

## REVIEWS

*Tennyson Transformed: Alfred Lord Tennyson and Visual Culture* edited by Jim Cheshire. London: Lund Humphries, 2009. 160 pp.+ 100 colour plates, 30 b/w illus. ISBN: 978-1-84822-003-4. £40; \$80.00.

In the rise of visual art in Victorian Britain, poets Shakespeare, Keats, and Tennyson, and novelists Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Thackeray stirred artists to create paintings, illustrations, and photographs of poems and serialized chapters of novels in the press. Shakespeare was a popular source of images from the eighteenth century on, while Keats was an esoteric taste in 1848, largely the subject of Pre-Raphaelite works. Tennyson, however, appealed to Academic, Pre-Raphaelite, and Aestheticist artists from mid-century into the early twentieth century in their paintings, sculpture, illustrations, and in Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs and Aubrey Beardsley's drawings. This book, exploring the relationship between Tennyson and Victorian visual culture, is a welcomed contribution to the topic, though it leaves much work yet to be done.

Authors in this anthology examine not only art drawn from Tennyson's poetry, but also the visual cult of his celebrity in photos, paintings, and sculpture. Tennyson was among the most prominent celebrities depicted, though there were others with more *cartes-de-visite* and painted portraits (e.g., Lily Langtry) as these venues became producers, rather than mere mirrors, of celebrity, and were manipulated by personalities anxious to disseminate their images on a mass scale. Tennyson, like Carlyle and Ruskin, attracted culture worshippers, and all three were portrayed by famous artists and fashionable photographic studios, willing subjects of their own celebrity, despite Tennyson's and Carlyle's ambivalence towards their celebrity.

Jim Cheshire's introductory essay considers Tennyson as exemplary of Victorian culture in areas of middle-class hegemony, the commercialization of culture, and the moral and educational benefits of high culture. Cheshire also suggest that Tennyson was unique as a rich, famous, and popular poet. We still tend to read Victorian culture through Tennyson's art and life, especially the persistence of Arthurian subjects from his poetry to our films. His Victorian influence was direct – paintings alluding to specific poems – and indirect – the autumnal themes influencing John Everett Millais's *Autumn Leaves* (1855-56) for example. For Cheshire the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition's art inspired by Tennyson marked both Tennyson's