Studies in Victorian Life and Literature
A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

ROMANTIC IRONY
IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Clyde de L. Ryals

Ohio State University Press
Columbus
For HSR

Superlative actors! how noble
the play, how splendid
your costume, how lofty
your role!

_St. Hildegard of Bingen_
(trans. Barbara Newman)
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

INTRODUCTION

AN IMAGE OF THE AGE 1

1 Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*  
   A “True Fiction” 17

2 *Vanity Fair*  
   Transcendental Buffoonery 34

3 Levity’s Rainbow  
   The Way of Browning’s “Christmas-Eve” 48

4 The Chameleon Personality  
   Arnold’s Poetry 60

5 The “Mononymity” of *Bleak House* 76

6 “The Old Order Changeth”  
   *Idylls of the King* 94
Contents

7 The Heracliteanism of *Marius the Epicurean* 114

AFTERWORD
  BEING TRUE AT THE VERGE 131

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 135

NOTES 137

INDEX 157
Portions of this book have been previously published. Most of chapter 1 appeared in *ELH* (Winter 1987–88); parts of chapter 3 in *Studies in Browning and His Circle* (1986) and the *Journal of Narrative Literature* (Winter 1987); most of chapter 4 in *Victorian Poetry* (Spring–Summer 1988); parts of chapter 6 in the *Tennyson Research Bulletin* (1990); and most of chapter 7 in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* (September 1988). I thank the editors of these journals for their kind permission to reprint this material.

In addition, portions of the book were delivered as lectures: at West Virginia University (October 1985); the Conference on Narrative Poetics, Ohio State University (April 1986); the University of Münster (May 1987); the Modern Language Association in New Orleans (December 1988); and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (May 1989). I am grateful to my hosts on these occasions. I should like especially to thank John Stasny of West Virginia University and Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador of the University of Münster for their generous hospitality when I appeared at their universities.