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## FREDERIC FAVERTY: HIS TIME AND SPIRIT

William J. Gracie, Jr.

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The exterior of Northwestern's University Hall exhibits its gothic aspirations readily enough: spires, ornamentation, rugged stonework from top to bottom. But the interior, home to the English department for many years, disappoints the eye and depresses the spirit: drab hallways, windowless office doors, lecture rooms with immovable desks. But for forty-one years those mundane hallways and dim lecture rooms were illuminated and even bathed in the special glow of a remarkable teacher and scholar. For thirteen of those years—1945 through 1958—Frederic Faverty could be found in the chairman's office quietly creating a department as notable for its teaching (Bergen Evans) as for its scholarship (Richard Ellmann). For the remainder of his years at Northwestern, Frederic Faverty might be found in the huge office he shared with his long-time colleague Zera Silver Fink—sometimes still preparing his lectures for the undergraduate Victorian period course, sometimes asking doctoral candidates for additional bibliographical references in the texts of the forty-two dissertations he directed in his Northwestern years. Whether his students were undergraduates just beginning their readings in the great Victorians or doctoral candidates nearly completing their research, the mind and manner they encountered in lecture hall, seminar, or office was always the same: Frederic Faverty was both formidable and accessible, demanding and kind. His special glow of learning and wit must influence his students to this very moment.

The Frederic Faverty students of the late 1960s will remember was a slightly stooped, even frail figure who nevertheless exuded energy and good humor. He usually opened his Victorian survey class by mounting the elevated platform in Room 101, picking up a lectern someone had thoughtlessly placed on the floor, and flinging the lectern onto the table. The crash of the lectern was followed soon enough by a lecture delivered in a voice so raspy and varying in pitch as to be inimitable but memorable to all who heard it—or who tried, and failed, to parody. The parodists—usually graduate students who had taken the course for the kind of background Faverty was constantly demanding of all his students—were paying tribute to a man whose lectures nearly always managed to make the Victorians seem so contemporary as to be living authors. The lectures themselves were cued by notes, in ink, penned on 5 x 8 Northwestern inter-office memoranda and literally jabbed, every few minutes or so, by eyeglasses which he would remove,

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clasp in his fist, wave a bit in the air, and then use to stab his book. As far as we know, he never lost his place, his glasses, or his students.

When recalling the man as teacher and scholar, former students always mention Frederic Faverty's humor. The humor was physically discernible in the sly twinkle of his eyes—a twinkle that suggested skepticism, irony, and bemusement all at once—and usually as well timed as those cut and thrust gestures with his glasses were well placed. His pronunciation even of single words would reveal their latent irony. Faverty could use a favorite Arnoldian pejorative—"interesting," for example—with devastating and amusing effect; his reading of Arnold's description of Carlyle as a "moral desperado" is memorable to this day for its accurate imitation of Arnold's deft, succinct wit. Sometimes even an entire lecture might end with a single sentence that would summarize and, in a twinkle, dismiss. One student recalls Faverty's lecture on Newman's "What is a University?" from his *Rise and Progress of Universities*. Newman had closed his lecture on the proposed Catholic University of Ireland with reverent hope. Here is Newman: "Shall [such a university as I envision] ever be again? We are going forward in the strength of the Cross, under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin, in the name of St. Patrick, to attempt it." And here is Faverty: "In spite of their help, the university failed."

Clerics, it seems, could be counted on to produce a bemused and amusing comment from Frederic Faverty. On at least one occasion, an entire lecture seemed designed to amuse as well as enlighten—always, of course, enlightening through irony and wit. Here, for example, is one student's recollection of Faverty on a writer usually not associated with his interests and research, Gerard Manley Hopkins:

The news would go out that Fred was to discuss the poetry of G. M. Hopkins on a specific day, and the lecture room would be crowded by people not ordinarily in his class. Fred would approach the reading of selections from Hopkins by the prefatory warning that he (Fred) did not himself espouse Jesuit austerity—indeed, his practice when about to read Hopkins in preparation for lecturing on him was to pour a glass of sherry, sit in a comfortable chair, and banish the world while he read as a sybarite. Then, at the lecture itself, he would select as the first item "The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo," which he would read with his distinctive gravelly voice in such a way as to denude the poem of any superficial beauty. The contrast between the Keatsian mellifluity of the verse and Fred's astringent reading of it was at once richly amusing and also

productive of the close attention the poem demands, and of course we learned much in the course of stifling our amusement and making a case within our minds for the goodness of the poem (and of course the poem). I think our legs were being pulled all along.

If Frederic Faverty's physical appearance sometimes suggested a wise and ironic view of life, it also suggested, to some, austerity. There is even some evidence that he could be, on occasion, severe. One former student remembers an "un-Faverty-like explosion" witnessed in an Arnold seminar in the early 1970s. A doctoral student had, that day, read a report on Arnold's poetry and had been admonished with unusual sharpness by Faverty. The professor concluded his comments by observing that "this report is exactly why a talk should never, never be read." The student, thus judged, appeared ready to faint. Behind Faverty's reprimand—unusual for its tone but not for its candor—was his abiding interest in good teaching. Good teachers do not simply read their notes—certainly Frederic Faverty never did—and even papers destined for conference presentation should be delivered by scholars who have learned to teach. The reprimand in the seminar was more a plea on behalf of passionate and rigorous teaching than a summary judgment on one student.

Although examples of professorial severity can be found in the reminiscences of students taught in a career that spanned more than four decades, examples of personal kindnesses and generosity clearly predominate. One former student, now one of our most distinguished Victorianists, believes that Frederic Faverty was "the most unfailingly gracious person I have ever met," and continues:

In a modern university, where the levels of stress and competition are high, this is an increasingly unusual trait. I remember sitting in a student lounge in University Hall one day and overhearing a conversation between two undergraduates. A girl told her friend that she was "going upstairs to see Professor Faverty about a paper that is overdue," and she left the lounge. When she returned about fifteen minutes later, she was crying. "Was he that hard on you?" asked her friend. "No, no," said the girl. "He was so nice to me that I burst into tears."

In a more personal example of generosity, Frederic Faverty's former student recalls that "in the spring of 1967, he gave me some of his own travel money from Northwestern to enable me to do some

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research for my doctoral dissertation in England. When I dedicated one of my books to him in 1976, I was conscious that this was a sadly inadequate means of publicly acknowledging my debt to a man who had so largely shaped my life.”

The man who inspired so moving an example of indebtedness as the preceding, was born 29 September 1902 in Sparta, Illinois—deep in southern Illinois and less than twenty miles from the Mississippi River. He graduated from East St. Louis (Illinois) High School in 1920 already showing signs of future accomplishments: he was president of the class of 1920 and a staff member of both the school newspaper and the literary magazine. Moving across the river, he attended Washington University and graduated with a B.A. in 1924. He began teaching English almost immediately upon his graduation and was an Instructor of English at Adelbert College, Western Reserve University for three years, 1925-28. His advanced degrees—the M.A. in 1929, the Ph.D. in 1930—were taken at Harvard where he wrote a dissertation, under the direction of Kittredge, on “Legends of Joseph, the Hebrew Patriarch, in European Literature of the Middle Ages.”

Faverty joined the Department of English at Northwestern in 1930 and remained there until his retirement in 1971. He married Margaret Ellen Beckett on 20 June 1934 and, in time, was father to two children, Kathleen Margaret and Richard Beckett. At Northwestern, he was promoted rapidly—to Assistant in 1933, Associate in 1939, and Professor in 1945—and, as noted earlier, was department chair for thirteen years during which the Northwestern faculty achieved attention as well as prominence for its teaching and research. Returning to full-time teaching in 1958, he was named Morrison Professor of English and remained in that endowed professorship until 1971. Although no one acquainted with the academy in twentieth-century America will underestimate the demands placed on department colleagues and chairs, the Faverty administration of the 1940s and 1950s must have been conspicuous for its collegiality. A personal letter sent Faverty on his resignation from the chair in 1958, is generous in its praise and sincere in its affection: “I remember your saying once at a staff meeting that when you stepped out of the chairmanship you would like your colleagues to be able to say of you, ‘His rule was easy, and his yoke was light.’ I would say those things with all my heart.”

The years of Frederic Faverty’s administration at Northwestern were also the years of his major contributions to research. Although his publications are extensive, beginning as early as 1926 and appearing in such important periodicals as *Modern Language Notes*, *PMLA*, *Studies in Philology*, and *Philological Quarterly*, the publication of *Matthew*

*Arnold, The Ethnologist* in 1951 and *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research* in 1956 represent his most significant contributions to scholarship and research. *Matthew Arnold, The Ethnologist* was an original work of research and scholarship and was, in some quarters at least, controversial and provocative. The book discusses Arnold's racial theories within the context of influential nineteenth-century classifications of Celts, Teutons, Semites, and Indo-Europeans. While its focus is on Arnold, it manages to see its subject steadily and wholly. "Its theme," remarked Faverty himself in *Victorian Poets*, "is the whole confused but significant doctrine of cultural and racial traits which colored much nineteenth-century thinking." That its author was not entirely happy with discoveries unearthed by his research is apparent from the book's opening sentence, a sentence typical in its balance and cadence of Frederic Faverty's mind: "This book deals with some of the maddest of theories and one of the sanest of men—nineteenth-century racial doctrines and Matthew Arnold."

Early reviews of *Matthew Arnold, The Ethnologist* were, on the whole, favorable. *TLS*, for example, commented on the "pleasant and easy" style of the book and judged its scholarship to be "concealed rather than paraded," a comment that could as easily have been applied to Faverty's classroom and seminar manner. John A. Irving in *Queen's Quarterly* felt that the Faverty book "suggests, in a quite remarkable manner, that the future of the humanities is bound up with the future of the social sciences." Whether Faverty himself was open to such a suggestion must remain a matter of conjecture, but he would certainly have been sympathetic with the appropriately Arnoldian range or synthesis of knowledge that Irving saw in *Matthew Arnold, The Ethnologist*.

A less sanguine view was taken by Kenneth Allott in the *Review of English Studies*. Allott's criticism of the book centered on what he took to be its "topicality," or, what the next generation would call by another term, its "relevance." "Surely Mr. Faverty is ill advised," Allott wrote, "to inject topicality into what is essentially a painstaking account of the references to racial and national characteristics in Arnold's prose works." Ironically, Allott chose to fault Faverty for one of his most conspicuous and positive traits—his ability to make the Victorians, and Arnold in particular, vitally important and wonderfully alive for students born half a century after the deaths of Arnold, Browning, Tennyson, and Victoria herself. One former student remembers that "Fred taught us what to make of, say, Matthew Arnold, a writer with concerns that appealed to students of the fifties and sixties, and he brought out for us Arnold's exquisite wit and irony so that we

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could pass on to our students those attractive qualities and draw the sting, as it was then, of Arnold's being a 'Victorian.'"

As a pioneering and illuminating example of scholarship, *Matthew Arnold, The Ethnologist* has never needed defenders, and may well be said to have stood the test of time. In its 1988 issue on the centenary of Arnold's death, *The Arnoldian* solicited from prominent Victorianists reviews of influential twentieth-century studies of Arnold. In the midst of reviews of the work of Trilling, E. K. Brown, and E. K. Chambers, came this assessment, by Ruth apRoberts, of *Matthew Arnold, The Ethnologist*: "It is by no means dated; it adds greatly to our knowledge of Arnold and the general issues of cultural conditioning. It can still be heartily recommended as a prime example of urbane scholarship, as essential to an understanding of Arnold, and broadly as a piece of the history of a 'science' which still touches us in devious ways."

Frederic Faverty's second contribution to Victorian studies in the 1950s—and a contribution which affects us to this day—was his editorial supervision of *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research*. Sponsored by the Victorian Group of the MLA, the Faverty collection followed the lead of the earlier (1950) *Romantic Poets: A Guide to Research* and surely encouraged publication of related works such as Lionel Stevenson's *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research* (1964, second edition edited by George Ford in 1978) and David J. DeLaura's *Victorian Prose: A Guide to Research* (1973). Contributors to the first Faverty collection (there would be a second edition in 1968) represented critics and scholars largely responsible for the revival of Victorian studies we now associate with the 1940s and 1950s, two of whom have been commemorated in this journal: Buckley on the Victorians, Baum on Tennyson; DeVane on Browning; Terhune on Barrett Browning, FitzGerald, and Clough; Hyder on Swinburne; Mumford Jones on the Pre-Raphaelites; Pick on Hopkins; Stevenson on the "later" Victorian poets; and Faverty himself on, of course, Arnold. No graduate student in the 1950s could begin work without consulting the Faverty *Guide*, no graduate student in the late 1960s could begin work without consulting the second edition, and the book's usefulness, combined with its annual supplement in *Victorian Poetry*, is evident to this day.

Another Faverty publication less evident to his fellow Victorianists as his scholarship and editions but well known to readers of the *Chicago Tribune*, is *Your Literary Heritage*, a collection of eighty essays written with a readership in mind that was far broader and more various than any found in the academy. Over the course of several years Frederic Faverty introduced readers of the *Tribune* to works and writers as different as Fielding and Dostoevsky or Twain and Trollope.

Characteristically self-deprecating in his assessment of his own works—which he usually labelled “effusions”—he once told a doctoral candidate that he had never taught novels because he found little required of the mind when ideas were spread so thinly by 800 pages of print. He may not have taught those novels, but the evidence from *Your Literary Heritage* is clear on one point: he knew them so well that he could write about them with economy and grace and, in so doing, help introduce to a very large audience some of the most significant works of world literature. Some of his assessments, though intended for a non-academic readership, recall the wit so evident in his university lectures. On Montaigne, for example: “He was the father of six daughters and the essay.” On Goethe: “He spent his life in an heroic and successful attempt to be Faust.” Although he himself did not give a direct definition of his critical objectives in writing on so many writers, much can be inferred on that subject by noting the epigraph he placed as frontispiece to *Your Literary Heritage*: “The critic who rightly appreciates a great man or a great work, and can tell us faithfully—life being short, and art long, and false information very plentiful—what we may expect from their study and what they can do for us: he is the critic we want.” It should surprise no one acquainted with Frederic Faverty that the author of that epigraph is Arnold.

In Faverty’s final years at Northwestern he remained active as the professor of choice for the Victorian period course as well as seminar leader in courses in biography and autobiography, in Browning, and, of course, in Arnold. He continued to sit on the advisory board of *Victorian Poetry* and *Victorian Studies*, and continued to serve, as he had for many years, as chair of the Harris Foundation Lecture Series. That committee, under his leadership, had brought to the Evanston campus over the years writers and scholars as different as Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell and R. H. Super. The Harris Lectures of R. H. Super, later published as *The Time-Spirit of Matthew Arnold*, remain especially memorable for their unfortunate topicality. Scheduled for the same week in 1968 in which Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis and riots broke out in Chicago, they were presented in abbreviated fashion to an Evanston audience only too aware of society’s fragile social fabric. I well remember Frederic Faverty’s typically gracious but atypically solemn introduction of R. H. Super on the evening of 8 April 1968 with its reminder that the very title of Arnold’s most famous work of social and political criticism offers each of us a choice: culture *or* anarchy.

Frederic Faverty retired in 1971, and in a dinner of commemoration and celebration for Faverty and two colleagues also retiring that year—



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Thomas Pyles and Ernest Samuels—he delivered a speech full of self-deprecating humor and witty reminiscence. Even its opening sentence was richly characteristic of its author. Said Frederic Faverty, as he surveyed a large audience of colleagues, family, and friends, “even Christ didn’t have to sing for his supper.” He was engaged in a study of Hardy’s poetry when he died on Sunday, 9 August 1981.

It may not be possible to sum up a life lived so well and so richly as Frederic Faverty’s, but one is tempted to try. In the remembrances and anecdotes of his former students and in the twenty boxes of his papers now housed in the Northwestern Archives, one word seems suggested again and again: spirit. Frederic Faverty’s spirit as a teacher seems evident in his students who taught, and continue to teach, with passion and energy. His spirit of kindness and generosity seems remembered by students who were welcomed to the Judson Avenue home of Professor and Mrs. Faverty with its Burne-Jones canvas and its Arnold autograph in the front room and with its many, many books on the shelves, on the tables, and on the piano. His spirit of good humor—sometimes sharply honed humor—seems to this day very much alive in the memories of his students. That that humor could be used as a reminder that we should not be always so highly serious might be illustrated through a story told by one of Faverty’s last doctoral students. Teaching a course in biblical literature for the first time, that student shared his syllabus with his former mentor and received, shortly thereafter, the following response: “I should appreciate later on a report on the progress of your Biblical studies—what you do with the patriarchs and the prophets, whether you omit the four gospels, what you think of St. Paul’s epistles, and how you stand on the Apocalypse. And what relationship you find for all the foregoing with English and American literature.” No one who knew Frederic Faverty would doubt that all those questions, each one of them tending to lessen one’s denominator, were delivered by a wise man with a twinkle in his eye, for one of Frederic Faverty’s most winning traits was his inability to take even himself with high seriousness.

In the nearly ten years since his death, the academy of which he was for so long a member has undergone changes too familiar to all of us to require description here. It may be fascinating to wonder what Faverty would take to be the function of criticism as the century nears its close, but such speculation would be, of course, idle. What remains indisputable is Frederic Faverty’s lasting example as teacher, writer, and humanist. He expressed his belief in various ways that teachers should take all knowledge as their province and should do everything they can to spread ideas and knowledge—not only for the sake of the ideas or for

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the teachers themselves but for the future and for the sake of our children. Richly aware of our literary heritage, he saw each of his students as men and women who should—indeed, must—pass on that heritage to the next generation. Such sentiments are, of course, Arnoldian, and as I look over my notes and recall my memories of Frederic Faverty, I find my eyes drawn to a starred passage in my worn copy of Harrold and Templeman. Starred passages mean that Frederic Faverty had called special attention to that part of the text. Here is such a passage from a paragraph near the end of “Sweetness and Light”:

The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the *best* knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.

Arnold goes on to name Abelard, Lessing, and Herder as examples of men of culture who were able to “humanise knowledge.” Because Frederic Faverty would never presume to claim such a title for himself, his former students, finding themselves deeply in his debt and influenced by his example to this day, must make that claim for him.

For their help in supplying materials and memories on the time and spirit of Frederic Faverty, I am very grateful to the following: Margaret Annan; Frank Fennell; Karl Gwiasda; George G. Harper; William S. Peterson; B. N. Pipes, Jr.; Barry Qualls; Patrick Quinn, Northwestern University Archivist; Edith Skom; Fred Standley; William C. West; and, for her many kindnesses, Margaret Faverty.

Oxford, Ohio  
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