

LEONEE ORMOND (ed.). *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*. Pp. 11424. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Hardback, £180.

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In recent years, the reception of Alfred Tennyson has received substantial critical attention; from Laurence Mazzeno's *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* (2004) to the collection *Tennyson Among the Poets* (2009), to my own *Tennyson Among the Novelists* (2010) and various other journal articles, the Victorian laureate has been well served by considerations of his appreciation and influence. However, all of these publications have focused on English-language reception, which makes this new collection of essays a welcome expansion of Tennyson studies. In the introduction, however, its editor Leonee Ormond makes a somewhat surprising confession: 'Finding contributors for this volume from some North European countries has been frustrated because Tennyson was apparently little read or studied there, and such meagre commentary as could be found was taken directly from other European sources, and, in particular, from French writers' (p. 1). The various chapters in this engaging and expansive collection (which take in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Russia, Bulgaria and Greece) demonstrate that Tennyson was, and remains, a figure of marginal interest in Europe, whose works are to this day barely available in translation in countries such as Italy. This does not impede the collection's value – if anything, it increases it.

The reasons for Tennyson's relative lack of continental appreciation are often political; thus Olga Sobolev, in her chapter on Tennyson in Russia, tells us that his impact in Russia was limited since, following the revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks imposed 'a final and firm ban on the queen's poet' (p. 264). Elsewhere Yana Rowland, writing on Tennyson in Bulgaria 1880–2010, claims that following the Second World War, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and *Idylls of the King* were neglected because of the country's 'left-wing socio-political climate' (p. 300); a similar claim is made in Georgia Gotsi's account of Tennyson in Greece 1830–1930, where she claims that readers found

it hard to square Tennyson's 'Englishness' with Greek nineteenth-century 'national values' (p. 331). These claims ring true, yet they do still feel, with the exception of the historically verifiable claim about Russia, rather too general to be fully convincing, and indeed the various authors quoted here go on to demonstrate the rather more complex reality underlying the generalizations.

Most contributors try to be as expansive and wide ranging as they can, but as the examples I have already noted demonstrate, they vary in the extent of their coverage: some try to cover the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, whereas others, for instance Gotsi, limit their scope substantially, and a few others, independent of survey chapters, present case studies rather than overviews (Gilles Soubigou on Dore's illustrations of the *Idylls*, Giuliana Pieri on D'Annunzio, and David Ricks on Cavafy). Even within some survey chapters, we find some smaller case studies; Juan Miguel Zarandona's chapter on Tennyson in Spain ends with a small case study of translations of 'The Lady of Shalott'. This variety is no bad thing – a book such as this which imposed a format on its authors would inevitably prove tedious – yet it does mean that the coverage is inevitably slightly uneven, depending on the taste and the depth of research of its various contributors.

The issue of coverage is not only a result of the decisions of the authors but also the material they have to work with. Some, such as Ann Kennedy Smith whose focus is Tennyson in France, are faced with so much material that they have to make decisions about what to include and what to leave out; others, such as Olga Sobolev and Juan Miguel Zarandona, only have a limited amount to work with. Zarandona's chapter claims to be comprehensive, and while the accumulation of many case studies, often very short, lends this claim credibility, the effect leaves it feeling a little stop-start. It is cheering to see his final footnote, which outlines some extra material he discovered close to the publication deadline; maybe there is yet more Spanish language appreciation of Tennyson out there, waiting to be seen.

One of the major joys for a Tennysonian in this collection is discovering the variety of taste in his poems which exists outside of the English-speaking world. Nowadays if an undergraduate is set the poet's work at an Anglophone University, they will likely be asked to read some of the early lyrics (most likely in their revised 1842

versions) and *In Memoriam*, along, maybe, with 'Maud' if a lecturer is feeling ambitious. But as, for instance, Torsten Caeners shows us in his excellent piece on Tennyson in Germany, *In Memoriam* 'never became even mildly popular in Germany' (p. 210), thanks to readers considering its grief 'stagnant' (p. 212); '[i]n Germany, Tennyson is the poet of Enoch Arden' (p. 214). The enduring European popularity of this poem, rarely studied in detail in the English-speaking world, can be gauged from this volume's index, where it occupies more space than 'The Lady of Shalott' or 'Maud'. Yet the Enoch Arden experienced in Europe is not always exactly the property of Tennyson—various authors demonstrate how translators and adapters in Europe modified the ending substantially.

A clear strength of this collection lies in its contributors' evident talent in both translation and analysis. Quite often the reader is given the original, then the translation, and in addition a translation of the latter, to analyse the significance of the changes made. This approach is so pervasive that when an author does not provide this (which is, of course their choice), the reader is left wanting more—this is the case in the otherwise very impressive piece by Georgia Gotsi. Leonee Ormond notes in her introduction that several contributors highlight Tennyson's 'complex verse structures and use of language' (p. 3) as a reason for the comparative lack of European translations, and the often loose nature of those that do exist. The collection also includes a table mapping European translations of Tennyson, which will prove immensely useful to future researchers.

A name looming over this collection from beginning to end is that of Byron. Tennyson himself was a fervent admirer of Byron in his youth, and yet this book demonstrates, in part, that the legacy of Byron's enduring popularity in Europe was to Tennyson's ultimate disadvantage in terms of widespread popularity; but this does not mean that his work did not inspire, and sometimes frustrate, readers and writers on the continent. And ultimately it has endured, albeit in sometimes limited and strange ways. Olga Sobolev's chapter ends with the fascinating revelation that, while Tennyson's works remained prohibited by the Russian government throughout the twentieth century, one of the most popular novels published in Russia in the second

half of the century, *Two Captains* by Veniamin Alexandrovich Kaverin (1946), carried, unattributed, as its epigraph the final line of Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.