

A Map of Tennysonian Misreading: Postmodern (Re)visions

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Abstract:

From the time of his submission of a poem for a literary prize as an adolescent, Tennyson conceived poetry in 'prophetic' terms, and 'Timbuctoo' (1829) engaged him in constructing his role as poetic voice in (and for) the present and in (and for) the future. In this sense, Ulysses's sentence "I am become a name" in the eponymous poem is paradigmatic of Tennyson's approach to his envisaged poetic afterlife. As a writer of poetry, a representative of Victorian thought and a 'brand name' in nineteenth-century literary and cultural market, Tennyson has been constantly subject to adaptations, revisions and intersemiotic translations. Using Harold Bloom's ideas on the inevitability of "misreading" as a driving force in the reception and successive re-creation of poetry, this analysis will try and retrace a 'map' of Tennysonian rewritings with particular reference to 'Tithonus' (1860), 'The Lady of Shalott' (1842), 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1854) and *In Memoriam* (1850) in a wide range of heterogeneous texts, including nostalgic fictional biographies, war movies, science-fiction and fantasy TV serials, teen-ager novels, pop and heavy metal music, crime novels, and experimental postmodern fictions.

Keywords: adaptation, brand name, intersemiotic translation, misreading, neo-Victorian, postmodernity, rewriting, Alfred Tennyson, Victorian.

Everything began with a postcard. Its effect was a mixture of surprise and pleasure, like unexpected "letters unto trembling hands". It was a postcard from a friend who knew my interest in Tennyson and decided to make fun of me (and of it). It included an incomplete quotation from *In Memoriam*: "'Tis better to have loved and lost / Then never to have..." (Tennyson 2007: XXVII, 15-16), followed by three options:

- a) loved at all
- b) had dinner with me
- c) replied to my letter.

This mixture of Tennyson's poetry and postmodern 'recycling' of the cultural heritage of the past in the form of a quiz epitomises the various (and sometimes paradoxical) modalities according to which Tennyson has been rewritten and re-visited in the course of the last fifty years, and in

what is generally defined as the postmodern society.¹ The decision to deal with an iconic poet such as Tennyson implies an analysis of the various strategies through which the Victorian age has been experienced not simply “as an exhibit left in a glass”, as the historian Miles Taylor says, but also a reflection on the ways “successive generations have used the Victorian past in order to locate themselves in the present” (Taylor 2004: 2).² Therefore, the main questions that this article raises are: What has become of Alfred Tennyson? What does it mean to read Alfred Tennyson nowadays and, as a consequence, is it possible to really experience Alfred Tennyson’s verse as Victorians did? Or is the only remaining possibility to (inevitably) misread it? In this sense, the very name Alfred Tennyson will refer both to the biographical subject and to the multilayered cultural meanings and suggestions that have accumulated and clustered around ‘Alfred Tennyson’ (in inverted commas), whose fame during his lifetime has been provocatively compared by Terry Eagleton to that of a contemporary pop star (Eagleton 1986: ix).

Of course it is impossible to offer a comprehensive list of how Tennyson has been intersemiotically translated (or subjected to transmutation, to use two expressions coined by the linguist Roman Jakobson) into narrative, painterly, musical and cinematographic terms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³ As a consequence, this analysis focuses on a limited number of poems such as ‘The Lady of Shalott’ (1842), ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ (1854), ‘Tithonus’ (1860) and *In Memoriam* (1850) in order to delineate an ideal ‘map’ of misreading, though this will not lead to any final ‘treasure’ but rather to further questions. There will be no discriminations between high and low artistic expressions, as this discussion includes various and different textual examples ranging from popular literature to postmodern novels, from rock music to television.⁴ The main idea behind this map of Tennysonian misreading is that the poetic text represents a shifting and all-but-permanent creation, because influence proceeds, as Harold Bloom puts it, “by a misreading of the prior poet [through] an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation” (Bloom 1997: 30). In Bloom’s Freudian reading, according to which in literary history there is a prolonged Oedipal wrestle between father-poets and their poetic ‘children’, “there are not texts, but only relationship between texts” (Bloom 2003: 3). In this sense, Bloom’s ‘tensive’ view on poetic influence may be counterbalanced by Robert

Douglas-Fairhurst's opinions on the 'effect' of quoting (or misquoting) a poet, since quotations "offer a significant resource for any practical investigation into the growth or decay of literature" and "can be read as equally convincing evidence of the redemptive power of art or the vanity of art" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2002: 36). As a result, for two hundred years Tennyson's macrotext (as well as Tennyson as poetical subject) has been 'filtered' and re-read – or better mis-read – in different ways by different generations of readers, who have alternatively used it as a 'redemptive' tool or as a 'vain' object. It is almost pleonastic to assert that the Victorian audience of Tennyson's poetry differed from those that came after, and that, in turn, postmodern readers cannot experience Tennyson as their predecessors did. Indeed, the readers' horizons of expectations and their interaction with (any) artistic text are inevitably determined by the socio-cultural and ideological context in which the reading event takes place. This aspect is complicated in the case of more 'educated' audiences, such as novelists, poets, film directors etc., who 'consume', absorb and 'digest' the cultural heritage of the past with complex aims and aspirations. Hence, in the course of this article, misreading will be seen as a fundamental driving force in the reception and successive re-creation of Tennyson's poetry.

When he was very young, Alfred Tennyson (before becoming 'Alfred Tennyson' in inverted commas) showed a peculiar interest in investigating the future, as well as *his own* future as a poet. From 'Timbuctoo' (a poem he unwillingly submitted to the Cambridge's commencement, which won the Chancellor's medal on 6th June 1829) onwards, Tennyson was constantly engaged in constructing his role as a poetic voice for the present, and in particular for the future, in 'prophetic' terms. From the mount of Gibraltar, the lyrical subject surveys the mythical city in Mali. Spurred by a young seraph, he "open[s] [his] eyes" and contemplates a futuristic vision:

[...] I saw
The smallest grain that dappled the dark Earth,
The indistinct atom in deep air,
The Moon's white cities, and the opal width
Of her small glowing lakes [...].
The clear Galaxy
Shorn of it hoary lustre, wonderful,

Distinct and vivid with sharp points of light [...].
 Nay – the hum of men,
 Or of other things talking in unknown tongues,
 And notes of busy life in distant worlds
 Beat like a far wave on my anxious ear [...].
 Then first within the South methought I saw
 A wilderness of spires, and crystal pile
 Of rampart upon rampart, dome on dome,
 Illimitable range of battlement
 On battlement, and the Imperial height
 Of Canopy o’ercanopied.
 (Tennyson 1983: 97-101; 104-106; 110-113; 160-165)⁵

The vision presented in ‘Timbuctoo’ aims at elevating the poetic subject in stature and knowledge, and thus epitomises Tennyson’s visual and creative qualities as a vaticinal poet who looks back to an imaginary past to dream of the future (“I saw...I saw...”).

During and after his poetic apprenticeship ‘Alfred Tennyson’ chose to wear the mask of an old Victorian sage confronted with the outcome of his fame and name in many of his compositions. In this respect, Anna Barton’s *Tennyson’s Name* (2008) focuses on Tennyson’s prolonged self-fashioning of his poetic identity and on his interest in portraying elderly protagonists (ranging from St Simeon Stylites to an aged Ulysses, up to the decaying immortal Tithonus), which dates back to his youth: “From early on his career, before the death of his own father, and before he himself became a parent, Tennyson populated his poems with the elderly” and contemplated “the tragedy of being old” (Barton 2008: 39). As if he were experiencing the world from a poetic time-machine, Tennyson reflected on his condition as a poet creating works of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, suspended – as it were – between a longing for the Romantic cult of the ivory tower and an awareness of the economic profits deriving from aesthetic products. Accordingly, ‘Ulysses’ (1842) remains a paradigmatic text that introduces readers to Tennyson’s ambivalent relationship with his ‘name’ and ‘fame’ in an age during which the role of the artist was inevitably changing. Moreover, ‘Ulysses’ seems to pave the way for Tennyson’s future as quintessential Victorian ‘brand name’:

I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments [...].
 I am part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 (Tennyson 2007: 11-14; 18-21)

In ‘Commodifying Tennyson: The Historical Transformation of “Brand Loyalty”’, Gerhard Joseph refers to Tennyson’s choice to replace the term “sword” with the more archaic sounding (and economically ambiguous) ‘brand’ in the *Idylls of the King* (1859-1872) as a sign of his complex negotiation with Victorian commodity culture. This “etymological parable” relates to the transition from the Medieval Arthurian brand to contemporary literary commodity (in the form of the ‘brand name’). In particular, Joseph reflects on the publisher Frederick Macmillan’s ‘branding’ of Tennyson’s poetry for its “net book” policy, which was established to avoid underselling and to publish artistic works at a fixed price. By doing so, this publishing company confirmed

the modern circulation of the book as a ‘branded good’ by an author with a valued name – Tennyson as a branded commodity of the Macmillan firm just as, say, a razorblade, with its advertising logo of crossed swords, is the branded product of Wilkinson. (Joseph 1996: 133-134)⁶

Therefore, in the course of his long career ‘Alfred Tennyson’ increasingly became a ‘brand’ for Victorian readers who, whenever confronted with his name, associated it with a cluster of meanings and (sometimes contradictory) values: tradition and innovation, Darwinian scepticism and religious faith, normativity and transgression, liberal politics and jingoism. This peculiar (mis)use of Tennyson’s ‘name’ has continued in the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries according to predictably different and heterogeneous (mis)readings. Like Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, Arthur Conan Doyle and Bram Stoker, Tennyson is probably one the most

adapted and (mis)quoted representatives of the Victorian age in contemporary culture, because he embodies not just the nineteenth-century as it *really* was but as *we want it to be*. For Simon Joyce “we never really encounter ‘The Victorians’ themselves but instead a mediated image like the one we get when we glance into our rearview mirrors while driving” (Joyce 2007: 4). This paradoxical condition of looking forward to see what is behind

also suggests something of the inevitable distortion that accompanies any mirror image, whether we see it as resulting from the effects of political ideology, deliberate misreading, exaggeration, or the understandable simplification of a complex past. (Joyce 2007: 4)

It follows that ‘Alfred Tennyson’ has offered a great amount of textually ‘translatable’ materials for what is commonly labelled as postmodern culture, a definition which will be used in this article in its various (and sometimes antithetical) nuances: from Fredric Jameson’s notion of disengaged ‘nostalgic’ pastiche to Linda Hutcheon’s re-evaluation of its parodic and self-conscious experimentation with artistic forms.

On account of its emblematic Medieval setting, its symbolical images and its deliberately ambiguous language, ‘The Lady of Shalott’ has always intrigued artists and writers. Its eponymous female protagonist’s (dead) body has in fact become, in Geoffrey Hartman’s words, a “floating signifier” (Hartman 1981: 110), whose referential nature has changed and evolved according to its readers. Since the mid-twentieth century, this narrative poem has been adapted for or set to music by various composers, from Sir Arthur Bliss for his ballet version dated 1975 (with the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra) to Celtic singer Loreena McKennit, who recorded a fourteen-stanza version of the text on her album *The Visit* (1991). The image of the Lady of Shalott has also inspired the cover of the album *Want Two* (2004) by Canadian singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright, who provocatively appears on it in female Medieval robes. On the contrary, in *Want One* (2003) he wore a male Medieval coat of arms. Like Wainwright’s previous (and future) albums, *Want Two* centers on the theme of homosexual love, and so its cover becomes his way of ‘iconising’ and ‘outing’ his sexual orientation. As far as visual transpositions are

concerned, the Youtube website includes hundreds of demi-professional and professional videos inspired by this ballad, including a cartoon dated 1976 with pastel and home made multi-plane rostrum by Sheila Graber. More recently WagScreen has produced and shot a richly-dressed twenty minutes film dramatisation for the 2009 Tennyson's birth celebrations, in which the image of the Lady of Shalott is explicitly based on J. William Waterhouse's painting of the same name dated 1888. But of course it is literature that offers the widest range of quotations, adaptations, transpositions, and translations from one semiotic system (poetry) into another (novel). Apart from general references to the ballad found in D. H. Lawrence's writing (from *The Rainbow* [1915] to *The Virgin and the Gypsy* [1930]), Agatha Christie was probably one of the first writers to use its image extensively in her novel *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962). Here the actress Marina Gregg's "frozen look" in the course of a tragic party, which reminded Mrs Bantry of the doomed expression of Tennyson's Lady, becomes the key to discovering the author of a series of homicides and of a final sorrowful confession:

'[Marina Gregg] had a kind of frozen look,' said Mrs Bantry, struggling with words, 'as though she'd seen something that – oh dear me, how hard it is to describe things. Do you remember The Lady of Shalott? *The mirror crack'd from side to side: "The doom has come upon me," cried the Lady of Shalott.* Well, that's what she looked like. People laugh at Tennyson nowadays, but the Lady of Shalott always thrilled me when I was young and still does.' (Christie 2002: 92-93)

This excerpt from a scene that deals with the theme of loss and during which the detective Jane Marple continually mourns the demolition of old houses for developmental plans, includes a misquotation from Tennyson. In Christie's novel, "*The doom has come upon me*" replaces "*the curse has come upon me*". As Miss Marple admits, Mrs Bantry's choice of "doom" was "perhaps a better word in the circumstances" (Christie 2002: 342), since in her opinion it reflected the transition from an Arthurian myth to a contemporary tragedy.

Apart from the presence of Tennyson's ballad on the Lily Maid of Asolat in novels ranging from Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1977) to Jessica Anderson (*Tirra Lirra by the River*, 1978) and David Benedictus (*Floating Down to Camelot*, 1985), which for length reasons we will not treat here, 'The Lady of Shalott' has made its appearance more recently in *Avalon High* (2005) by Mag Cabot, an American writer of romantic comedies whose readership is mainly composed of teenagers. The novel, whose movie rights have been bought by the Disney Channel and which reached number 3 in the *New York Times* children's bestsellers list in January 2006, is centred on the adventures of Elaine Harrison, a teenager who moves to Annapolis, Maryland, with her parents, two academics who have taken a year long sabbatical to concentrate on Medieval studies. Her new high school, Avalon High, is the main setting of a weird repetition/updating of the story of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. After a series of coincidences (in particular her name and her love of floating on a raft in her house pool), Elaine comes to believe she is a reincarnation of the lily maid of Asolat. Then she realises that she is, rather, a sort of new Lady of the Lake, whose task is to rescue Arthur. Elaine is convinced of the truthfulness of these strange coincidences by Mr. Morton, her high school teacher, who personifies Merlin and who is a member of the mysterious "Order of the Bear". This sect believes that the Arthurian legend repeats itself every generation and tries to save the 'new' Arthur, William Wagner (Elaine's boyfriend), from death. Each chapter of the book is introduced by a quotation from Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' generally related to the content of the chapter. Despite the novel's limits and incongruities, its main quality lies in the updating of the Arthurian (and Tennysonian) myths and in their 'adaptation' to a contemporary context in order to investigate, in particular, questions of generational conflict, as evident in Elaine's reflections on her parents:

Oh, yeah. That's the other thing about having professors as parents: they name you after totally random authors – like poor Geoff, after Geoffrey Chaucer – of characters from literature, such as the Lady of Shalott, aka Lady Elaine, who killed herself because Sir Lancelot liked Queen Guinevere – you know, the one Keira Knightley played in that King Arthur movie – better than he liked her.

I don't care how beautiful the poem about her is. It's not exactly cool to be named after someone who killed herself over a guy. I have mentioned this several times to my parents, but still they don't get it. (Cabot 2006: 7)

Among the most peculiar adaptations of 'The Lady of Shalott' must be counted Graham Masterton's use of the Tennysonian poem as a source of inspiration for the three vampire tales included in his illustrated book entitled *Half-Sick of Shadows* (2009), namely 'The Lady of Shalott', 'Reflection of Evil' and 'Camelot'. 'Reflection of Evil', for instance, deals with a trio of archaeologists, who stumble upon the ruins of the original island and the "four gray walls" of Shalott, while investigating a construction site in Cadbury. A terrible truth is disclosed to them after they find the Lady of Shalott's mirror: the woman who literally 'emerges' from it is none other than a vampire, or better a Lamia:

Very gradually, a *face* began to appear in the polished circle [...]. The face was pale and bland but strangely beautiful, and it was staring straight at him, unblinking, and smiling. It looked more like the face of a marble statue than a human being [...]. Soundlessly, the pale woman took one step out of the surface of the mirror. She was naked, and her skin was the colour of the moon. The black tarnish clung to her for a moment, like oily cobwebs, but as she took another step forward they slid away from her, leaving her luminous and pristine [...]. She had a high forehead, and her hair was braided in strange, elaborate loops. She had no eyebrows, which made her face expressionless. But her eyes were extraordinary. Her eyes were like looking at death. She raised her right hand and lightly kissed her fingertips. [...]. She whispered something, but it sounded more French than English – very soft and elided – and he could only understand a few words of it. (Masterton 2009)⁷

But 'The Lady of Shalott' is not the only case in which a Tennysonian poem has been translated in vampiristic terms. A long quotation from 'Tithonus' (1860) is inserted in *Shadow of the Vampire*

(2000), an American horror movie directed by E. Elias Merhige and written by Steven A. Katz, starring John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe. The movie is a fictionalised account of the making of the classic vampire film *Nosferatu*, directed in 1922 by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (played by John Malkovich). In the course of the filmmaking and after a series of strange events, the film crew begins to suspect that their lead actor, the highly professional German method player Max Schreck (played by Willem Dafoe) is a real vampire. Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* is a typical postmodern movie, dealing with the themes of self-conscious narration and self-reflection. (The movie is, after all, about the making of another movie.) In one of the most relevant scenes, Max Schreck/Willem Dafoe recites Tennyson's poem 'Tithonus', while looking at an actress's portrait image, sitting alone in a cave (the actress having been 'promised' by Murnau to Schreck as a gift for his services). In a typical postmodern gesture, Tennyson's lines perfectly fit in with the feelings of the actor/vampire, consumed by "cruel immortality" both in his life as one of the undead and in his afterlife as the protagonist of a movie that future generations of people would continue to watch:

But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
 And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
 And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
 To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
 Immortal age beside immortal youth,
 And all I was in ashes.
 (Tennyson 2007: 18-23)⁸

Like other re-visions, re-readings and adaptations of Tennyson's poems, Merhige's film can be also interpreted in light of Michel Foucault's opinions. Indeed, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that since the sixteenth century,

words have lost the stability of being regarded as semiotic signs of what they mark, so that their meaning is determined by other words, themselves determined by other words, unto infinity. And the meaning of those words shifts according to

the mindset of the social system using them. (Foucault 1973: 44)

The implication of Foucault's discussion find an application in postmodern poetics and in the practice of borrowing, adapting and (mis)quoting that is characteristic of contemporary forms of art, and in our case of the re-visions to which Tennyson's texts have been subjected.

'Tithonus' is also the title of an episode of the successful sci-fi TV drama *X-Files* (season 6, episode 9; written by Vince Gilligan and directed by Michael Watkins), dealing with a photographer named Alfred Fellig, who is suspected of a series of murders because he is always and inexplicably found on the crime scene. On the one hand, FBI agent Dana Scully tries to find a rational answer to this mystery, while on the other, the 'spooky' agent Fox Mulder discovers Alfred Fellig's secret by finding his fingerprints on records dating back 149 years. At the end of the episode Fellig explains that he sees people who are about to die in black and white (this fact justifies the photographs taken on the crime scene before the crime takes place), and that he himself missed death when he was sick with Yellow Fever. This twentieth-century Tithonus takes photos of dying people to try and catch Death's attention, believing that if he sees his face he will finally die himself.⁹ Apart from its Tennysonian title, many dialogues of this episode create an implicit relationship with Tennyson's hypotext by introducing questions related to the immortality (and mortality) of feelings:

Dana Scully: You know, most people want to live forever.

Alfred Fellig: Most people are idiots, which is one of the reasons I don't.

Dana Scully: I think you're wrong. How can you have too much life? There's too much to learn, to experience.

Alfred Fellig: Seventy-five years is enough. Take my word for it. You live forever, sooner or later, you start to think about the big thing you're missing and that everybody else gets to find out about but you.

Dana Scully: What about love?

Alfred Fellig: What? Does that last forever? Forty years ago, I drove down to the city hall, down to the Hall of Records, Record Archives, whatever they call it. I wanted to look up

my wife. It bothered me I couldn't remember her name. Love lasts 75 years, if you're lucky. You don't want to be around when it's gone.¹⁰

This episode from *X-Files* seems to engage an implicit dialogue with Tennyson's poem, as in the case of Fellig's sentence "You live forever, sooner or later, you start to think about the big thing you're missing and that everybody else gets to find out about but you", which echoes Tennyson's melancholic "Me only fatal immortality / Consumes" (Tennyson 2007: 5-6). Instead of Aurora (who watches Tithonus's slow decay in her arms), here Alfred Fellig mourns the loss of his wife, whose name he "couldn't remember anymore".

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1854) was Tennyson's most popular poem during the Crimean war, because it summed up the conflict's mixture of heroism and humiliation, courage and incapacity. But the poem also represented the typical artistic branded product intended for dissemination and reproduction on a large scale. An example of its marketability can be found in the request of the chaplain at the Military Hospital in Scutari. Through the intercession of the society for the propagation of gospel, the chaplain asked to receive printed copies on slips of paper for the soldiers to sing. Like a mass-produced photograph, Tennyson's poem could be readily circulated and enjoyed by all levels of society (Groth 2002: 560).¹¹ Along with some sections from 'Northern Farmer' (1869), 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington' (1852), excerpts from *Lancelot and Elaine* (1859-1870), and *Maud* (1855), 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' was one of the few poems that Tennyson decided to record between 1890 and 1892 on soft wax cylinders supplied by Thomas J. Edison. It is still possible to listen to the poet's own voice just by switching on a computer, surfing the net and searching for it via various websites, from where it can be downloaded. Therefore this poem literally projected Tennyson from the print-age into the digital age, allowing readers (and listeners) to experience the ghostly voice of the Victorian past. The impact of Tennyson's lines on the twentieth-century imagination was so strong as to inspire two movie adaptations, respectively dated 1936 and 1968. Michael Curtiz's film, starring Errol Flynn (in the role of Major Geoffrey Vickers of the 27th Lancers) and Olivia de Havilland (playing Elisa), is basically a love story in the context of the famous charge, where

the two officers who contend for Elisa's love fight their final battle at Balaclava. The movie became famous because of its spectacular charge sequence (which included superimposed quotations from Tennyson's poem), where the battlefield set was lined with trip wires to trip the cavalry horses. But the movie was also notable for its gross inaccuracies, since its script originally featured the Siege of Cawnpore in the course of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion. When it was pointed out that the Indian Mutiny took place three years after the Battle of Balaclava, the name of Cawnpore was hastily changed to Chukoti, and the rebellion was turned into a fictional uprising led by Surat Khan, the leader of Suristan, a vaguely Turkish country. In the film, the reason for the fatal attack of the Light Brigade was shown to be the 27th Lancers changing the direction of the manoeuvre so as to invade the Russian camp to kill Surat Khan. According to recent historians, however, it was actually the result of a wrong evaluation of the troops' positions and of a confused order dispatched by General Lord Raglan to Lord Cardigan and Lord Lucan. Moreover, the Battle of Balaclava did not result in the fall of Sebastopol, as erroneously stated in the film. Finally, the 27th Lancers in the movie are fictional as well: they were not part of the British Army until 1941. (The 17th Lancers, the 8th and 11th Hussars, and the 4th and 13th Light Dragoons made the real charge.) As this information suggests, Curtiz's film did not aspire to historical accuracy but rather wanted to give a primary value to movie stars of the 1930s and to cash in on the Tennysonian allusion of its title.

The second movie inspired by the battle of Balaclava and also entitled *The Charge of the Light Brigade* was directed by Tony Richardson in 1968, starring Trevor Howard (as Lord Cardigan), John Gieguld (as General Raglan), David Hemmings (as Captain Nolan) and Vanessa Redgrave (as Clarissa). The screenplay, written by Charles Wood and partially inspired by Cecil Woodham-Smith's historical book *The Reason Why* (1953), aims to offer a brutally realistic depiction of what was behind the events, laying the blame of the massacre, above all, on General Lord Raglan's incompetence and on Major General Cardigan's vacuity and arrogance.¹² Although not explicitly an anti-war manifesto, Richardson's film must be interpreted in the 'revolutionary' context of the late sixties and in light of the public debate on the Vietnam war. (The American 'revisionist' movie *Soldier Blue*, for instance, was screened only two years after.) If Tennyson's poem, in Jerome McGann's opinion, "represents an

effort to appropriate for an English consciousness” the heroic figure of the French *chasseur* of Napoleonic wars, in turn twentieth-century audiences, “like Tennyson and his contemporaries, intersect with our own age and experience [...] in certain specific and ideologically determined ways” (McGann 1985: 220; 202). This ‘new’ *Charge of the Light Brigade*, which describes in unromantic terms the life in the British Army during the 1850s, focuses in particular on the generational contrast between the old aristocratic officers (Cardigan, Raglan, Lucan) and the young and idealistic ones (such as Nolan). The film also includes humoristic animations by Richard Williams based on the graphic style of *Punch Magazine*, which are a sort of postmodern engrafting aimed at enhancing the fictional nature of Richardson’s reconstruction. It is interesting to note that neither Woodham-Smith’s *The Reason Why* (whose titled is inspired by a line from the poem) nor Richardson’s movie make any explicit reference to Tennyson. Like other famous branded products, from cars to fast food companies and sportswear, the absence of ‘Alfred Tennyson’ demonstrates that the more a ‘name’ becomes famous, the more it tends to be taken for granted, implied and then erased.

Among the most unexpected adaptations of Tennyson’s poem on the battle of Balaclava is a song composed by the British heavy metal band Iron Maiden entitled ‘The Trooper’, included on the album *Piece of Mind* (1983).¹³ Although Iron Maiden’s song does not explicitly quote lines from Tennyson’s poem, their song is usually introduced in their live shows as being inspired by Tennyson, and the video for ‘The Trooper’ even features clips from the famous battle scenes of Curtiz’s movie. The following excerpt conveys a general idea of the lyrics’ engagement with poem and film:

The bugle sounds as the charge begins
 But on this battlefield no one wins
 The smell of acrid smoke and horses’ breath
 As you plunge into a certain death.

The horse he sweats with fear we break to run
 The mighty roar of the Russian guns
 And as we race towards the human wall
 The screams of pain as my comrades fall.

We hurdle bodies that lay on the ground
And the Russians fire another round
We get so near yet so far away
We won't live to fight another day.

We get so close near enough to fight
When a Russian gets me in his sights
He pulls the trigger and I feel the blow
A burst of rounds take my horse below.

And as I lay there gazing at the sky
My body's numb and my throat is dry
And as I lay forgotten and alone
Without a tear I draw my parting groan.

Like Richardson's movie, Iron Maiden's musical transmutation of Tennyson's poem must be read in its specific cultural and historical context, given that the song was composed when the Cold War still juxtaposed many Western countries (including Margaret Thatcher's Britain) with the USSR. Moreover, the song was also written during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), as if to create a direct connection between old and new forms of imperialism and expansionist policies of extending military, political and economic influence. This justifies a more ideologically-laden reading of lines such as "the mighty roar of the Russian guns", "the Russians fire another round" and "When a Russian gets me in his sight". Although they refer to the armies fighting in the Battle of Balaclava, these sentences acquire a further socio-political significance related to the context of creation and reception of 'The Trooper'. Maiden's song adapts the allusions to an event set in the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-1980s, where the word 'Russian' and the military allusions included in the text referred to a totally different world map. In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Gérard Genette defines the term "proximation" as an "updating or cultural relocation of a text to bring it into greater proximity to the cultural and temporal context of readers and audiences" (Genette 1997: 304).¹⁴

But 'Alfred Tennyson' did not simply represent a source of inspiration for what he wrote and published. His own life has been subjected

to speculations and various re-visioning not only by biographers, but also by writers. Indeed, Tennyson as biographical and textual subject appears in Lynne Truss's nostalgia novel *Tennyson's Gift* (1993) and A. S. Byatt's novella 'The Conjugal Angel', included in the collection *Angels and Insects* (1992). However, these texts deal with his role as 'media poet' and *ante-litteram* pop star in totally divergent ways. Truss's novel is set in 1864 at Farringford and features an idiosyncratic Tennyson working on *Enoch Arden* and reciting his poetry to furniture, while his wife Emily tries to hide bad reviews in teapots. On the Isle of Wight the Tennyson family receives the visit of a series of eccentric characters, which include the photographer Margaret Julia Cameron, Lewis Carroll (in search of the Laureate's permission to dedicate *Alice in Wonderland* to him),¹⁵ and the painter George Frederic Watts, accompanied by his sixteen-year-old wife Ellen Terry and the American phrenologist Lorenzo Fowler. Although some of the episodes recounted in the novel are true, the aim of *Tennyson's Gift* is not to be historically accurate but to be, as its back cover suggests, "[a] Carrollian comic novel about mid-Victorian highbrows" about "the ideals of Beauty, Art, Friendship, Gratitude and Serious Beards". In Truss's novel, Lewis Carroll, who can be considered the real protagonist, is a shy and stammering intellectual, while Emily Tennyson, Margaret Julia Cameron and Ellen Terry function as epitomes of Victorian femininity (respectively embodying domesticity, artistic aspiration and the desire to be free from the codes of society). As far as Tennyson is concerned, he is characterised exactly as twentieth (and twenty-first) century readers expect him to be:

At Farringford, Emily Tennyson sorted her husband's post. Thin and beady-eyed in her shiny black dress, she had the look of a blackbird picking through worms. She spotted immediately the handwriting of Tennyson's most insistent anonymous detractor (known to the poet as "Yours in aversion") and swiftly tucked it into her pocket. Alfred was absurdly sensitive to criticism, and she had discovered that the secret of the quiet life was to let him believe what he wanted to believe – viz, that the world adored him without the faintest reservation or quibble [...].

Thus was Alfred, the greatest, touchiest and dirtiest living poet, protected from the unnecessary hurt of point-

raisers, and family life sealed off from interruption. Luckily, Alfred's eyesight was so execrable that he missed all sorts of nuances in everyday intercourse, including the yawning and snoozing of his Farringford guests. In fact, he could read *Maud* to a library full of empty sofas. It made little difference to him. (Truss 2004: 8-9)¹⁶

This brief excerpt from Truss's novel demonstrates that *Tennyson's Gift* is an example of what Fredric Jameson calls "blanc parody" in postmodern art and fiction, where the presence of pastiche and the use of an historically unladen past does not have any critical aim but conveys "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (Jameson 1991: 9). In Truss's novel Tennyson's poetics is emptied of its complexity and contradictory quality and reduced to what Jameson defines as "a new kind of superficiality" aiming at offering only a 'consumable' portrait of the Poet Laureate.

Although Truss has never acknowledged her literary debt to Virginia Woolf, the novel's comic structure, its setting and many of the characters included in *Tennyson's Gift* are reminiscent of the drama *Freshwater* (1935), which represents another facet of Woolf's complex negotiation with her literary and biographical Victorian "grandparents",¹⁷ as she called them. In Woolf's hilarious farce, first performed at Vanessa Bell's London studio (and whose cast included Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Julian and Angelica Bell), Tennyson is in the company of G. F. Watts, Ellen Terry, Queen Victoria, Mr. Cameron and, in particular, the photographer Margaret Julia Cameron (Woolf's great-aunt, to whom the play is dedicated and who serves as its central focus). Unlike *Tennyson's Gift*, which displays an a-critical cultural approach to Victorian culture, *Freshwater* dramatises a generational contrast by way of an ironic and even satirical tone, which gives voice to the Modernists' feelings of attraction and repulsion for their 'eminent' predecessors. For instance, at the beginning of Act 3, set in Julia Cameron's studio at Dimbola Lodge, Tennyson (who is reading *Maud* aloud) reflects on those aesthetic and artistic ideals, towards which writers such as Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell were feeling increasing unease and dissatisfaction:

TENN. There is something highly pleasing about the death of a young woman in the pride of life. Rolled round in earth's diurnal course with stock and stones and trees. That's Wordsworth. I've said it too. 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Wearing the white flower of a blameless life. Hm, ha, yes let me see. Give me a pencil. Now a sheet of paper. Alexandrines? Iambics? Sapphics? Which shall it be? (Woolf 1985: 40)

Opposite to *Tennyson's Gift*, Antonia S. Byatt in 'The Conjugal Angel' approaches 'Alfred Tennyson' as contradictory poet and icon of Victorian values. Here Tennyson plays a more marginal role, as Byatt explores the afterlife of his works through their long-term effects on those closest to him. Byatt's treatment calls to mind Julian Wolfrey's study *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* and his comparison of reading to a dialogue with ghosts, since to some extent all types of narratives are "spectral" and exist in order to fill or counter different kinds of absences.¹⁸ Indeed, in 'The Conjugal Angel', Byatt uses the dialogue with the dead both as a narrative strategy and a metaphor, dealing with the experiences of a group of late-Victorian characters who come in physical and textual contact with the ghosts of the past. Although séances had already appeared in *Possession* (1990), Byatt makes the encounter with the dead the main "narrative agent" of 'The Conjugal Angel' (Posnar 2004: 178).¹⁹ In Byatt's tale the medium Sophy Sheekhy and her friend Liliás Papagay, an improvised spiritualist who desires to contact her supposedly dead husband Arturo, try to evoke the spirit of Arthur Henry Hallam at Margate, in the house where Emily Tennyson (Hallam's promised wife) and her husband Captain Jesse live. The originality of Byatt's treatment of the biographical and textual subject named 'Alfred Tennyson' lies first of all in her decision to include, along with Hallam's ghost and Tennyson himself, Emily Jesse's marginalised voice. By juxtaposing Emily Jesse with Tennyson, Byatt foregrounds their divergent reactions to Hallam's death, as well as their divergent ways of overcoming it, based upon specifically Victorian gender divisions.

Alfred had not attended the funeral, and had begun to write again, to go about his life, whilst she lay in her bed of

pain and anguish. She remembered her face in the wet pillows, wet through the cotton to the damp feathers inside. She remembered swollen eyelids, uneasy sleep, and terrible wakings to the truth of loss [...]. But Alfred had lived with his grief, and worked upon it, for another eight years after her nine. She had married Richard in 1842 and closed her mourning. (Byatt 1994: 264; 268)²⁰

As this excerpt suggests, while for Emily her mourning left her undefended and alone (at least until she met the pragmatic and unpoetic Captain Jesse), Tennyson on the contrary turned his personal ‘mourning’ into a ‘melancholy’ poetical subject in his elegy to Arthur Henry Hallam.

In Memoriam, which can be approached as a sort of lyrical dialogue with the dead, represents a pre-text (in the double sense of the meaning) to ‘The Conjugal Angel’ and to its peculiar narrative construction. Byatt’s novella is a mixture of allusions, comments and reflections on Tennyson’s elegy by all the characters directly or indirectly involved in the events, including Tennyson himself. Through a peculiar narrative technique defined by Byatt as “ventriloquism”,²¹ which enables her to solve the problematic relationship between authorship and authority, she is capable of introducing metaliterary reflections by Tennyson (both as a ghostly voice of the past and a material textual presence) on the genesis of specific sections of *In Memoriam*:

He was proud of the good phrase ‘matter-moulded forms of speech’ – that said in a nutshell what he wanted to say about the stubborn body of language, and so of his poem, Arthur’s poems. Now ‘*mould*’ was a good word, it made you think. It made you think of the body of this death, of clay, of things mouldering away. It was art, it was decay. Not only cunning casts in clay, he had written in his moments of doubt about the magnetic tics of the fleshy brain, though elsewhere he had added to his idea of ‘what *is*’ a pair of potter’s hands [...]. Mould, mouldering. God livening the clay, God, or whatever it was, breaking it all down again. (Byatt 1994: 310)

Byatt's story is set in the late 1880s, when the great nineteenth-century poets were either very old or already dead.²² Therefore, the fact that her novella includes a detailed description of Tennyson as a decaying body may be interpreted as a critical reflection on the decadence of the "the old, worn-out words" (in Joseph Conrad's assertion) of Victorian literary language:

[...] His legs were cold and goosefleshed; he shivered inside his nightshirt. He was aware of his own body, with an appalled pity he might have felt for some dumb ox doomed to be slaughtered [...]. Now he was an old man, he saw that the young man he was had felt himself eternal in his noontday strength, in his grip and his stride and his inhalation and his exhalation, all of them now problems. He was approaching annihilation, however temporary he trusted it would be, step by step, and at every step, he saw his poor flesh as another creature he was responsible for. (Byatt 1994: 303)

Contrary to Truss's unproblematic treatment of the subject, 'The Conjugal Angel' can be more readily aligned with other neo-Victorian novels such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), John Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), which share a more complex approach to the Victorian cultural and literary heritage. Indeed, the Victorian age is not experienced by these novelists as a 'flat' and 'depthless' (to quote again from Jameson) historical period, and its writers and intellectuals as orthodox representatives of a frame of mind based upon mere prudery and technological (and Imperialist) advance. Rather, Victorianism is debated, so to say, from within, through the voices and the writings of its most eminent figures, or through the re-writing of its most canonical texts.

The BBC drama *Bonekickers* (the debut of which was on 8th July 2008 and which ran for just one series), featuring a team of archaeologists who work at the fictional Wessex University, represents a more recent postmodern revision of the brand name 'Alfred Tennyson'. Considered by journalists and academics as one of the worst TV fictions in the history of the BBC, the programme has also been described as an unlikely mixture of *CSI* and *Indiana Jones*. The final episode of the first series is entitled

‘Follow the Gleam’ and, as the title suggests, is heavily based on Tennyson’s poetry. The plot goes as follows: Professor Gillian Magwilde risks her reputation, friendships and even her life on a quest for her deepest obsession, the sword Excalibur. This obsession is steeped in Arthurian legend and in Tennyson’s verse. To bring this quest to a conclusion, Professor Magwilde searches through Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* and ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ to find her answers. She must come to terms with her relationship with archaeologist Viv (who is probably her sister) and with other mysterious characters, including a sect named the Disciples of Good Use, whose members included Tennyson and Hallam. The episode indicates that the Disciples of Good Use probably assassinated Hallam to protect the secret of the sword. When the well-funded and media-aware archaeologist Michael Gift and his team dig up part of Arthur’s round table in Somerset and evidence suggests that it points to the resting place of King Arthur’s sword, Gillian’s obsession is reinforced through the help of Tennyson’s verses, between whose lines she finds an indication of the location of Excalibur. All the stereotypes associated with Tennyson are included in the episode (along with the allusion to his eventual homosexual relationship with Henry Arthur Hallam), while the Cambridge Apostles become a Masonic group of masked psychopaths interested in re-establishing Arthurian codes at all costs. The climax of ‘Follow the Gleam’, which in a sense summarises the whole aesthetics of *Bonekickers*, is probably represented by Professor Mastiff’s motto, pronounced during the chase of Excalibur: “Don’t mess with me. I’m an archaeologist!”²³

This (far from exhaustive) survey of Tennysonian misreadings has been an attempt to follow an ideal ‘map’ of the ways in which the Laureate (as biographical and textual subject) has been read, translated and misread by artists, painters, musicians, novelists and film directors. However, this ‘mapped’ investigation cannot offer ultimate answers (and treasures) but only new questions (and maps) to be explored, in the awareness that the postmodern world is still inhabited by the ghosts (and by the fragmented relics) of the past and that “[no] matter how vociferously we protest our postmodern condition, we are in many respects post-Victorians, with a complex relationship to the ethics, politics, psychology and art of our eminent – and obscure – Victorian precursors” (Krueger 2002: ix).²⁴ It follows that ‘Alfred Tennyson’, as a Victorian poet and a set of textual references, can be ultimately experienced through misreading, as if to fulfil,

albeit in a paradoxical way, his aspiration to become (and to survive) as a 'voice' *for* and *in* the future. Although the questions posed at the beginning of this article – What has become of Alfred Tennyson? What does it mean to read Alfred Tennyson nowadays? Is it possible to really experience Alfred Tennyson's verse as Victorians did? – have hopefully been partially answered, the future of Tennysonian misreadings is obviously unpredictable, because the ways in which 'Alfred Tennyson' will be read and written by future readers/writers remains to be seen. The only sure thing is that audiences change with time, along with the modalities through which poets, novelists, artists and intellectuals are experienced by them. And, since this article began with a personal note, probably the most coherent way to conclude is to refer to an event which took place during the final part of my research in London. While I was walking in the Great Court of the British Museum, a perfect example of the postmodern coexistence of art and commodities, culture and market, archaeology and tourism, I was attracted by an enormous inscription carved on the floor and taken from Tennyson's 'The Two Voices' (1842): "...and let / Thy feet, millenniums hence, be set / In midst of knowledge..." (Tennyson 2007: 88-90). In that very moment I realised that, although it had led me neither to any treasure nor to any conclusive answer, my map of Tennysonian misreadings had probably guided me to my final destination.

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the Tennyson Bicentenary Conference 'Young Tennyson', University of Lincoln, 16-20 July 2009. In John Morton's words, "Today, Tennyson's words remain present in the most unlikely of places – on the tables of cafés and restaurants as well as in homes across the world" (Morton 2010: 143). To date, John Morton's book *Tennyson Among the Novelist* is the most complete and detailed study on the influence on Tennyson on (mainly English) novelists from the Victorian age onwards.
2. For Matthew Sweet "[the] Victorians are the people against whom we have defined ourselves. We are who we are because we are not the Victorians" (Sweet 2002: 231).

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3. Jakobson defines “transmutation” as the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (Jakobson 1960). In this view, cinema, painting and music can be considered examples of transmutation.
 4. Linda Hutcheon, who defends the dignity of each “adaptation”, argues that “[we] retell – and show again and interact anew with – stories over and over; in the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same. What they are not is necessarily inferior or second-rate – or they would not have survived. Temporal precedence does not mean anything than temporal priority [...]. In the working of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception” (Hutcheon 2006: 177). Robert Stam asserts that literature is traditionally considered to have an axiomatic superiority over adaptations because of its ‘seniority’ as an art form. This hierarchical approach involves “iconophobia” (a suspicion of the visual) and “logophilia” (Stam 2000).
 5. In his poetic macrotext Tennyson offers other prophetic descriptions of the future, such as the one included in *Locksley Hall* (1842): “When I dipt into the future far as human eye could see; / Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be. / Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails, / Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales; / Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew / From the nations’ airy navies grappling in the central blue; / Far along the world-wide whisper rushing warm, / With the standards of the peoples plunging through the thunder-storm; / Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furled / In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the World” (Tennyson 2007: 119-128).
 6. Despite his aversion to the media attention and to success, in Kathryn Ledbetter’s opinion “[Tennyson] was an active participant as a cultural commodity and an influential force in the media explosion of the nineteenth century. Just as Queen Victorian was the first media monarch, so was Tennyson the first media Poet Laureate” (Ledbetter 2007: 100).
 7. The winner of many literary prizes, the Scottish writer Graham Masterton’s first success dates back to 1975 with the publication of *Manitou* (whose film version starred Tony Curtis), followed by more than 35 horror novels and a great number of short stories, some of which have been filmed for TV in Tony Scott’s horror series *The Hunger* (1997-2000).
 8. Tennyson’s ‘Tithonus’ also inspired Aldous Huxley for the title of his novel *After Many a Summer* (1939), which tells the story of a Hollywood millionaire fearing his impending death. This satiric novel, which deals with

philosophical and social issues, was awarded the 1939 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction.

9. In an essay on the influence of Tennyson's poem on the *X-Files* episode 'Tithonus', Matthew VanWinkle addresses the programme's focus on Tennyson's preoccupation with the agony of an ever-aging but never-ending existence as a narrative trope to convey a self-reflexive meditation prompted by the unexpectedly lengthy run of the series (VanWinkle 2007). A quintessential example of postmodern TV, *The X-Files* cuts across 'low' and 'high' culture and "[perhaps] most remarkable about [its] blurring high/low cultural distinctions is the way in which it absorbs, revises, or questions a bastion of high culture: literature in all its forms" (Yang 2007: xii). As a matter of fact, 'Tithonus' is not the only episode of *X-Files* inspired by literature. William Blake, for instance, is quoted at length in the episode entitled 'Fearful Symmetry' (season 2, episode 18, 1995) along with many other writers, ranging from William Shakespeare to Thomas Pynchon and Vladimir Nabokov.
10. For some reason, references to Tennyson seem to be abundant in horror, sci-fi and fantasy movies. The supernatural action movie *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army* (2008), for instance, includes a quotation from *In Memoriam*. Princess Nuala (played by Anna Walton) reads the following lines from a book: "Be near when my light is low, / When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick / And tingle" (Tennyson 2007: L, 1-3). Abe Sapiens (played by Doug Jones) listens to her and recognises the poem. Like the first movie of the series (dated 2004), *Hellboy II* is inspired by Mike Mignola's comic book and is directed by the visionary Guillermo del Toro, starring Ron Perlman in the leading role. I would like to thank Dr. John Morton for drawing my attention to this quotation.
11. In a letter forwarded to John Forster on 6 August 1855, Tennyson wrote: "Having heard that the brave soldiers before Sebastopol, whom I am proud to call my countrymen, have a liking for my ballad on the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, I have ordered a thousand copies of it to be printed for them. No writing of mine can add to the glory they have acquired in the Crimea; but if what I have heard be true, they will not be displeased to receive these copies of the Ballad from me, and to know that those who sit at home love and honour them" (Tennyson 1898, vol 1: 386). Kathryn Ledbetter notes that Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' became "required reading for school-aged children for much of the twentieth century, and it now often represents the token piece of information many people retain about the

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- Crimean War. Without the poem, the charge might have become a footnote in the long history of military blunders” (Ledbetter 2007: 103).
12. Some historical events and episodes related to the life of the various characters are adapted in the filmscript; for instance, as Cecil Woodham-Smith notes, the so-called “black bottle episode” involved in a dispute (and even a trial) Lord Cardigan and Capt. John Reynold. The movie alters the historical roles, casting Captain Nolan (who was in truth disliked by Lord Lucan), rather than Reynold, as the person involved (Woodham-Smith 1958, 63-65).
 13. Iron Maiden used to take inspiration from literature, with examples ranging from Samuel Taylor Coleridge (‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ inspired an eponymous song), and G. K. Chesterton (whose lines from ‘Oh God of Earth and Altar’ are quoted in the song ‘Revelations’), to Aldous Huxley, whose novel *Brave New World* inspired the title (and the title-track) of another album, dated 2000.
 14. As Julie Sanders puts it, the processes of adaptation and appropriation “are frequently, if not inevitably, political acts” (Sanders 2006: 37). For Linda Hutcheon, “[the] contexts of creation and reception are material, public and economic as much as they are cultural, personal and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today’s globalized world, major shifts in a story’s context [...] can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally” (Hutcheon 2006: 28).
 15. Charles Dodgson first met Tennyson’s family members in 1857 as a photographer (a first recorded photo of Hallam Tennyson is dated September the 28th) and ended his relationship with them in 1870, after he asked Emily for permission to show his friends an autograph copy of the unpublished ‘The Lover’s Tale’, which he owned. Emily Tennyson’s sharp reply is another example of the Laureate’s (and his family’s) attempt to protect his brand name: “[when] an author does not give his works to the public he has his own reasons for it” (Carroll 1979: 151). For a more detailed study on the relationship between Carroll and Tennyson, see Eperson 2000.
 16. On her homepage, Truss admits that her novel is centered more on Carroll than on Tennyson: “Madness seems to be a recurrent theme in my novels. The greatest influence on *Tennyson’s Gift* is not the poet laureate, or even his wonderfully enthusiastic neighbour, slaving night and day for Art, Mrs Cameron. It is the great Victorian children’s writer Lewis Carroll (real name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), who made a real visit to Freshwater in July 1864, and thus supplied a real date for the book’s entirely invented action.

Tennyson's Gift is about love, poetry, the beauty of girls with long hair, the questionable sagacity of men with beards, the language of flowers and the acquisition of famous heads; but it is mainly about the insane Carrollian egotism that accompanies energetic genius" (Truss, no date).

17. Virginia Woolf's relationship with the Victorian age developed on a biographical, generational and artistic level. When her mother Julia Duckworth died, Virginia was only thirteen and her father Leslie Stephen was sixty-three. For this reason at 22 Hyde Park Gate "two different ages confronted each other in the drawing room [...], the Victorian age and the Edwardian age. We [Virginia and Vanessa] were not his children; we were his grandchildren" (Woolf 1985: 147). Apart from Virginia Woolf's negative opinion on some sections of *Maud* (considered in *A Room of One's Own* as "ludicrous" and "laughing") and her ironical allusions to 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' in *To the Lighthouse* (where Mr. Ramsay constantly repeats the line "someone had blundered"), many critics underline the influence of Tennyson's lyrical language on her modernist novels, in particular "the groundswell rhythm of his poetry, the emphasis on hybrid forms from dramatic monologue to monodrama, the deconstruction of sexual identity, and the failure of the subject to be fulfilled by the desired Other" (Shires 1990: 19).
18. "[To] tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded" (Wolfreys 2002: 3).
19. In Andrew Williamson's view, "'The Conjugal Angel' continues *Possession's* metaphoric correlation of spiritualism and reading. However, Byatt expands this association to include the act of writing [...]. The aim of the séance is, to borrow Byatt's pun, to *possess* and, in the case of the medium, *to be possessed* by, the past, to seek answers from the past" (Williamson 2008: 115-116).
20. Christien Franken argues that "as a Victorian woman who was economically dependent upon her family and expected to find a husband, Emily Tennyson was simply not in the position to mourn Hallam as long and in the same way as her brother did" (Franken 1999: 244). For Ann Marie Adams "an analysis of Hallam and Tennyson's friendship is as important to the novella (and the novella's reading of the poem) as the recovery of Emily Tennyson Jesse's story. Byatt achieves this dual focus by effecting a rough equivalence between the two apocryphal accounts: just as Emily is given the voice that *In*

Memoriam seemingly denies her, so Tennyson is given the chance to respond to the charges of improprieties his contemporaries and latter-day critics would levy upon him” (Adams 2008: 31).

21. According to Byatt, ventriloquism “avoids the loaded moral implications of ‘parody’ and ‘pastiche’”, because it emphasises “at once the presence of the past and its distance, its difference, its death and difficult resurrection” (Byatt 2001: 43; 41).
22. “In *Angels and Insects*, the form of writing she invokes is ghostwriting, which she reads in a double sense: first, that of ‘borrowing’ (‘writing like...’) that seems to approach the postmodern forms of the pastiche, and second, a ghostwriting that is speaking with the dead, not so much as writers but as moldering bodies, decaying forms” (Schor 2000: 237, original ellipses).
23. The episode ‘Follow the Gleam’ is another example of Fredric Jameson’s notion of the postmodern as pastiche and “blanc parody”. Like other cases of ‘Victoriana’, this one too is based, in Cora Kaplan’s words, on “the charm of antiquity and the exotic, so that increasingly, in the new millennium, even [the nineteenth century’s] worst abuses seem to fascinate rather than to appal” (Kaplan 2007: 6).
24. For Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich “[rewritings] of Victorian culture have flourished [...] because the postmodern fetishizes notions of cultural emergence, and because the nineteenth century provides multiple eligible sites for theorizing such emergence” (Sadoff and Kucich 2000: xv).

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