to swallow:

> If this were the biography of Edward Browne and not his father, his delightful letters, full of ardour and keen observation, excellently written, too, with a flowing pen, would enrich the narrative with an abundance of touches . . . Even in spite of the fact that He supplies his father with the gossip which he he knows that he will enjoy! (145) (italics mine)

One would have thought Edwards's letters with their "abundance of touches" were amply disposed with, once and for all, by the great Cham of the eighteenth century. Dr. Samuel Johnson's comment on Edward Browne's writing was:

> I cannot recommend it....A great part seems to contain very unimportant accounts of his passage from one place where he saw little, to another where he saw no more.[6]

This is almost Gosse's "unkindest cut of all."

Not only would Gosse award the palm for style to son Edward, but also for calligraphy. "The very old fashioned handwriting of Sir Thomas Browne affords a curious contrast to the trim, modern, and legible style of his son Edward." (158n)

Gosse vs. Pepys on Browne's Fame

Once again Gosse belabours Sir Thomas with this club fashioned of his own flesh and blood:

> It is probable that to the majority of the fashionable people in London, Sir Thomas Browne was chiefly known, at the time of his death, as the father of the celebrated traveler and man of science, Dr. Edward Browne of Salisbury Court. (159)

With this surmise, Samuel Pepys would not have agreed. In his diary, he quotes a respected friend, Sir William Petty, expounding in a coffee house at the end of the century, as stating that Religio Medici was the book in his lifetime that had been "most esteemed and generally cried up for wit in the world."[7]

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[6]Johnson's Life, Wilkin, I, xl.

[7]The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. H. B. Wheatley (New York, 1894), IV, 22.

Gosse vs. Stephen on Browne's Humor

Without so much as an apology to Sir Leslie Stephen, who regarded humor as the key to an understanding of Browne, Gosse states ex cathedra, "Browne had no sense of humor.... As a man and as a writer, he was sententious." (184) Certainly Gosse was not amused. He interprets the famous passage from Religio Medici on dreams, ending, "a confused and broken tale of all that hath passed" (87) as a literal literary confession. He did not take Stephen's advice: "The numerous class which insists upon a joke being as unequivocal as a pistol shot, and a serious statement as grave as a Blue-book should therefore keep clear of Sir Thomas Browne."[8]

Gosse's Mixed Feelings toward Browne as a Linguist

Gosse does give Browne more than his due, possibly, concerning Browne's knowledge of languages. "He actually quotes Danish." (115) No one before or since, not Browne or any other, has claimed for him a knowledge of Danish, yet we cannot easily dismiss Gosse's testimony as he himself was an accomplished translator of Scandinavian.[9] While it is true that Browne had a rudimentary knowledge of Anglo-Saxon, which is allied, Gosse knew of the correspondence between

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[8]Hours in a Library, II, 5.

[9]Gosse introduced Ibsen to England. "Gosse, Edmund," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed.

Browne and Theodore Jonas of Hitterdale, Iceland, and assumed momentarily perhaps that the correspondence was conducted partly in Danish although he states elsewhere the known fact that the correspondence was actually in Latin. A. C. Howell states that Browne did learn some Icelandic which is closely allied to the Danish tongue.[10] Aside from the French, Italian, Spanish, German and Dutch with which Gosse also credits him and the smattering of Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon mentioned, he was ~~an~~ accomplished ~~classical scholar~~ in Greek and Latin and knew Flemish, Tremelius, Septaguint, Vulgate,[11] Bezas, and Provencal. He was one of the few English gentlemen of the seventeenth century who read Dante in the original and he was probably learning Hebrew at the time of his death. It might also be added that his account of the Red Sea's color in Pseudodoxia includes an excellent translation from the Portugese. Here he had Raleigh's account as a guide and his own knowledge of Spanish, but the translation is alleged to be from the original.[12]

He takes the droll remark on Latin in the introduction of the Pseudodoxia quite literally. He alleges Browne wanted

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[10] "A Note on Sir Thomas Browne's Knowledge of Languages," SP, XXII (1925), 412-417.

[11] "To pick out the meaning of a page in a polyglot Bible is no great stretch of scholarship," (186) sniffs Gosse.

[12] Joao de Barros in Raleigh's History, quoted by Robert R. Cawley, "Sir Thomas Browne and His Reading," PMLA, XLVIII, 426-470. Cawley gives us the original; the favorable opinion of the translation is mine.

"a language which only could be understood by those who were masters of Latin." (195)

Gosse deplored Browne's Latinisms. It is true that Browne encouraged Johnson and a whole school of rhetoricians down to Coleridge to indulge in Latinisms and Gosse objects, "It is impossible not to ask ourselves how many of his readers can be expected to know that 'exantlation' is the same as 'pumping up out of a well.'" (180) It can be hoped, not many, as the word means "drawing out as from a well," which to those who are not deaf to words means something vastly different. Incidentally, exantlation is a word encountered frequently in Basil Willey's Seventeenth Century Background; in the context, it is used nicely. Browne may have invented it as the New English Dictionary lists 1680 as its date of introduction; but then, he invented medical and Gosse did not object to that. This was a period of inventing useful words, a creative period for the language, and Browne was a major creator, or offender, if you take Gosse's view. One does not have to be a very good Latinist or have a glossary to read Browne profitably, though it must be admitted that some of his creations failed of adoption,[13] but for these, only a slight knowledge of Latin will suffice for the "exantlation."

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[13]Johnson cited "arthritical analogies" for joints yet of course it is the pot that calls the kettle black. In his dictionary, cough is "A convulsion of the lungs vellicated by some sharp serosity." Prof. Donald J. Greene of the University of New Mexico has pointed out the lexicographer's debt to Browne for decussated, reticulated, and interstices in his well-known definition of network. "Johnson's Definition of 'Network,'" NQ, CXCIV (December, 1949), 583-9.

Strachey's quarrel with Gosse on this point is on aesthetic grounds:

> There's something almost shocking to those who love Browne truly in the spiritual state of someone who would want to replace "pensile" by "hanging" and "asperous" with "rough."

While condemning Browne's Latinisms, Gosse carefully avoids commenting on its use in the skillful interplay of effective, contrasting, curt Old English, a leit motif of several articles written later in this century.[14] Take the last sentence of Urn Burial for instance. Browne is speaking of a grave, "As content with six foot as the moles of Adrianus."[15]

Gosse's Innuendoes

Gosse seems to attach a sinister significance to Browne's correspondence with and interest in younger men. Beside the microscopist Dr. Henry Power, he mentions Windet, a young physician who wrote Browne concerning a proposed panegyric on Vulgar Errors and an Isaac Gruder who spoke of doing a Latin translation of that book. Gosse does not openly charge Browne with homosexual tendencies or, indeed, anything else reprehensible;

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[14]"For the rolling southern music he was certainly inclined to underrate the value of direct and rustic forms of speech." (195) Yet Gosse was not unaware of its existence: "It is odd that, when he pleases, Browne can be the most lucid of writers and employ none but the shortest and plainest of words." (197)

[15]Lytton Strachey, "Sir Thomas Browne," Books and Characters (New York, 1922).

this critic's technique, rather, is to proceed by insinuation or innuendo. Of this technique, Le Roy states, "The errors or the half truths...are generally so subtle or so ingenious that if they excite contradiction, they never inspire disdain."[16] Thomas Babington Macaulay's remark on the technique of coloring history would certainly apply to Gosse:

> A little exaggeration, a little suppression, a judicious use of epithets, a watchful and searching skepticism with respect to the evidence on one side, a convenient credulity with respect to every report or tradition on the other, may easily make a saint of Laud, or a tyrant of Henry the Fourth.[17]

Who's Slipshod?

Gosse concludes one long paragraph on Browne's style with this would-be withering but wonderful sentence: "Those whose passion for simplicity leads them to reject everything that is not slipshod and careless will find nothing in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne to attract them." (203) If Gosse's passion for simplicity and rejection of the slipshod had carried over into proof reading, he might have deleted that not. Le Roy lists ignorance of the correspondence and commonplace books as sources of Gosse's errors, but there are other details that trip him up even in the major works themselves.

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[16]"Les Critiques," Le Chevalier Sir Thomas Browne.

[17]"History," Edinburgh Review (May, 1828).

For instance, he attributes the figure of the tail of the serpent returning to its own mouth to the Religio Medici (165) whereas it is not found in that work but in the conclusion to Letter to a Friend. By the time of Browne's death, Gosse states "The Vulgar Errors had been printed five times," (166) while publishing history bears out the fact that there were seven editions in print at the time.[18] Of Descartes, Gosse states, "he never once makes mention in any portion of his writing." This is no gross error because it is true Browne seldom refers to "moderns" and his reference to Descartes is fleeting.[19] This is no incontrovertible proof that he was uninterested, as Gosse would intimate. It was not good form to refer to moderns in serious writing at the time. For example, John Selden in his Table Talk advises against it:

> To quote a modern Dutchman where I may use a classic author, is as if I were to justify my reputation, and I neglect all persons of note and quality that know me, and bring the testimonial of the scullion in the kitchen.[20]

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[18] My own copy of the sixth edition (London: Nathaniel Ekins, 1672) reads on the title page, "The Sixth and Last Edition, Corrected and enlarged by the author—" Browne died in 1682 and by that time there was yet another edition in print, a fact readily available to Gosse in Appendix IV of Greenhill's Browne, to which he refers, if not in Wilkin.

[19] In commending Digby's "excellent treatise on bodies," Browne endorses the work by stating that Descartes in his Principles of Philosophy agrees. Chapter 4, Book 2, Vulgar Errors. Also see 1925, A. C. Howell, p. 87 below.

[20] ed. Richard Milward, 2nd ed. (London, 1696), quoted in Seventeenth Century Prose, eds. R. P. T. Coffin and A. M. Witherspoon (New York, 1946), p. 232.

Le Roy's Evaluation of Gosse

While Olivier Le Roy believes Gosse indulges an ingeniously covert but irresistible tendency to find fault with Browne, there is one aspect of Browne's work, he believes, of which Gosse is sincerely appreciative; that is the ornamental. To this French critic, Gosse's biography and critique of Browne is partially brilliant, but a fundamental antipathy has led him into grave critical errors. Le Roy believes that Gosse sees a somewhat sinister purpose in the Religio Medici. It is not just a meandering book of reflections meant to delight with its beautiful prose; it has an end---the confession of one who has been religious but is now totally scientific, seeking to take another look at religion from this aspect, a procedure which Gosse feels is insincere. This sentence from Gosse in the grieved and accusing tone of Tondelayo's reformer boyfriend in Rain would seem to corroborate the view, "Wherever we lean on the substance of Browne's treatises, it cracks and gives way; it is worm eaten and hollow." (190) Le Roy uses another example, "We presently detect his cunning under his appearance of innocence." (28)

The truth is, says Le Roy, that Gosse is sceptical of Browne's scepticism but more so of his Anglicanism. He quotes the following sentence, a fair sample of the Gosse treatment: "He makes his confession as we have seen, rather glibly, in order under the shelter of it he may insinuate some more subtle reservations." (28,29)

Le Roy writes, "In sum, the Browne of Religio is shown in his essential traits a sceptic so crafty that it was a long time before anyone suspected it." It can be inferred, though not stated by Le Roy, that Gosse feels that he himself came along in the nick of time. Le Roy comments:

> The fantasy with which this critic composes this first silhouette ought not to rebuff us from the pursuit of analysis of Gosse's work....To Gosse uniquely, Browne was a born optimist. Gosse bases this on the fact that there is little talk of hell. [The plain fact of the matter is, Gosse discloses, that Browne just wasn't much interested in the subject of Religio Medici. He is really more interested in gulling the naive reader. But he is a good salesman; in every generation there are different types attracted to him. "His style totters with ecstasy." (49)

Here Browne begins to emerge as a weird combination of Mephistopheles and Elmer Gantry. Browne's effects, Gosse affirms again ex cathedra and without further explanation, are studied, unlike those of Taylor or Fuller. (203) This to Le Roy seems to contradict what Gosse previously states on the style of Religio Medici, comparing it to an ecstatic chant or a voice babbling with emotion.

But in spite of these grave faults, Le Roy would not underrate Gosse. He states sincerely of his book:

> It is for the volume, the multiplicity of its points of view, and the talent of its author, the most considerable which has been written on Browne, on his life, on his genius, and his work. In spite of this talent, perhaps in part because of this talent, in love with paradox, and put in the service of thought little sympathetic to the

> philosophic ideal of Browne--this study
> is not satisfying.

Actually, this would seem a cool and overly deferential reaction.

Le Roy finds the same insufficiency in Hazlitt for the same reason--the incapacity of forgetting their own joint reaction in a too summary knowledge of Browne's work. It is somewhat unfair to Hazlitt to link him with Gosse, for however Hazlitt's philosophy may be similar to that of Gosse and dissimilar to that of Browne, Hazlitt seems to have had a genuine and not unsympathetic appreciation for Browne the writer as well as for his books, however superficial his knowledge of them might have been.

What Gosse did appreciate sincerely, Le Roy believes, was the high style, although as James Mason Cline points out, praise by Gosse must be qualified to mean detail if the work itself has no meaning.[21] The question is a crux which Strachey just leaves as an ironic paradox. "In practice, [Gosse] approves; in theory, he condemns."[22] This truism is misleading and must not be construed as Gosse's insincerity, Le Roy feels.

Gosse simply does not agree with something we have come to regard with Buffon as axiomatic, "Le style, c'est l'homme." To Gosse, the style is <u>not</u> the man. He loves Browne's high style although he abominates its imitation and even its principles;

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[21] "Hydriotaphia," <u>Five Studies in Literature</u> (Berkeley, 1940), pp. 73-100.

[22] <u>Books and Characters</u>, p. 34.

he loathes Browne. And he criticizes legitimately when he warns, "Browne's rock ahead is wrapping the trite in the coronation robes of fine language." (197) [Certainly this has been done in some passages of Christian Morals.] Yet Gosse also wrote:

> When Browne is extremely moved by his imagination he can hardly be too grandiloquent; we accept his most audacious "Brownisms" with delight. He leads us at his will through his labyrinths of language, and every turn of the path displays some new sombre beauty, brings forward to our ears some new strain of melancholy faëry music. (201)

To accuse the man who wrote this of no appreciation of Thomas Browne is to accuse him of reading Browne not only "partially but partially," Le Roy puns.

In counterdistinction to Le Roy's opinion, it seems that even that which Gosse regards most highly in Browne's style, he does with grave reservations. His approval is that of the hair-shirted monk for the Cardinal's velvet. Gosse seems to regard as a grave fault in Urn Burial, which, to him, is Browne's finest, that "to go to Browne's book for plain archaeological statement would be like applying to a gin shop for a shoulder of mutton." (113) Gosse dismisses Christian Morals and Letter to a Friend rather curtly. In Browne's old age, "it seems that he grew somewhat pietistic." (162) While he treats the Letter respectfully, of the former he states, "This

kind of book, occupied with the sententious expansion of accepted moral maxims is scarcely compatible with high intellectual culture." (178)

Of some antiquarian notes on the cathedral church of Norwich monuments, published posthumously, Gosse's comment was that the rough work "remains an instance of the necessity that Browne's work had of being duly robed, jewelled, and perfumed before it was presented to the public." (176)

Literature and Architecture as Ornament

There is a good analogy to Gosse's point of view toward Browne which the critic Gosse suggests himself. "Think of him as an architect."[23] Then think of what architecture was in Gosse's day--wedding cake and gingerbread. Jig-saw machine Gothic was architecture to Gosse. Building was something else again. A good builder built a strong structure and then the good architect came along like a pastry cook and put the frosting on the cake. There may be a dichotomy between sound structure in writing, too, and its adornment. At least this is what Gosse hints at and Le Roy seems to accept from him. This aesthetic happens to be unpopular today and is not that held

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[23]"If we think of him as an architect of phrases the skill with which he is able to build up cloud castles of mere verbal development...is a snare....They are...not carved out in bold forms with a chisel or a lathe, but with the daintiest care, fragments sometimes of no great intrinsic value, are fitted into the brilliant surface pattern." (204)

of Browne's work by the relatively few who have read him. A paradox which might have interested both these writers, lovers of paradox as they were, is that certainly one reason for the fewness of the few Browne admirers today is owing to an interdict growing from this principle, congenial to no one but Gosse. Gosse could be flattered and Browne might smile.

Was Gosse Sincere?

But was Gosse really sincere? If, as Gosse did not do, we insist on Browne's sincere ambivalence, it is difficult to deny this Janus aspect to Gosse's way of looking at him. Yet, somehow, the case is not strengthened by reading the short sketch of Browne in English Literature attributed to Gosse, and appearing only shortly after his Sir Thomas Browne. In the chapter "From Milton to Johnson," Gosse shows but one of his two faces, the more favorable one. Having vented his spleen, done his dirty work, he lays a lily on the chest of his victim. Here, Browne the man comes in for unreserved adulation.

> His modesty and sincerity made him a universal favorite; he had more friends in the world of letters and science than any other Englishman of his age...Sir Thomas Browne is one great example of the fact that it is not quite impossible for an illustrious author to be consistently humble, extremely beloved, and entirely happy.[24]

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[24]"From Milton to Johnson," (London, 1905), III, 52.

Who killed Cock Robin? "Not I," said the weasel, "Just read the lovely things I wrote about him in my English Literature."

Gosse's Success

So Gosse's work is not just another little book; it is an extremely interesting psychological document—an unsolved problem in motivation perhaps without a clear parallel in literary history. It is the reverse of what Defoe tried ineptly in his pamphlet One Way with Dissenters. A dissenter himself, he pretended that hanging was too good for them. When the Anglicans discovered his irony, they were incensed, and the nonconformists were incensed both before and after they discovered it. So Defoe fell in the middle, that is, in jail. Gosse, much smoother, masqueraded as a friend, proved a false friend, and was entirely successful.

C. H. Herford

The year 1905 was Browne's tercentenary. The English Men of Letters Browne was followed the next year by the Everyman Library edition of the Browne works, Religio Medici and Other Writings, with an introduction by C. H. Herford, which, in short compass, manages to convey some insights.

Herford describes Norwich as it was then, presents a short Browne biography, and a brief description of Browne's works.

He is markedly influenced by Gosse, yet stands up to him, feebly, on the question of the Royal Society. He believes there was no deliberate intention, as Gosse surmises, to exclude Browne. However, he agrees with Gosse that Browne was neither a real scientist nor a real thinker. "His supreme merit belongs to literature, not to philosophy." Browne, he feels, did not keep religion and philosophy in "watertight compartments."[25] He admires greatly the unique texture and richness of Browne's style. Browne seems to him a rarity among happy men, as few are so "detached and lonely in their thought."

He opines that the Royal Society probably did not approve of Browne's style, "Yet for Browne's ends and aims his writing is incomparable. It is not a cumbrous and artificial way of conveying facts any more than a symphony is a vague and equivocal way of telling a story."[26]

Sir William Osler

The great physician, Sir William Osler, made Browne a literary avocation. A bibliophile, he amassed a valuable collection of early editions and published several essays on Browne. Osler engaged in research at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris among the Patin papers looking for Browne references.

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[25]A direct lift from Gosse (28) like the "happy man" view below.

[26]Herford, Religio Medici, vi-xvi.

He visited and corresponded with Charles Williams of Halifax, the Norwich antiquarian and Browne specialist, who wrote biographical pamphlets. Osler wrote in his essay, "Sir Thomas Browne," that Browne, while possessing the "charm of high thoughts clad in beautiful language," was no great scientist. "He does not seem to have been on intimate terms with...great contemporaries--Harvey, Sydenham, or Glisson--though he mentions them, and always with respect." Guy Patin, the literate head of the School of Medicine at the University of Paris, was always Browne's sincere admirer though on philosophic, non-medical grounds. Osler concluded:

> As a scientific man, Browne does not take rank with many of his contemporaries. He had a keen power of observation and there is abundant evidence that he was an able naturalist. But we miss in him the clear, dry, light of science revealed in...Harvey.[27]

Paul Elmer More

Paul Elmer More, author of The Greek Tradition, taught ancient languages for a year at Harvard and for another at Bryn Mawr and then led a hermit's life in a small cottage farmhouse at Shelburne, New Hampshire. After several years, he returned to the world as a journalist and critic. One of his Shelburne Essays was on Sir Thomas. While the essay is colorfully written,

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[27] An Alabama Student and Other Biographical Essays (London, 1908), reprinted in Selected Writings (1951), pp. 40-64. "Clear, dry, light" echoes Gosse's "Dry, white, light." (189)

it is no great contribution to Browne scholarship. More was interested in Browne as a scientist. He thought him by intellect a force in the forward movement but by temperament a reactionary. He considered Browne's restatement of the Bacon idols in the introduction to Pseudodoxia rather weak, accurate for the first couple, the cave, and the tribe, but when he deviated, no improvement.

Perhaps More is the first to note the use of contrast of the Anglo-Saxon with the Latin in Browne's style. He compares the Anglo-Saxon to a "pure tone" and the Latin to "harmonics."

He too, like Herford and the later Gosse, believed Browne to be a happy man, "one of the few happy men of this world," and, as an ex-hermit, he commended Browne's lack of participation in affairs. There was "nothing cowardly in his inaction. Indeed, it was by the waiting sobriety of such men that his country was finally saved and made sound."[28]

More is particularly amusing in his brief, suggestive descriptions of the works. He calls The Garden "about as nondescript a piece of Pythagorean madness as ever bewildered the wits of man," and Vulgar Errors a composite or mixture in equal parts of Francis Bacon and Robert Burton.[29] While he

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[28] Selected Shelburne Essays (New York, 1909), VI.

[29] Studies of Religious Dualism, Sir Thomas Browne (Cambridge, 1909), pp. 154-86.

too voices the new Edwardian opposition to Browne, Sir Thomas is no less his idol because he would show Browne's feet of clay. One may feel perhaps that More is more journalist than scholar, yet he thinks forthrightly for himself and is not giving us Gosse warmed over.

Edward Dowden

Edward Dowden, Irish critic and Cambridge lecturer, was an old man when his "Sir Thomas Browne" was published in Puritan and Anglican Studies in Literature in 1909. His Browne essay may have been written considerably earlier as it seems more fin de siècle than Edwardian. It is full of unalloyed appreciation with more gratitude and interest in Browne's sweet soul than in his science or letters. "Wonder and love" is Browne's "divinity." The biography is certainly uncritical and the writings are paraphrased or characterized without distinction.

George Saintsbury

George Saintsbury was the most considerable critic besides Gosse to specialize in Sir Thomas Browne in this period. An Oxford scholar and school teacher, he made his name as a critic of the Saturday Review and at the age of fifty became Professor of Rhetoric and English at Edinburgh. His interest in Browne was specialized and his interest was in writing

technique, which is not to say that he left the psychological study and biography completely to Gosse, and the theological and spiritual comment to Dowden.

Saintsbury's article "Antiquaries" in the Cambridge History of English Literature made Browne focal but also considered Fuller, Walton, and Urquhart. Here, his interest in Browne's style did not preclude his interest in his thought for he was quite modern in believing, unlike Gosse, that both are aspects of the same subject.

Browne, he wrote, "has been held by certain good wits to have hardly a superior in one kind of English prose, and his matter, as is not always the case, fully matches his manner." Saintsbury must state this forthrightly because of Gosse. It is in a sense a flat contradiction of Gosse's aspersion that Browne's "rock ahead" was in "wrapping the trite in the coronation robes of fine language." In other words, Browne criticism following Gosse seemed to divide into two general camps: that of Saintsbury who would defend him, and that of the Gosse mob who would hit him again. Browne, or what was left of him, was no longer a sacred cow.

To Saintsbury, the underlying spirit of Browne was not his humor as it was to Stephen, but "his intense and quiet melancholy." He felt that Christian Morals was entirely composed of melancholy reflections and precepts, "and that these ingredients, no doubt, have accounted for a recent tendency to

depreciate them, the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries being, as is well known, in no need of religious and ethical instruction."

It was the Pseudodoxia, however, that Saintsbury felt was the true key to understanding Browne and his thinking. It was the "touchstone of appreciation." Browne believed that an accepted fact or theory "is open to trial by experiment, and that if experiment does not prove or justify it, you should give it up...but where a fact or opinion is not open to experiment...you are at liberty not to give it up, and to doubt the wisdom of those who do." Which is perhaps the most succinct statement on the method of the Pseudodoxia that has been written.

To Saintsbury, this is "The hinge and center of Browne's thought":

> ...double scepticism....And it may further be deemed to have some real connection with the astonishing chiarascuro, the mixture of shaded sunlight and half illumined gloom, which makes the charm of his style and habit of his expression; while its connection with the singular charity and equity of his temper and judgment is quite unmistakable.

For one whose primary interest is Browne's style, the most dazzling of his works is of course the Hydriotaphia. Saintsbury calls the fifth and last chapter, "the longest piece, perhaps, of absolutely sublime rhetoric to be found in the prose literature of the world." Letter to a Friend he characterized as "a curious blend of medical sang froid and

humane sympathy." Of Browne's epistolary style, Saintsbury stated, "It should not surprise that his letters contrast with the style of books. He did not 'talk book.'" There is no pose; the letters are delightfully easy.[30]

In his later A History of English Prose Rhythm, Saintsbury considered three great virtuosi of seventeenth century prose: Browne, Milton, and Taylor. Of the three, he believes Browne to be the greatest; not that Browne's prose does not have its faults. Its beauty does not contribute greatly to understanding. Browne's syntax, as Coleridge noted, is at times undisciplined, but this is no less true of Milton and Taylor. Browne employs forced Latin terminology, but merits our indulgence if not our admiration for the astonishingly adroit way he uses it. Browne prefers "clarity" to "clearness" but when he uses strange words, he invariably adds to the sonority and harmony of his phrase.

Saintsbury may have been the first to speak of scansion in connection with Browne's prose. If so, he should be credited with establishing a leit motif in subsequent criticism. Saintsbury believed he had discovered the secret of Browne's rhythm. An analysis of the famous fifth chapter of Hydriotaphia discloses the incessant novelty of the arrangement of feet. No three identical feet are contiguous and in the best passages,

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[30] CHEL, VII, ch. 10.

no two. Browne was never guilty of subordinating his rhythm to sense, an occasional fault of Milton, to the detriment of the equilibrium.[31]

C. W. Eliot

Saintsbury was the last major critic of this period to concern himself deeply with Browne, although in America, Dr. Charles W. Eliot of five-foot bookshelf fame wrote an adequately appreciative introductory note to his reprint of Religio Medici in the Harvard Classics.

> His full and sonorous periods remain the delight of readers with an ear for the cadence of English prose. The matter...also reveals a personality of great charm and humor, a mind at once surprisingly acute and surprisingly credulous, and a character of exalted nobility.[32]

F. E. Hutchinson

F. E. Hutchinson, writing of Donne in the article "The English Pulpit from Fisher to Donne" for the Cambridge History of English Literature, set a style in comparing Browne with

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[31](London, 1912), pp. 181-200. In going to poetry for a model or analogy of prose scansion, Saintsbury was not blazing new trails. P. Fijn van Draat uses this ancient guide when he turns to poetry for rhythmic principles in his Rhythm in English Prose (Heidelburg, 1910). "Here we shall find a systematic application of every rhythmical device to which prose language occasionally has recourse." p. 18.

[32](New York, 1910), III.

Donne. As interest in Donne increased later in the century, a number of other writers compared Browne to Donne to one or the other's detriment. The intemperate tone of these later reviews was also set in the Hutchinson piece. Hutchinson refers to Donne:

> He can rise like Sir Thomas Browne to a rapt appreciation of the Christian vision of death as a portal to a better life. But his expression of both moods [exaltation and a combination of the feelings of pomp and horror], when he is writing to order, is apt to degenerate into an accumulation of gross and disgusting hyperboles....[Yet] there are sentences in the sermons which, in beauty of imagery and cadence, are not surpassed by anything he wrote in verse, or by any prose of the century from Hooker's to Sir Thomas Browne's.[33]

Edward Bensley

Edward Bensley in his article in the Cambridge History of English Literature entitled "Robert Burton, John Barclay, and John Owen," (IV, 283) was more conventional in comparing Browne to Burton, a comparison made even in Browne's time. He writes:

> Neither in thought nor in style can he rival the subtlety of Sir Thomas Browne, to whom he has been compared and with whom he certainly has this in common, that the same readers seem drawn to both ....Samuel Johnson whose wide reading and hypochondriacal taint instinctively drew him to The Anatomy, was emphatic in his praise and affords another instance of admiration extended at the same time to Browne and Burton.

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[33] IV, 246.

Bensley quotes Anthony à Wood on a Browne technique shared by Burton:

> No man in his time did surpass him for his ready and dextrous interlarding his common discourses among them... with sentences from classic authors, which being all the fashion in the university made his company the more acceptable.

A not very lengthy and unsigned article in the eleventh edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica notes of Browne, "A mind as aloof as his is a psychological curiosity."

Jules Derocquinguy

In Europe, there was very little noteworthy written on Browne in the early years of the century. A Frenchman, Jules Derocquinguy, in a study of Charles Lamb, considered Browne's relation to his subject.

> It is true that Lamb chaffed Browne but it is affectionate raillery, a breeziness without tartness that he exercises at Browne's expense that testifies simply to the good humor in which his favorite old author puts him.[34]

Wilhelm Schonack

In Germany, the only book solely on Browne and the first discussion of his work in over a century was published by Wilhelm Schonack. Le Roy states that this book is poorly documented, badly

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[34] Charles Lamb, sa vie et ses oeuvres (Lille, 1904) quoted in Le Roy, p. 313.

written, and without literary interest. Peter Green calls it "one of the first attempts to place Browne's religious thought in its proper historical context."[35] Dowden was not sufficiently objective for that attempt. At least, it is agreed that Schonack had read Browne which is more than can be said for his earlier fellow countrymen.

Schonack's thesis is that Browne's theology was unorthodox and the precursor of Deism. He believed Browne embraced only these tenets: belief in an omnipotent, omniscient deity; faith in the immortality of the soul; and use of reason in religion as a duty to God.[36]

The book is avant garde in one way, in its concentration on Browne's thought to the exclusion of Browne's expression.

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[35]Green, "Bibliography," Sir Thomas Browne, Writers and Their Works No. 108 (London, 1959).

[36]Sir Thomas Brownes Religio Medici ein Nerschollenes Denkmal des englischen Deismus (P. Siebeck: Tübingen, 1911).

CHAPTER VI

THE MODERN PERIOD

Browne's Waning Popularity Compared with the Rise of Donne's

Undoubtedly, expatriate artists such as T. S. Eliot and Hemingway raised Donne's stock following the first World War; undoubtedly, Edmund Gosse sunk Browne's before the war. But publicity, good or bad, is not the only reason for the rise or decline of a literary reputation. Other reasons that might be cited for the relative obscurity of Browne in the twentieth century are first the fact that he was popular in the nineteenth. A cyclical factor seems to work here not entirely inoperative in the case of reputations of artists even of the first rank such as Leonardo and Milton. Secondly, the very term belles lettres is a kiss of death in this streamlined age that takes its writing neat or not at all. Who reads for words? The answer may be, some of the few who read poetry, but unfortunately, poetry has seldom been less esteemed.

Thirdly, perhaps, the easily translatable word "Religio" in the title of Browne's best known work has not been a help. Books of spiritual inspiration, paradoxically, are

as relatively popular today as ever, and, it is rumored, have amassed fortunes for parson-authors, but the best sellers do not use the word "religion" or "church" or "creed" in their titles to say nothing of "Christian" or "Morals." While Sir Thomas was undoubtedly the Norman Vincent Peale of his own age and Religio Medici has remained a religious book for a few, it has never been regarded primarily in this light by the majority of its readers since. Browne is read for his expression and his unique cast of mind, an antique magic he evokes almost exclusive of subject matter.

The vogue in scholarship for writers in this period has favored Donne. For the years 1924 to 1960, the International Index lists 174 articles in scholarly periodicals on Donne to 33 on Browne, a proportion of over five to one in favor of Donne. This has been a continuing trend. For example, in the years 1924-1927, five articles were published on Browne to nine on Donne; in the years 1958-1960, one article was listed as published on Browne to seventeen on Donne.

Modern Articles on Browne and Publishing History

With few exceptions, the more modern articles on Browne tend toward esoteric specialization, though there have been a few articles on phases of the Browne biography of the popular type, most of which were published before 1930. There has been a growing interest in Browne's position in the history

of science with a number of articles written, one book, and numerous references to Browne in other books under the general subject. Included in this category are some learned papers and doctoral dissertations.

Writers have made further attempts at prosodic analysis of Browne's prose of the type initiated by Saintsbury, and there has been a growing interest in Browne's thought from the historical-philosophical, psychological, and theological viewpoints. These, in the main, have been separate categories. One book has been published on Browne's religion, space devoted to him in longer works on the history of ideas, and a number of articles have been written on aspects of these subjects.

There have been two full-length critical biographies of Browne and one long monograph of this genre published since 1930. In the rash of reprints of classics this century, Browne has been represented modestly although there have not as yet been published any paper-back editions of his books in the United States.

Back in the Edwardian period, a paper-back of excerpts was available entitled Golden Thoughts from Sir Thomas Browne, as well as an edition of Christian Morals bound in velvet! According to the U. S. Catalogue of Books in Print, Macmillan and Dutton were competing with nearly identical, cheap, three-volume editions of the Works. Also available were individual editions of every Browne work, thirteen editions of Religio Medici

alone. By 1928, the several books about Sir Thomas in print in 1912 had dwindled to Gosse's alone. Of the editions of individual books, only Religio Medici and Urn Burial were left, the former in five editions and the latter in two. No complete Works were in print.

Aside from the definitive Works edited by Sir Geoffrey Keynes, containing all of Browne's published works and the correspondence and a valuable bibliography, the works reprinted since have been the Religio Medici and the Hydriotaphia. The Everyman's edition has continued active and has been reprinted several times since the original with the Herford introduction. The current editor is Frank L. Huntley of the University of Michigan. This edition still contains, besides Religio and Urn, an excerpt from Pseudodoxia, Letter to a Friend, the Garden of Cyrus, and Christian Morals, the only popular edition to contain any of these later works except for a London edition of Religio, edited by Keynes, also containing Christian Morals.

Pre-First World War

In 1912, Malcolm Letts wrote a short article for the English publication, Notes and Queries, entitled "Sir Thomas Browne and Witchcraft." A. C. Clark used Browne's Hydriotaphia as a leading example in his Prose Rhythm in English (Oxford, 1913).

Charles Whibley: The same year, Charles Whibley included a chapter, "Sir Thomas Browne," in his Essays in Biography. While clear and sympathetic, he added no interpretation to the bare facts of the biography and, as Strachey said, the scope here is limited. He does not resolve a contradiction in Browne's career. "Few men have more sternly divorced themselves from affairs....When Cromwell took arms against his king, Browne with the greatest resolution, closed the door to his study." Yet, "He was a keen partisan. No man dared doubt his loyalty."[1]

While Gosse was ruthless on Browne concerning his part in a witchcraft trial, Whibley merely stated the undeniable fact that belief in witches was the prevalent opinion of the time. He also defended Browne's Latinisms. He wrote that we do not reproach him for his "medical," "hallucination," or "antediluvian."

Perhaps the most telling statement Whibley makes in the defense of Browne against his critics is that to heartily dislike any part of this paradoxical character is to dislike him completely. Le Roy agrees.[2]

Aside from another note by Malcolm Letts in 1914 in Notes and Queries on the sale of Browne's library, nothing was

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[1] London, 1913, p. 283.

[2] "Condamner quelque chose de lui, c'est le condamner en bloc." pp. 342-3.

published on Browne until Lafcadio Hearn's posthumously published Interpretations of Literature in 1916.[3]

During the War

Morris Croll: Morris W. Croll was one of the few writers to publish on Browne during the first World War. Croll's concern was not at all for Browne the man or the thinker, but for Browne's style, and then merely as an example of the vanishing discipline of rhetoric which Croll revives and refines, thus opening another fruitful avenue for critical analysis. Thoroughly aware of Saintsbury's work, he rejected the older critic's verse prosody as a premise.

One of Croll's early articles was entitled "The Cadence of English Oratorical Prose."[4] This he followed with "Attic Prose in the Seventeenth Century."[5] In neither of Croll's articles or in the school that grew from his original work is Browne's writing really focal. It merely exemplifies admirably an anti-Ciceronian style that lends itself to Croll's analysis.

1922

Christopher Morley and Lytton Strachey: In 1922, the popular American man of letters, Christopher Morley, retold the dramatic story of Browne's first critic in "Sir Kenelm Reads in

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[3] "Sir Thomas Browne," (New York, 1916).

[4] SP, XVI (1919), 7-55.

[5] SP, XVIII (1921), 79-128.

Bed," a feature in the now defunct New York Evening Post.[6] The same year, in Lytton Strachey's Books and Characters, a charming chapter on Browne appeared which, for the work of a popular biographer, did not concern itself much with the biography.

> The Life of Sir Thomas Browne doesn't afford much scope for the biographer. Everyone knows that Browne was a physician who lived in Norwich in the seventeenth century; and, so far as one must call, for want of a better term, his "life," that is a sufficient summary of all there is to know.

As to style, Strachey stoutly defends Browne against Gosse.[7] On Browne the scientist, he was less flattering than later, better-qualified, scientific critics. "Browne was scientific just up to the point where the examination begins. He knew little or nothing of general laws but his interest in isolated phenomena was intense."[8] To him, the essence of Browne is in the endings of Urn and Garden. Henry Seidel Canby in reviewing Strachey's book noted an anachronism in the ending of Garden. "The huntsmen are up in America and they are already past their first sleep in Persia." Canby wrote, "Obviously, the computation of time is wrong."[9]

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[6] December 18, 1922.

[7] p. 48.

[8] Strachey, p. 45.

[9] Dunn, p. 129.

Basil Anderton: In Sketches from a Library Window by Basil Anderton, published the same year, the chapter on Sir Thomas Browne concentrates on his style. Anderton uses the Saintsbury verse-prosody approach and believes Sir Thomas consciously copied verse rhythm. Recalling Browne's own preoccupation with the number five in the Garden, Anderton sees as a fault in Browne too much five-beat rhythm. He notes that Browne has a trick of ending paragraphs in trimeter, "One in the trunk of a cedar."[10] In the space of one chapter, Anderton does not provide enough evidence to substantiate his thesis.

F. J. Meyrick and Others on Sir Thomas's Skull

Also in 1922, the British Medical Journal published a note of antiquarian interest by F. J. Meyrick, "Sir Thomas Browne: The Story of His Skull, His Wig, and His Coffin Plate,"[11] recounting the ironic story of the theft of Sir Thomas's earthly remains from his crypt in St. Peter's Mancroft early in the nineteenth century and how the skull was finally recovered in a medical museum, thus ironically underlining the theme of Ozymandian evanescence in his own Urn, where "Mummie is become Merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharao is sold for balsoms."[12] The account was picked up the same week by Sir

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[10] Anderton, p. 154.

[11] London, May 6, pp. 725, 726.

[12] Urn Burial, p. 181.

Arthur Keith in the London Times Literary Supplement, "The Skull of Sir Thomas Browne."[13] The story bore repetition, apparently, for the following year it was told again by Miriam L. Tildesley in "Sir Thomas Browne, His Skull, Portraits, and Ancestors."[14]

Horace J. Bridges: Horace J. Bridges, in a book of old-fashioned essays entitled As I Was Saying, includes one called "Browne Study," primarily concerned with the religious aspects of Browne's writing. He feels that the central message is that "There is a piece of divinity within us." He is another appreciator of Browne's subtle sense of humor. About his style, he feels Browne can imbue a platitude "with the slow falling cadences of suggested sorrow, and it becomes a psalm of mourning, the epitome of pathos and frustration of human life."

1924

Geoffrey Keynes: The year 1924 was noteworthy in that it saw the first publication of the editorial work of Sir Geoffrey Keynes, greatest of Browne editors, in A Bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne, Kt., M.D. This included "A Catalogue of the Libraries of the Learned Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Edward Browne, His Son."[15]

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[13] May 11, 1922.

[14] Biometric, XVII (1923).

[15] (Cambridge, 1924), pp. 182-4.

1925

A. C. Howell: The following year marked the debut of another notable Browne scholar of our century, Almonte C. Howell, whose "Sir Thomas Browne and Seventeenth-Century Thought" began a modern skein long overdue in Browne criticism: Dr. Browne's science considered seriously. Howell wrote that Browne not only consciously strove to carry out Bacon's plan outlined in his "Kalendar" but followed Descartes's method of collecting varied experience and subjecting it to reason and experiment.[16] Browne's library, he noted, included a 1637 edition of the Cartesian Discourse on Method.

> Spratt in his History of the Royal Society notes the tremendous influence of Bacon on that body. It is not going too far to say that Browne's share in the spread of that influence was important....Possibly he had a direct influence upon [The Invisible College] in pressing home the value of the Baconian and Cartesian ideas of method in scientific procedure.

Howell implies that Browne's contribution was unoriginal but that "His service was in popularizing the idea of the scientific approach."[17] It is difficult to discover just what Browne did believe concerning Copernicanism. Boyle and Wren, the latter a geometer and Oxford professor of astronomy long before the construction of St. Paul's, were emphatic disbelievers in heliocentrism. The Royal Society was officially against raising

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[16] SP, XXII (1925), 67.

[17] Ibid., 71.

the question. All that you can say of Browne is that he was sceptical of Copernicanism; he was also sceptical of the old traditional Ptolemaic cosmology. His stand may be explained as regarding cosmology as a religious subject. "I have no genius to disputes in religion, and have often thought it wisdom to decline them, especially upon a disadvantage, or when the cause of truth might suffer in the weakness of my patronage."[18]

The modus operandi employed by Browne in Vulgar Errors was to list the error and the known sources; the confuting authorities and reasons against; finally, experiment and observations, if available or if possible. Browne's very scepticism was scientific and healthy.

Howell also published this year his "A Note on Sir Thomas Browne's Knowledge of Languages." He wrote that "Readers are prone to lose sight of [Browne's] erudition in following the mazes of his sonorous periods." Browne's library included works in Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Flemish, and Dutch. Most were medical, but philological works were not lacking.[19]

R. Sencourt: Borrowing a title from Meredith, "They have outflown philosophy," R. Sencourt published Outflying

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[18] Religio Medici, p. 5.

[19] SP, XXII (1925), 412-7.

Philosophy: A Literary Study of the Religious Element in the Poems and Letters of John Donne and in the Works of Sir Thomas Browne and of Henry Vaughan etc.[20] This critic is more concerned with theological than literary values. To him, there is no doubt of the fervour of Browne's religion. His faith is simple, solid, and effective. Everything becomes in Browne a pretext for religious contemplation. Like Donne, he was an Anglican who believed that the dream frees the soul from corporeal bonds and renders it purer and more intuitive; like him, he made the body a major part of the religious activity. Both, finally, have exalted in mystical terms the sentiment of friendship. When Browne tells us that he occupies his solitude in meditation on the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption, was he not inspired by Dante? When Browne reflects on friendship, one soul in two bodies, he echoes St. Thomas. "At my Devotion," writes Sir Thomas, "I love to use the civility of my knee, my hat, and hand, with all those outward and sensible motions which may express or promote my insensible Devotion."[21] Sencourt comments, "There is no passage that has more the tone of a personal confession. Yet Browne is following closely a doctrine expounded in the Summa Contra Gentiles." Sencourt feels that Browne made scholastic philosophy the basis of his meditations. Le Roy feels that Sencourt makes this point a

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[20] London, 1925.

[21] Religio Medici, p. 3.

little too emphatic for the amount of corroboration he adduces. However, he has no quarrel with Sencourt's attempt to reconcile Browne's imagination, warm heart, and sound reason. He believes it is an effective refutation of Coleridge's allegation that Browne's brains were a little twisted and will therefore excuse the author for what he considers a sloppy job of writing.[22]

1926

William P. Dunn: An important longer work on the subject, first published in 1926, was William Parmly Dunn's Sir Thomas Browne, A Study in Religious Philosophy. The title is a little misleading because there are many interesting biographical points aired which have only indirect bearing on Browne's religious philosophy. Browne's participation in the witchcraft trial is treated fully and sympathetically, for example.

Dunn believes Browne's thinking contrasts sharply with that of Bacon, who felt that "Knowledge is power." Browne would state, rather, "Light is the shade of God." Dunn feels Browne's religion is largely Catholicism overlaid with Platonism. While he holds points in common with the Cambridge Platonists, he departs from them in his tendency to discern the symbol of the invisible in manifestations of the visible world. He is a poet and a mystic, influenced by Hermeticism and Cabalism; his theme is death. Dunn's study is one of the few such twentieth century books to be reprinted.

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[22]Le Roy, "Les Critiques," p. 304 ff.

E. H. Legouis and Louis Cazamian: The same year saw the first edition of Legouis and Cazamian's bid for the mantle of Taine, French expertise in English literature, with their A History of English Literature. Judging from the sympathetic treatment Louis Cazamian has since accorded Browne, the co-authors did not see eye-to-eye for the Browne chore fell to Emile Hyacinthe Legouis who proved to be fully in the Gosse tradition if not under his direct influence.

> [Browne] sometimes recalls Montaigne by his confessions, sometimes foreshadows Pascal by the greatness of his cosmic visions. But the insistence with which he places himself in a favourable light, his care to establish himself on a pedestal, awaken a regret for Montaigne's greater spontaneity and less discreet confidences ....At the same time, Browne is differentiated from Pascal by what may be called his complacent redundancy. In this, there is something of literary artifice, a too apparent rhetoric, and there is also a taste for the eccentric which is evidence of a less intense and inexorable seriousness than belonged to Pascal....He is in fact, an artist rather than a thinker and more interesting as a writer than a man. His prose is admirable. His style is very distinct from Burton's. His sentences are short, clearly outlined, and modern and restrained in construction. He dates his vocabulary for he is a great latiniser....but his search for latinised words is also inspired by his love of cadences....So subtle is his use of sonorities that few poets can afford in their verses a better feast to the ear than does this mystical doctor in his prose.

Sir Arthur T. Quiller-Couch singles out these remarks for special praise in his preface to the work. "How sensitively our two authors can appraise eccentric genius in itself, let any reader judge who will turn to M. Legouis's twin estimates of Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne." Later Cazamian in his chapter "Browne" from Development of English Humor (Durham, 1952) appreciates Browne's "tongue-in-cheek" quality, induced perhaps by the doctor's interest in Rabelais, but believes Sir Leslie Stephen goes too far in finding this the whole key to his work.

1927

Norton Tempest: In 1927, Norton Tempest picked up the discussion of Browne's prose style, after a mere nod to Anderton, where Saintsbury dropped it.[23] He ignored Croll's now more popular approach to use verse-prosody as his tool. His comment that the prose of Browne has not been sufficiently remarked might have been countered by the question, "Where have you been?" Tempest finds that no other works have the full Brunonian harmony of Religio, Urn, and Garden. Specifically, he excepts Letter to a Friend from the select list. The best of this prose he finds is smoother than Taylor's and also more majestic. Browne excels in interlacing feet of two or three syllables: "Gar'dens/were/ before'/gar'deners/ and but'/some' hours'/af'ter/the earth'."

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[23] "Rhythm in the Prose of Sir Thomas Browne," RES, III (1927), 308-18.

Le Roy takes an anti-intellectual approach to this type of attempt. "Browne defies analysis. The music escapes as all beauty, the grasp of science; and Tempest is endeavouring to define the indefinable."[24]

1928

Hugh Walker: Hugh Walker, in The English Essay and Essayists published in 1928, considers Browne as an essayist, perhaps the greatest who ever lived. He thinks his best work the Hydriotaphia but would class with it, though on an inferior level, Letter to a Friend. It is unjust and dangerous, he feels, to separate the style from the man. Nevertheless, Hydriotaphia proves nothing, no more than Paradise Lost. Both are instruments to make imagination vibrate. It can be admitted that Browne latinised to excess and in doing so, set a bad example, but let us indulge him; let him who has written better prose be the first to cast the stone.

In 1928, the London Times Literary Supplement carried a general story on Sir Thomas Browne[25] and J. H. Lloyd also drew on the biography for an article in the Annals of Medical History entitled "Sir Thomas Browne and the Witches."[26]

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[24]Le Roy, "Les Critiques,"

[25]"Sir Thomas Browne," May 24.

[26]X, 135-7.

1929

Alwin Thaler on Browne and Shakespeare

The following year Alwin Thaler compared Browne to Shakespeare in his book, Shakespeare's Silences. Thaler believed that Browne had no contempt for poetry as some have alleged, indeed he was more than half poet; nor was he unconscious of or antipathetic to contemporary literature or the drama. Especially does he find in Browne many lines that are related to Shakespeare's, in much the same spirit and occasionally the same form. Browne also, says Thaler, borrows professional theatrical jargon that would presuppose a familiarity with the dramatic medium. He quotes a statement of Gosse that the "Seventeenth Century's comparative want of accepted critical authority applied to literature."[27]

There is considerable evidence according to Thaler that Browne knew and liked the theater;[28] that he was not impervious to Elizabethan poetry. The number of ideas he held in common with contemporary poets and similarities of expression especially to Shakespeare seem to Thaler to transcend coincidence. "He seems to have drawn verbal or figurative reminiscence from something like a third of the plays." He sees a marked similarity

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[27] Life, p. 55. Yet this quotation, if meaningful at all, would hardly apply to Browne, except in respect to contemporaries. He certainly did not lack ancient authority.

[28] In Browne's Works including the correspondence, J. S. Finch was able to find but two instances of specific mention of plays, neither of which had Browne attended. "Sir Thomas Browne and the Strolling Players in Norwich," RES, XV (1939), 468-70.

to Browne in the Grave Digger scene from Hamlet. Yet "Browne never imitated Shakespeare. He did assimilate him...the highest tribute that one man of genius can pay to another."

It is quite true, as tables in Thaler's book comparing lines of Shakespeare to Browne attest, Browne did not imitate Shakespeare. In fact, as much as any Browne proponent might like to see him borrow some of Shakespeare's glory, if the case must rest on these tables, there is really very little here quoted to prove beyond doubt any but the most tenuous linkage. No one example shows similarity so striking as to rule out mere coincidence.

The seventeenth century was an age of great individuals rather than individualism. There were recurrent conceited themes. Such ideas as the microcosm or the great chain of being are to be found not only in Browne and Shakespeare but in the work of many poets and philosophers of the era. Perhaps today, in an age of greater uniformity, creative artists strive more consciously for novelty. Then, there was not the same stigma attached to the bromidic when thinkers strove for uniformity.

While the real attack against individualism, against differentness, became dominant in the neoclassicism of the eighteenth century, it was certainly a factor in the seventeenth. A. O. Lovejoy quotes Spinoza, "The purpose of Nature is to make men uniform, as children of a common Mother." He writes:

> The general attack upon differentness of men and their opinions and evaluations...was the central and dominating

> fact in the intellectual history of Europe for two hundred years--from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth century.[29]

This notion may play a large part in the fancied resemblance between Browne and Shakespeare.

Perhaps René Wellek's stricture may apply to Shakespeare's Silences.[30]

> First of all, parallels must be real parallels, not vague similarities assumed to turn, by mere multiplication, into proof. Forty zeroes still make zero. Work violating...elementary requirements is not only shockingly large in amount but is sometimes produced by distinguished scholars who should be able to recognize the commonplaces of a period--clichés, stereotyped metaphors, similarities induced by a common theme.[31]

J. B. Masterson: A passing reference to Browne in The Age of Milton,[32] a work written by J. B. Masterson, is in agreement with Sir Leslie Stephen that Browne was a conscious humorist. Also in 1929, M. W. Croll continued his analysis of prose rhythm in "The Baroque Style in Prose," wherein Browne was again used as a prime example.[33] A work on Sir Thomas Browne in the Italian

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[29] Essays in the History of Ideas (New York, 1960), pp. 80-81.

[30] "Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne," (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 97-138.

[31] René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1942), p. 248.

[32] (London, 1929), pp. 146-59.

[33] Studies...in Honor of Frederick Klaeber, pp. 427-56.

language, perhaps the first such critical study in Italy, reprinted in translation in English Studies, was written by Mario Praz.[34]

1930

R. F. Jones: R. F. Jones wrote an interesting article in 1930 entitled "Science and English Prose Style in the Third Quarter of the Seventeenth Century," wherein he discusses the styles of Milton, Taylor, and Browne together as a classification characterized by rhetorical devices such as figures, tropes, metaphors, and similes or "similitudes." In Browne's prose, long sentences developed a stately cadence. There was a studied effort of inversions, the prose counterpart of Miltonic blank verse. There was a penchant for interlarding with classical quotations, a frequent use of exotic words and Latinisms.

In this period, wrote Jones, the Royal Society adopted a linguistic program. The Bishop of Rochester, Thomas Sprat, in his A History of the Royal Society (1667) argued for a plain style in scientific writing. Bacon, in his Magna Instauratio, had written:

> It being part of my design to set everything forth, as far as may be, plainly and perspicuously (for the nakedness of the mind is still, as nakedness of the body once was, the companion of innocence and simplicity....

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[34]"Sir Thomas Browne," XI, 161-71.

Yet Bacon's style was not the model chosen by the Royal Society. Hobbes was hard on verbal ornament in Leviathan as was Robert Boyle in "Some Considerations Touching the Style of the Holy Scriptures;" Joseph Glanvill wrote, "Thus these verbosities do emasculate the Understanding; and render it slight and frivolous as its objects."[35]

That the battle was not won by these champions of simplicity is indicated by both the style and content of the following lines from Sprat's History:

> We all value one another so much upon this beautiful deceit [this vicious abundancy of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue, which makes so great a noise in the world] and labour so long after it in the years of our education, but we cannot but ever after think kinder of it than it deserves. And indeed, in most other parts of learning, I look upon it as a thing almost utterly desperate in its cure: and I think it may be placed among those general mischiefs...which have been so long spoken against that men are become insensible about them; every one shifting off the fault from himself to others; and so they are only made bare common-places of complaint.

So it was apparently a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Ironically, one of these champions, Joseph Glanvill, perhaps unconsciously but possibly consciously, modelled his style after that of Browne. There is no record

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[35] Vanity of Dogmatising (1661), pp. 150 ff.

of Sir Thomas being singled out as a prime offender against scientific clarity of style in his own day; this was left for later critics.[36]

Dorothy Tyler: Dorothy Tyler, in the same year, put Sir Thomas and the witchcraft trial in a truer historical perspective in an article in Anglican Living.[37]

1931

Olivier Le Roy: A banner year for Browne was 1931, when Olivier Le Roy published in Paris his Le Chevalier Thomas Browne, perhaps the best and certainly the longest critical biography, quoted freely in this study. Section IV of this book was the first compilation and detailed consideration of Browne criticism since Wilkin.[38] It is a selected sampling, however, and did not pretend to be exhaustive.

Le Roy's own views on Browne were not crystallized and displayed internal contradiction. For example, he defended Gosse's "fault finding," believing Strachey went too far in intimating that Gosse might therefore have no deep and true appreciation for some phases of Browne's artistry; but Le Roy is

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[36] PMLA, XLV (1930), 977-1009.

[37] "Sir Thomas Browne's Part in a Witchcraft Trial," pp. 179-95.

[38] Quatrième Partie, "Les Critiques" (Libraire J. Gamber: Paris, 1931), pp. 285-370.

also inclined to agree with Whibley that to condemn part of Browne is to damn him entirely.[39] These statements seem mutually contradictory.

Partially admitting his confusion, confronted with Browne's complexity, Le Roy still concludes:

> It is possible to follow a line of development. In life, a vigorous, orthodox Christian philosophy; in style, an immoderate taste for luxury and erudition, an ear for ever more solemn music.

He called Browne "the last and most brilliant exponent of flamboyant English prose"[40] and added that it is impossible to preserve the full flavor of his style in a Latin tongue. French translation smooths it too much, as a great deal of the effect is obtained by the juxtaposition of Anglo-Saxon and Latin words.[41]

Browne's Pyrrhonism, he believes, was merely youthful and not a stable element of his personality.[42] The stable elements were tolerance, complete submission to Christian ethics, pursuit of science, penchant for the supernatural, and a stoic

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[39] p. 82, n.2.

[40] Le Roy, Troisième Partie, pp. 279.

[41] Ibid., p. 271. "Des vocables latins et saxons s'évapore dans l'unité de notre langue."

[42] Bredvold and Basil Willey disagree on this point with Le Roy. Many of the critical views aired here admit scepticism in Pseudodoxia which was written in middle life and I believe some elements can be discerned in the later works. See Christian Morals, p. 284, and beginning of Sect. III, p. 294.

quality of religious sentiment. Antinomies are only apparent, not real, such as love of science and mystery. Physics and metaphysics are more closely allied than are casually assumed.

> Because Browne has had many friends of very different and often opposed character, each one finding in his work a private reason for liking him, today we have a new and richer Browne with more "background" than the true Sir Thomas Browne, Norwich doctor, parishioner of St. Peter's Mancroft, naturalist and versatile writer.

Contrary to the sequence of characteristics and its implication in the quoted paragraph, Le Roy does not consider Browne the writer last.

Anna K. Tuell: Inasmuch as Browne has never been expunged from the Catholic prohibited Index, it is interesting to note that in 1931 a favorable article on him was published in The Catholic World, without mention of the Index. The essay by Anna Kimball Tuell stated, "Thomas Browne's writings reveal the temperament of a good and pious man of settled years and Christian constitution." The article was afterward reprinted in her Victorian at Bay.[43]

Joseph Needham: Joseph Needham, F.R.S., eminent Cambridge embryologist, biochemist, and historian of science, delivered a series of lectures at the University of London[44] which form the

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[43] "Sir Thomas Browne Again," CXXXIII (1931), pp. 186-90.

[44] Speculation, Observation, and Experiment (Univ. of London, 1931).

first four chapters of his authoritative History of Embryology,[45] and the following year, borrowing his title from Sir Thomas, published The Great Amphibium.[46]

As he proved earlier in his Science, Religion, and Reality,[47] Needham is an indefatigable Browne admirer. As in all his works, his History contains many quotations from Browne and pays no less a tribute to his scientific achievement than to his style, character, and cast of mind. He believes Browne may be regarded as the "father of the static aspect of physico-chemical embryology." He quotes from the Religio Medici on the incubation of eggs and the keen observations of Chapter 28, Book III, of the Pseudodoxia.

In a section entitled "Thomas Browne and the Beginnings of Chemical Embryology," he writes:

> These citations show Sir Thomas to have been more than simply the supreme artist in English prose, which is his common title to remembrance. In picking his way carefully among the doubtful points and difficult problems which previous embryologists had propounded but not answered, he usually managed to give the right answer to each.

Needham gives Browne high marks as an experimental scientist in his willingness to put "any disputed point to the test of 'ocular aspection'," and for his accurate observations when he did so.

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[45] Cambridge, 1934.

[46] New York, 1932.

[47] New York, 1928.

> The only conclusion that can be drawn from these remarkable observations is that it was in the "elaboratory" of Sir Thomas's house at Norwich that the first experiments in chemical embryology were undertaken. His significance in this connection has so far been quite overlooked, and it is time to recognise that his originality and genius in this field shows itself to be hardly less remarkable than in so many others.... a great step for those times.[48]

Hutchinson of Yale, himself a biochemist, believes Needham gives Browne only his due,[49] a departure from the earlier literary critics, Gosse, Strachey, and others, to say nothing of Sir William Osler who might have known better, who were at best amiably patronizing of Browne, the scientist. In this connection, Taine, intuitively, came nearer the mark.

Kenneth Burke: Browne's style came under scrutiny in a chapter called "Lexicon Rhetoricae" in Kenneth Burke's Counter-statement.[50] Burke quotes Saintsbury's dictum that while verse rhythm gains its effect through repetition, prose gains its through variety. Burke injects the further idea that prose rhythm is not entirely a matter of feet but is influenced by logic and ideational motivation. In scanning lines from Hydriotaphia, he compares the "multitude of dissimilar balances" to "complex musuclar movement involved in walking."

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[48] pp. 141-3.

[49] The Itinerant Ivory Tower (New Haven, 1953).

[50] New York, 1931.

W. H. Barnes: More belated recognition of Browne, the scientist, came through an article by W. H. Barnes in Isis, "Browne's Hydriotaphia with a Reference to Adipocere."[51] Browne calls the substance found in graves and later termed adipocere, "a fat concretion," and compares it to "castle" (castile) soap. Barnes states that his "hypotheses of its formation are sufficiently close approximations of the truth to justify the occupation by Sir Thomas Browne of the place accorded by Ure in his Dictionary of Chemistry[52] to Fourcroy as the 'scientific discoverer of this peculiar matter'."

1933

Robert J. Kane: An article in Review of English Studies finally solved an interesting textual problem. Appearing in Wilkin's first edition of Browne's Works was a curious fragment concerning Egyptian mummies. This passage was suppressed in subsequent editions, only to be revived again by Keynes with the note that it had been deleted by Wilkin who had reason to doubt its authenticity. Robert J. Kane finally laid the ghost, scotching a possibility that Wilkin might have been mistaken as to the authenticity of the fragment, in this story of a forgery with a reverse twist.

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[51] XX (1933), 337-43.

[52] London, 1828.

At the time when he was compiling the Works, the fragment was sent to Wilkin by a James Crossley of Manchester with the explanation that it was a copy of a manuscript, but which manuscript and where read and copied, Crossley had forgotten. Wilkin printed the fragment in good faith. Then, a Dr. Samuel Crompton accused Crossley of forgery and Crossley not only confessed but boasted that the fragment was good enough to fool Bulwer who had quoted a passage saying that it was "one of the finest things that Browne ever penned." The passage was good, bearing marks of Browne's high style; therefore the possibility still remained that the fragment might have been a legitimate discovery simply claimed by the eccentric Crossley for his own.[53]

Kane ruled out the possibility, not on Egyptological grounds which he explored and found sound enough, but on philological grounds. Certain words used, according to the New English Dictionary, were introduced during the eighteenth century, among them vampire and ghoul. It was not stupid of Crossley to use them as these would have been subjects dear to Browne's heart had he known of them.[54]

In 1929, a Professor Robert M. Gay had reprinted the Mummies fragment in his anthology, College Book of Prose, with

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[53]It is interesting to note how the motives imputed are opposite those of most forgers. See Franklin Dickey's "The Old Man at Work: Forgeries in the Stationers' Register," SQ, XI (1960), 39-47.

[54]"James Crossley, Sir Thomas Browne, and the Fragment of Mummies," RES, IX (1933), 266-74.

the comment, "Milton in his nativity hymn, and Shelley in "Ozymandias" have produced a comparable effect, but their verse is no better than this prose."

1934

Louis I. Bredvold: In 1934, Louis I. Bredvold published his important Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden wherein he traced the historical development of Pyrrhonism and demonstrated how Dryden's sceptical temperament eventually, paradoxically, led him to Catholicism. A key point in the argument is the comparison of Dryden's thought with that of Montaigne and Browne, who influenced him, and of Pascal, who probably did not.

Brevold shows, too, that the spirit of the Royal Society, of which Dryden was a member, was predominantly sceptical and may have abetted Dryden's sceptical tendencies. Of the Royal Society, he adds:

> Perhaps they were also indebted to Sir Thomas Browne, although his imaginative flights and complete humiliation of the reason must have appeared to them rather too uncritical. And yet Glanvill conveyed, in rhythms that recall Browne, a sense of the mystery of the world both in its vastness and in its infinite minuteness, and of the miracle of man among all these unexplainable wonders.[55]

Bredvold believes that the type of scepticism of Browne and Dryden goes with a conservative temperament based as well

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[55] p. 63.

on fideism as Pyrrhonism. The fideistic argument may take two forms: one, theological or philosophical, a direct attack on reason; the other, ecclesiastical, against anarchy. In Dryden, both are together. While Browne loves to pursue his reason to an "O Altitude," Dryden writes in "The Hind and the Panther,"

> Rest then, my soul, from endless anguish freed;
> Not sciences thy guide, nor sense thy creed.

The notion of authority had a strong hold on his mind.

Another point in common Dryden and Browne held which Bredvold does not stress except as it fills in the picture of a political conservative, was their anti-democratic distaste for the mob. Bredvold writes of Dryden:

> He feared the crowd, the "dregs of democracy," and believed that the weakness of human nature must be offset by compelling and supreme authority in church and state.[56]

Alexander Hamilton, who is alleged to have said, "Your people, Sir, is a great beast!" echoes this feeling and may have been quoting Religio Medici:

> If there be any among these common objects of hatred I do contemn and laugh at, it is that great enemy of Reason, Virtue and Religion, the Multitude: that numerous piece of monstrosity, which, taken asunder, seem men, and the reasonable creatures of God; but, confused together, make but one great beast, and a monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra.[57] [italics mine]

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[56] Bredvold, p. 128.

[57] Religio Medici, pp. 67-8.

"It goes without saying," writes Bredvold, "that Dryden knew Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici; the great vogue of the book and the title of Dryden's poem [Religio Laici] would be presumptive evidence even had Dryden not paraphrased Religio Medici from memory in a note to his Persius."[58]

Basil Willey: First published in the same year as The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden was another important work in the realm of history of ideas: Basil Willey's The Seventeenth Century Background. Willey, like Browne admirers Needham and Raven, is a noted Professor at Cambridge University. He devotes a chapter of his book to Browne. Willey opens his chapter as follows:

> Bacon was pleading for science in an age dominated by religion; Browne is already—at least in the Religio Medici—pleading for religion in an age which was beginning to be dominated by science. This is partly what makes him so interesting to us now.[59]

Willey believes sincerely that Browne was indeed a "great amphibium" living at ease in "divided and distinguished worlds," a trick now difficult to accomplish. Browne could think and feel simultaneously, which is perhaps what prompted Osler to remark that he lacked "the clear, dry, light." It explains to Willey what "makes Browne's science so 'unscientific'

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[58]Bredvold, p. 119.

[59]Willey (New York, 1953), p. 49.

if by 'scientific' we mean 'chemically pure' from feeling."

He counsels:

> It is romantic falsification to "relish" Browne for his "quaintness." It is more valuable in reading him, to try to recover something of his own inclusiveness, in virtue of which his juxtapositions are not quaint, but symbols of his complex vision.[60]

Willey compares Browne's style with that of Hobbes:

> Browne lives amphibiously, in divided and distinguished worlds, and the richness of his prose betokens the range of his explorations and the rapidity of his transits. With Hobbes there is but one real world, that in which all is "body"; all else belongs to the "kingdom of darkness"....This is what gives his style singleness and force, while making it in the long run, monotonous and unsatisfying.[61]

Willey also compares Browne's style with that of Glanvill:

> Glanvill has caught something of Browne's attitude to his subject, his play of fancy steadied by wistfulness and pity...the progression by allusion, image, and antithesis, the varied repetition, the intellectual somersault, the flash of paradox. But Glanvill's is a thinner medium, and if you surrender to it for awhile, allowing yourself to pretend that it is Browne's, you will soon sink.[62]

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[60] Ibid., p. 53.

[61] Ibid., p. 102.

[62] Ibid., p. 176.

The imitation is nevertheless exceedingly lifelike, as witness this sentence from the Vanity of Dogmatizing: "The Sages of old live again in us; and in opinions there is Metempsychosis. We are our reanimated Ancestours and antedate their Resurrection."

1936

Gilbert Phelps: A much less sympathetic English point of view of Browne was that held by Gilbert Phelps, in 1936 of the Staff Training Department of the B.B.C. In an essay, "The Prose of Donne and Browne,"[63] he invidiously compares Browne to Donne:

> That there are such immediately recognizable 'fine passages' in [a writer's] work that can be lifted out bodily, may be symptomatic of weakness as well as merits....A prose which translates experience directly and palpably and a prose of the literary occasion is inherent in any examination of Browne and Donne....Browne speaks as an amateur and spectator. In Donne, there is none of this whimsical rolling of the pellets of learning on the tongue....Quotations and allusions are functional, entirely related to that excitement and subjugated to it....Donne is closer to the medieval traditions of thought than is Browne....He is not even a true humanist. He read his Greek in Latin. He knew the schoolmen better and seems to have more coherence.

Browne's "amateur playing with 'new ideas'" is considered by Phelps comparatively fragmentary, desultory, and dilettantic.

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[63] From Donne to Marvell (Harmondsworth: Pellican, 1936), pp. 116-130.

> By comparison with the variety and richness of Donne's language and imagery...Browne's stylistic resources often seem threadbare....Browne's 'fine passages' have charm and even grandeur, but they are fundamentally 'safe'.... Lilly and Sydney...were more elaborate than Sir Thomas Browne in their stylistic devices, but these sprang more directly from their emotional commitment and were not picked up and laid down like objects in a collection.

The comparison of Donne to Browne "emphasizes the difference between literature and belles lettres."

Clay Hunt: An equally intemperate comparison of Donne to Browne was written twenty years later by Clay Hunt from the opposite point of view in his book Donne's Poetry.[64] He states that Browne writes prose in the manner of a metaphysical poet:

> With as firm a logical plan, as elaborate an intellectual ingenuity, and as precise a workmanship in detail as one finds in any of Donne's metaphysical conceits. He observes as careful a philosophic rigor, and he plays just as carefully with paradox and ambiguities and puns. But Browne works also with the emotional suggestions of the sounds and rhythms of his language and with the subtleties of sensation and feeling and what one never encounters in any of Donne's many treatments of religious "mysteries"—an evocation of the sense of mystery, of the emotional quality of losing oneself in an "O Altitudo!" to feel the wonder and awe at the contemplation of the infinitude.

He quotes the Religio Medici:

> Not that I am ashamed of the anatomy of my parts, or can accuse nature of playing

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[64](New Haven, 1954), pp. 131 ff.

> the bungler in any part of me, or in my own vicious life for contracting any shameful disease upon me, whereby I might not call myself as wholesome a morsel for the worms as any.

In Browne, Hunt finds humor in his regard to a memento mori as he does in the Grave Digger scene in Hamlet; none of the "utter humorlessness of Donne's voluptuous abandonment to his necrophilous ardors."

> [Donne was unable] to feel wonder and pleasure--as that professional scientist Sir Thomas Browne did--over the fact that "the whole creation is a mystery," and to find in the contemplation of these things which one's mind could not understand, a satisfying sense of the finitude of man's reason. "Certum est, quia impossibile est."

Hunt sums up his case against Donne:

> From the time of his marriage until the end of his career, I think Donne would have echoed, with a cold intensity of commitment which that gentle and contemplative man never knew, Browne's statement that, "The world that I regard is myself; it is the microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other, I use it but like my globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation."[65]

G. K. Chalmers: Underscoring the newest note in Browne criticism was an article in 1936 in Osiris by Gordon Keith Chalmers entitled "Sir Thomas Browne, True Scientist."[66] The article not only impressively recapitulates Browne's scientific

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[65] Religio Medici, p. 85.

[66] II, 28-79.

achievements but records the respect with which he was regarded by his fellow scientists. Robert Boyle, for example, called Sir Thomas a naturalist "so faithful and candid" that he should not be distrusted. John Evelyn wrote to Browne, "What indeede may I not promise myself from your ingenuity, science, and candour?" Dugdale applied to him for criticism. L'Estrange wrote eighty-five pages on the Pseudodoxia. Dr. Henry Power, father of British microscopy, imitated him and was his professed disciple. Dr. Henry Oldenberg, Secretary of the Royal Society, called him "that deservedly famous physician." Elias Ashmole, noted chemist, gratefully acknowledged his scientific assistance. Later, Dr. Johnson was so far from taking the Pseudodoxia lightly that he seriously suggested reprinting it with notes, bringing it up to date.

Chalmers somewhat vitiates the effect of all this impressive recognition in a long footnote speculating as to why Browne was never "elected" to the Royal Society.[67]

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[67] Sir Thomas Browne, A Doctor's Life of Science and Faith (New York, 1950). May not the reason be that at this time, no one was elected; one simply joined? The first elected member was Browne's young disciple, Dr. Henry Powers. J. S. Finch points out that election to the Royal College of Physicians to which Browne belonged was indeed an honor and carried with it automatic membership in the Royal Society. Active membership would have involved for Browne a most uncomfortable, time-consuming, and dangerous journey of 113 miles by coach, not to mention the payment of dues. On the other hand, he was most interested in the Royal Society, corresponded with its officers, contributed to it specimens from his "cabinet of rarities," was referred to respectfully in the minutes as "the learned Dr. Browne of Norwich," and, finally, wrote his son's acceptance speech in Latin on the occasion of that worthy's election to the presidency of the Society.

Among Browne's scientific accomplishments, he was credited with coining the word electricity. His scientific writing was noted for its clarity, brevity, and accuracy. Chalmers concludes, "In scientific practise, Sir Thomas Browne was really scientific ....In scientific activity, Boyle and Browne were similar."

The same year Chalmers considers Browne among early atomic thinkers[68] and in an article on the lodestone in 1937 quotes liberally from the Pseudodoxia.[69]

George Williamson: George Williamson, an impressively erudite scholar of rhetoric and metrics, entered the lists with a long article in 1936 entitled "Senecan Style in the Seventeenth Century."[70] Taking his title from Shaftesbury, he enlarged upon the subject later in his book, The Senecan Amble.[71] In the article, he credits the poet Francis Thompson with first recognizing Silver-Latin imitation in Browne's style. Unlike Bacon, Browne does not indulge in "strong lines." To illustrate what is meant by that term, he quotes from Boileau's Art of Poetry:

> A verse was weak, you turn it much too strong
> And grow obscure for fear you should be long.

Bacon's own mother complained of that obscurity in his letters, getting a younger son to translate them for her.

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[68] "Three Terms of the Corpuscularian Philosophy," MP, XXXIII, 243-60.

[69] "The Lodestone and the Understanding of Matter," Philosophy of Science, IV, 75 ff.

[70] PQ, XV, 321-51.

[71] London and Chicago, 1951.

Bacon's model was Tacitus. Williamson characterizes three tendencies of the anti-Ciceronian style: a/ curt (Lipsius); b/ loose (Montaigne and Browne); c/ obscure (Bacon).

In The Senecan Amble, he agrees with Croll, whom he lavishly credits, that Browne's style was loose and adds that it is "untouched by the innovations of Georgias," by which he seems to imply, symmetry. Browne, he feels, employs disguised symmetry. He detects an occasional hammer-stroke rhythm in Browne, accomplished by stringing together native stressed monosyllables, "Now since these dead bones...." This does not "nullify" movement but slows it down and gives it a weight by clustering accents that carry the rhetorical burden. In the juxtaposition of these monosyllables the tendency to assert their individual force is countered by the rhetorical grouping imposed on them and hence they are not equally strong or equally separated. Williamson adds, "Of course Browne also produces the harmony derived from Latin rhythms introduced from his vocabulary and in which English ears had been trained from the Book of Common Prayer."[72]

The "loose period" in Senecan mode creates "a mental or oral suspense, commonly supported by formal elements." Williamson quotes Croll's comparison of Bacon's, Browne's, and Lily's use of antinomy. Bacon's was of sense: "Revenge is a kind of wild justice"; Browne's was for symmetry of form to point up his

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[72] Ibid., p. 49.

artful departure from it; and Lily's was purely for sound.[73]

Williamson compares Browne to Burton:

> The loose period in Browne realizes an orotund effect within a laxer form than that of the Ciceronian period; in Burton, on the other hand, it produces a conversational effect; but in both, it remains emergent in form, unlike the Ciceronian period.[74]

In Browne's and Milton's time, there was an unusual effort to cast English into a Latin mould or to bring Latin terms into English at least where a writer was not addressing the vulgar. Milton's is the former tendency; Browne's, the latter.

Williamson compares the prose of Browne with the transitional prose of the latter part of the century:

> The difference between early and late seventeenth century prose may be put in this way: the early prose suggests an extension of the soliloquy in Elizabethan drama, and is in this sense a private communication from mind to mind; but the later prose, like dialogue, feels and manifests the pressure of the social scene. Sir Thomas Browne, for instance, indulging the privacy of his thoughts, can call upon the resources of the poet and create his medium in a way that requires one to learn his language; while Cowley, only a little later, is more concerned with the public quality of his thought because he is more conscious of speaking a common language.

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[73] Ibid., p. 115.

[74] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

> Again, the earlier prose seldom has the sense that it may be answered except in another declamation; hence it lacks that precise sense of mind accomodating itself to mind which we may well call the social sense; it is, in a way, too private.

Initiating a theme which Jean-Jacques Demorest developed later, Williamson adds:

> There is some truth to the paradox that seventeenth century verse developed prose virtues before seventeenth century prose did. This was largely because of the conversational or dramatic immediacy which the verse affected; witness Donne, whose verse is often more conversational than his prose.[75]

The review of The Senecan Amble in the London Times Literary Supplement was most unusual. The reviewer practically confesses that this is the best book he ever read that he did not understand. He finds it extremely informative and erudite but without clearly defined thesis and organization, therefore difficult.

1938

Edward L. Parker: In 1938, Edward Locke Parker, then an instructor of English at New York University, inspired like Williamson by Croll, published an article that was not so important intrinsically as in opening a new avenue of intensive analysis of Browne's style. He also, almost as an afterthought, drew

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[75] Ibid., pp. 541, 542.

some distinctions which were useful in resolving paradoxes that had plagued earlier Browne criticism and had previously resulted in violent differences of opinion regarding Browne's prose. The article was entitled "Cursus in Sir Thomas Browne."[76]

Croll had stated, "Sir Thomas Browne, like his master, Seneca, was fond of the cadence of oratory,"[77] and suggested that a profitable study might be made of the known rules governing that oratory toward a further understanding of Browne. Parker admits that Norton R. Tempest had already attempted to follow the suggestion,[78] and had brought up the subject of the guide to oratorical rhythms, the medieval Latin cursus, but, more under the influence of Saintsbury than Croll, had continued his study in terms of verse rhythms, an approach even Saintsbury had finally judged unfruitful.

Parker's cursus analysis is highly technical and space will not permit recapitulating it in this study. He admits that as a tool of analysis, the cursus does not lend itself to all of Browne's prose.[79]

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[76] PMLA, LIII (December, 1938), 1037-53.

[77] Ibid., p. 71.

[78] Ibid., p. 77.

[79] "The Cursus in Sir Thomas Browne," JEGP, LVIII, 60-7. In 1959, another article on the subject was published by Michael J. Maloney of Marquette University, who attempted to show the native origins of some Browne rhythms by scanning certain famous passages from Religio Medici and Urn Burial.

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[76] PMLA, LIII (December, 1938), 1037-53.

[77] Ibid., p. 71.

[78] Ibid., p. 77.

[79] "The Cursus in Sir Thomas Browne," JEGP, LVIII, 60-7. In 1959, another article on the subject was published by Michael J. Maloney of Marquette University, who attempted to show the native origins of some Browne rhythms by scanning certain famous passages from Religio Medici and Urn Burial.

Parker's clarification of criticism on Browne's prose style was his identification of not one, but three styles which he calls "high," "medium," and "low." The high style is best exemplified by the fifth chapter of Urn Burial; the low style, by the Pseudodoxia. The major part of Religio Medici represents the medium style. Religio has comparatively few rhythmical periods, according to Parker. It is more straightforward exposition and less conceited than Urn Burial, the conceits in which tend to fall in cursus patterns.

Austin Warren accepts and develops the notion of the three styles in one of the most informative articles of the century, "The Style of Sir Thomas Browne," published in the Kenyon Review.[80] He calls the style of Religio Medici "a loose or libertine style associated with Pyrrhonism and Montaigne which expresses the movement of ordering the mind in the process of thinking--rhetoric and logic triumphing over grammar." Warren characterizes the examples of the styles:

> Religio Medici is an intellectual biography, a 'familiar essay'; Vulgar Errors, by its author's intention, a work of instruction and enlightenment, is soberly expository. But the two prose poems, Urn Burial and the Garden of Cyrus, though they may at first appear to be on or about topics, are not.

Warren emphasizes a point made by Williamson, "Though [Browne's] diction is Latin, his sentence structure, unlike Milton's, is rarely so." Warren finds Browne a snob:

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[80] XIII (1951), 674-87.

> ...an intellectual snob...with no such metaphorical originality as Donne, Herbert, or Cleveland. Almost completely absent is visual imagery or other overt thrust into the writing unsubdued by language.

1942

Walter E. Houghton: By 1942, when Walter E. Houghton published an article entitled "The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century,"[81] the critical sneers of the earlier twentieth century for Browne, the scientist, were so far out of vogue, thanks to the recognition of qualified scientists, that Houghton actually apologizes for including Browne in his study of virtuosi:

> I do not mean to imply that Browne is [merely] a virtuoso. In many respects he fails to fit the type—his serious concern with metaphysics, his Platonic and mystical turn of mind, both are far from the study of things as they are...but to a considerable extent, however, Browne shares the tastes and sensibilities of a typical virtuoso.

1948

Elizabeth Cook: An interesting item in Browne textual scholarship turned up in 1948, in an article by Elizabeth Cook for the Harvard Library Bulletin,[82] challenging some accepted premises of the early publishing history. She argues for the

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[81] JHI, III, 51-73; 190-219.

[82] "The First Edition of the Religio Medici," II (1948), 22-31.

accepted first edition that had drawn the top price for a Browne work at a book sale, $670, being actually the second. She also absolves Browne's first publisher Crooke from the charge of malicious piracy. She believes that both the first two editions bear the marks of author's care, very untypical in pirated editions. This had always been a minor crux, Johnson alleging that Browne's disclaimer regarding the first edition was but a coy convention of the day. Miss Cook believes, contrary to Keynes, that the longer edition of 96 pages is the first edition. Keynes based his opinion mainly on the condition of the frontispiece. She suggests that the frontispiece for both editions may well have been printed simultaneously in one press run. Her argument may have convinced Sir Geoffrey, who recanted on the point in a letter to the Times.[83]

D. C. Allen: D. C. Allen, in an article "Style and Certitude,"[84] links the philosophical bases of Browne and other seventeenth century stylists with their baroque style.

> The terse Senecan style [of Bacon] was replaced by a looser style, a baroque style, which is familiarly known to the readers of Sir Thomas Browne and Jeremy Taylor....[It was] the "African style" of which Milton

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[83] TLS, 18 April 1952.

[84] ELH, XV (September, 1948), 167-75.

> complained when he wrote, "The knotty Africanisms, the pampered metaphors, the intricate and involved sentences of the fathers."

It was the style of "those who had solved their metaphysical problems...of those who were no longer perplexed by rational doubt."

Tucker Brooke: Tucker Brooke of Yale, writing on the same group, states that they were "capable of turning austerity itself into a garment of beauty." He calls the Religio Medici "almost a conscious plea against Donne's dark theology....Its curative value is what took it through Europe." Urn Burial he calls a "prose poem on death of perhaps unequalled verbal harmony."[85]

Marjorie Nicolson: Marjorie Hope Nicolson, in her study of the effect of the new sciences upon seventeenth century poetry, considers Browne a poet,[86] and quotes him extensively. Like that other great scholar of the seventeenth century, Basil Willey, she seems to regard Browne as a symbol of the century and a key to its philosophy. She remarks on Browne's "conceited" beliefs: the circle, the microcosm, and the mystical number, five. With regard to the number five, she states:

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[85] "Seventeenth Century Prose," A Literary History of England, ed. A. C. Baugh (New York, 1948), pp. 590, 615.

[86] The Breaking of the Circle (Evanston, 1950).

> Even more firmly convinced than was Sir Thomas Browne of the mystical meaning of the number five, Kepler's one objection to Galileo's supposed discovery of four new planets was, as we know, that they must be five in number. Commenting upon the Nineteenth Psalm dealing with the creation, he said, 'Clearly the psalmist was not pretending to speak as an astronomer, for otherwise he would not have failed to mention the five planets since there is no more admirable, more beautiful, more suitable evidence to thinking men of the wisdom of the Creator than their motions.' (132)

1950

J. S. Finch: With the exception of Le Roy's, Jeremiah Stanton Finch has written the longest book on Browne of this or any other century. His Sir Thomas Browne: A Doctor's Life of Science and Faith was published in 1950. Confronted with no new material and no very definite opinion of the meager biographical material available, he fleshes out his book with historical background of a general nature: what it was like to go to school at Winchester early in the seventeenth century, at Oxford, the history and standing of the medical schools Browne attended, and the like. Much of this material is interesting. Less so is the better documented account of the prosaic family life and what happened to all the relatives, since Browne managed to cover his own tracks fairly well. There is considerable justice in what a recent critic, Peter Green, writes of it. Finch's book is "'popular' and disappointingly light weight."[87]

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[87] "Bibliography."

George Gordon: A book published in London in 1950, compiled from the posthumous papers of George Gordon, late Professor of Poetry and Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, contains a chapter, "Sir Thomas Browne."[88] Gordon saw Browne's real artistic triumph not so much in his writing, as highly as he regards it, as in his life. "The conduct of his life, it is clear, was more to Browne than any ambition as a writer or even advancer of knowledge." He states that Browne's art of life was as delicate and nicely ordered as Montaigne's.

Gordon saw other parallels with Montaigne. Both believed the world was deteriorating; both had the same sceptical approach to epistemology. "Whoever will be cured of ignorance," wrote Montaigne, "must confess it"; "We must forget and part with much we know," wrote Browne. Yet Montaigne wrote, "'Tis not amiss that our opinions are hereditary for we could not choose worse than by ourselves in so weak an Age." Here Browne, for all his conservative respect for authority, did not scruple to throw out Aristotle's theories when they did not square with observed fact.

In appraising the Works, Gordon wrote that Religio may always be the most popular; Urn his finest writing; yet there is truth in Saintsbury's remark that "an appreciation of Pseudodoxia is the real touchstone to appreciation of Browne generally." As for his character, Gordon found Browne "unworldly but warm

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[88] Lives of the Authors, pp. 101-10.

blooded," not impervious to politics and affairs. As a literary artist, "the slenderest topic in his hands acquires the composure and dignity of ordered knowledge."

1951

F. L. Huntley: Frank Livingstone Huntley in 1951 presented convincing proof that he had discovered the identity of the subject of Letter to a Friend in "Robert Loveday, Commonwealth Man of Letters."[89] Huntley had little to go on except that the young man whose wasting death by "phthisis" (tuberculosis) which the victim called "a Hecktical condition," clinically described in Browne's work, was a Cantabrigian. In the records of Cambridge, and in correspondence, Huntley finally identified Loveday beyond reasonable doubt, and found him to be quite an interesting character in his own right.

Loveday's translation of La Calaprenède's Cleopatra with prefaces by James Howell and Digby went through five editions after Loveday's death at 35 in 1656. He was a delightful epistolary in the manner of Howell and his letters furnish abundant evidence of his connection with Browne. Who the hypothetical friend to whom Browne's work was addressed, if there was such a person, has never been established.

Five years later, Huntley wrote an exercise in criticism comparing Urn and Garden which was both original and

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[89] RES, II, 262-7.

illuminating.[90] Gosse and Le Roy had dismissed the original publication of the two works under the same cover as merely a matter of typographical utility. "Not so," wrote Huntley. "They stand together by design rather than by accident." He points out that each has five chapters (again, the mystic number!) and indicates the connection that Browne himself had made in the epistle dedicatory to his honored friend, Nicholas Gillingham, "That we conjoin these Parts of different Subjects your Judgement will admit without impute of Incongruity; since the delightful World comes after Death, and Paradise succeeds the Grave."

Beyond this, Huntley discerns these antitheses: Urn treats of time, the Garden, space; Urn emphasizes dryness, the Garden, wetness; Urn preaches vanity, Garden, humility; Urn in the first four chapters stresses doubt, Garden, exact knowledge.

> The shadow of Urn and the sunlight of Cyrus unite to form this paradox.... "The Sunne itself is but the dark simulachrum and light but the shadow of God."

1956

René Wellek and Austin Warren: Reprinted in paper-back in 1956 was Austin Warren's and René Wellek's Theory of Literature

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[90] "Sir Thomas Browne--The Relationship of Urn Burial and the Garden of Cyrus," SP, LIII (April, 1956), 204-91.

first published in 1949, with more remarks on Browne's style.[91] The authors admit the inadequacy of Saintsbury's treatment.

> The modern reader has difficulty in hearing the elaborate patterns of the Latin cursus when imitated in English, since English longs and shorts are not fixed with the same conventional rigidity as in the Latin system; but it has been shown that effects analogous to the Latin were widely attempted and occasionally achieved, especially in the seventeenth century.

On imagery, they categorize Browne's images with Shakespeare's, Burke's, and Bacon's as "expansive." By "expansive image" they mean "one in which each term opens a wide vista to the imagination and each term strongly modifies the other." The example cited is Romeo's line,

> Yet wert thou so far
> As that vast shore washt by the farthest sea
> I should adventure for such merchandise.

There is in this type of imagery "recalcitrance to pictorial visualization; internality" (metaphorical thinking); and "interpenetration of the terms."

Wylie Sypher: Wylie Sypher in his Four Stages of Renaissance Style[92] remarks concerning Browne's and other anti-Ciceronian styles of the period,

> In one or another way, Montaigne, Bacon, Browne, and Burton all brought

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[91] pp. 152, 153; 191-3.

[92] Garden City, 1956, pp. 128, 176, 177.

> to bear, in curt or loose manner, a strain on their sentences beyond the capacity of syntax; one sign is their use of interpolation and parentheses.

On Sir Thomas Browne particularly, he writes,

> The leaps from concrete to conceptual statement in Sir Thomas Browne's prose may partly be due to the author's belief that man is that great and good [sic] amphibium....In the nature of man, Browne advises us "there are united incompatible distances."

J. J. Denonian: An imposing tome published a few years ago in Africa is Jean Jacques Denonian's Thèmes et Formes de la Poésie "Metaphysique" wherein the author compares Donne to Browne in T. S. Eliot's terms, as a split personality bridged by his work,[93] and in his medieval cynicism toward women, "an echo of misogyny."[94]

He contrasts Claudio's speech from Measure for Measure with Browne's on death:

> The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
> That age, ache, penury, imprisonment
> Can lay on nature is a paradise
> To what we fear of death.

While Browne in Religio wrote:

> For to mee that consider things in a naturall and experimentall way, man seems to me but a digestion or a preparative way unto that last and glorious Elixar which lies imprison'd in the chaines of the flesh.[95]

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[93] Etude d'un aspect de la Littérature Anglaise au Dix-Septième Siècle (Alger, 1956), p. 107.

[94] Ibid., p. 112.

[95] p. 300.

Denonian observes that Donne and his followers, except for latecomer Cleveland, eschewed "aurate diction" and "ink-horn" terms in favor of a tone of colloquial conversation. Nevertheless, it can be said of Donne as Johnson said of Browne, "His style is indeed a tissue of many languages brought together from distant regions with terms originally appropriated to one art drawn by violence into service of another."[96]

Denonian makes an interesting distinction between seventeenth-century and later artists:

> For Donne, Herbert, Traherne as for Descartes, Thomas Browne, Evelyn, Milton, Pepys, Bunyan, and Dryden, it is the human microcosm which, according to Browne, contains the "wonders we seek without us."... Especially, it is a man, not an author, that is encountered in the works of these writers. And more than that, it is a simple man: the man Donne, such as he is or pretends to be, the man Browne, the man Bunyan, the man Pepys, in the especially humble exercise of their everyday thoughts. Could one say as much for the work of Spenser? of Pope? of Johnson? The contrast is blinding! And each one of these men looks for his truth, not some universal truth. He looks for it in everyday life rather than in profound speculations. That is, each of the metaphysical poets, like Browne and Descartes, [searches himself].[97]

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[96] pp. 369, 370.

[97] pp. 459, 460.

Denonian objects to Eliot's notion of "unified sensibility" with its implication that the union of thought and feeling was peculiar to the metaphysicals of the seventeenth century including, as Willey does, Browne in that category. Denonian maintains that the concept must be equally applied to Shelley, and, indeed, is not the exclusive device of any age or literary period. He asks further, of what modern man can it really be denied? We all live simultaneously "in divided and distinguished worlds" even granting our greater specialization, nor is feeling the exclusive province today of verse, nor thought of prose.

He cites Browne as "the wisest and clearest interpreter of the cabalistic significance of the number five," alleged to be found in Donne as well as in the Garden.

1959

Peter Green: The final and latest work covered in this study is that of Peter Green, published in London in 1959.[98] Green is a charming writer who rakes over the old biographical material and makes it seem to come alive. His little book is unpretentious but the bibliography appended is a useful introduction. He too, like Denonian, sees a strong similarity to Donne in Browne.

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[98] Sir Thomas Browne, Writers and Their Work No. 108 (London: Longmans Green, 1959).

He is at heart a poet; his vision has the direct symbolic intensity we associate with Vaughan, Traherne, Crashaw, or--above all--Donne, whose famous declaration that "all divinity is love or wonder" exactly echoes Browne's own attitude. 99

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99. Ibid. p.

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APPENDIX

FOREIGN LANGUAGE QUOTATIONS TRANSLATED IN TEXT

page

10n 13 "d'un des plus délicieux auteurs de la langue anglaise." Le Roy, p. 311.

"One of the most delightful authors in the English language." Southey's incomplete mss. intended for the Quarterly Review. Keynes, Bibliography, Appendix IV, p. 242.

14N 23 "Pater ne jouit pas avec un parfait abandon de la musique brownienne. Il est trop sensible pour n'en pas saisir le charme, trop intelligent pour n'en pas mesurer le prix; mais il est trop amoureux de règle, de clarté, de bon sens et de santé grecque, pour se livrer sans remords aux délices de ce romantisme gothicisant. Il y a en Browne une superfluité, un hasard et un clair-obscur à quoi il ne peut, physiquement, se résigner. Pseudodoxia que G. Saintsbury dira 'un des plus charmants livres que existent ou qui se puissent concevoir', paraît à Pater une oeuvre assez revêche et d'un style qui le fait soupirer après la férule de Johnson." Le Roy, p. 320.

35n "Tous ayant d'ailleurs ceci de commun qu'ils ne l'avaient pas lu . . ." Le Roy, p. 338.

40n "Pour Milsand, Thomas Browne est en partie le reflet d'une époque: il résume une phase de transition marquée par un rationalisme croissant en contraste avec la luxuriance imaginative héritée du moyen âge . . . . s'il réflechit ces tendances de son temps, c'est qu'il leur offre un milieu parfaitement réfringent. Son goût de la critique et de la méditation est bien à lui . . ., mais il a trouvé dans son siècle une atmosphère propre à son épanouissement." Le Roy, p. 316.

41n "'assurément celui ou il montre sa supériorité la plus constante et la plus incontestable. Jamais son style n'a été plus inspiré que dans ces pages, jamais son imagination et sa mémoire n'ont été si empressées à mettre tous leurs trésors au service de ses pensées.'. . . nous retrouvons en lui le double courant qui nous entraîne vers l'intellectualisme scientifique et nous porte en même temps à le dépasser par recours (ou abandon) à la connaissance intuitive. . .. La place de Thomas Browne dans notre bibliothèque n'est pas pour autant parmi les philosophes, mais sur le rayon des 'auteurs charmants'.

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Nous pouvons, dans le détail, n'être pas de son avis; dans l'ensemble, il nous plaît toujours. Nous oublions l'agacement et l'ennui qu'il nous a parfois causés. . . .'il inspire l'affection . . . . Il y a en lui du caméléon, remarque-t-il, il change complètement d'aspect suivant le point de vue sous lequel on le regarde.'" Le Roy, p. 317.

41 "'soit la tournure de son imagination, soit l'éternelle curiosité de son esprit, soit simplement l'allure de son style, qui est encore une des formes de sa pensée.'" Le Roy, p. 322.

41N "'pour s'égayer des absurdités de l'homme a puisé a pleines mains dans Pantagruel ou dans les Essais.'. . . . l'influence de Montaigne 'est visible à chaque page.' Le scepticisme qu'il y montre procède de Montaigne et annonce celui de Bayle.

"Cet humour n'est pas incessant. Il se tait devant le mystère de la mort, dont Browne, qui est aussi un mélancolique, a su parler si bien. Mais sa mélancolie ne le mène pas aus pessimisme irrémédiable, car, en lui, ce n'est pas le sceptique qui a le dernier mot, c'est le croyant." Le Roy, p. 323.

42n ". . . un panégyrique intemperant. Son manque de réserve et de nuance occupe, dans l'admiration, une position à peu près symétrique à la partialité grincheuse de Hazlitt. Browne est à la fois l'écrivain le plus grand et l'âme la plus édifiante que l'Angleterre ait donnés au monde. On l'a comparé à Montaigne. Quelle calomnie!" Le Roy, p. 321.

42n "La lecture du traité de Newman ne permet pas d'apercevoir entre les deux esprits d'autre similitude qu'une commune tendance a défendre le surnaturel." Le Roy, p. 322, n. 3.

52 ". . . une connaissance trop sommaire de l'oeuvre de Browne . . . . Ni la correspondance, ni les extrait des Commonplace Books ne paraissent avoir assez retenu l'attention d'Edmund Gosse." Le Roy, p. 336.

58n "Les erreurs ou les parti-pris que nous y rencontrerons encore sont généralement si subtils ou si ingenieux que s'ils excitent la contradiction, ils n'inspirent jamais le dédain." Le Roy, p. 328.

60 "Celui-ci a une tendance irrésistible a se complaire dans un Browne frondeur . . ." Le Roy, p. 323.

41 "suit la tournure de son imagination, soit l'agrandit comme-
sité de son esprit, soit simplement l'allure de son style, qui
est encore une des formes de la pensée." Le Roy, p. 329.

41M "pour s'égayer des banalités de la conversation prêté à plaisan-
mains dans Pantagruel ou dans Don Juan. . . . L'influence
de Montaigne 'est visible à chaque page.' Le scepticisme qu'il
y montre procède de Montaigne au même degré que de Bayle.
"Cet humour n'est pas inoffensif. Il ne fait épargner la dou-
tère de la mort, dont Erasme, qui est adroit au maniement
à en parler si bien. Mais sa méthode lui ne le mène pas sur
pessimisme irrémédiable, car, en fait, ce n'est pas sur le scep-
tique qui a le dernier mot, c'est le croyant." Le Roy, p. 323.

42n ". . . un paradoxe intempérant. Son esprit de recherche et
de nuance occupe, dans l'admiration, une position à peu près
symétrique à la partialité grincheuse de Swift. Erasme est
à la fois l'écrivain le plus grand et l'âme la plus sympathique
que l'Angleterre ait donnée au monde. On a comparé à son
tainge. Quelle calomnie!" Le Roy, p. 323.

42n "La lecture du traité de Newman ne permet pas d'apercevoir
entre les deux esprits d'autre similitude qu'une commune tol-
dance à défendre le surnaturel." Le Roy, p. 323, n. 3.

52 ". . . une connaissance trop sommaire de l'oeuvre de Erasme . . .
Ni la correspondance, ni les exhorts des Colloquia Sacra ne
paraissent avoir assez retenu l'attention d'Edmond Scherer."
Le Roy, p. 326.

58n "les erreurs ou les partis-pris que nous y rencontrons doivent
sont généralement si subtils ou si hypothétiques qu'ils ré-
citent la contradiction, ils n'immobilisent guère la pensée."
Le Roy, p. 328.

60 "Celui-ci a une tendance irrésistible à se compliquer dans un
Browne trouveur . . ." Le Roy, p. 323.

61 "En somme, le Browne de Religio, tel que le montre E. Gosse, se ramène, dans ses traits essentiels, à un sceptique assez cauteleux, que personne auparavant n'avait soupçonné.

La fantaisie avec laquelle le critique compose cette premiere silhouette ne doit pas nous rebuter de poursuivre l'analyse de son travail . . . . Browne lui fait l'effet d'un optimiste né." Le Roy, pp. 328-9. (See Gosse, p. 44.)

". . . ont pour but de satisfaire son humeur joviale et d'éblouir le lecteur naif." Le Roy, p. 330. (See Gosse, p. 46.)

". . . dans chaque generation des individualités toutes différentes, c'est par l'atmosphère de sympathie et d'aimable confidence qu'on y respire." Le Roy, p. 330.

61-62 "L'étude de Gosse est importante. C'est, par le volume, le multiplicité de ses point de vue et le talent de l'auteur, la plus considérable qui a été écrite sur Browne, sur sa vie, son génie et son oeuvre. Malgré ce talent--peut-être en partie à cause de ce talent, fair d'imagination vive, épris de paradoxe, et mis au service d'une pensée peu sympathique à l'idéal philosophique de Browne--cette étude n'est pas satisfaisante. . . . Nous avons retrouvé ici, sur une plus grande échelle, mais aussi avec de larges compensations, les mêmes insuffisances que chez Hazlitt et il semble qu'on doive leur assigner des cause identiques: l'incapacité d'oublier sa propre philosophie jointe à une connaisance trop sommaire de l'oeuvre de Browne." Le Roy, pp. 335-6.

63 "Discuter la sympathie de celui qui a écrit ces lignes pour le talent de Browne, c'est faire supposer qu'on a lu sa critique non seulement partialement mais partiellement." Le Roy, p. 347, n. 2.

76 "Il est vrai que, par ailleurs, Lamb a raillé Browne, mais c'est, comme le remarque J. Derocquigny, une raillerie affectueuse, une verve sans âpreté qu'il exerce à ses depens et qui témoignent simplement de la bonne humeur où le met son vieil auteur préféré." Le Roy, p. 313.

89-90 "Cette insistance a vouloir annexer la pensée de Browne non à la philosophie thomiste en général--dont il avait certainement subi l'influence--mais à des textes définis, n'est pas le seul défaut de l'étude de Robert Sencourt." Le Roy, p. 353.

93 "La musique brownienne, dans son essence et son charme, échappe, comme toute beauté, aux prises de la science...." [He quotes Tempest's admission (p. 317) of attempting to define the undefinable.] Le Roy, p. 370.

61 "En somme, le Brownе de Religio, tel que le montre R. Dugas, se ramène, dans ses traits essentiels, à un scepticisme assez candides, que personne aujourd'hui n'aurait scrupule.

La fantaisie avec laquelle la critique confond cette première silhouette ne doit pas nous rendre de pertinents l'analyse de son travail . . . . . [illegible] fait l'objet d'un opuscule. Le Roy, pp. 329-9. [illegible] Dugas, p. [illegible]

". . . ont pour but de restituer son humour [illegible] d'éblouir le lecteur naïf." Le Roy, p. 330. [illegible]

". . . dans chaque conversation des Dialogues, toutes différences, c'est par l'atmosphère de sympathie et d'amitié confidence qu'on y respire." Le Roy, p. 333.

61-62 "L'étude de Cosse est importante. C'est peu le volume, la multiplicité de ses points de vue et le talent de l'auteur, la plus connaissable qui a été écrite sur Browne, sur sa vie, son génie et son oeuvre. Malgré ce [illegible]-être en partie à cause de ce talent, fait d'imagination, parfois de [illegible] doxe, et mis au service d'une pensée qui appartient à l'idéal philosophique de Browne--cette étude n'est pas [illegible]. . . Nous avons retrouvé ici, sur une plus grande échelle, mais avec de larges compensations, les mêmes [illegible] que chez Haylett et il semble qu'on doive leur semblant des mêmes [illegible] tiques. L'inconvénient d'oublier au contraire [illegible] à une connaissance trop sommaire de l'oeuvre de Browne." Le Roy, pp. 335-6.

63 "Discuter la sympathie de celui qui a écrit ces lignes pour le talent de Browne, d'est faire supposer qu'on y [illegible] tique non seulement partialement mais particulièrement." Le Roy, p. 317, n. 2.

76 "Il est vrai que, par ailleurs, Lamb a raillé Browne, mais c'est, comme le remarque J. Dorpat Dingy, une raillerie affectueuse, une verve sans aprete qu'il semble à son époque et qui témoignent simplement de la bonne humeur où le lui ont vieil auteur préféré." Le Roy, p. 23.

89-90 "Cette insistance à vouloir ramener la pensée de Browne [illegible] à la philosophie thomiste en général--dont il avait certainement l'influence--nuit à des parties [illegible], n'est pas la seul défaut de l'étude de Robert Metcalf." Le Roy, p. [illegible].

93 "La musique browningienne, dans son ensemble et par endroits, échappe, comme toute beauté, aux prises de la critique. . . . [illegible] de quelles Tempest's admission (p. 37) [illegible] une définition une indéfinable." Le Roy, p. 230.

100 "Vouloir Browne autre qu'il n'est, c'est ne rien comprendre a son charme; condamner quelque chose de lui, c'est le condamner en bloc." Le Roy, p. 343.

"Il est en effet certain qu'il y a chez Browne une ligne de développement bien apparente, et qu'il suffit de suivre, pour se garer des écarts personnels. Cette ligne, elle va, pour la pensée, dans le sens d'une philosophie plus nettement chrétienne, plus rigoureusement orthodoxe; pour le style, vers un goût plus immoderé de la luxuriance et de l'érudition, vers une musique plus pleine et plus solennelle." Le Roy, p. 375.

". . . le dernier et le plus brillant virtuose de la prose flamboyante anglaise." Le Roy, p. 279.

"Certains éléments, comme le paradoxe, l'étalage du moi, un certain pyrrhonisme, apparaissent au contraire comme éphémères et liés a une poussée de jeunesse: simples feux follets voltigeant à la surface de l'esprit de Browne, au fort de ses 'jours caniculaires.' Et s'il est interdit d'ignorer ce phénomène dans l'histoire de son développement intellectuel et moral, nous ne pouvons davantage le traiter comme un élément stable de sa personnalité." Le Roy, p. 375.

101 "D'autres valeurs, enfin, se montrent sensiblement constantes, présentes a l'origine comme a l'aboutissement: la tolérance, l'adhésion sans murmure au code moral chrétien, la poursuite de la science, la foi dans le surnaturel--jointe au souhait d'en circonscrire rationnellement le domaine--une certaine qualité stoïque du sentiment réligieux." Le Roy, pp. 375-6.

"C'est parce que Browne a eu beaucoup d'amis, de caractères très différents et souvent opposés, et que chacun a cru trouver chez lui ses raison particulières de l'aimer, que nous avons aujourd'hui un Browne nouveau: plus riche, plus émouvant, avec plus d'arrière-plan, que le vrai Sir Thomas Browne, médecin consultant de Norwich, paroissien de St. Peter Mancroft, naturaliste et polygraphe." Le Roy, p. 377

129 "Ainsi toute recherche de mots rares, de ceux que manie et forge à foison un prosateur comme Sir Thomas Browne, est exclue du langage des poètes 'métaphysiques,' a l'exception de quelques tard-venus comme Cleveland, qui s'efforceront de compenser par l'excentricité du vocabulaire l'absence de la subtilité dans l'inspiration. 'Aureate diction,' 'Ink-horn terms' sont des étiquettes critiques de l'époque qui ne sont pas de mise lorsqu'il s'agit de Donne, de Herbert (malgré son aveu de recherche de 'quaint words'), de Crashaw (si profondément qu'il s'abandonne a l'ivresse des mots), de Vaughan, ni de Traherne. . . . Ce que Johnson disait a juste titre de Sir Thomas Browne s'applique excellemment a Donne." Denonain, p. 369.

100

101

129

129 "Pour Donne, Herbert, Traherne, comme pour Descartes, Thomas Browne, Evelyn, Milton, Pepys, Bunyan, Dryden, c'est le microcosme humain qui, selon le mot de Browne, contient les merveilles que l'on avait coutume de chercher au dehors.

Plus que jamais, c'est un homme, et non un auteur que l'on rencontre sans entrave dans les oeuvres de ces ecrivains. Et, mieux qu'un simple homme, c'est l'homme-Donne, tel qu'il est ou se pretend, l'homme-Browne, l'homme-Bunyan, l'homme-Pepys, dans les exercice parfois humbles de leur pensee de tous les jours. Pourrait-on parler aussi bien de l'homme-Spenser? de l'homme-Pople? de l'homme-Johnson? Le Contraste est aveuglant! Et chacun de ces hommes cherche sa verites, non quelque verite universelle. Il la cherche dans la vie courante plus qu'en de profondes speculations.

Est-ce a dire que chacun de nos poetes 'metaphysiques' se livre, a la facon d'un Browne et d'un Descartes. . . ." Denonain, p. 459.

IMPORTANT!

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