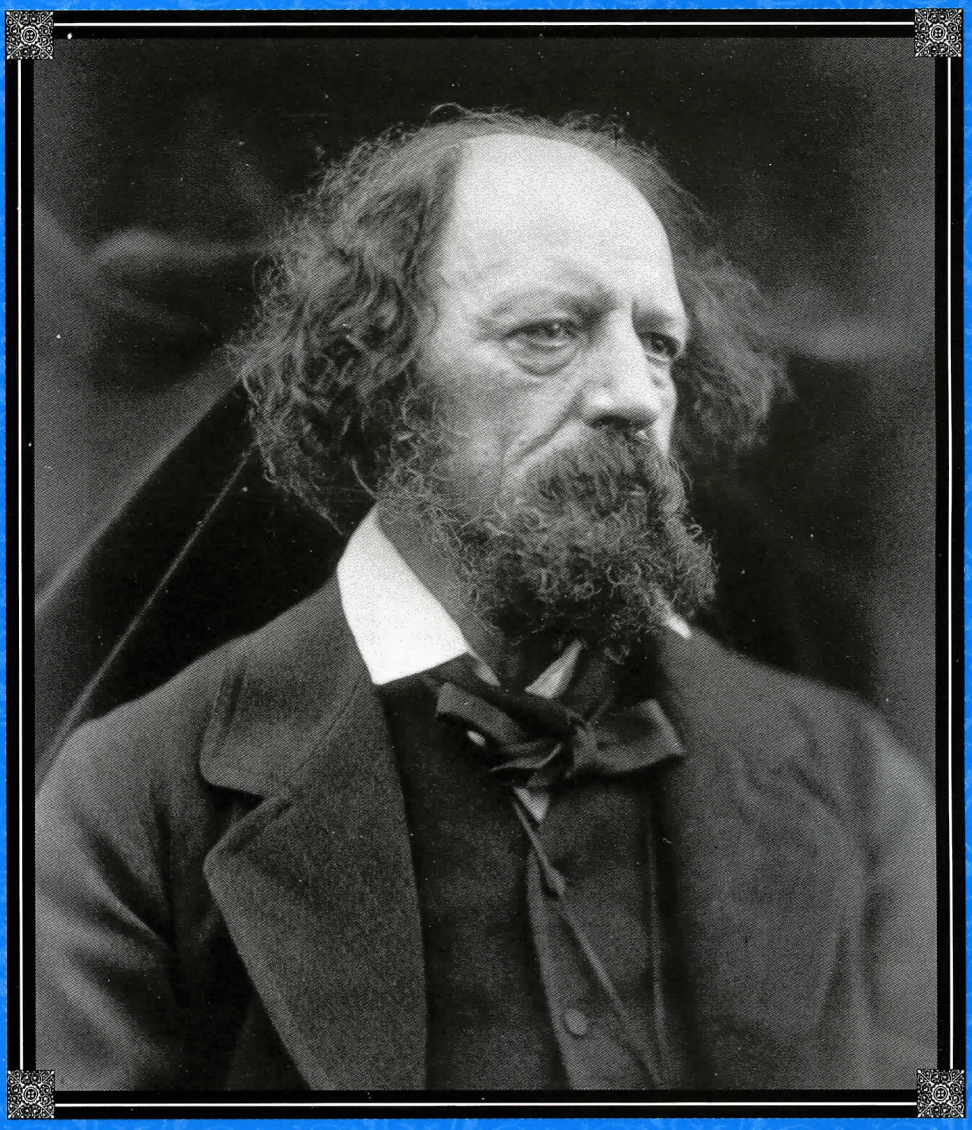
Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy



LAURENCE W. MAZZENO

Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy

Studies in English and American Literature and Culture: Literary Criticism in Perspective

Literary Criticism in Perspective

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Alfred Tennyson

The Critical Legacy

Laurence W. Mazzeno

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Acknowledgments

AS THE CRITICS OF CULTURE are quick to point out, no book is produced in a vacuum, and no author can claim exclusive rights to its preparation. *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* was a project that competed for attention with the students, faculty, and staff of Alvernia College, whose friendships I value and to whom I owe much both professionally and personally. Among the many people who assisted me, I feel an obligation to single out Ms. Roberta Rohrbach of the Franco Library at Alvernia, a librarian and researcher extraordinaire when it comes to locating copies of long-out-of-print volumes and journals. James Hood of Guilford College, who read the draft of this volume with critical acumen, has helped me immensely, though he is certainly not responsible for any errors or faulty judgments that remain. Finally, I would also like to thank James Walker and James Hardin of Camden House for their willingness to let someone — whose duties as a college president must take precedence over his scholarly pursuits — have the time necessary to work on this project.

Introduction

In 1855, Charles Tennyson, Baron d'Eyncourt of Bayons Manor, found himself once more embarrassed by one of his unsuitable relatives. Throughout most of his life he had become accustomed to treating the family of his Uncle George with open disdain. But now he was totally exasperated with his nephew Alfred's latest volume, *Maud, and Other Poems*. "Horrid rubbish indeed!" he wrote to a correspondent. "What a discredit it is that British taste and Poetry should have such a representative before the Nations of the Earth and Posterity! For a Laureate will so appear. Posterity will, it is hoped, have a sound judgment on such matters, and if so what an age this must appear when such trash can be tolerated and not only tolerated but enthusiastically admired!" (Ricks 233).

Posterity has not come to share Uncle Charles's judgment. The Bayons branch of the family never reconciled themselves to the fame achieved by their poor relation who had been elevated (quite unfairly in their view) to become England's poet laureate in 1850. The English public, however, and England's queen found in Tennyson the voice of their deepest hopes and fears. He was not simply one of England's poet laureates; in his own day, and for a century after, his name became synonymous with the term.

No poet has ever or since been more closely associated with his times than Alfred Tennyson. The Victorians were captivated by his poetry. He could make them weep over the plight of the poor fisherman Enoch Arden or fire their idealism with his portrait of the perfect ruler in his Arthurian epic *Idylls of the King*. He could stir up controversy with poetic tracts such as *The Princess* or experimental verse such as *Maud*. And above all, he could offer readers the possibility of hope emerging from grief as he did in his signatory accomplishment, *In Memoriam A. H. H.* As Leonée Ormond observes, when he accepted the invitation to become Queen Victoria's poet laureate, Tennyson was profoundly aware of the temperament of his countrymen. He did not simply become *a* poet laureate; rather he became "the greatest of all laureates, the man with whom the title itself will always be most closely associated" (Ormond 109). He was, as Joanna Richardson describes him in the title of her critical biography, the "pre-eminent Victorian."

Hence, it is not surprising that Tennyson's reputation has risen, fallen, and risen again as critics during the twentieth century continued to reassess and reinterpret the Victorian Age. His early works were criticized as trivial and introspective by a generation raised to appreciate the poetry of the

Augustans and Sir Walter Scott. By mid-century he had risen to a position of prominence enjoyed by few poets in their lifetime. As the century closed, a new generation was finding fault not only with his artistry but also with what they considered his priggish morality, while those who were growing old with him continued to treat him with the reverence accorded to sages and saints. For a half-century after his death, his reputation suffered the same fate as other Victorians at the hands of their children and grandchildren who found the promises of optimism and belief in progress demolished and dispelled by the tragedy of world war and the emergence of modernism. The rise in the Victorians' reputation during the middle of the twentieth century saw a concurrent rise in Tennyson's stature, though the hostile trends late-century critics displayed toward more politically conservative Victorian writers has had an effect on the Victorian laureate's reputation. At the same time, some of his poems have risen or fallen in stature — a trend reflecting as much on the tastes of the twentieth century as it does on Tennyson.

Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy focuses on ways critics have approached Tennyson's poetry and judgments they have made about his work. Such a book is possible because so much has been written about Tennyson, and so much scholarly work has been done to provide authentic texts and detailed biographical information. Anyone wishing to understand Tennyson's reputation should first be familiar with the history of the texts used to present his works to twentieth-century readers, the major sources for biographical information, and the important bibliographical studies that precede and complement the present study.

For more than half of the twentieth century, scholars relied on the multivolume edition of Tennyson's poetry, commonly known as the Eversley Edition, published by Macmillan & Co. in 1907–8 under the supervision of the poet's elder son, Hallam. Because Hallam Tennyson had access to his father's notes and private papers, and because his father had reviewed and revised many of these poems before he died, these volumes were considered definitive. Unfortunately, when Tennyson died, he left his papers to Trinity College, Cambridge, establishing a perpetual ban on their publication. Scholars could examine these papers, but could not quote from them; so, for nearly a century, critics were forced to resort to cryptic allusions to variant readings or additional stanzas not included in Hallam Tennyson's edition. Hallam's editorial commentary in the Eversley edition was modest, further exasperating those who might have wanted to do serious study of the poet's creative process.

In 1963, after the revival of interest in Tennyson made it possible for young scholars to devote serious attention to his work, George O. Marshall compiled *A Tennyson Handbook* (1963), providing details about publication history, background, plot, and theme. While this book still serves as a useful guide to understanding individual poems, Marshall's work was supplanted in

less than a decade by one of the great achievements of twentieth-century editing, Christopher Ricks's *The Poems of Tennyson* (1969). This volume contains variant readings, extensive textual notes, brief critical commentaries, and sound background on the poet and his times. Ricks was limited in his work by the prohibition the Tennyson family had placed on using the poet's manuscripts deposited at Trinity College, Cambridge. His frustration at having to complete his work without quoting from the manuscripts at Trinity was shared by many who used this first edition. Fortunately, the prohibition was lifted several years later. Diligently, Ricks prepared a second edition, issued in three volumes in 1987. It is unquestionably the finest source of information about the poet's literary career, and the starting point for serious students of Tennyson's work.

The removal of the ban on copying and quoting has had other beneficial effects. Since 1986 Christopher Ricks and Aidan Day have been compiling copies of these papers and other collections in a monumental thirty-volume *Tennyson Archives* (1986–). Additionally, distinguished Tennyson scholars Marion Shaw and Susan Shatto, both associated at one time or another with the Tennyson Research Centre and its publications staff, used the newly available manuscripts at Trinity College to produce a superb variorum edition of *In Memoriam* (1982). The volume contains a detailed commentary on the composition process and extensive notes on textual variants, supplementing the work of earlier scholars who either had to guess at Tennyson's methods or write circumspectly about what they had discovered in the Trinity manuscripts. Shatto produced a variorum edition of *Maud* in 1986, applying the same high standards she and Shaw had demonstrated in their edition of Tennyson's elegy.

In the days prior to computer-assisted search capability, the publication of concordances was often welcomed by scholars needing to identify key words and phrases in a poet's work. Two major concordances of Tennyson's work are available, Daniel B. Brightwell's *A Concordance to the Entire Works of Alfred Tennyson* (1869) and Arthur E. Baker's *A Concordance to the Poetical and Dramatic Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson* (1914). Unfortunately, the first is incomplete, since it does not index works published during the last quarter-century of the poet's life; the second is more helpful, but it is keyed to the Eversley edition, not the newer and more comprehensive Ricks edition.[1]

Tennyson's letters have been edited ably by two distinguished scholars of the Victorian period, Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar Shannon. Unfortunately, the three volumes of *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (1981–90) contain little important information about Tennyson's poetic theory and less about his private life than one might hope to find. There is not much, either, in James Hoge's editions of the *Letters of Emily Lady Tennyson* (1974) or *Lady Tennyson's Journal* (1981) to shed additional light on the poet's life and

works that is not at least hinted at in the monumental two-volume *Memoir* produced by the poet's son Hallam Tennyson in 1897. That book contains reminiscences of Tennyson by contemporaries (most are flattering portraits), but a more balanced assessment of the poet by fellow Victorians can be found in John D. Jump's *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage* (1967) and Norman Page's *Tennyson, Interviews and Recollections* (1983). Additional information about the family is available in Sir Charles Tennyson and Hope Dyson's *The Tennysons: Background to Genius* (1974).

Books, articles, and notes about Tennyson's poetry and plays are catalogued regularly in annual publications such as the *MLA Bibliography,* the *Humanities Index* (formerly *Humanities & Social Science Index*) and, to a much more limited extent in the *Readers Guide to Periodicals Index.* Fortunately, the systematic study of Tennyson criticism has been aided by several important bibliographies that point readers to sources not easily identifiable in more generalized, comprehensive bibliographies. Theodore G. Ehrsam, Robert H. Deily, and Robert M. Smith include a chapter on Tennyson in *Bibliographies of Twelve Victorian Authors* (1936), a book of great use to scholars for more than two decades but now superseded by more comprehensive and recent compilations. Similarly, the essays by Paull F. Baum and E. D. H. Johnson in the two editions of *The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research* published by Harvard University Press (1956, 1968) are enlightening for their scholarly assessment of the poet's reputation, but are limited in their usefulness in identifying sources for further study.

Nearly a half-century of scholarship on Tennyson is catalogued in the five volumes of *Bibliographies of Studies in Victorian Literature,* begun by William Darby Templeman and Samuel Chew and continued by others working with the University of Illinois Press; individual volumes, published at roughly ten-year intervals, list critical work published between 1932 and 1984. Since the 1970s, the editors of *Victorian Poetry* have commissioned respected scholars to compile annotated listings of "the year's work" on Victorian writers. Tennyson has been well served by the efforts of Joseph Sendry and Linda K. Hughes, whose commentary on contemporary scholarship is a valuable resource for scholars wishing to keep up with the flood of publications about Tennyson. The Tennyson Centre in Lincoln subsidized publication of a two-volume catalogue of primary and secondary sources in their collection (Nancie Campbell, *Tennyson in Lincoln: A Catalogue of the Collections in the Research Centre,* 2 vols., 1971). Peter Revel and Sian Allsobrook's *A Catalogue of the Tennyson Collection in the Library of University College, Cardiff* (1972) identifies materials in this major repository outside Cambridge and Lincoln. Many other major research libraries, including Harvard University, have substantial collections of Tennysoniana.

During the twentieth century, a baker's dozen of bibliographies listing critical studies of Tennyson's works were published. The most comprehen-

sive, Kirk Beetz's *Tennyson: A Bibliography, 1827–1982* (1984), contains over four thousand entries. Some scholars have criticized this work for notable omissions and paucity of commentary; fortunately, Arthur Sherbo's "Additions to the Beetz Tennyson Bibliography" (1993) corrects many of the deficiencies by publishing a list of dozens of works not included in Beetz's volume. Despite its shortcomings, Beetz's work remains the single best source for identifying Tennyson scholarship published before 1983. John Dixon Hunt's chapter on Tennyson in A. E. Dyson's *English Poetry: Select Bibliographical Guides* (1971) is more heavily annotated than Beetz's book, and closer to my own study in providing some analysis of critics' biases. Though not organized chronologically, it provides a good idea of how Tennyson was viewed before 1970. Other specialized, selected bibliographies that scholars and students may find useful are Sir Charles Tennyson and Christine Fall's *Alfred Tennyson: An Annotated Bibliography* (1967), Aletha Andrew's *An Annotated Bibliography and Study of the Contemporary Criticism of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," 1859–1886* (1993), and Marion Shaw's *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Alfred, Lord Tennyson* (1989).

Tennyson's reputation has been the subject of several articles and monographs, and has occupied the attention of most of his biographers as well. Thomas Lounsbury's *The Life And Times of Tennyson: From 1809 to 1850* (1915) contains detailed discussion on the impact reviewers had on Tennyson's decision to revise early poems, and sometimes caustic commentary on the unfair judgments of some of these critics. Edward T. Cook writes briefly about the subject in "The Second Thoughts of Poets" (1919), finding that Tennyson paid careful attention to criticism, even from those who seemed to take pleasure in savaging his work. Amy Cruse's *Victorians and Their Reading* (1935) takes a slightly different tack, focusing on ways the general public affected the laureate's decisions regarding his choice of subjects and his decision to revise work that did not meet with popular approval. W. D. Paden's "Tennyson and the Reviewers (1829–1835)" (1940) is an excellent analysis of the reception of the 1830 and 1833 volumes. In *The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture* (1941), Leslie Marchand studies in detail the way reviewers in one influential journal treated Tennyson's work, demonstrating how critical opinion shifted in the poet's favor over a half-century. Edgar Shannon's 1943 *PMLA* article and his 1952 monograph *Tennyson and the Reviewers* are the best sources for understanding the poet's reaction to reviews of his work and to learn how, despite his protests to the contrary, Tennyson took seriously criticisms leveled at him. Shannon adeptly challenges assertions of earlier critics and sets the record straight about the true impact of contemporary critics on Tennyson's early work. *Tennyson and the Reviewers* also contains an extensive bibliography that will be of valuable assistance to those wishing to explore this topic.

Focused studies of Tennyson's reputation have appeared from time to time. John Eidson's *Tennyson in America: His Reputation and Influence from 1827 to 1858* (1943) and Marjorie Bowden's *Tennyson in France* (1930) are more detailed than most, and are helpful for those wishing to see how foreigners reacted to the appearance of new works by the poet. Barbara Clark's 1987 Memorial Address to the Tennyson Society, printed as "Tennyson Across the Atlantic" in the *Tennyson Research Bulletin,* expands Eidson's study to include twentieth-century critics and lovers of Tennyson's work. Earlier studies are more limited but nonetheless useful. Hamilton W. Mabie's "The Influence of Tennyson in America" (1892) is useful for those interested in seeing how an American contemporary assessed his countrymen's reaction to Tennyson's work. Charles W. Moulton's compilation of excerpts from various reviews and reminiscences in volume 8 of *The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors* (1905) suggests how widely Tennyson's influence penetrated readers in the United States. Clyde Ryals's "The Poet as Critic: Appraisals of Tennyson by his Contemporaries" (1962) brings together comments from the poet's friends and others whose opinions shaped criticism during the last half of the nineteenth century. Similarly, Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Scrutinies* (1972) is a collection of reviews by Victorian critics of works by Tennyson and others; it includes key reviews of the 1830, 1833, and 1842 volumes, as well as commentaries on *The Princess* and *In Memoriam.* E. E. Smith's "Tennyson Criticism 1923–1996: From Fragmentation to Tension in Polarity" (1967) and Kerry McSweeney's "The State of Tennyson Criticism" (1974) attempt in a more limited way the approach I apply in this volume. Both offer some judgment on the way scholars have viewed Tennyson and on ways shifts in critical approaches to literature have affected Tennyson's reputation.

Although the principal focus of *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* is on documenting critical responses to Tennyson's poetry, this book is also intended to explain something about the premises from which these critics have worked. My approach has been historical and chronological, rather than topical. It would be fair to say that I have produced what Lee Patterson would call "an immanent or intrinsic history" of Tennyson criticism (*Critical Terms for Literary Study,* 250). My analyses of critics' arguments do not stray far from *their* texts to examine larger social, cultural, political or religious ideologies that underlie their work. Had I done so, this would be a very different (and much longer) book. Nevertheless, I have attempted, where appropriate, to offer suggestions regarding the external factors, both literary and cultural, that motivated critics to interpret Tennyson as they did.

Indeed, the vacillations in critical methodology, as well as in the tastes of the period, can tell readers something not only about Tennyson but also about the men and women who have chosen to write about him. I have divided the study into segments that seem to me to reflect major shifts in atti-

tude toward Tennyson, although one might argue that since the 1960s his reputation has remained relatively stable. But the shift in emphasis in critical approaches to literature reflected in the work of poststructuralists has shed new light on the poet, his poems, and the period in which he lived and worked. In keeping with the guidelines of the Literary Criticism in Perspective Series, I have included a list of Tennyson's publications and a "Works Cited" list, both arranged chronologically to assist others who might wish to read for themselves the record of scholarship as it emerged during the past century.

Critics began writing about Tennyson long before the poet died, and the volume of criticism has grown steadily for more than a century. By the time Robert Horton published *Tennyson: A Saintly Life* in 1900, the British Museum had already catalogued fifty-two books on Tennyson (Horton 1). Beetz's bibliography contains approximately forty-five hundred entries, and does not cover the last two decades of the century. Therefore, in writing a book such as *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy,* I found myself thinking of the advice the philosopher Imlac gives to the young prince in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas:* like the poet, my function has been "to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances" (Johnson 628). It has not been possible for me to "number the streaks of the tulip" (628): hence, quite a few excellent studies of individual works, or of Tennyson's technical merit, are not mentioned. There is little room for explications of individual poems, unless those reflect something about the larger trends in criticism or are the work of a notable and influential critic. Instead, my hope is that the readers of *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* will come away with a sense of how Tennyson has mattered to readers for more than a century, and how readers' and critics' reaction to his poetry reveals something about the shifts in literary criticism during a period of intense, diverse study that has shaped the modern profession of letters.

Notes

[1] A concordance based on the first edition of Ricks's *Poems of Tennyson* was begun in 1980 with the permission of the editor and the publisher, Longman's. The project moved from the U.S. Naval Academy to the University of Western Ontario in 1989, where a machine-readable tape was completed. But the appearance of Ricks's second edition makes that work, too, of limited value.

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1: Tennyson Among His Contemporaries: 1827–1892

TO APPRECIATE THE VICISSITUDES OF Tennyson criticism in the twentieth century, it is necessary to understand how his reputation first developed among his contemporaries in the nineteenth. Of course, any assessment of the early critical reception of Tennyson's poems must be undertaken with a certain degree of wariness. Tennyson often encouraged his friends to write reviews of his work, so his first readers would have been encouraged to buy his books by someone who had a vested interest in seeing Tennyson's career advanced. The most famous, and in some ways most biased, was written by the poet's bosom friend and fellow Cambridge Apostle Arthur Henry Hallam. His essay on Tennyson's 1830 volume, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in the *Englishman's Magazine* (1831), bore the pretentious title "On the Genius of Alfred Tennyson."[1] Another close friend, James Spedding, provided a similar encomium of the 1842 *Poems* in the *Edinburgh Review*. He praises Tennyson for his "sound view of human life and the condition of man in the world," for his "healthy, manly, and simple" moral views (Jump 146), and for his exceptional ability at versification. His only reservation: these poems cannot be accepted "as a satisfactory account of the gifts which they show" Tennyson possesses (151). Carefully avoiding any mention that Tennyson is also his good friend, Spedding argues that the poet can, and will, do even more spectacular work in the future. Suffice it to say that one needs to be cautious of such special pleading.

Nevertheless, many of the poet's earliest critics were men from a generation raised to appreciate the work of Dryden, Pope, Gray, and their neoclassical contemporaries. These critics had given only grudging acceptance to Wordsworth and Coleridge, considerably less credit to Shelley and Keats. Byron had won their admiration, and Scott had given them a new standard for contemporary poetry in his ballads and chivalric narratives. It is little wonder that the first volumes of a young poet with a penchant for introspection and unusual metrics were met with patronizing skepticism.

Among these first critics, only W. J. Fox had excessive praise for the 1830 volume. Whether Thomas Lounsbury is right to call Fox a "crazy panegyrist" (211) may be debatable, but there is no denying his enthusiasm for the new poet. After a lengthy introduction in which he expresses his belief that poetry is but one of many vehicles for universal human improve-

ment, Fox informs readers that many of Tennyson's works offer excellent character studies. A man of his times, Fox chides the young poet for his propensity to use irregular meter and his occasional inclusion of words that "young ladies of the present day" might not "be accustomed to read or sing in the parlour." Though the "very originality" of these poems might "prevent their being generally appreciated for a time," Fox is convinced that Tennyson might mend his idiosyncratic ways and begin to write poetry that would serve a better public service. Speaking as one who measured the temper of the times, Fox observes that "a genuine poet has deep responsibilities for his country and the world, to the present and future generations, to earth and heaven"; he must, therefore "consecrate himself to their promotion" (Jump 32–33).

By contrast, John Wilson, the infamous "Christopher North," attacked Tennyson's 1830 volume with gusto. The subjects are often silly, he says, the versification rough, the poet's knowledge of the world and human nature incomplete. The worst offense, however, is that he seems to have become the darling of the Cockney School, a group including William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Keats, and Shelley, which had drawn ridicule from *Blackwood's* reviewers in the past. Their own writing flaunted accepted — that is, neoclassic — poetic norms, especially with regard to rhyme and meter. That men like Hunt would find Tennyson a poet of promise immediately made him anathema to critics such as Wilson. Worse still, Wilson goes on to say, Tennyson has been over praised by contemporaries who are either too blind to his faults or too ignorant themselves to offer seasoned criticism. Not content simply to excoriate Tennyson's work, Wilson savages the reviewers who have been so wrongheaded in celebrating the new poet. He even attributes the demise of the *Englishman's Magazine* to its publication of Hallam's 1831 review, which raised such a "general guffaw" that the journal "expired in convulsions" (Jump 51).

Unfortunately, Tennyson did not have the good sense to refrain from retaliating publicly against Wilson. He dashed off a nine-line satire, "To Christopher North," which he included in his next volume of poems. This puerile response to a respected critic did little to enamor Tennyson with the sages of the day. There is little wonder, then, that the 1833 volume evoked vitriolic response from established reviewers.

Another critic writing for the *Quarterly Review,* John Wilson Croker, typifies this reaction. His disparaging critique of Tennyson's *Poems* (1833) bears overtones of his damaging review of Keats's work in 1818; in fact, Croker goes out of his way to make the comparison explicit, ironically calling Tennyson "another and a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger" (Jump 66; Croker's italics). In prose dripping with irony, Croker appears to praise while damning the young poet for his excesses. Near the end of the review, he takes pains to

castigate Tennyson for the satire on Christopher North, using it as the springboard to attack him for his inability to accept what Croker considers honest criticism intended simply to help him improve in his craft. The viciousness of his remark prompted Tennyson's most distinguished modern editor, Christopher Ricks, to describe Croker's review as "venomous" (Ricks 1969, xxx).

Whether Croker, Wilson, and other early reviewers were aiming principally at Tennyson or the associates who held him in high esteem may be debated. Twentieth-century scholar Edgar Shannon believes that "nothing more than the association of Tennyson with radicalism and the Cockney poets was needed to incite Croker" to write severely. In the view of many early reviewers, Shannon says, Tennyson was part of the radical crowd that was thought to be headquartered at Cambridge (*Tennyson,* 25, 22).

In 1835, Tennyson found a champion against Croker. The young John Stuart Mill, writing in an early issue of the *London Review* (July 1835), accuses the *Quarterly Review* of practicing needless antagonism toward new voices. Meeting the work of emerging writers "with a curl of the lip," the critic for the *Quarterly* gains pleasure not from the work being reviewed, but from "his own cleverness in making it contemptible" (Jump 85). Having put Croker in his place, Mill enumerates the good qualities he finds in Tennyson's poems, claiming they display beyond question that Tennyson has a "poetic temperament"; the volumes of 1830 and 1833 show that he is mastering his craft (92). He is not without faults, Mill says, but his natural gift for versification indicates that, if he works diligently, these can be turned to strengths and future poems may indeed be great.

American readers were less critical. Largely due to the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell, a coterie at Harvard and throughout the Boston area read Tennyson's works enthusiastically. By 1840, he was being linked with Spenser as "the greatest of poets" (Eidson 9). The early volumes were reviewed favorably in several journals, including the *Western Messenger* in Louisville, Kentucky. The admiring commentary written by Margaret Fuller for the *Dial* in 1841 indicates the high favor in which Tennyson was held by his American cousins.[2]

Reviewers in France also took notice of Tennyson's 1830 and 1833 volumes, and while most simply acknowledged him as one of the emerging new voices, several wrote longer analyses. The writers for *L'Europe Littéraire* (1834) and the influential *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1833) cited his originality and predicted great things for this new poetic voice from England. However, a later critique in the *Revue* by E. D. Forgues (*Revue,* 1847), while more detailed, is less laudatory. Forgues acknowledges Tennyson's mastery of style and technique, but believes his thought is "hazy" and his philosophy "null." He is unlikely, Forgues says, to have lasting influence in France (Bowden 17).[3]

Many twentieth-century critics have pointed out Tennyson's sensitivity to adverse criticism, and there is certainly evidence that the sting of Croker's bite was not fully soothed by the balm of Mill's more balanced assessment. At the same time, Tennyson suffered a series of personal setbacks. In 1831, his father died. In 1833, Arthur Henry Hallam died. In 1836, Rosa Baring rejected Alfred's suit (and perhaps a marriage proposal as well). In 1837, the Tennyson family was forced to move from Somersby Rectory to Epping Forest. Whether negative criticism or the series of personal tragedies that brought significant change to his life affected him more may be open to question; what is certain is that Tennyson waited a decade to publish another volume of poetry. In 1842, he brought out two volumes. The first contained selections of earlier works, many revised; the second consisted of previously unpublished poems. This time, the reviewers reacted more kindly.

John Sterling, like Tennyson an Apostle at Cambridge, wrote a balanced review that appeared in what might seem a most unlikely place: the *Quarterly Review* (September 1842), which had published Croker's hostile attack a decade earlier. After a lengthy introduction in which he bemoans the absence of any great poets in his own time — the influence of his mentor Thomas Carlyle is most evident at this point — Sterling praises Tennyson for producing verse that is fit to its station and worthy of readers' attention. He is especially enthusiastic about the English idylls, which he calls "a real addition to our literature" (Jump 122). Leigh Hunt, still active in literary circles long after his early friends Keats and Shelley had died, seconds Sterling in praising Tennyson's work (*Church of England Quarterly Review,* October 1842), calling him "a kind of philosophical Keats" (Jump 136). Having expressed confidence in Tennyson's poetic powers more than a decade earlier (*Tatler,* February 1831), he encourages Tennyson to outgrow his boyish desire for unqualified praise (128). Hunt's balanced critique indicates that the tide was turning in the poet's favor. R. H. Horne acknowledges this explicitly in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844) when he awards Tennyson "the title of a true poet of the highest class of genius" (153). Horne is among the earliest to notice a characteristic that later critics, including T. S. Eliot, would highlight in describing Tennyson's limitations: while he can be "intensely tragic" and display "great power of concentration," he "is not at all dramatic" (Jump 160). Horne is perceptive, too, in recognizing that, although little acknowledged in earlier reviews, "Ulysses" is "one of the most exquisite . . . poems in the language" (Jump 163).

Fox, Mill, Hunt, Sterling, and certainly Hallam and Spedding all express their belief that Tennyson's early efforts would not be his best. They predicted that, once he turned to loftier subjects, he would produce works that would rank with the greatest in the language.[4] In fact, many of these reviewers challenged the poet to become more of a teacher and less a melancholy lyricist. John Forster, writing in the *Examiner* in 1842, expresses these

thoughts succinctly: "we think that he would find himself able to fly a higher flight than lyric, idyl, or eclogue, and we counsel him to try it" (Shannon, *Tennyson,* 62).

Unfortunately, the first of Tennyson's long poems did not produce the reaction his champions had predicted. *The Princess* (1847, 1850), a medley told by several contemporary young men and women about a medieval prince's conquest of a proto-feminist princess, met with what can best be described as mixed reviews. While some early commentaries were decidedly favorable (cf. Shannon, *Tennyson,* 98–100), strong criticisms by writers in influential periodicals such as the *Spectator, Athenaeum,* and *Atlas* gave the public a negative impression of the poem. Dramatist J. W. Marston sums up critical opinion quite succinctly in the opening sentence of his *Athenaeum* review in 1848: "There is so much to admire in this volume that we cannot wish it unwritten," he says, but "so much also to censure that, while we could recognize the whole if tendered as a pledge of genius, we cannot accept it as a due consummation of that faculty" (Jump 166).

On the other side of the ocean, however, the young poet was faring much better. Edgar Allan Poe, long a champion of Tennyson, delivered a lecture in 1848 that was subsequently printed in *Home Journal* and *Sartain's Union Magazine* in 1850. In what is certainly Poe's most influential critical statement, "The Poetic Principle," the American poet offered his British counterpart the highest praise to date: "I call him, and *think* him the noblest of poets — *not* because the impressions he produces are at *all* times, the most profound — *not* because the poetical excitement which he induces is at all times the most intense — but because it *is,* at all times, the most ethereal — in other words, the most elevating and most pure. No poet is so little of the earth" (Eidson 61). As Gerhard Joseph demonstrates in "Poe and Tennyson" (1973), the admiration was mutual.

Though *The Princess* may not have been the blockbuster Tennyson had hoped it would be, he did not have to wait long to come into his own as the undisputed major poet of his age. During the "ten years' silence" from 1833–1842, and all the while he was working on *The Princess,* Tennyson was also writing and revising dozens of short lyrics inspired by the death of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. The poet claimed that many of the poems in the 1842 volumes were inspired by his thoughts of Hallam; "Ulysses," for example, "was written soon after Arthur Hallam's death, and gave my feeling about the need for going forward and braving the struggle of life" (Hallam Tennyson 1:196). For nearly two decades Tennyson collected these lyrics, working them over and trying to decide how he might use them. The result was the publication, in 1850, of *In Memoriam, A. H. H.,* one of the great English elegies.[5]

The poem appeared anonymously, and some reviewers immediately began speculating about its authorship. One went so far as to surmise that it

was written by a widow as a tribute to her late husband. Not all were in the dark, however. Novelist Charles Kingsley, writing in *Fraser's Magazine* (September 1850), expressed what many thought: "All the world, somehow, knows the author" (Jump 173). Reaction to the poem was almost universally favorable. Writing in the *Leader,* philosopher and editor George Henry Lewes called the poem superior to Milton's *Lycidas,* and predicted it would become "the solace and delight of every house where poetry is loved" (Shannon, *Tennyson,* 142). The reviewer for the *Guardian* thought that "judged even by the standard of Shakespeare and Spenser, Mr. Tennyson will not be found wanting" (142–43). Its appeal to the idealism and faith Victorians sought in literature was a special strength, according to J. W. Marston of the *Athenaeum,* who claimed that "in its moral scope the book will endear itself to all who suffer" (143).

Kingsley's review is especially noteworthy because it represents a new turn in Tennyson criticism: the age of unqualified, perhaps even hyperbolic, praise for anything the poet published. *In Memoriam,* he states without hesitation, is "the noblest Christian poem which England has produced for two centuries" (Jump 173). Kingsley looks back at Tennyson's earlier work to demonstrate how the seeds of this great elegy were planted in the lyrics and narrative poems of the 1830, 1833, and 1842 volumes. "This latest and highest volume," he remarks, brings together "all the poet's peculiar excellencies . . . fused down in a perfect unity to bear on his subject with that care and finish which only a labour of love can inspire" (182). For his readers Kingsley provides lengthy quotations — without comment. Like so many Victorians who stood in awe of Tennyson's masterpiece, Kingsley felt it would be "an injustice to the poet to think they needed any" (184).

In similar fashion, Coventry Patmore, reviewing the book in *Palladium,* declared it "the best religious poetry that has ever been written in our language," in large part because "secular knowledge is humbled before loving faith" (Shannon, *Tennyson,* 145, 149). The French critic Joseph Milsand shared these sentiments, concluding his article in the *Revue Britannique* (1850) with the observation that "One could make this book one's Bible" (Bowden 19).

It would be disingenuous, however, to suggest that there were no negative reactions. Perversely, American critics, who had been high on Tennyson's earlier work, were critical of *In Memoriam*. Some, like the reviewer for *Brownson's Quarterly Review,* thought it "feeble, diffuse, and tiresome," and the critic writing for the *Southern Literary Messenger* considered it "monotonous," and lacking in "varying rhythm" (Eidson 78–79). Some who had embraced the 1842 volumes found *In Memoriam* tedious, overdone, and too long.

Nevertheless, the poem touched the Victorian reading public like nothing else published before it. As his son Hallam observed a half-century later,