

**Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson's Circle**, by Charlotte Boyce, Páraic Finnerty, and Anne-Marie Millim; pp. vii + 265. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, £55.00, \$95.00.

Though there is no danger of Alfred Tennyson following William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, or Jane Austen onto British banknotes any time soon—the closest he has gotten is a set of stamps commemorating the centenary of his death in 1992—he nonetheless remains something of a Victorian celebrity in the early twenty-first century. Lines from “Ulysses” (1842) were featured on a wall of the London Olympic Village in 2012, a major biography by John Batchelor was published in the same year, and in the last twenty years he has been a central presence in two neo-Victorian novels: Lynne Truss’s *Tennyson’s Gift* (1996) and Adam Foulds’s *The Quickening Maze* (2009). He has hardly disappeared from view. Nonetheless, his celebrity has certainly declined, both in literary and more general terms; shortly after his death, Tennyson was bracketed with “Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, [and] Milton” by F. V. N. Painter in the *Homiletic Review*, and while his state funeral was a genuinely public event in 1892, today his centrality within the British literary canon is subject to question (*Homiletic Review* 25 [1892], 202).

*Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson’s Circle* seeks to investigate the former through a detailed examination of the latter, and in doing so it taps into a recent surge of interest in Victorian celebrity—specifically literary celebrity—through a writer whose celebrity has nevertheless been somewhat neglected in recent criticism. With the exception of Kathryn Ledbetter’s *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals* (2007), one has to look back to Michael Millgate’s *Testamentary Acts* or Ian Hamilton’s *Keepers of the Flame* (both published in 1992) for considerations of Tennyson’s legacy as a celebrity. Both these books focus their attention on Hallam Tennyson’s two-volume 1897 *Tennyson: A Memoir*, which was compiled with the assistance of the Poet Laureate himself before his death in 1892, but is also full of the reminiscences of many of his friends. These “vicarious celebrities,” whose recollections “insert themselves into the poet’s history,” are the subject of one of the chapters by Anne-Marie Millim (168). That Hallam (with the blessing of his father) indulged so many of these “vicarious celebrities” in the *Memoir* seems at odds with the Laureate’s sometimes tortuous negotiations with the public—he and his wife deemed literary tourists (who would occasionally arrive unannounced at Farringford, the Tennysons’ home on the Isle of Wight, seeking branches from the tree planted there by Garibaldi in 1864) “Cockneys”—a rather unfortunate echo of an insult leveled at the young Tennyson by early conservative reviewers of his work (19).

Ledbetter’s book on Tennyson and the periodical press focuses primarily on Tennyson as a contributor to periodicals, and in a sense *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson’s Circle* begins where Ledbetter left off: Charlotte Boyce’s first chapter provides a well-researched consideration of “virtual literary tourism” in the periodical press, and she pays particular attention to accounts of visits

to Farringford, identifying the myth of Tennyson “constantly besieged by hordes of inquisitive holidaymakers” as a product of the myriad accounts in the press (18, 19). This chapter, inspired in part by the work of Alexis Easley, provides some excellent close readings of these accounts, demonstrating the tension between revelation and secrecy that was vital to sustaining readerly interest in celebrity. Boyce continues this discussion in chapter 3, where she considers Julia Margaret Cameron’s engagement with “the workings of the celebrity apparatus” both in terms of the subjects of her photographs and her negotiations in selling and copyrighting her work (119).

Other chapters are less squarely focused on the relationship between celebrity culture and market forces. In one of his two chapters, Páraic Finnerty examines the differing approaches to celebrity taken by G. F. Watts and Edward Lear (both of whom were frequent guests at Farringford). His other chapter considers *Idylls of the King* (1859–85) as a commentary on celebrity, replete as it is with “scenes presenting close encounters between well-known Camelot personalities and their awe-struck admirers,” scandals concerning infidelity, and public occasions where the many have a chance to rub shoulders with the few (191). In chapter 4, Millim considers two supposed insiders to Tennyson’s circle, Charles Dodgson and William Allingham, and succeeds—through the juxtaposition of these two very different diarists—in articulating a more general truth about Victorian celebrity-hunters: that they desired not simply “the mere thrill of possession” but “an imagined but deeply personal relationship” with their chosen celebrity (160).

The pervasive influence of Thomas Carlyle on Tennyson’s Isle of Wight circle, combined with the unusual level of public interest in the Laureate, render the comings and goings at Farringford ripe for parody—something of a gift to writers such as Truss. *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson’s Circle* demonstrates, however, that behind the spring 2015 possibly apocryphal tales of the Laureate evading the attention of “tourists” who turn out to be flocks of sheep, many of the most pressing issues concerning the public and the private in the nineteenth century—accurately summarized in the book’s measured and engrossing group-authored introduction—can be observed at play at Farringford (19). That this accessible book feels so coherent throughout its individually authored chapters is testament to its authors’ collective diligence, and to a shared sense of purpose which will undoubtedly inform many future works on Tennyson, as well as Victorian celebrity culture more generally.

John Morton

*University of Greenwich*