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Personal Museums: the Fan Diaries of Lewis Carroll and William Allingham

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In its 1896 commemoration of the late Emily Tennyson's life work, the *Athenaeum* particularly commended her skilful diaristic writing and praised her 'power of selecting really luminous points for preservation in her diary'; namely those that 'shed light upon Tennyson's method'.¹ According to the journalist, Emily's talent for daily chronicling distinguishes her record from the great bulk of diaries of the time, which,

as a rule [,] professing as they do to give portraiture of eminent men, are mostly very much worse than worthless. The points seized upon by the diarist are almost never physiognomic, and even if the diarist does give some glimpse of the character he professes to limn, the picture can only be partially true, inasmuch as it can never be toned down by other aspects of the character unseen by the diarist and unknown to him.²

Intriguingly, the author establishes biographising as the principal task of a diary, stipulating that the quality of diaristic writing depends on the diarist's ability to render the 'character' of an eminent figure, rather than his or her own, from the perspective of an omniscient external observer. Disregarding the private endeavour of diaries and deploring their inadequacy to serve as accurate reminiscences, the author establishes diaristic observations as necessarily one-sided and flawed due to the diarist's insuperably subjective stance. The severity of the *Athenaeum's* dismissal of diaries as reliable biographical sources must, however, be understood as a reaction to the hero-worshipping culture of the nineteenth century rather than as an attempt to set standards for the quality and usefulness of diaristic writing. Criticising reminiscences based on diary entries, and diaries published by authors prone to

1 exaggerate the kindness, wildness, or grumpiness of the poet, the article
2 confounds biographies written in diary-format with diaries that display
3 a biographical interest.

4 This chapter demonstrates the impact of the Victorian belief in a
5 strict hierarchy of fans on the fan behaviour of the mid-century diarists
6 William Allingham and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll). The fact that
7 these diarists relentlessly justify their own fan behaviour, and constantly
8 re-negotiate their position as fans within Tennyson's circle and the
9 lionising culture that surrounded them, indicates the influence of their
10 culture's separatism. This chapter investigates a constellation of the bio-
11 graphical triad slightly different from the one examined in Chapter 5;
12 namely the changing personae of the diarist as fan, friend and biog-
13 rapher. While scholarship has thus far reduced Allingham's diary to
14 a useful biographical account of Tennyson's eccentricity, I highlight
15 the diarist's reactions to contemporary conventions of fandom, which
16 caused his own status to constantly waver between that of an onlooker,
17 guest and biographer. Critics have tended to stigmatise Dodgson as a
18 lion-hunter, insisting that his fan behaviour and his personal desire for
19 anonymity are irredeemably paradoxical. I extend and correct this read-
20 ing by highlighting the self-fashioning and system-building function of
21 celebrity-worship in the life of the fan and by arguing that 'collecting'
22 involves the cultivation of an intimate, if often imagined, relationship
23 with an admired other, rather than unsympathetic consumption. This
24 chapter demonstrates that fandom naturally involves the narrative
25 and spatial organisation of collected objects and impressions related
26 to celebrities, but that, beyond this cataloguing of the other, it also
27 includes the classification of the individual as either a legitimate reader
28 or an obtrusive fan and thus demands the active positioning of the self
29 within a set of behaviours and values.

30 Dodgson and Allingham's diaristic records differ from published
31 reminiscences in their tendency to faithfully include their disappoint-
32 ments about *not* seeing the poet, the latter's quirks and moody spells,
33 as well as their own consequent tiptoeing around him. Although the
34 diaries in question are not wholly private documents, as both clearly
35 exhibit an awareness of a potential reader, their unedited nature
36 reveals the direct experience of the vulnerable fan more so than
37 the self-bolstering success stories of reminiscers do. There are some
38 similarities between the two modes of narration, such as the typical
39 division of the acquaintance process into several stages (admiration
40 of poetry, anticipation, arrival at Farringford, first impressions of the
41 poet, delightful afternoons on the lawn, walks, poetry readings and

1 dramatic farewells), but reminiscences tend to omit vital steps, such
2 as the visitor's scheming to meet Tennyson, his or her active attempts
3 to gain the poet's attention and the difficulties of coping with his
4 rude remarks and rejections. While writers of reminiscences tend to
5 construct sleek monuments of their hero as well as of themselves,
6 stressing their own importance in the poet's life, rather than vice
7 versa, Dodgson and Allingham's diaries are important documents
8 because they candidly testify to Tennyson's enriching presence in their
9 private lives. In this context, it is important to stress that fan experi-
10 ences differ greatly: while Allingham was a fan who became a friend,
11 Dodgson remained a fan.

12 Recent scholarship has altogether dismissed the myth of the reader/
13 fan as a mere consumer, rejecting the lingering idea that fans are an
14 ahistorical mass of mindless followers, driven by the 'collective strategy'
15 of the herd. Instead, they have considered the impact of readers and
16 fans on the artist's creative process and also the emotional aspects of
17 venerating a celebrity. Accordingly, Tom Mole considers celebrity to be
18 'a cultural apparatus, consisting of the relations between an individual,
19 an industry and an audience'.³ These three instances influence each
20 other – fans do not blindly adopt the industry's fabrication of the
21 famous individual but do have the choice to make or break a celebrity.
22 Eric Eisner has shown that 'nineteenth-century poetry was crucially
23 shaped by the practices of its star-struck readers and by the affective
24 relationships between reader and writer'.⁴ Evidently, fans' lionising
25 behaviour and subjective responses to a celebrity's image, presence and
26 work differed greatly, and surely, the nature of the latter's discipline (act-
27 ing, writing, painting, etc.) affected those responses. Since 'consump-
28 tion' is frequently applied to all forms of fandom, I shall not treat each
29 category specifically, but wish to replace the idea of celebrity-worship
30 as primarily utilitarian consumption, a process in which images, texts,
31 objects and persons are swallowed up and nothing is retained, by the
32 concept of the collection, in which 'aesthetic value replaces use value',
33 to use Susan Stewart's terms.⁵

34 The fact that the Victorians were avid collectors is well known. The
35 countless museums built during the nineteenth century to house
36 and display both exotic and familiar objects are prominent physical
37 manifestations of this 'impulse or spirit that infused the age and many
38 of its projects', as Barbara J. Black has shown.⁶ The accumulation of
39 congruent and incongruent objects in various forms such as 'the triple-
40 decker novel; collected works, encyclopaedias and dictionaries [and]
41 phenomena as ordinary as keepsakes, dollhouses [and] rock collections'

1 similarly stems from the desire to implement 'system-building projects'
2 in order to both structure and enjoy the world.⁷ Because a museum can
3 be seen as the concretisation of and the stimulus for the Victorians'
4 passion for collecting, for Black, it allows a culture 'to stand outside
5 of itself within itself' and 'to leave the realm of the merely familiar
6 while staying at home'.⁸ A *carte de visite*-album, an autograph book or
7 a diary can similarly cater to a fan's desire to see his or her tastes repre-
8 sented and affirmed and to expand his or her sensory and intellectual
9 environment. The physical and intellectual appropriation of the world
10 inherent in both collecting and celebrity-worship are characteristic of
11 an age shaped by colonialism, scientific discoveries and a new historical
12 consciousness. As Judith Pascoe has demonstrated, the democratisation
13 and popularisation of collecting were decidedly nineteenth-century
14 phenomena as 'opportunities for participating in this activity, directly or
15 vicariously, proliferated'.⁹ Collecting was an integral part of nineteenth-
16 century education and 'from an early age children were encouraged
17 to identify objects and effectively "curate" the formation of their
18 own collections' as collaborating scholars Susan M. Pearce, Rosemary
19 Flanders, Mark Hall and Fiona Morton have highlighted.¹⁰

20 Victorian fans, like museum-goers, were able to feed their imagination
21 by engaging in parasocial relationships with their idols, who, just like
22 the Elgin marbles, were on public display. The collection of impressions,
23 feelings and ideas inherent in museum and celebrity culture is not
24 merely an economically motivated quantitative amassment, but a world
25 view influenced by the Romantics' belief that the past is an 'idealised
26 lost world, partly salvageable through the recovery and preservation of
27 old objects and documents', as Pascoe has argued.¹¹ The fan and/or the
28 museum-goer do not simply want to increase their cultural capital, but
29 they wish to render tangible and durable the world of their imagina-
30 tion through collecting objects, writing down impressions and claim-
31 ing acquaintance with celebrities through pilgrimages to their houses.
32 Considering that periodical editors tended to 'equate magazines to
33 museums or cabinets of collectible objects', it is entirely conceivable to
34 view fan culture with its paraphernalia, such as *cartes de visite*, albums,
35 press cuttings, celebrity interviews and souvenirs, as a fundamental
36 part of the Victorian culture of collection.¹² If a magazine could assume
37 the function and aura of a museum, the diary must be seen as an
38 individual's effort to 'curate' his or her personal collection of memo-
39 rable experiences and memoranda. Because classifying is inherently
40 linked to collecting, Asa Briggs has shown, it was 'a favourite as well as
41 a necessary Victorian preoccupation, like naming and listing'.¹³

1 For both Allingham and Dodgson, diaristic inscription was the means
2 through which to translate their fascination with celebrities into a pos-
3 session, allowing them to prolong the excitement of first-hand contact.
4 In their fan behaviour, the diary functions as a museum to harbour
5 delightful experiences that might also showcase them to potential
6 readers. While it is tempting to think of Dodgson as not only the big-
7 ger star, but also the bigger lioniser of the two, his intention to create
8 durable traces of Tennyson's cultural eminence is in fact very similar to
9 Allingham's, differing mostly in the chosen generic medium. Allingham
10 used his diary as the basis of an autobiographical/biographical project,
11 whereas Dodgson 'collected' the distinguished figures of his day by
12 naming them in brief diary entries and appropriating their image in
13 numerous photograph albums. This impulse to collect and keep images,
14 snippets, as well as memories of first-hand contact stems from a desire
15 for emotional and intellectual complementation by an admired person.
16 A fan's attempts to become acquainted with a celebrity, often described
17 as 'hunting', should therefore be seen as acts of 'wooing' him or her into
18 an actual relationship.

19 Dodgson and Allingham's diaries document a sincere longing for
20 a relationship with Tennyson (as well as other selected celebrities/
21 children). In their chronological comprehensiveness, the diaries dem-
22 onstrate the extensive efforts that Dodgson and Allingham undertook
23 to advance from the passive position of the admiring reader, who
24 '[participates] mentally in the lives of ... characters and personalities'
25 through engaging with the Poet Laureate's works and reviews of it, to
26 actually making his acquaintance. The meetings with Tennyson were
27 carefully engineered through a series of cunning schemes and facilitated
28 by acquaintances. Allingham retrospectively recorded the first encoun-
29 ter in his diary, stating 'that a longing of [his] life had been fulfilled',
30 and Dodgson '[marked] this day with a white stone'.¹⁴ The prominent
31 position that Tennyson occupies in both diaries indicates the authors'
32 intention to give physical presence to the visual and spiritual image they
33 had formed of the poet, based on his published works and press appear-
34 ances. Many scholars of celebrity have argued that this 'parasocial',
35 unsubstantiated relationship connecting the fan to the celebrity is very
36 similar to an actual relationship, as 'we attribute motives to and develop
37 expectations about the behaviour of parasocial partners'.¹⁵ The diarists'
38 reports of their gradual penetration into the poet's consciousness and,
39 subsequently, his domestic sphere, indeed illustrate that fandom, just
40 like fame, is a '*process* rather than a state of being'.¹⁶ The fans' passage
41 from a relationship with the poet that is, to a large extent, imagined to a

1 bilateral one is accompanied by the emotional transition from personal
2 insignificance to actualisation, which may be reversed at any moment.

3 Although Allingham's endeavour to befriend Tennyson was much
4 more successful than Dodgson's, both believed that proximity to celebri-
5 ties benefited them intellectually, artistically and emotionally. The form
6 of these diaries reflects the diarists' fan status: while Allingham (even-
7 tually) enjoys the position of a privileged interlocutor, creating lively,
8 meticulous and intimate records of his conversations with Tennyson
9 (and Carlyle), Dodgson's accounts of his encounters with Tennyson and
10 other celebrities remain cursory; often simply list-like and emotionally
11 detached. The apparent formal carelessness of Dodgson's diary has no
12 doubt reinforced his critics' tendency to interpret his strong desire to
13 appropriate and reproduce celebrities' images, through photography,
14 drawing, or the acquisition of their autograph, as the behaviour of an
15 indefatigable lion-hunter.

17 White stone days: Dodgson's diary

19 Lewis Carroll biographer John Pudney's assessment of the diary as a 'two-
20 dimensional ... massively detailed monument of self-evasion', seems
21 strangely appropriate, yet unfair.¹⁷ Rather than to dismiss Dodgson's
22 unconfessional diaristic writing as guarded, incomplete and therefore
23 hermetic, I propose to 'study what the subject has selected for preserva-
24 tion', as diary critics Wendy J. Wiener and George C. Rosenwald suggest,
25 viewing 'the act of remembrance [as] a choosing, a highlighting, a
26 shaping, an enshrinement' not unlike a collection staged at a museum.¹⁸
27 Dodgson's diary is characterised by its striking tendency to limit entries
28 to brief summaries of encounters with celebrities and children, often
29 presented in the form of lists, which are punctuated by longer accounts
30 on particularly memorable 'white stone' days. The careful selection
31 of tensely compressed shreds of information underlying Dodgson's
32 diaristic process is gesturally analogous to choosing and photographing
33 subjects and to collecting *cartes de visite* and autographs in its attempt to
34 'temporarily [move] history into private time'.¹⁹ Stewart's theorisation
35 of everyday objects as reflections of 'longing' helps to demonstrate that
36 Dodgson's diary is not simply a 'gigantic' public 'monument of self-
37 evasion', but rather a private, domestic 'miniature' of self-cultivation.
38 Dodgson's diary, like his photographic albums, indicates a desire to make
39 the appropriated 'souvenir' melt into the 'collection', endeavouring to
40 'collapse distance' into manageable 'proximity to, or approximation
41 with, the self' and thus to create a 'nexus for all narratives, the place

where history is transformed into space, into property'.²⁰ Diary-writing allowed Dodgson to take possession of pleasurable experiences and persons and to revisit them at leisure.

While critics interested in the work of Lewis Carroll have almost unanimously viewed Dodgson's intense aversion to publicity as irreconcilable with his enthralled interest in encountering contemporary celebrities and in capturing their image and handwriting, a focus on the creative aspects of fandom can rectify this misjudgement. Helmut Gernsheim's formulation of Dodgson's 'paradox' sums up the critical consensus on his ambiguous stance towards celebrity culture:

he had a horror of being photographed but never tired of pressing others to sit for him; he was fond of collecting *cartes* but to have his own portrait collected was distasteful to him; he was a lion-hunter who hated to be lionised himself; he was a great autograph collector but when he suspected others of writing to him only in order to get his signature he would use script or a typewriter and ask a friend to sign for him.²¹

Despite this apparent inconsistency, Dodgson's behaviour is in no way contradictory: he simply did not consider himself obligated to engage in a compensatory relationship with his subjects/audience and felt no pressure to provide his own image in exchange for taking someone else's – just as the majority of theatregoers would never venture onto the stage themselves. While he could be sure of his own 'fondness' of his subjects and his genuine admiration for the personalities he lionised, he could not himself understand or control the reaction of those in possession of his image. Dodgson's desire to respectfully '[preserve] in perpetuity' the 'likenesses' of his 'dearly beloved' family and child friends, as well as those of the public figures he admired, through various photographic means neither conflicts with, nor does it necessarily relate to, his fear of being at the mercy of a lionising public.²² As John Plunkett has convincingly argued, 'the familiarity created through celebrity photographs was far from being a wholly benevolent affair'.²³ Since the publication of Mayall's *Royal Album* of 1860, the public was able to respond with a 'voyeuristic *schadenfreude*' to the 'authentic countenances of kings and queens for the first time'.²⁴ This availability of images and the consequent deconstruction of blind idolatry were certainly illuminating and empowering to the masses, as sovereigns could 'no longer hope to perpetuate their sway by throwing the dust of flattering portraits in the eyes of the multitude'.²⁵ However, the dispersion of *cartes de visite* meant

1 that the photographed individual was integrated into the household
2 of the Victorian family as ‘no drawing-room was considered complete
3 without an album’.²⁶ Caged into an unknowable context and exposed
4 to the judgement of ever-changing gatherings of visitors, the photo-
5 graphic subject becomes exceedingly vulnerable. If the loss of personal
6 agency represented the ‘trauma of commodity capitalism’, Tom Mole
7 has observed, then the celebrity experienced it ‘in a particularly acute
8 fashion’.²⁷ The emotional ordeal of the celebrity was not merely caused
9 by the threat of having his or her work misrepresented by an audience,
10 but by that of being physically represented and owned by someone
11 else. The photographed celebrity was thus exposed to an ever-changing
12 congregation of spectators, which implies his or her integration into an
13 unforeseeable number of social constellations.

14 15 **Dodgson’s visits to the Tennysons**

16
17 Although Dodgson is always mentioned among the famous guests
18 at Farringford, he cannot be seen as a member of the Freshwater cir-
19 cle, as he was neither a regular, nor a particularly welcome visitor of
20 the Tennysons. The process of acquaintance between Dodgson and
21 the Laureate was long and effortful, resulting in sparse interactions
22 between the two that provided little satisfaction to the former aside
23 from a few compliments about his work. In his diary, his personal
24 museum, Dodgson marks the day he encounters Emily, Hallam and
25 Lionel Tennyson (18 September 1857) ‘with a white stone’, as he does
26 when meeting Alice Liddell on 25 April 1856 and Kate and Ellen Terry
27 on 20–21 December 1864 – events that durably shaped his life.²⁸ John
28 Pudney insists that the day Dodgson spent with Alice and her siblings
29 ‘hit home’, not because he was able to capture the children’s physical
30 beauty – the photographs ‘did not come out’ – but because ‘he was in
31 love’.²⁹ While the nature of Dodgson’s ‘penchant for pre-pubescent
32 girls’ must remain a mystery and cannot be addressed in this context,
33 it is important here to stress that he uses the exact same formulation to
34 record the significance of ‘becoming excellent friends’ with the Liddells
35 and ‘having at last accomplished [his] wish’ to meet the Terrys, as he
36 does to mark the day he enters the Tennysons’ domestic sphere.³⁰

37 For Dodgson, meeting celebrities and children was a system-building
38 activity in that it lent structure and substance to his life as a math-
39 ematician. Hoping to establish stimulating and rewarding bilateral
40 relationships, he was as attracted to the wholesome purity of talent
41 as he was to the innocent beauty of childhood; though befriending

1 celebrities proved to be much more difficult for the socially awkward
2 Dodgson than entertaining child-friends. Derek Hudson has asserted
3 that Dodgson received emotional, rather than sexual, nurture from his
4 child-friends and we may infer that he sought similar affective warmth,
5 as well as intellectual support, from celebrities. Dodgson's first encounter
6 with John Ruskin at Christ Church college on 27 October 1857 is
7 very telling of his hopes for awe-inspiring intellectual prowess:

8
9 At Common Room breakfast met, for the first time, John Ruskin.
10 I had a little conversation with him, but not enough to bring out
11 anything characteristic or striking in him. His appearance was rather
12 disappointing – a general feebleness of expression, with no commanding
13 air, or any external signs of deep thought, as one would
14 have expected to see in such a man.³¹

15
16 Whereas the Terrys succeeded in embodying as persons the ideal of genuine
17 grace and lucidity that their stage personae had conjured up, Ruskin's
18 corporeal self failed to radiate the intellectual grandeur that his writings
19 evoked. Dodgson felt let down by Ruskin's demeanour as it did not correspond
20 to the mental picture he had formed. Although he still deemed
21 the day a 'dies notabilis', he was obviously waiting to be awed by the
22 physical characteristics of leadership of 'such a man' and appears harshly
23 disillusioned by the real Ruskin, almost contesting his celebrity status.³²
24 Dodgson's demand for embodied intellect challenges assumptions of
25 his lionism, proving that he expected guidance rather than spectacular
26 entertainment. As Hudson has explained, in the 1850s, Dodgson did not
27 meet famous people 'on equal terms, as a celebrity, but as a diffident,
28 stammering youth, whose future fame could scarcely have been prophesied'.³³
29 Despite his strong interest in meeting and photographing celebrities,
30 Dodgson must not be seen as a lurking autograph-hunter, but as an
31 admirer who had to contrive calculated plans in order to approach them.

32 For Dodgson, meeting Tennyson was an important step to personalise
33 and bilateralise his relationship with the poet through actualisation,
34 as his rating of 'dies mirabilis' indicates.³⁴ Not only would Tennyson's
35 physical appearance be revealed but Dodgson would also be able to
36 stand out from the mass of fans and enter the poet's consciousness. He
37 is deeply excited when he makes the acquaintance of Emily's sister Mrs
38 Weld in Yorkshire on 18 August, 1857:

39
40 A party came down from the Castle to be photographed, consisting
41 of Mrs. Otter, W. Chaytor, and a Mrs. Weld and her little girl Agnes

Grace; the last being the principal object – Mrs. Weld is sister-in-law to Alfred Tennyson, (I presume sister of Mrs. Tennyson), and I was much interested in talking about him with one who knew him so well.³⁵

Starting with an indefinite article, Dodgson creates suspense by gradually adding specificity, culminating with the person most closely associated with Tennyson, who increases his own proximity to the poet. Dodgson photographs Agnes Grace as ‘Little Red Riding-Hood’ and sends a print ‘through Mrs. Weld, for Tennyson’s acceptance’.³⁶ Much like Allingham, whose poetry had paved his way towards the Poet, Dodgson gained Tennyson’s attention through his artistic ‘gem’, as the Tennysons ‘pronounced’ the photograph.³⁷

Having thus gained the Tennysons’ artistic approval, which was a common requirement for entry into the social circle, Dodgson seeks to increase the proximity to them even further by visiting Tent Lodge in Cumbria. Concurrently, his culture’s contempt of lionising forces him to minimise and detract from his wish for the actualisation of his imagined relationship with Tennyson, even in the privacy of his diary. John Pudney, like many critics, has observed this deliberate de-emphasis of his aim to go see the Tennysons: ‘in 1857, on his way back from his only visit to Scotland, he “happened” to find himself in the Lake District, and indeed at Coniston where the Tennysons were staying’.³⁸ Besides a clear awareness of a potential reader, Dodgson’s reticence to disclose his plan to his diary indicates his desire to differentiate himself from the status of the intrusive fan as defined by convention. Documenting and probably feigning indecision, Dodgson presents himself as merely ‘intending at least to see Tent Lodge (where Tennyson stays) if not call’.³⁹ This interest in ‘seeing’ the house is not motivated solely by an aesthetic or historical curiosity, but by a strong desire to ‘experience “in reality” the pleasurable dramas [he has] already experienced in [his] imagination’.⁴⁰ Having imagined encountering Tennyson in person and having visualised his presence in the house, the close proximity to Tent Lodge gains magnetic attraction, so that he ‘at last [makes] up [his] mind to take the liberty of calling’; a formulation that accentuates the long process of internal debate preceding this decision.⁴¹ As this visit has obvious similarities with invasive tourism, Dodgson somewhat defensively emphasises the propriety of his approach of the poet: ‘I sent my card, adding (underneath the name) in pencil “artist of “Agnes Grace” and “Little Red Riding-Hood”’.⁴² Dodgson’s specification of his writing utensil denotes his satisfaction with his own polite confidence

1 and his pride at the 'strength' of the introduction he was able to craft
2 for himself.⁴³

3 Although Dodgson only met Tennyson five days later, he marks
4 17 September 'with a white stone'.⁴⁴ He was overjoyed at the 'kind'
5 reception by Emily and her sons and probably visualised his integration
6 into the family unit, as his emphasis on the amount of time spent with
7 Emily ('nearly an hour') and the children's attachment to him ('they
8 wanted to come with me when I left') indicates.⁴⁵ Dodgson's diary entry
9 of 18 September is remarkable because he consistently foregrounds his
10 respectful behaviour in an attempt to conceal his intense joy at having
11 penetrated the poet's domestic sanctum, at '[getting] leave to take por-
12 traits of them' and at Emily's indication that 'it was not hopeless that
13 Tennyson himself might sit'.⁴⁶ As if reacting to accusations of lionising,
14 Dodgson adds in modest self-effacement: 'I said I would not request
15 [a sitting], as he must have refused so many that it is unfair to expect
16 it'.⁴⁷ Although Dodgson simulates humble solidarity to impress Emily as
17 well as a potential reader, he clearly positions himself above the countless
18 photographers whom Tennyson rejected, as one of the few whose gaze
19 and camera were to receive the poet's aspect directly. Dodgson interprets
20 this advancement into Tennyson's private circumference and the assur-
21 ance of a sitting as a promise of an affectionate reciprocal relationship.

22 Dodgson's narrative rendition of his first meeting with Tennyson
23 builds up a suspenseful tension, which indicates that he savoured this
24 moment of initiation and actualisation and wished to preserve it for
25 re-visitation. Reporting the events of his travels and his waiting time at
26 Tent Lodge, he carefully sets the stage for the poet's entrance, which he
27 recounts with a deliberately realistic vividness:

28
29 the door opened, and a strange shaggy-looking man entered: his
30 hair, moustache and beard looked wild and neglected: these very
31 much hid the character of the face. He was dressed in a loosely fitting
32 morning coat, common grey flannel waist-coat and trousers, and a
33 carelessly tied back silk neckerchief. His hair is black: I think the eyes
34 too; they are keen and restless – nose aquiline [*sic*] – forehead high
35 and broad – both face and head are fine and manly. His manner was
36 kind and friendly from the first: there is a dry lurking humour in his
37 style of talking.⁴⁸

38
39 The report clearly stages the moment of recognition and the actualisa-
40 tion of the relationship: Dodgson switches from a descriptive past tense
41 and from a sequence of vague indefinite articles to the surprisingly

concrete 'is' to render the emergence of Tennyson in the writer's life. During this first meeting at Tent Lodge, Dodgson immediately takes the opportunity to substantiate his imagined relationship with the poet by 'asking meanings of two passages in Tennyson's poems which have always puzzled [him]'.⁴⁹ Receiving the privilege of the poet's personal guidance, Dodgson is able to participate in the latter's imagination, which increases the intellectual proximity between them.

Due to the unfortunate loss of four out of thirteen volumes of Dodgson's diaries, we do not have a diaristic account of his first visit to Farringford during the Easter vacation of 1859. Dodgson's letter to his cousin W. E. Wilcox of 11 May, however, reports the reconnection with the Tennysons and shows that the accusations of invasive fandom that he imagines and reacts to in his diaristic writing were in fact levelled at him. Claiming to offer a general 'account of my visit to the Isle of Wight' to his cousin, Dodgson focuses in great detail on his time at the Tennysons'. Part of this account consists of his immediate defence against the allegation of violating the family's privacy: 'Wilfred must have basely misrepresented me if he said that I followed the Laureate down to his retreat, as I went not knowing that he was there, to stay with an old College friend at Freshwater'.⁵⁰ Indeed, as Anne Clark writes, Dodgson habitually stayed at Freshwater during his holidays (later preferring Sandown as a recreational spot), a fact that explains his biting insistence on the 'inalienable right of a freeborn Briton to make a morning call', evoking his earlier formulation of taking 'the liberty of calling at Tent Lodge'.⁵¹ Dodgson adamantly maintains he did not hope to meet Tennyson, stressing that his friend Collyns had 'advised [him] that the Tennysons had not yet arrived', and that he 'fully [expected] the answer "no"' when inquiring about the poet, accentuating the 'agreeable surprise' at his unanticipated presence. Before Dodgson can begin to recount his experiences, he feels compelled to call attention to his respectful, dignified approach to the Tennysons, positioning himself against the intruding tourists with whom he has been associated.

At Farringford, Dodgson rejoicingly participates in the poet's consciousness, verbally following the latter's eyes as he directs him around his property. Upon his arrival, Dodgson candidly includes, Tennyson does not recognise him, which he promptly excuses on the basis of the poet being 'too short-sighted to recognise people'.⁵² In the account he crafts for Wilcox, Dodgson counteracts his feared irrelevance by assuming the persona of a close friend who knowingly omits depictions of interior decoration, which were typical for first-time visitors and journalistic interviews, such as Edmund Yates's series of articles *Celebrities*

1 *At Home* (1877–79), and frequently took the appearance of a ‘furniture
2 catalogue’.⁵³ In the context of the Victorian obsession with celebrities’
3 homes, which Chapter 1 has discussed, Dodgson’s ‘refusal-to-describe’
4 counters this type of ‘ritualised scrutiny’, stressing his superiority to
5 celebrity culture.⁵⁴ He instead adds descriptors that highlight his own
6 integration into Tennyson’s domestic sphere; ‘[the poet’s] little sitting
7 room at the top of the house’, for instance, is characterised as the place
8 ‘where [Tennyson] of course offered [Dodgson] a pipe’, ‘the nursery’
9 is where they meet Hallam ‘who remembered [Dodgson] more read-
10 ily than his father had done’.⁵⁵ Through recounting these gestures of
11 welcoming acceptance, Dodgson seeks to anchor himself in the house
12 and establish himself as a friend of the Tennysons, who was invited,
13 not invading. While Dodgson subtly exaggerates his integration into
14 the Tennysons’ sphere, he cunningly dissimulates his delight at the
15 incorporation of his photographic work among the decorative artwork
16 displayed inside Farringford, which he modestly mentions in a paren-
17 thesis: ‘(... my photographs of the family were hung “on the line”,
18 framed in those enamel – what do you call them – cartons?)’⁵⁶ Dodgson
19 purposefully detracts from his pleasure at the Tennysons’ obvious
20 appreciation of his work by inserting uncertainty concerning an irrel-
21 evant issue into this understated aside. At the same time the seemingly
22 unpretentious focus on the elegant frames highlights the Tennysons’
23 careful staging of Dodgson’s work, thus affirming his sense of belong-
24 ing not only among the family friends, but also among the great artists
25 whose work is displayed in the house.

26 Although Dodgson did not return to Farringford after the summer
27 of 1864, during which he took only two good pictures he was pleased
28 with, he never explicitly expresses disappointment over the fact that
29 the friendship never burgeoned, which can perhaps be related to his
30 increasing devotion to making new child friends at the seaside, espe-
31 cially from the late 1870s onwards. The relationship with Tennyson
32 had been unravelling since his stay in April 1862 when he saw ‘hardly
33 anything more of Mr. Tennyson’ despite his excellent friendship with
34 Hallam and Lionel.⁵⁷ As a consequence of Dodgson’s well-documented
35 quarrel with Tennyson about an unpublished poem, contact ceased
36 completely. Nevertheless, the fact that the interactions with the
37 Tennysons, as well as those with the Liddells, stand out in terms of nar-
38 rative development, contrasting with the many short notes that simply
39 sketched the appearance and character of other child friends, demon-
40 strates that Dodgson envisaged a relationship that combined the thrill
41 of the new and the stability of intellectual companionship.

Allingham's diaries

Allingham's diaristic records are part of an elaborate autobiographical project, in which he sought to render 'the whole texture of [his] life', 'without philosophising' and '[giving] recollections and impressions as simply as may be'.⁵⁸ Though he never completed it, Allingham's project aimed to portray his heroes in a lifelike, non-didactic fashion rather than to monumentalise himself; a rare occurrence in the context of Victorian biography's fixation with '[prompting] emulation' and teaching 'lessons about hard work and perseverance'.⁵⁹ The narrative style of Allingham's diary alternates between retrospective formal autobiography and the immediacy of diaristic writing. The resulting pastiche offers a vivid picture of the living Tennyson, as well as of Allingham's ongoing adjustments to the poet's eccentricity. As opposed to the glorifying reminiscences by Tennyson's other friends and acquaintances (discussed in Chapter 5), Allingham's diary strictly privileges realistic accuracy over the flattering idealisation of the poet. Although the Irish poet enjoyed a uniquely fortunate position as one of Tennyson's closest friends, Allingham, unlike most reminiscers, did not explicitly portray himself as fundamentally superior to those who were deprived access to Farringford. Nevertheless, he constantly re-negotiated his position as Tennyson's confidant to avert reproaches of intrusive lion-hunting, and competed with fellow visitors at Farringford for Tennyson's affections.

The first meeting between Allingham and Tennyson took place on Saturday, 28 June 1851, when the poet and his wife were living at Twickenham.⁶⁰ Long before this 'appointed day', however, Tennyson had been an integral part of Allingham's consciousness.⁶¹ Allingham was not merely a passive reader of Tennyson's work, but he actively created awareness of the poet's work when the latter was still 'an unknown name' by '[preaching] Tennyson' to the clerks when he was a Principal Coast Officer (1846–48), 'reciting bits from *Locksley Hall*' and 'meeting at first a cold reception, but afterwards better acknowledgment'.⁶² These poetry recitals, unusual in the context of a customs office, are a symptom of Allingham's 'longing for culture, conversation and opportunity' during these years.⁶³ Tennyson's work shielded Allingham against the frustrating banality of his life: 'my mind was brimful of love and poetry, and usually, all external things appeared trivial in their relations to it'.⁶⁴ Allingham's connection to Tennyson can clearly be seen as parasocial, as 'the quality of the relationship, rather than the quantity of the interaction seems to matter most'.⁶⁵

1 This parasocial relationship is likely to have grown in intensity
 2 because Allingham had few qualified interlocutors who could share his
 3 intellectual passions and ambitions. As Sharon Marcus has argued, in
 4 Victorian culture, 'friendship between men was believed to promote
 5 enlightenment ideals of self-cultivation, sympathetic communion
 6 and civic association'.⁶⁶ Thus, even before the first meeting, Tennyson
 7 occupied a doubly important role for Allingham: while the latter's
 8 poetry provided him with intellectual nourishment and encourage-
 9 ment, he longed for further self-actualisation as an intimate friend.
 10 The jealousy he displays when his status as a leading fan and pro-
 11 spective friend is threatened is indicative of his advanced emotional
 12 attachment to the poet. When, for instance, on 1 January 1849, in
 13 Donegal, Reverend Jos. Welsh and English land agent Wilson stop by
 14 his room for a snack, Allingham reports that 'Wilson looked into my
 15 Tennyson, and saying "Now that is what I call *stuff*!" began to read
 16 out part of *Ænone*'.⁶⁷ Allingham's attachment to 'his' book extends to
 17 Tennyson as a poet and person, which explains the rush of irritation
 18 with which he reclaims the volume from his rival: 'I said, "Let me look
 19 at it", and put the book in my pocket without another word. [Wilson]
 20 appeared rather stunned'.⁶⁸ As if to console himself after this annoying
 21 incident, Allingham seeks to restore the possessive intimacy between
 22 himself and his image of Tennyson: 'How Tennyson gives the effect of
 23 everything, – enriched with a peculiar glow!'⁶⁹ Allingham's shriek of
 24 delight communicates his gratitude to Tennyson for gracefully render-
 25 ing the universal 'everything', which brightens his personal vision of
 26 the world and thus creates emotional proximity between the reader
 27 and the writer.

28 We see that Tennyson's work significantly shaped Allingham's world
 29 view and emotional well-being, and thus the poet as an imagined person
 30 occupied a crucial position in his thoughts. When in the summer
 31 of 1849, Allingham travels to England to investigate the possibilities of
 32 starting a literary life in London, he feels titillated by his growing
 33 geographical proximity to Tennyson and excitedly screens his environ-
 34 ment for traces of his hero. When, on 6 July, at a *table d'hôte*, he spots
 35 a 'dark, long-haired, notable looking' man drinking a glass of wine and
 36 smoking a cigar, 'a thought flashed – *Could* it be Alfred Tennyson!'⁷⁰
 37 This heave of hope is deflated after a brief conversation: 'Tennyson
 38 quickly vanished'.⁷¹ Evidently, even before Tennyson was awarded the
 39 laureateship, Allingham was familiar with his image, visualised the poet
 40 consistently and, most likely, imagined interactions. Longing to see
 41 the poet embodied, Allingham eagerly collected and assembled traces

1 of Tennyson, even randomly asking a waiter in Kentish Town whether
 2 he had 'heard of a Mr. Tennyson' to maximise his sources of first-hand
 3 information.⁷² Upon receiving a negative response, Allingham '[tries]
 4 another waiter who *had* heard of him, but had never seen him'.⁷³
 5 Tennyson's presence becomes more traceable when, on 18 August,
 6 Coventry Patmore shows Allingham his former house in Hampstead
 7 Heath, 'where Emerson and Tennyson sat at his table and liked each
 8 other'.⁷⁴ Patmore's house, located 'in a sort of crescent with trees before
 9 it', becomes an auratic object that is imbued with Tennyson's presence.⁷⁵
 10 Seeing, apprehending and writing about the place in which Tennyson
 11 interacted with Emerson as if it was a museum allows Allingham to
 12 substantiate his purely imagined vision of the living Tennyson and
 13 to participate in this bygone scene mentally. In light of Harald Hendrix's
 14 observation that writers' houses 'attract those that feel the need to go
 15 beyond their intellectual exchanges with texts and long for some kind of
 16 material contact with the author', Patmore's abode acquires the status
 17 of a secondary shrine, worshipped for temporarily housing Tennyson.⁷⁶
 18 Patmore's anecdotes and possessions document the presence of
 19 Tennyson and thus help Allingham to concretise his conception of the
 20 poet. The drafts of his poems 'The Storm' and 'The Two Journeys' that
 21 Patmore shows Allingham, for instance, bear the physical traces of
 22 Tennyson's mental engagement with them: 'Tennyson's mark is on
 23 the margin in various places: "+T"'.⁷⁷ Like many of his contemporar-
 24 ies, for whom the 'collecting of papers in the author's own hand' had
 25 'a certain element of piety or of sentiment and romance', Allingham
 26 is in awe of these MS, as they have been read, touched and annotated
 27 by Tennyson.⁷⁸ Even their value is exceeded by Patmore's announce-
 28 ment that he has 'in this room perhaps the greatest literary treasure in
 29 England – the manuscript of Tennyson's *next poem*'.⁷⁹ Rather than criti-
 30 cise Patmore's self-important teasing or deplore not being able to look
 31 at the poem, Allingham revels in being in such close proximity to a
 32 poem that millions of readers are waiting for. He retrospectively adds
 33 that he 'was not even told the title at this time', creating suspense for
 34 an anticipated reader by a full stop and then solemnly revealing: 'It
 35 was *In Memoriam*'.⁸⁰ There is a quiet triumph in Allingham's realisation
 36 that, without then knowing it, he once occupied the same room as
 37 the manuscript of Tennyson's most important poem. The proximity to
 38 this unpublished treasure validates Allingham as a privileged insider in
 39 Tennyson's social and intellectual sphere.
 40 For those who got to meet Tennyson in person, the vision of the
 41 poet they had fostered in their imagination, often based upon images

1 dispersed by the press and through *cartes de visite*, was incongruent
 2 with the poet's actual aspect. Perhaps to detract from the unglamor-
 3 ous awkwardness of their first encounter with Tennyson, reminiscers
 4 tend to foreground their grand entry into the charmed grounds of
 5 Farringford, usually omitting their first impressions of the poet. In
 6 contrast, Allingham, like Dodgson, candidly describes Tennyson as
 7 a 'strange' and 'almost spectral figure'.⁸¹ Tennyson's warm welcome
 8 transforms the parasocial relationship into a bilateral one, with the 'the
 9 Great Man [peering] close' at Allingham, reciprocating his gaze and
 10 'shaking hands cordially ... with a profound quietude of manner'.⁸²
 11 Significantly, Tennyson had also been establishing a parasocial relation-
 12 ship to Allingham, albeit of a less elaborate character than vice versa,
 13 when engaging intensely with the latter's poetry: 'He took up my vol-
 14 ume of poems, saying, 'You can see it is a good deal dirtier than most of
 15 the books'''.⁸³ Being thus acknowledged as a capable poet by Tennyson
 16 must have provided immense gratification to Allingham, but aside
 17 from recording these facts, he remains silent about his feelings. When
 18 Patmore calls, Tennyson tells him: 'You didn't know Allingham was
 19 here' and it '[rejoices]' Allingham 'to hear the familiar mention of my
 20 name'.⁸⁴ Tennyson's comfortable use of Allingham's name proves the
 21 latter's integration into the poet's sphere of consciousness.

22 Allingham's autobiographical project demonstrates that he was acutely
 23 aware that his friendship with the Tennysons might be perceived as
 24 lion-hunting. He thus insists that his relocation from Ballyshannon to
 25 Lymington in Hampshire in early 1863 was determined by 'fortune,
 26 not choice', meaning that he did not plan on intruding into the poet's
 27 refuge at Farringford.⁸⁵ Lymington and Freshwater were conveniently
 28 close, so Allingham tried to manage his hopes of becoming a frequent
 29 visitor, which is evident in the following scene: "'You will be near
 30 Tennyson," said Carlyle [...] "I doubt if I shall see him" I replied, disheart-
 31 ened by a second failure to settle in London, and disinclined for even
 32 the best company. "Yes, yes", said C., "you are sure to come together"'.⁸⁶
 33 In this retrospective entry, Allingham mimics his own reticence, effect-
 34 ing Carlyle's reassuring response, in order to show his respectful dis-
 35 tance to the Tennysons and to stress the extent to which his friendship
 36 with them is established and known to others. At times, Allingham,
 37 in his overcautious yet determined approach to the Tennysons, seems
 38 to perform insecurity in order to legitimise his longing for admission
 39 into 'the enchanted realm of Farringford'.⁸⁷ His description of his first
 40 visit to Freshwater on 3 July 1863 strikingly recalls the accounts given
 41 in published reminiscences in that it builds up suspense through his

1 inclusion of the voyage on the 'evening boat' and his walks 'over the
2 bridge' and 'two or three miles of beautiful green-sided roads, spoilt
3 here and there by Forts', leading to Farringford. Surprisingly, he con-
4 structs the arrival at the house as an anticlimax, as he 'could not see
5 the house' and 'would not of course enter any gate'.⁸⁸ The inclusion of
6 'of course' into this purposefully anticlimactic narrative suggests that
7 Allingham aims to distinguish his own respectful behaviour from that
8 of pushy tourists. Hiding his excitement as well as his obvious wish
9 to be close to the poet, Allingham insists that he has not 'the faintest
10 thought of presenting myself to him or wish, even, to meet him by
11 chance on his return (he was from home at this time)'.⁸⁹ The insecure
12 desire for undeserved proximity that Allingham experiences outside
13 the gates of Farringford is closely related to Tennyson's celebrity status.
14 Allingham feels intellectually and socially unequal to the Poet Laureate
15 and to others he admires, and deplores that he has 'lost the faith I used
16 to have in people's wishing to see me'.⁹⁰ This lack of self-confidence
17 indicates that Allingham's bilateral relationship with Tennyson has
18 collapsed back into parasocial one-sidedness, with the fan's position
19 regressing from interlocutor to spectator.

20 Allingham refuses to bear the pledge of inferiority, however, and,
21 as if to defend himself against societal judgment, stresses his sense of
22 belonging to Tennyson's circle and his right to be well-acquainted with
23 Carlyle, Rossetti and Palgrave:

24
25 But I feel a natural bond to him (I say it with humility) and to a very
26 few others, and only in their company am better contented than to
27 be with nature and books. With these persons I feel truly humble, yet
28 at the same time easy. I understand and am understood, with words
29 or without words. It is not the fame that attracts me, it disgusts me
30 rather. Fame has cooled many friendships for me, never made or
31 increased one. Fame is a thing of the 'World,' and the 'World' is a
32 dreadful separator.⁹¹

33
34 With a gentle but decisive 'but', Allingham negotiates a space for him-
35 self among his heroes, acknowledging his inferiority by insisting on
36 his 'humility', yet asserting equality. Due to its organicity, he locates
37 the connection he feels between himself and Tennyson, as well as that
38 between himself and selected others, outside the realm of culture,
39 beyond discourse, and hence beyond society's judging gaze. Even
40 though Allingham regards fame as a label obtruded by the intruding
41 world, which splits the bonds between spiritually connected persons

1 through imposing a meritorious and commercial value upon the indi-
2 vidual, he reacts to it.

3 4 **Fan rivalry**

5
6 Unlike many reminiscers, who publicly insist on the fundamental,
7 insuperable division between Tennyson's 'true' admirers and those
8 presumably going through the motions of fandom for its entertain-
9 ment value, Allingham is uninterested in situating his relationship to
10 the poet in a macro-societal context. He does respond to conventions
11 of fandom in his diaristic writing, especially when first meeting the
12 poet, but he does so in order to evade accusations of inappropriate
13 invasiveness, rather than to demean others. His accounts are perme-
14 ated not by his annoyance with anonymous fans, but with his culture's
15 selfish expectation that the celebrity's endlessly giving eminence might
16 compensate for the receiving admirer's shortcomings. In his auto/bio-
17 graphical narrative construction of himself as Tennyson's intellectual
18 companion, his rivalry with other members of Tennyson's entourage
19 takes on a prominent role. While most of them, Julia Margaret Cameron
20 in particular, seem to hinder the development of his friendship with
21 Tennyson, their relative inadequacy as listeners and interlocutors also
22 serves to heighten his own importance in Tennyson's life. Allingham's
23 reports of his interactions with Tennyson thus demonstrate a desire to
24 respect the humanity of the poet by renouncing selfish possessiveness
25 and the simultaneous wish for an exclusive friendship with him.

26 Although Allingham does not explicitly comment on Tennyson's
27 celebrity status, several of his entries touch upon the poet's position
28 in society. Witnessing the arrival of amateurs' poetry and letters from
29 'autograph seekers' at Farringford on 21 November 1866, he understands
30 through Tennyson's enervated reaction – 'I should like to sneak out
31 and get a cup of tea by myself' – that fans' pressures and expectations
32 weighed on the poet.⁹² Writers of such fan mail hoped to establish
33 educative, validating and inspiring contact with the poet in order to, as
34 Carlyle's promised in his 1840 lectures *On Heroes*, improve themselves in
35 different ways: 'Great Men, taken up in any way, are profitable company.
36 We cannot look, however, imperfectly, upon a great man, without
37 gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is
38 good and pleasant to be near'.⁹³ Although Tennyson fulfilled precisely
39 this enlightening function in Allingham's life, Allingham refused to view
40 the poet entirely from a utilitarian perspective and did not expect him to
41 have the answers to all sorts of subjective anguish:

1 T. is unhappy from his uncertainty regarding the condition and
2 destiny of man. Is it dispiriting to find a great Poet with no better
3 grounds of comfort than a common person? At first it is. But how
4 should the case be otherwise? The poet has only the same materials
5 of sensation and thought as ordinary mortals; he uses them better;
6 but to step outside the human limitations is not granted even to him.
7 The secret is kept from one and all of us.⁹⁴

8
9 Allingham here deconstructs the premise of celebrity culture, namely
10 the construction of a talented person as an 'indispensable saviour of his
11 epoch', to use Carlyle's terms, or 'one of those beacon-lights of human-
12 ity', to use those of *The Saturday Review*.⁹⁵ Society venerated the poet as a
13 natural leader, distinguished by his unparalleled insight into the human
14 condition. Many expected Tennyson to give a sense of direction to 'the
15 generation which flourished from 1780 to 1850 [and who] had passed
16 from a period of great national danger to one of great personal perplex-
17 ity', as Harold Nicholson observed.⁹⁶ Autographs, like *cartes de visite*
18 and annotated manuscripts of poems, constituted an extension of the
19 poet, to which the public could intimately connect, as my discussion of
20 Dodgson's collection of such items has shown. What united Tennyson's
21 fans was the hope to 'gain' something through interacting with him, be
22 this knowledge, status or even money. Allingham resented the universal
23 responsibility that was attributed to the poet and insisted on the latter's
24 insurmountable, because fundamentally human, ignorance without
25 attacking specific groups.

26 Although for Allingham, his imagined relationship with Tennyson
27 represented an important source of emotional comfort and intellectual
28 inspiration and ambition, he felt that a consistent focus on Tennyson's
29 poetry could prevent the emotional and social exploitation of the poet
30 for the personal gain of his fans:

31
32 I doubt if -- holds poetry in any honour, or poets as such. I sought
33 AT and worshipped him as the well-head of an enchanting river of
34 song: charm of personality and surroundings came in addition, a fine
35 setting to the priceless jewel of his genius. -- I imagine, admires the
36 poetry mainly because she admires and loves the man.⁹⁷

37
38 This entry represents one of the only instances in which Allingham
39 directly compares the authenticity of his own admiration for Tennyson
40 and poetry in general to that of another person. Unlike this unnamed
41 female, who seems enthralled by the external glamour surrounding

1 Tennyson's person, Allingham came to the poet for the reasons he con-
2 sidered legitimate, namely through reading authorised, published poems.
3 Through attentive listening to and devoted fandom of Tennyson,
4 Allingham created a space for himself in the poet's life and remained a
5 regular visitor until his death in 1889.

6 In his introduction to the published diary, Geoffrey Grigson remarks
7 that for Allingham, Tennyson 'was not a person' but that it was rather
8 'as if Tennyson was always the Desired Place, half real, half dream'.⁹⁸
9 During the pre-1851 period Allingham was indeed so enchanted by
10 Tennyson's poems that their dreamy atmosphere saturated his other-
11 wise bleak life as an administrator. In the 1860s, although he had made
12 his entrance into the poet's world, Allingham was in awe of Farringford,
13 not only because of its exclusivity but also because of its unearthly
14 beauty, as the entry of 25 June 1865 shows: 'I go to the top of the house
15 alone, have a strong sense of being at Tennyson's, green summer, ruddy
16 light in the sky'.⁹⁹ Allingham has undergone an emancipatory evolution
17 since his intimidated paralysis at the gates in 1863 and moves freely
18 about the property. His amazement at being allowed to immerse himself
19 in the glow of Farringford is still palpable in his account of entering
20 Tennyson's sanctuary 'alone'.

21 It is evident from Allingham's attitudes towards celebrity-worship,
22 as well as his unembellished accounts of Tennyson, that he, unlike
23 the majority of biographers and reminiscers, consistently sought to
24 represent and surround himself with the poet's humanity instead of
25 constructing him as the generous, warm, welcoming and supremely
26 interesting host, who managed to effortlessly combine socialising and
27 poetic work. Rather than praising Tennyson endlessly and thus elevat-
28 ing himself, Allingham depicts the poet's quirks, such as his occasional
29 quarrelsomeness and his domineering superiority, at his own expense,
30 as can be seen in the following anecdote of 22 July 1866:

31
32 After dinner we talk of dreams. T. said, 'In my boyhood I had *intui-*
33 *tions* of Immortality – inexpressible! I have never been able to express
34 them. I shall try some day'.

35 I say that I too have felt something of that kind; whereat T. (being
36 in one of his less amiable moods) growls, 'I don't believe you have.
37 You say it out of rivalry'.¹⁰⁰

38
39 Questioning Allingham's intellect, talent and truthfulness and insist-
40 ing on his higher status, Tennyson re-establishes inequality between
41 them, which the former's bold claim had sought to eliminate. When,

on 25 August 1867, while the two men are having a beer in Charmouth, Allingham quotes a line of poetry, 'T. (as usual)' reprimands Allingham: "You don't say it properly" – and repeats it in his own sonorous manner'.¹⁰¹ For the sake of giving a 'physiognomic' account of the poet's character and behaviour, Allingham faithfully includes Tennyson's slightly denigrating comments but omits his own response to them. He does, however, subtly, and somewhat apologetically, use parentheses to write his responses into the accounts, thus conveying his explanations for the poet's contrariness. In the first case, Allingham relativises the poet's snide comment by implying that, for the most part, Tennyson's moods are 'amiable', and in the second case, the diarist banalises and thus normalises his hero's meliorative suggestion.

While Allingham records his encounters with Tennyson in great detail, he is remarkably reluctant to include simultaneous visitors to Farringford into his accounts. He occasionally acknowledges their presence and at times briefly sketches conversations – 'At dinner: Mr. and Mrs. Bradley of Marlborough, Mr. and Mrs. Butler of Harrow' – but he does so in order to emphasise Tennyson's memorable statements or to shed light on his own relationship with the poet rather than to include the respective visitor. In this often quoted anecdote of 28 December 1863, for instance, Allingham mentions Palgrave in order to introduce the subject of Tennyson's patronising schoolmasterly behaviour: 'A.T. reproves P. for talking so fast and saying "of – of – of – of", etc. He also corrects me for my pronunciation (or so he asserts) of "dew". "There is no *Jew* on the grass!" says he – "there may be *dew*, but that's quite another thing"'.¹⁰² Omitting Palgrave's, as well as his own, reaction to Tennyson's criticism, Allingham normalises and palliates his own slight indignation. Whereas Tennyson reprimands Palgrave, he rectifies the delivery of Allingham's utterances in order to improve it, which establishes the latter as the poet's favoured interlocutor.

Allingham's mentions of simultaneous visitors tend to be quite brief and neutral, but his accounts of Julia Margaret Cameron's presence at Freshwater, much like Edward Lear's (Chapter 2) bear a definite tint of irritation. Many reminiscers foreground Cameron's generosity, creativity and kindness, but Allingham portrays her as an incongruous element that disturbs the perfect harmony and serenity of Farringford. Allingham's entry of 3 October 1863, for example, creates an atmosphere of calm domestic comfort, 'Drawing-room, tea, Mrs. Tennyson in white, I can sometimes scarcely hear her low tones', which is interrupted by 'Mrs. Cameron, dark, short, sharp-eyed, one hears very distinctly'.¹⁰³ This snide description of Cameron's restlessness

1 and craving for attention suggests that Allingham is annoyed by the
 2 former's eccentricity. Cameron's boundless enthusiasm for socialising
 3 and photographing contrasts with Allingham's humble, patient and
 4 reticent demeanour as a listener. The dissimilarity in their attitudes to
 5 celebrity is evident in Allingham's entry of 24 June 1865, when he, still
 6 a shy and insecure visitor, appears at Farringford unannounced, '[hides
 7 his] bag' and '[finds] some people in the hay-field and Mrs. Cameron
 8 photographing like mad'.¹⁰⁴ The confident determination with which
 9 Cameron positions her often famous photographic subjects stands in
 10 stark contrast to Allingham's decision to wait, in a passive and cowardly
 11 manner, to be invited by Tennyson. Cameron's strong belief in her work
 12 as an artist irritates Allingham, who, after a failed attempt, refuses to be
 13 photographed by her: 'she thinks it a great honour to be done by her'.¹⁰⁵
 14 As Chapter 3 shows, he does, though, go on to write a positive review
 15 of her work in the press, which suggests a willingness to subjugate his
 16 personal antipathy in the interest of maintaining the harmony of the
 17 wider circle. While Cameron, as the talented wife of a diplomat and a
 18 member of the Prinsep family, is firmly integrated in the celebrity circle
 19 and, with Emily, partly runs it, Allingham, the customs officer longing
 20 to be a professional poet, still does not feel assured of his place in it.
 21 He expresses his disapproval of her self-confidence, which to him is
 22 unfounded arrogance, again on 10 June 1867, in his account of a shared
 23 train journey to Lymington, during which 'she [talks] all the time'.¹⁰⁶

24 Allingham constructs Cameron as his effusively chatty counterpart
 25 and rival, continuously implying that her privileged social position
 26 does not make her Tennyson's favourite. His comment on her
 27 tendency to interject 'Hm?' into her conversations makes his irrita-
 28 tion obvious: '[she] seldom waits for a reply'.¹⁰⁷ Not only are such
 29 pseudo-interrogative utterances gratuitous, but, coupled with an unwill-
 30 ingness to engage with an interlocutor, they become meaningless.
 31 In contrast, during the long conversations between Allingham and
 32 Tennyson, conducted 'all with the friendliest sympathy and mutual
 33 understanding', the poet was able to discuss his ever-troubling anxiety
 34 'to get some real insight into the nature and prospects of the Human
 35 Race'.¹⁰⁸ Although Allingham portrays his own participation in these
 36 dialogues as marginal, with his role confined to that of an encouraging
 37 interviewer and attentive listener, he nevertheless maintains that 'T. is
 38 the most delightful man in the world to converse with, even when he
 39 disagrees'.¹⁰⁹ Allingham here stresses the bilateral nature of his interac-
 40 tions with the poet, constructing himself as Tennyson's confidant, who
 41 does not just talk at the poet, but 'converses with' him. Allingham gets

the impression that Tennyson indeed prefers his conversational style to Cameron's when, on the way to her house, he confides: 'Mrs. C. (using the initial, as he often does) is so gushing!'¹¹⁰ This criticism of Cameron's effusiveness, Allingham writes, was 'presently justified' by her 'fervent' assurance that F. Walker's 'soul' was at Tennyson's 'feet'.¹¹¹ Much to Allingham's delight, Tennyson provocatively responds: 'I hope his soles are at his own feet!'¹¹² The poet's brusquely playful sarcasm suggests Cameron's misestimation of her interlocutor's interests, providing another, certainly satisfying, example of her ineptitude as Tennyson's friend to Allingham. The diaristic inscription of these rivalries serves to affirm Allingham's importance in Tennyson's most intimate circle without his having to utter self-complacent and therefore critical reminiscences about others members of that circle.

Allingham's autobiographical project functions as a written museum that allows for the preservation and re-visitation of personal memories, but also accommodates potential readers by acquainting them with aspects of Tennyson not otherwise accessible. Allingham discretely validates his role as an attentive listener to Tennyson and is not ashamed of inscribing his own vulnerability when interacting with the Laureate. In his biographical endeavour, Allingham very subtly traces his own presence among the Victorian intelligentsia, capturing and memorialising Tennyson in a lifelike, direct fashion, abstaining from the sentimental lingo that characterised the published reminiscences and 'At home' reports discussed elsewhere in this study. His diary can thus be seen to bear testimony to the very personal meaning that real, as well as imagined, interactions with an admired person could have for a Victorian 'fan', and reflects the immense pressure to conform to accepted forms of celebrity-worship.

Conclusion

Allingham and Dodgson were ardent admirers of Tennyson's work and, like many of their contemporaries, sought to substantiate their imagined relationship with the poet through collecting and cherishing real-life interactions. Their diaries were vital tools not only for the construction of a mental anticipatory relationship to Tennyson, but, after meeting him, functioned as auto/biographical repositories of the living poet for posterity. While diaries are generally considered to be autobiographical texts, generically, these accounts of Tennyson must be situated at the intersection of 'private' diarising, 'public' retrospective autobiography and formal biography, constantly reacting to journalistic

habits of representation and conventions of fandom. The diaries in question are characterised by a museum agenda because they privilege the collection of experiences over introspection: their object is less to trace the vicissitudes of daily life, but rather to showcase its highlights. Intimate emotion functions as an indicator of the value of specific events; with Allingham impressing through his candour and Dodgson leaning towards the abstraction of excitement through symbols rather than verbalisation and the omission of low-spiritedness. The semi-private nature of the diaries demonstrates that, due to the overbearing influence of the Victorian press, the private veneration of a public figure inevitably became a public act. The diaries also show, that, conversely, the poet played an important part in these writers' consciousness, from which we can infer that the meaning that an autograph-seeker derived from Tennyson's response must have gone far beyond the mere thrill of possession. The emotional value of a collector's object relating to Tennyson, or a glimpse of him caught outside the gates of Farringford, was not simply something to show off, but also a trigger to substantiate an imagined but deeply personal relationship with the poet.

Notes

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