

Darwin, Tennyson and Their Readers: Explorations in Victorian Literature and Science edited by Valerie Purton. London: Anthem Press, 2013. xxii, 169 pp. ISBN 978 0 85728 076 3. £60.00; \$99.00.

This volume offers a rich sample of essays in the field of nineteenth-century science and literature written by a number of important figures, ranging from established lights, such as Valerie Purton, Rebecca Stott, Gillian Beer, George Levine, and Roger Ebbatson to newer figures at the top of their game, such as Gowan Dawson. The essays here are, by and large, of high quality, and discuss a wide range of literary figures despite the title's somewhat misleading suggestion that all chapters will focus on Tennyson. To be sure, Tennyson is paid significant attention (six essays discuss his work), but the overall focus of the volume is really on Darwin and nineteenth-century literature in the broadest sense. Besides Tennyson, the literary and cultural figures given substantial attention include John Ruskin, Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, George Meredith, and T.H. Huxley as critic and scientist.

While Tennyson knew, and was fascinated by, Darwin and at least some of his work, the Tennyson essays here remind us that the poet was thoroughly engaged with and troubled by evolutionary hypotheses long before the publication of the *Origin of Species* in 1859. Everyone is familiar with his well-known meditation on the evolutionary implications of Lyell's work in *In Memoriam* (1850). Matthew Rowlinson's essay in this volume, "History, Materiality and Type in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*," offers an interesting re-interpretation of the meaning of the term "type" in that poem. Like Whewell, who used the term to defend species boundaries, Tennyson, according to Rowlinson, also deploys "type" to forestall the threat of a Lamarckian fudging of boundaries. Moreover, Rowlinson makes the compelling observation that Tennyson saw Chambers's *Vestiges* (1844) as a model for working the exegetical together with natural-historical meanings in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson also borrowed Chambers's phrase "the coming race" to hint at his troubled awareness of the instability of "type" in an evolving natural order.

Valerie Purton's essay "Darwin, Tennyson, and the Writing of 'The Holy Grail'" focuses on the impact of Darwinian evolutionary thought on the later *Idylls of the King*, which was written after the publication of the *Origin of Species*. In Purton's essay, questions of permanence and stability, so important to Tennyson throughout his career, come to the foreground. She sees Darwin and Tennyson as joined in their concern with the fraught issue of eternity. Purton formulates the question: "should life itself be read teleologically, as possessing a share and meaning of its own, or contingently, as a series of adaptations to changing circumstances?" While we all know where Darwin came out on the scientific question of permanence (there's nothing