

**AUTHORS EXPOSED: VICTORIAN LITERARY CELEBRITY AND THE GRAPHIC  
REVOLUTION**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

In an effort to historicize celebrity as a phenomenon that pre-dates film, celebrity studies scholarship has, over the last three decades, taken a turn toward the literary in general and Victorian authors in particular. Most scholars point to the Graphic Revolution of the nineteenth century as celebrity's inaugural moment, proposing that the industrialization of print, rise of the pictorial press, and advancements in photographic technologies kindled a new mode of celebration—one based less on personal achievement or service to God or state, and more on a perceived desire for proximity to the public individual. Scholars generally agree that this “public intimacy” is one of the defining paradoxes of celebrity culture.

*Authors Exposed* complicates the relationship between public intimacy and the printed image in Victorian literary celebrity by examining portraits of three authors—Charles Dickens, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Oscar Wilde—and by tracing how those images were produced, circulated and appropriated during each author's lifetime. I argue that Victorian literary celebrity was characterized as much by a turn away from celebrity authors and their images as it was by audiences' desire to know more about and get closer to their favorite authors. In exploring these other attitudes towards public intimacy during the period, I challenge two key assumptions in the scholarship: first, that printed images gave audiences more intimate access to celebrities and second, that audiences always *wanted* more intimate knowledge about authors and their lives in

the first place. In Dickens' case, his celebrity image endangered the relationship his audiences had with the characters in his early fictions, most notably Mr. Pickwick of *The Pickwick Papers*. For Tennyson, portraits designed to subvert celebrity and promote classical fame resulted in a kind of premature commemoration that made the Poet Laureate the object of ridicule in popular periodical series such as "Celebrities (Very Much) at Home." Finally, the celebrity images Wilde cultivated for his American lecture tour functioned as an artistic forgery that not only informed his later works like *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, but also served as evidence of the "gross indecency" that resulted in his incarceration.

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## PREFACE

This project began with a single word—“celebrity.”<sup>1</sup> Even before I knew exactly what I was looking for, I started mining hundreds of newly digitized books and periodicals for trends in the use of *celebrity* between roughly 1835 and 1905. Guided by Raymond Williams’ conception of “keywords”—the idea that the everyday use of certain, highly-contested words enacts not only the negotiation of meaning, but also the processes of cultural change—I focused my inquiry on two key moments in *celebrity*’s semantic history. The first was a shift that occurred around 1849 when, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, English speakers and writers began to use *celebrity* to refer to an actual person in the concrete sense, in addition to using it to refer to a condition or state of being indicated by possession (e.g., “She is a celebrity” versus “Her celebrity waned”). The second occurred in 1961, a little over a hundred years later, when historian Daniel Boorstin put forth his popular, if often misquoted, definition of “the celebrity” as “a person who is known for his well-knownness” (57-58).<sup>2</sup> With these two points in mind, I aimed to trace how *celebrity* had come to mean in such complex ways, and how those complexities had been distilled into such a disparaging epigram. Despite emerging celebrity studies scholarship, there seemed to be a gap in *celebrity*’s semantic history spanning from the

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<sup>1</sup> All further references to the words “celebrity” and “celebrities” will be italicized.

<sup>2</sup> Boorstin’s phrase is often unattributed and/or misquoted as “a person who is famous for being famous.”

mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth. I quickly learned, however, that the derogatory connotations of Boorstin's indictment were embedded within usages of *celebrity* that appeared well before the turn of the century. In other words, it became clear that Boorstin's understanding of celebrity was, in many ways, a Victorian one.

Much of what I found in my primary research resonated with claims made in more recent scholarship. For instance, I observed that the term "literary celebrity" was not only one of the earliest, but also one of the most widely used formations of the word used in its concrete sense. Far from being a twentieth-century phenomenon anachronistically mapped onto Victorian culture, celebrity in general and literary celebrity in particular have a history that pre-dates both reality television and the Hollywood "star system." Further, my research confirmed that celebrity is defined, in many ways, by visibility. Literary or otherwise, *celebrities* most frequently appeared with sight-oriented verbs and in visual contexts, mediated and unmediated, while the usage of "fame" was most commonly yoked to oral and/or textual communication. This trend corroborated the idea that the emergence of celebrity culture is inextricably tied to what Boorstin disparagingly identified as the "Graphic Revolution."

Outwardly, scholars seemed to acknowledge that Victorian celebrity was, as I had observed, entangled both with the literary and the visual, with the word and the image. But Victorianists had yet to offer an in-depth examination of how the celebrity author's portrait was actually produced, circulated and appropriated during his/her lifetime, which is to say, both alongside and apart from his/her written works. So I narrowed my scope, surveying visual representations of three authors across a range of literary genres—Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson and Oscar Wilde—as they were depicted in frontispieces, illustrated periodicals, and photographs. Additionally, I concentrated my continuing semantic research on illustrations in

pictorial periodicals that contained the word *celebrities* and *celebrity* as well as “fame” and “famous.” Ultimately, my investigation of these authors’ images and *celebrity’s* usage complicates one of the key arguments repeated in the scholarship—namely, that the “public intimacy” paradox, one of the defining features of celebrity culture, is facilitated by the printed image and driven by audience desire.

In closing, I would like to thank my dissertation committee—Phil Smith, Colin MacCabe, Jonathan Arac, and Ronald Zboray—for all their guidance and patience over the years as this project took shape. I also want to acknowledge the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh English Department who, though they did not serve on my committee, were nevertheless kind enough to muse with me about celebrity on numerous occasions. I want to thank the University of Pittsburgh for a generous PhD Research and Development grant to support my primary research with funding for a trip to the British Library and the National Art Library. Thank you to my wonderful colleagues and friends who endured countless conversations about Dickens and Wilde in stairwells, at coffeehouses and bars, and on benches outside Pitt’s Cathedral of Learning—Robert Bailey, Katherine Kidd, Robin Hoffman, Maura McAndrew, Alicia Williamson, Ryan and Aarti Smith-Madan, Amy Cymbala, Kristy Fallica, Andrew Hearin, and Schuyler Chapman. Deep gratitude to Tina, Caitlyn, Krissy, Tom, Manny, and Bill. Most of all, much love to my family, my best friend, and the inimitable Gomez.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an effort to historicize celebrity as a phenomenon that pre-dates film, celebrity studies scholarship has, over the last three decades, taken a turn toward the literary in general and Victorian authors in particular. The majority of scholars point to the “Graphic Revolution” of the nineteenth century as celebrity’s inaugural moment, proposing that the industrialization of print, rise of the pictorial press, advancements in photographic technologies, and emergence of middle-class consumerism kindled a new mode of celebration—that is, one based less on personal achievement or service to God or state, and more on a perceived sense of closeness between the public and the public individual.<sup>3</sup> Like their counterparts in film and media studies, scholars of literary celebrity agree that this experience of “public intimacy” is one of the defining paradoxes of celebrity culture (Braudy *Frenzy* 605-607; Roach *It* 44; Mole 23; DeCordova 73-84; Schickel 35; Rojek 62-63; Esterhammer 779). To be certain, celebrity culture rearticulates complex, centuries-old traditions of fame and heroism.<sup>4</sup> But celebrity also poses a new contradiction, one endemic to the mass media that construct it: the well-known individual, whatever he/she may be “known for,” appears at once distant from and closer to his/her unknown audience. In circulation, the printed portrait both constitutes and intercedes in the asymmetrical relation

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<sup>3</sup> Though he uses it disparagingly, the term “Graphic Revolution” is taken from Daniel Boorstin’s *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1962).

<sup>4</sup> For an expansive look at the history of fame and its paradoxes, especially the tensions between Roman and Christian models of the celebrated individual, see Braudy *Frenzy* 150-151.

between the well-known individual and his/her unknown audience(s), brokering the paradox of public intimacy that makes celebrity culture possible—and, literary scholars would add, that makes Victorian authors among the first modern celebrities.<sup>5</sup>

As important as this work has been in securing a place for the Victorian author in the history of celebrity, the complex relation between the printed image and public intimacy continues to provide opportunities for further study. First, despite their acknowledgement of the Graphic Revolution's significance to Victorian celebrity culture, literary scholars yet to offer an in-depth examination of how the celebrity author's likeness circulated in print during his/her lifetime, which is to say, alongside and apart from his/her body and his/her texts. In other words, in advocating for the literary dimensions of celebrity culture, Victorianists have spent less time considering printed images of celebrity authors during the period. Second, there is a tendency in celebrity studies at large to assume that public intimacy necessarily depends on the audiences' desire to get closer to the "real person" behind the mediating "Image," the real person who, scholars remind us, is always already an imposture of authenticity.<sup>6</sup> Third, in contrast to celebrities of film and television, literary celebrities are often endowed with the unique ability to manipulate public intimacy and thus author their own celebrity Image in much the same way they author novels, poems, plays, or essays. Put simply, the semblance of authority over the text has been conflated with the idea of authority, even control, over one's celebrity.

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of the relation between asymmetry and theatricality, see Marcus 1003.

<sup>6</sup> I use "Image" figuratively to refer to the legible text comprised of the celebrity's "official" personae as well as representations and appropriations of him/her across a range of media and over time. Further references to this figurative "Image" will be capitalized while lower-case use of "image" will refer to individual pictures. For more on the term "imposture," see Gilman 5-6.

*Authors Exposed* investigates the dynamics of the printed image and public intimacy in Victorian literary celebrity by examining portraits of three authors—Charles Dickens, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Oscar Wilde—and by tracing how those images were produced, circulated and appropriated during each author’s lifetime. While I agree that public intimacy is central to our understanding of celebrity’s paradoxical logic, a problem arises when our focus skews too far towards the desirability of intimacy, when proximity to the celebrity is coded as something necessarily attractive to or fulfilling for audiences. Because we have focused too much on the desirability of intimacy, we have minimized the meaning-making that actually happens in representations of and encounters with public intimacy, and left less scholarly room to explore the range of ways audiences participate in and/or engage with celebrities and celebrity culture. However, an analysis of printed images of Dickens, Tennyson and Wilde complicates the prevailing idea that public intimacy, as we understand it, is the governing principle of Victorian celebrity culture. Instead, this dissertation explores a host of other attitudes towards public intimacy during the Victorian period, many of which challenge two key assumptions in the scholarship: first, that printed images gave audiences more intimate access to celebrities and second, that audiences always *wanted* more intimate knowledge about authors and their lives in the first place. In the cases of Dickens, Tennyson and Wilde, the opposite seems true: the circulation of their printed portraits almost always implied some element of disappointment with, aversion to, or irreverence for intimacy with the author. This is a common trope in celebrity culture now—to be a celebrity is almost certainly to be an object of ridicule—yet such perspectives remain underrepresented in the scholarship on literary celebrity.

Though the title *Authors Exposed* refers to both the sensational rhetoric of tabloids and the technologies of photographic reproduction, my purpose is to highlight the idea that for every

moment of sought-after intimacy, there are equal parts judgment, disappointment, irreverence, disinterestedness—and even disgust—on the part of the audience. I argue that the Graphic Revolution exposed Victorian authors in ways that not only complicated their literary authority, but that also challenge our underlying assumptions about public intimacy and its relationship to celebrity culture. Most importantly, it complicates the simple equation that more images of a celebrity necessarily yield a greater sense of intimacy with him/her. My investigation of authors' images and illustrated periodical features suggests that *too much* intimacy was as much a concern for the audience as it was for the author: the greater the intimacy between the audience and the celebrity, the greater the desire to either restore the glamor afforded by distance or the greater the license to deride the alleged hero. In short, overexposure was as much a part of the Victorian conversation about celebrity and public intimacy as desire was. Ultimately, this dissertation is an attempt to remind scholars of literary celebrity that intimate encounters with celebrity authors always involve the risk of exposure—and not just a risk for the author on display. The celebrity-watching audience also has a lot at stake in looking, or looking too closely: the risk of overexposure, of learning too much about the author or learning something one did not want to know and cannot overlook; the risk of being disappointed with what one might find in the search for the “real person”; the risk of ruining an otherwise pleasurable façade or fictional narrative; and most importantly the pleasure of making up and making fun of what gets “exposed.”

From a twenty-first century perspective, it may seem like an obvious point to call for further analysis of celebrities' images as they circulate in print (or now, digitally). But in the scholarship on literary celebrity, finding work that offers sustained, direct engagement with

authors' images, whether historical or contemporary, can prove difficult.<sup>7</sup> In the limited amount of work that has studied printed portraits of Victorian authors, the focus is primarily on photographs at the expense, I would argue, of a many other types of and venues for printed images.<sup>8</sup> Until recently, the only full-length study that treats the iconography of authorship has been art historian David Piper's excellent *The Image of the Poet: British Poets and their Portraits* (1982). Piper's main interest is in visual representations of poets in painting and sculpture, but he does treat some photographs of Alfred Tennyson in a final chapter, tellingly titled, "The End of Fame."<sup>9</sup> Of the studies that do address the role of the image in literary celebrity, many often end up reifying the iconoclastic commonplaces leveled at mass media and popular culture more generally (e.g., that both celebrities and images are hollow, potentially manipulative distractions, while fame and "the word" are somehow more real and substantive, that the author's entanglement with the reproducible image somehow diminishes his status as a figure of high culture, and so on).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars of both British and American literature have treated other aspects of celebrity culture with precision and depth: Tom Mole has focused on Lord Byron and Romanticism; Stacey Margolis has explored the representation of copyright and privacy in the works of Edith Wharton; David Haven Blake has considered the intersection between celebrity and civic engagement in the poetry of Walt Whitman; and Richard Salmon has examined how the "culture of publicity" informed the writing of Henry James.

<sup>8</sup> For a notable exception to this trend and the pattern of overlooking author's images in general, see Fisher 98-123.

<sup>9</sup> For a more recent discussion of the iconography of authorship, see Curtis *Visual Words* 143-203.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent analysis of the iconoclastic trends in Marxist theory, see Mitchell's *Picture Theory*. See also Dyer *Stars* 1-34. For examples of this rhetoric, see York's analysis of Turner and Gamson, 8-11.



That authors' printed portraits have shown up so little in scholarship on literary celebrity is surprising for several reasons. For one thing, the rich body of scholarship on Victorian visual culture, as well as the exceptional work on book illustration, would seem to lend itself to a study of author's printed portraits. Furthermore, many of the frameworks and much of the vocabulary used by literary scholars to talk about celebrity have been derived, at some point, from work in explicitly visual disciplines, especially Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1979). Most obviously, scholars of literary celebrity themselves acknowledge the tremendous importance of the Graphic Revolution to the development celebrity culture. Though the issue of historical origin is still open for debate, Victorianists in particular emphasize that, of all its necessary conditions, celebrity culture perhaps depends most on an infrastructure of mass communication that can (re)produce and distribute not just print, but printed images.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, gossip plays an integral role in the generation of public intimacy, but ultimately even literary scholars admit that celebrity depends on seeing and being seen in ways that other historical manifestations of fame do not (Boone and Vickers 907; Marcus 1003; Braudy 279-282, 605-607).

If we agree that celebrity cannot exist without seeing and being seen, whether on film, in print or in person, then it stands to reason that we should examine how Victorian authors were visually represented in printed portraits. In surveying celebrity author's images, we trace not only how authors were represented in promotional and "ceremonial" portraits, but also how authors' likenesses were (re)imagined and appropriated as they circulated in print, especially Victorian illustrated periodicals (Piper 74). This kind of study does more than just plot the visual

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<sup>11</sup> Though some critics locate the "origins" of literary celebrity with writers like Laurence Sterne, the critical mass of scholarship points to the mid- to late-nineteenth century. For more on Sterne, see Fawcett 141-42.

trajectory of each author's individual celebrity; it also sheds light on how the printed image relates to conceptions of public intimacy that underpin our understanding of celebrity culture. Celebrity, literary or otherwise, takes on the characteristics of the media that construct it: the paradoxes of mass reproduction—the simultaneity of presence and representation, of proximity and distance—are also the paradoxes of celebrity.

Though his classic essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” focuses on what happens when a conventional artistic composition (such as a painting) is widely reproduced, Walter Benjamin's theory of aura could also apply to the Victorian celebrity. For Benjamin, when an original work of art is mechanically reproduced, it loses its “aura” of authenticity and the “ritual” afforded by privileged sites of display, and gains mobility instead: because the unique work of art is no longer confined to a single site of display, it is free to “meet the beholder halfway.” But in the case of celebrity, as in the case of the work of art, the beholder is not always content to “substitute a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (218-221).<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, the “plurality of copies” brings the work of art and its beholder closer together; on the other, this proximity only underscores an irreconcilable sense of distance and thus reaffirms the value of the original. In an entry in the collected manuscripts that have become known as *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin elegantly sums up this irony of the reproducible image. He writes: “Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us” (*The Arcades Project* 377 [M16a, 4]).

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin's discussion of aura as it relates to stage and film actors is also particularly germane to the case of celebrity. See Benjamin “The Work of Art” 228-238.

Seen in this way, the seemingly inverted logic of celebrity culture makes sense: public intimacy, in large part, grows out of the material conditions of the reproducible image. But in celebrity studies, the workings of public intimacy are attributed less to the medium itself, and more to the “desire” of celebrity-watching audiences.<sup>13</sup> Although each uses a slightly different disciplinary vocabulary, literary, film and media scholars alike predicate their arguments about celebrity and public intimacy on this presumption of desirability—on the idea that audiences *want to* traverse the gulf between publicity on the one hand (aligned with exteriority, artificiality and unreality), and intimacy on the other (associated with interiority, authenticity and reality), in the hopes that seeing the embodied original will reveal some otherwise unattainable, private knowledge about the person.<sup>14</sup> For Joseph Roach, certain celebrities—those who have “It”—cultivate public intimacy through their ability to physically embody and balance uniqueness with typicality, inscrutability with accessibility, power with vulnerability.<sup>15</sup> In his words, “Public intimacy describes the *illusion of proximity* to the tantalizing apparition.... The It-Effect, in turn,

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<sup>13</sup> Consider, for instance, the title of Christine Gledhill’s anthology, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. See also Braudy’s commentary on the history of personal ambition for public fame is sometimes coded negatively (e.g., in Christian traditions), 150-151.

<sup>14</sup> Locating this “true” identity—whether interior or exterior, for example—is a question that extends well beyond celebrity culture. In addition to the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, works such as William Archer’s *Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting* (1888) and Charles Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) argued that embodiment was a more privileged way of knowing because the body—its gestures, posture, and facial expressions—could not always be controlled or concealed for the purposes of display. “In person” encounters could reveal one’s true feelings and thoughts in ways that even the most accurate reproductions of one’s likeness could not. For more on Archer and Darwin on embodiment, see Knoper 89-97.

<sup>15</sup> For more on embodiment in celebrity culture, see Roach *It* 36. He argues that the appeal (usually sexual) of modern celebrities is rooted, at least in part, in the eighteenth century monarchical body: the body of the King, for example, always signified its own “double-bodiedness” as both the physical manifestation of divinity *and* a fragile, mortal form.

intensifies the *craving* for greater intimacy with the *ultimately unavailable* icon” (44, emphasis mine). The audience’s desire to negotiate and reconcile these binaries sets in motion celebrity’s ongoing relay of signification and interpretation.

Though he focuses his study on the “picture personalities” of early Hollywood, Richard DeCordova’s description of public intimacy is similar with respect to the desire. Drawing Barthes’ theorization of the “hermeneutic code,” he argues that a similar “hermeneutic structure ... led the spectator from an illusion presented through film in through a series of questions to a ‘reality’ behind it.” On the one hand, the media narratives surrounding celebrities *invite* the spectator to interpret them; on the other, the spectator is *driven* by his desire to know more, a desire DeCordova casts in Foucauldian terms: “The spectators’ sense that they were uncovering secrets with every answer gleaned from the films and fan magazines *piqued their will to knowledge* and afforded a *bonus of pleasure* with every ‘discovery’” (84, emphasis mine). DeCordova goes on to show how the play between “concealment and revelation” became increasingly enigmatic as the discourses of knowledge surrounding the actors in films evolved. Whatever gets “revealed” carries within it the possibility that something else, something still *more* private or authentic, remains unknown. Once the audience has acquired this sought-after knowledge about the individual, the relationship reverts back to one of perceived distance. Finding the “true,” “real,” or “authentic” identity of the star becomes like making one’s way through a hall of mirrors, which in turn intensified the audience’s desire (73).<sup>16</sup>

Both Chris Rojek and Roach describe the presumption of desirability using religious terminology. Rojek identifies what he calls the “St. Thomas Effect” as “the imaginary relation of intimacy with the celebrity,” which “translates into the *overwhelming wish* to touch the celebrity,

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<sup>16</sup> For a lucid description of this hall-of-mirrors effect, see Dyer’s *Heavenly Bodies* 1-35.

or possess celebrity heirlooms or other discarded items.” He continues by saying that the St. Thomas Effect is driven by “the *compulsion* [on the part of audiences] to authenticate a desired object by traveling to it, touching it and photographing it” (62, emphasis mine). While Rojek astutely articulates the religious dimensions of celebrity, in doing so, he unnecessarily equates celebrity “fans” with religious fanaticism. Joseph Roach adds to Rojek’s work by reminding us of the significance of embodiment inherent in what he renames the “Doubting Thomas Effect.” As in the biblical story that lends its name, the Doubting Thomas effect demands a tactile, sensory interaction between the celebrity and the audience in order to be believed. As a result, celebrity bodies are often divided (figuratively and literally) into “synecdochal” parts to be consumed, into relics to be owned—a lock of hair or an article of clothing, for example (Rojek 62-63; Roach “Doubting-Thomas” 1127-1128).<sup>17</sup>

Even in cases of celebrity where a real, flesh-and-blood person does not exist behind the Image—as in the case of a literary character—the same logic of public intimacy and audience desire is often applied. Though still a topic of debate among contemporary celebrity studies scholars, Neal Gabler and others have suggested that a celebrity, by definition, must be a living person and that the possibility of face-to-face interaction between celebrity and audience, however remote the possibility may be, is what differentiates celebrity from fame (Braudy “Knowing” 1072). Yet, as Elizabeth Hodgson Anderson points out, the focus on celebrities with “historical, physical presence” does not account for the vast number of fictional celebrities in recent history—that is, celebrity characters. Since at least the eighteenth-century, the “celebrity of fictive bodies” has been driven by the audience’s “desire to get beyond or behind [the]

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<sup>17</sup> Rojek has recently dedicated a book-length study to introducing to new terms into the “public intimacy” conversation—what he calls “presumed intimacy” and “removed intimacy.” See Rojek 1-22.

persona.” (Notably, she also refers to this desire as an “obsession.”) But in the case of characters, getting “beyond or behind” the fiction elicits a *productive* action on the part of the audience: in the same way audiences are ostensibly compelled to investigate a celebrity’s private life, so too are some driven to imagine origin stories and extra-textual lives for their favorite fictional characters (935-937). As Adena Spingarn has shown in the case of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for example, audiences not only go searching for the real-life “inspiration for” characters; they can also claim to be the “original” on which the character was based. In other words, audiences make intimacy with celebrity characters possible by searching for—and if necessary, manufacturing—correspondences in “real life.”

Like the play Benjamin describes between trace and aura, the relation between publicity and intimacy in celebrity culture is a tangled reciprocity mediated by the printed image, not a unidirectional expression of audience desire. To put it in Leo Braudy’s terms, nineteenth-century celebrity culture and its technologies of mechanical reproduction were “actually creating a new kind of aura” in which “intimacy and distance became bizarrely mingled” (605). A lot is at stake when the complexities of public intimacy are reduced to one-sided desire. Specifically, in the scholarship on literary celebrity, an overemphasis on desire in public intimacy often goes hand in hand with an overemphasis on authorial agency. Unlike their counterparts in film, authors are largely positioned as “creating” their Image in the same way they created their characters, poems, and novels—that is, as being “self-inventors,” “self-fashioners” and “self-promoters.” No doubt Victorian authors were incredibly media savvy, taking great care to project a calculated Image of themselves and enlisting a network of publicists and intermediaries to help them do so. But at times, scholars of literary celebrity end up reiterating more Romantic notions of authorship in which the author is the “genius” and sole creator of his works and his celebrity. (Of

course, in the case of many Romantic poets, that Image was constructed so as to appear *unconstructed*—as sincere, natural, effortless.)

But when authors are more visible to the public eye, it compromises the appearance of their authority over the text (Glass 18). In *Star Authors* (2000), Joe Moran theorizes that when an author becomes a celebrity, he/she necessarily becomes a “disembodied image,” “a kind of free-floating signifier within contemporary culture.” In becoming “merely an image,” “the author becomes gradually less in control not only of her work, but also of her image and how it circulates, at the same time as the machinery of celebrity asserts...that she is wholly in control of it” (61). In other words, if the power of the proper name constructs and consolidates authority, then the power of the image does just the opposite—it defrays authority, instead functioning as a “repository” for cultural meanings and a venue for the negotiation and valuation. In the case of an author, this particular fabric of meaning actually perpetuates its opposite—the notion of authorship itself. Moran says, “the literary marketplace”—where images circulate—“will threaten the whole notion of authorship, taking away agency from the author at the same time as it apparently celebrates that author’s autonomy as a ‘star author.’”

However, non-literary celebrities are primarily talked about in terms of being constructed and controlled by others, though, significantly, the rhetoric of audience desire remains.<sup>18</sup> Sports stars and politicians have “handlers,” actors have publicists and cadres of fashion designers, make-up artists and hair stylists.<sup>19</sup> We tend to read more about how stars or

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the differences (and similarities) between literary and cinematic celebrity, especially as it relates to gender, see Glass 190-195.

<sup>19</sup> Scholars of literary celebrity often argue that there are fundamental differences in what is at stake for authors who become celebrities versus celebrities from other fields of cultural production—theatre, film, sports, etc. For instance, Joe Moran notes that since the late-

celebrities were constructed by a Hollywood “machine” or about how otherwise regular people receive what Neal Gabler has called the “celebrity treatment” (“Toward” 4). For scholars studying film stardom, it seems a given that a celebrity Image is “always extensive, multimedia, intertextual” (Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* 4). Yet, when the conversation shifts to a discussion of literary celebrity, scholars have a tendency to invoke the author function, placing the author at the center of his celebrity and collapsing the intertextuality of the celebrity Image itself.<sup>20</sup>

On the flipside, the conflation of public intimacy with desire often positions celebrity-watching audiences as blindly reverent, “star-struck” worshippers; as potentially dangerous, near-ravenous “fans;” or as passive, easily-manipulated drones—all of which minimize the agency of the audience to appropriate, shape and even co-create the celebrity’s Image.<sup>21</sup> Despite perennially unflattering representations of mass media audiences, cultural studies and reception theorists have demonstrated time and again that people engage with popular culture—including celebrities—in complicated ways.<sup>22</sup> In *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*

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nineteenth century American celebrity authors have been, for better or worse, enmeshed with the rise of “middlebrow” consumerism. For an author to become a celebrity, as for a book to become “popular,” is betraying the sanctity of literature’s privileged place as an artefact of “culture.” See Moran 15-35.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the author function, see Foucault 113-138. For a theory on how promotional culture affects conceptions of the author function, see Wernick 85-103.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that celebrities themselves often perpetuate the rhetoric that their “fans” consume or overrun them. This is perhaps one of the most common tropes in celebrity culture: the fan and/or paparazzi so desperate to get close to the celebrity he/she loves, that he/she ends up destroying the object of desire. The death of Princess Diana is perhaps the most salient example, but this narrative can be seen throughout mid- to late-nineteenth century literature. For more, see Marcus 1007-1008 on Wilde’s *Salomé* or Newbury 79-119 on Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

<sup>22</sup> Celebrity is, of course, only one very small part of this much larger debate about semiotics, power and popular culture. More often than not, individuals act as *bricoleurs*, appropriating



(1994), Joshua Gamson argues convincingly that the stereotype of the “obsessed” fan, consumed by desire, is the exception rather than the rule. Relying on evidence from a wide range of interviews with celebrity “makers” (agents, publicists, producers, casting directors, etc.) and celebrity watchers, Gamson contends that audiences generally oscillate between “traditional” and “postmodern” orientations toward celebrity culture. As their name would suggest, the “traditionals” or “believers” demonstrate a very low level of “production awareness,” maintain that celebrity is merit-based, and engage with celebrity culture through “modeling, fantasy, or identification.” On the other end of the spectrum, the “postmodernists” or “antibelievers” have an exceptionally high level of production awareness, generally seeing all celebrities as elaborate media constructions. It is crucial to point out, however, that even the most skeptical postmodern viewers *still engage with celebrity culture*, participating for the sake of deconstructing the spectacle and its “techniques of artifice,” not because they have a deep investment in one celebrity or another.<sup>23</sup> In Gamson’s words, “theirs is an engaged disbelief” (146-147).<sup>24</sup>

Most celebrity-watching audiences fall somewhere in between these two extremes. For some, an awareness of even the most elaborate celebrity-making machinery does not preclude

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artefacts of popular culture in ways that make meaning for *them*. For more on these views, see, Hebdige 102-106, Fiske *Reading* 1-10, Fiske *Understanding* 19-26, and Zboray and Zboray 87-125. On celebrity-fan relationships in particular, see Fiske “Cultural Economy” 30-49, Caughey 39-40 and Marshall 60-61.

<sup>23</sup> Spectacle, in Guy Debord’s words, “is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.” For more on spectacle, see Debord 12-14.

<sup>24</sup> Continuing the interaction despite a high level of production awareness might also be described in terms of performance theory. For example, in “team” performances, individuals not only work to control their own “presentation of self” but also work to maintain the expectation of the “situation.” People rely on a kind of “dramaturgical co-operation” in order to preserve the coherence and integrity of the mutually-performative interaction. For more, see Goffman 77-83.

the possibility of “both discernible authenticity and the deserving celebrity;” these audiences, like those identified by Roach, DeCordova and Rojek, continue to believe in and search for the “true,” “real,” or “authentic” identity beneath the celebrity façade, no matter how elusive it may be. Perhaps the most complex audience group—those Gamson calls the “gamers”—engage with celebrity culture not as a “prestige system” (as the traditionals do) or as a “hall of mirrors” (as the postmodernists do), but as an opportunity “to play freely with the issues they [celebrities] embody” (149-50, 173).<sup>25</sup> “Their involvement,” Gamson observes, “may be based on pleasures that simply bypass the question of claims to fame or that make use of both the stories and the ambiguity they together create.” Whatever their level of production awareness, gamers “leave open the question of authenticity and along with it the question of merit,” opting instead to evaluate, interpret and (re)use celebrity texts in ways that make meaning for *them* (173). Ultimately, Gamson’s work provides an intuitive taxonomy of contemporary audience-celebrity relations that goes beyond the simple rhetoric of audience desire and challenges the assumption that more images of celebrities necessarily yields a greater sense of intimacy with them.

In order to explore the relation between the printed image, public intimacy and Victorian celebrity culture, my first chapter revisits the historical semantics of the word “celebrity.” By mining hundreds of newly digitized books and periodicals for trends in usage between 1835 and 1905, I show that the term “literary celebrity” was not only one of the earliest, but also one of the most widely used formations of the word used in its concrete sense. Further, I demonstrate that *celebrities* appears most frequently with sight-oriented verbs and in visual contexts, both mediated and unmediated. This trend corroborates the idea that the emergence of celebrity

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<sup>25</sup> This “gaming” component of audience behavior seems not entirely unlike the “lion-hunters” of the nineteenth century. For more on autograph hunting, see Giloi 41-51.

culture is inextricably bound up with what Daniel Boorstin has disparagingly identified as the “Graphic Revolution.” In other words, celebrity depends on an infrastructure of mass communication that is capable of reproducing not just printed text, but printed images, quickly and cheaply. Most importantly, my research suggest an array of different attitudes towards the idea of public intimacy: though many Victorian periodical features constructed narratives of celebrity exposure (for example, the incredibly popular “Celebrities at Home” series in *The World*), they also critiqued and complicated the very narratives they perpetuated, representing the risks, as well as the rewards, of public intimacy for celebrity-watching audiences.<sup>26</sup>

My digital search of *celebrity*’s usage is limited primarily to Victorian periodicals in three online databases—the *Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals*’ “New Readerships” collection, the *Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers*, and the *British Periodicals*, Collection I. Included in these databases are such publications as *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, *Penny Illustrated Paper*, *Punch*, *Athenaeum*, *Chambers’ Journal*, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, *The Graphic*, and more. Collectively, these three archives include hundreds of periodicals ranging in frequency (monthlies, weeklies and dailies), cost and circulation. Paying special attention to illustrated periodical features, I searched a variety of terms, including but not limited to “fame,” “famous,” “great men,” “illustrious men,” “notabilities,” “celebrity” and “celebrities.” (“Star” and “stars” proved more difficult because their usage is almost entirely context-dependent.) The most productive search term for my purposes was “celebrities”—rather than the singular “a celebrity” or “the celebrity”—as the plural always indicates concrete usage,

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Salmon, for instance, argues that many celebrity interviews from the period actually *called attention to* their own mediated-ness (e.g., to the fact that the interviewer functioned as interlocutor between reader and interviewees) while simultaneously perpetuating a rhetoric of direct, intimate access to the celebrity. For more, see Salmon “Signs” 104-111.

reducing the number of results in which “celebrity” refers to a condition or state of being. Further, I narrowed my results by isolating usages of *celebrity* that were accompanied by illustrations. Of course, this type of research is limited by the corpus of texts that are digitally available, and as such I supplemented these searches with my own comparably limited reading from the period.

Building on this historical-semantic groundwork, my remaining chapters engage with three of the most visually recognizable authors of the period—Charles Dickens, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Oscar Wilde. Each chapter is guided by a common set of questions: How was each author rendered visible and recognizable? To whom? Through what media and in which contexts? How did the medium of visibility affect its reception? Alongside what other images and texts? How did portraits of each author establish, undermine, complicate, challenge, and/or bolster his figurative “Image”—that is to say, his celebrity? And how does each author’s visibility as a literary celebrity affect his/her works, if at all?

These guiding questions, along with my primary research, shape the focus of each chapter somewhat differently. In following the trail of each author’s celebrity, different sites of tension between the printed image and public intimacy emerged for each author. In Dickens’ case, his celebrity image endangered the relationship his audiences had with his narrative persona, Boz, and with the characters of his early fictions, most notably Mr. Pickwick of *The Pickwick Papers*. For Tennyson, portraits designed to subvert celebrity and promote classical fame resulted in a kind of premature commemoration that made the Poet Laureate the object of ridicule in popular periodical series such as “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home.” Finally, the celebrity images Wilde cultivated for his American lecture tour functioned as a kind of artistic forgery that not only informed his later works like *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, but also serve as

evidence of the “gross indecency” that resulted in his incarceration. Ultimately, my investigation of these authors’ images and *celebrity’s* usage complicates the argument that public intimacy is both facilitated by the printed image and driven by audience desire.

## 2.0 “KNOWN FOR WELL-KNOWNNESS:” THE GRAPHIC REVOLUTION AND THE HISTORICAL SEMANTICS OF CELEBRITY

In his landmark cultural critique, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1962), historian Daniel Boorstin put forth the following, now-seminal description of celebrity:

*The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness.... He is neither good nor bad, great nor petty. He is the human pseudo-event. He has been fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness.... He is made by all of us who willingly read about him, who like to see him on television, who buy recordings of his voice, and talk about him to our friends. His relation to morality and even to reality is highly ambiguous. (57-58, emphasis in original)*

For Boorstin, the celebrities of mid-twentieth century America—singers, comedians, athletes, designers, politicians, movie stars—embodied the effects of what Boorstin called the “Graphic Revolution” of the mid-nineteenth century. From the mid-1830s onward, the mass (re)production and circulation of the printed image (and later, the moving image) radically altered the ways in which Americans saw themselves and the world around them—and not for the better (13-15). “Image-thinking,” Boorstin argued, had overtaken “ideal-thinking,” manufactured illusions or “pseudo-events” had eclipsed spontaneous “reality,” and the empty circularity of “the celebrity” had obscured the “solid virtues” of “real” heroes of past generations—people like “Moses, Ulysses, Aeneas, Jesus, Caesar, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Shakespeare, Washington, Napoleon,

and Lincoln.” (197-98, ix-x, 11, 49). In short, “big names” had replaced “big men” of “achievement” (61-62).

Since the original publication of *The Image* over fifty years ago, the definition of the celebrity as “a person who is known for his well-knownness” has itself become well-known—a slogan of sorts. Despite, or perhaps because of, his reactionary sentiment and moralizing tone (e.g., *The Image*’s sub-titling as a “guide”), Boorstin’s work has nevertheless defined the terms of debate for celebrity studies: to say that celebrities are “known for [their] well-knownness” is to say that they are “fabricated on purpose” and by extension, that they are hollow, potentially manipulative distractions undeserving of renown; that fame and heroism are “real” and substantive because they are rooted in masculine ideals of work, action and/or achievement (Brock 1-15);<sup>27</sup> that those who listen to, read about and watch for celebrities are passive (read “feminized”) consumers, “willingly” deluded by a cultural sham of their own making; that celebrities themselves are likewise feminized because they are put on display by others, rather than actively making or doing something worthy of being “known for” (Gever 70); that fame and heroism characterize an unspecified “golden age” of deserved adulation long-since overrun by the emergence of celebrity (Braudy *Frenzy* 8-9); that celebrity is transient, aligned with contemporaneity, while fame and heroism are enduring, aligned with history (Marshall 4-6); and,

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<sup>27</sup> Scholars have since responded to Boorstin’s gendered rhetoric that pits masculine “fame” against feminized “celebrity.” According to Claire Brock, since antiquity, fame has been taken for granted as a heterosexual, masculine phenomenon that depends on the posthumous celebration of the hero. By contrast, self-display, advertising and the mass-circulation of periodicals were deemed “feminine”—an unfit venue for determining “real” masculine fame, literary or otherwise. For more on the “feminization of fame,” see Brock 1-15 and Gever 70. On fame and masculinity in antiquity, see Braudy *Frenzy* 55-106.

that the more celebrity one has, the less likely he/she is to be truly “great” (Gabler “Toward” 2, Boorstin 76).<sup>28</sup>

Though Boorstin’s position has been (rightfully) criticized over the years, his indictment of celebrity has actually helped frame the work of celebrity studies, generating lines of inquiry with which scholars continue to contend: How is celebrity constructed, circulated and consumed and by whom? How do changes in media affect or alter the relation between the well-known individual and his/her largely unknown audience? To what degree do celebrities construct, reflect and/or challenge the values of a particular public? How do we understand the political, ideological and/or economic apparatus of celebrity? And what are the effects of celebrity? The issue at stake now is less about what celebrities are “*known for*” and more about how celebration functions as a highly contested, culturally significant meaning-making practice.

Beginning any analysis of Victorian literary celebrity demands that we resituate Boorstin’s polemic within the much broader semantic trajectory of the word “celebrity” itself, and that we engage with his claim that the Graphic Revolution is inextricably tied to celebrity culture. This chapter begins the complicated work of investigating how and what *celebrity* has come to mean, how its meaning(s) have been constructed, developed and shifted over time. My purpose is to trace a) those threads of meaning in *celebrity* that presage Boorstin’s mid-century

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<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, I am using Boorstin here to represent a much broader, more complicated conversation about mass culture including, among others, Frankfurt School theorists such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Leo Lowenthal, and twentieth-century American critics such as C. Wright Mills, Neil Postman, Richard Schickel, Neal Gabler, and more recently, Chris Hedges. To what degree the “masses” are to blame for their own participation in the “culture industry” seems a key point of distinction; however, art historian W.J.T. Mitchell has argued convincingly that both the right *and* the left are themselves ideological insofar as they efface their own iconoclasm: for critics like Boorstin, celebrity—and the mass media infrastructure on which it depends—are always already suspect *because they are visual*. For more on this iconoclasm, see Mitchell *Picture Theory* 11-83 and *Iconology* 160-208.



indictment and b) those complexities of meaning that have been obfuscated by it. On the one hand, some Victorians were no doubt suspicious of celebrity as lacking substance, especially given its relation to the Graphic Revolution, consumerism, and promotional culture. Seen in this way, one might say that the Boorstinian conception of celebrity is, for better or worse, a distillation of Victorian concerns about renown in the age of the printed image. On the other hand, Boorstin's implication that celebrity culture and "image thinking" metastasized to an otherwise pure literary culture of "ideal thinking" does not entirely hold up given a closer examination of *celebrity's* actual usage in the nineteenth century. In fact, the term "literary celebrity" was one of the earliest formations of the term, and was used with largely positive connotations. Put simply, while Boorstin's work has many limitations, he gets one thing right: the material transformations of the Graphic Revolution *are* tied directly to the emergence of celebrity culture—but in more complex ways than he imagined.

I begin by briefly introducing a methodology for a historical semantic analysis, and continue with a review of previous "keywords" entries for the word *celebrity*. Next, I sketch some of the technological advances crucial to the Graphic Revolution as it relates to celebrity culture. Finally, I examine the degree to which *celebrity* is used in the contexts of visibility and intimacy, asking a key question: if celebrity is a mode of celebration necessarily oriented more towards visual media rather than (or in addition to) textual and audial media, then how can we make sense of what happens when a figure of the word—an author—becomes also a figure of the image—a celebrity? Embedded within Victorian discussions about the Graphic Revolution and celebrity are questions about public intimacy: to what degree can the printed image act as a conduit for more intimate access to the literary celebrity? What does the printed image obscure or misrepresent about the celebrity? And how much exposure, how much intimacy is too much?

*Celebrity* is, to use Raymond Williams' term, a "keyword"—a commonly used word in which "deep conflicts of value and belief" are embedded and through which scholars can engage in "analysis of different social values and conceptual systems," both past and present.<sup>29</sup> For Williams, a keyword does not simply "reflect" tensions between past and present values. Rather, he argues that "important social and historical processes occur *within* language, in ways that indicate how integral the problems of meanings and of relationships really are" (*Keywords* 23, emphasis in original). A keyword analysis considers the semantic development of a word over time as well as the "contested" and "controversial"—even contradictory—meanings within its present usage. Such an analysis accounts for the etymologies of a word as well as the "particular and relational" meanings the word as it has used by "different *actual speakers and writers*...in and through historical time" (*Keywords* 23, emphasis mine). In this way, keywords are difficult both because of "historical changes of meaning," and because of their polysemy or vagueness in current usage—that is, a keyword "has multiple, concurrent senses which are historically and semantically related or it under-specifies what it denotes to such an extent that its use calls for narrowing or modulation in different contexts." Usages with a "derogatory implication" (e.g., Boorstin's use of "celebrity") are particularly important to Williams, as they capture moments of semantic contestation, moments of meaning in the making ("What is a 'Keyword'?"). Boorstin's "known for well-knownness" definition is significant, then, not because it marks the first derogatory usage of *celebrity* (it doesn't) but because it exemplifies the complexities and

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<sup>29</sup> The *Keywords Project* usefully defines a keyword as "a socially prominent word (e.g., art, industry, media or society) that is capable of bearing a cluster of interlocking, yet sometimes contradictory contemporary meanings." The editors go on to name five typical criteria for a keyword: the word must be "currently used," "polysemous," "categorical" (that is, a word that "lexicalizes...social practices, beliefs, value systems, and preferences" rather than concrete people, places or things), "actively contested," and finally, "part of a cluster of interrelated words which typically co-occur." For more, see "What is a 'Keyword'?"

controversies of *celebrity* as it came to mean in the nineteenth century. In other words, Boorstin's definition marks a kind of culmination rather than a point of origin.

Though not included in Williams' editions of *Keywords* (1976/1983), *celebrity* has since been included in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2005) as well as in the *Keywords Project* online—an ongoing collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh and Jesus College, Cambridge to update and expand Williams' vocabulary.<sup>30</sup> In his entry for the *Keywords Project*, Colin MacCabe offers the most nuanced entry for *celebrity* to date. The word *celebrity*, he suggests, emerges in English in the early-seventeenth century from the Latin *celebretatem*, meaning “famous” and/or “thronged” (Marshall 27; Boorstin 57). For roughly two centuries, *celebrity* maintained these two adjacent branches of meaning: the dominant sense of *celebrity* derived from its root in “thronged” and referred to “due observance of rites and ceremony; pomp, solemnity” or “a solemn rite or ceremony; celebration,” especially with religious connotations; the subordinate sense derived from its root in “famous” and referred to “the condition of being much extolled or talked about; famousness, notoriety” (“Celebrity,” def. 1-3).<sup>31</sup> By the late-eighteenth century, however, the subordinate sense had overtaken the dominant sense, rendering the former obsolete in nineteenth-century usage (MacCabe).

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<sup>30</sup>Both Graeme Turner's entry in *New Keywords* and Colin MacCabe's entry in the *Keywords Project* use the *Oxford English Dictionary* as their point of departure. The *OED*, however, chooses representative or illustrative usages to fit existing definitions, rather than deriving definitions from the usage itself, as the *Oxford Dictionary of English* does. For more on the methodological differences, see Pearsall viii-ix.

<sup>31</sup> As MacCabe points out, these two branches of meaning seem obliquely related: the “throng” of people gathered to solemnly celebrate have a link to the “masses” often associated with celebrity, and the religious contexts for these gatherings may have a link to our contemporary understanding of celebrity as the desire to “find the sacred in the profane.” For more, see MacCabe's entry for “celebrity” in the *Keywords Project*.

As MacCabe rightly points out, the reference to both “famousness” and “notoriety” in the subordinate-cum-dominant definition of *celebrity* is significant. “*Celebrity* is a double-edged term,” he writes, “giving with one hand (well-known) and taking away with the other (for specious reasons).” Though both “famousness” and “notoriety” share roots in neutral action—talking about, reporting, making widely known—fame leans toward positive, and notoriety toward negative, connotations. *Fame*, from the Latin *fama*, meaning “to report,” is defined first neutrally—as “that which people say or tell; public report; common talk”—and then positively—as “the condition of being much talked about. Chiefly in good sense: reputation derived from great achievements; celebrity, honour, renown” (“Fame,” def. 1a, 3a). Conversely, *notoriety*, from the Latin *notorietas*, meaning “state or condition of being well-known”, is defined both as “a notorious or well-known thing, event, act, etc.” (“Notoriety,” def. 2) and as “the condition or state of being notorious; the fact of being famous or well-known, esp. for some reprehensible action, quality, etc.” (“Notoriety,” def. 1).

Celebrity studies scholars agree that sometime during the late-1830s, *celebrity* undergoes its most recent, and perhaps most crucial, semantic change: its emergence as a concrete noun, indicating both innateness and possession. One could always *have* celebrity, but by the mid-nineteenth century, one could *be* a celebrity. A search for the term “celebrities” in two digitized collections of British periodicals (*British Periodicals’* Collection I and *Nineteenth-Century UK Periodicals’* “New Readerships” Collection) and in Google’s “Ngram Viewer” (a resource searching GoogleBooks’ corpus of texts) confirms a steep increase in the concrete usage from the late-1830s to early-1840s onward.<sup>32</sup> In Collection I of the *British Periodicals*, for instance, only 22 instances of the word appeared from 1830-1839 compared with 117 instances between

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<sup>32</sup> For a fuller explanation of the methodology of Google’s Ngram viewer, see Michel 176-182.

1840-1849. Despite such a significant semantic change, MacCabe's entry for the *Keywords Project* seems to downplay the importance of the celebrity-as-individual usage from the 1840s to the early-twentieth century. "It might be possible," he writes, "to argue that celebrity in a modern sense is not a feature of the nineteenth century but of the twentieth century, since the most famous celebrities are Hollywood film stars."

In *New Keywords*, Graeme Turner takes a similar position, suggesting that celebrity culture as we understand it derives not from the mid-nineteenth century but from early-twentieth century, specifically from the Hollywood star system. Turner's entry is worth quoting at length. He writes:

For most of the twentieth century, they [celebrities] were more likely to be referred to as stars. *That term [stars] was to some extent displaced by the sheer scale of the proliferation of fame in the 1980s and 1990s.* Prior to this, the movie star and the sports star were the primary object of media and public attention... The movie actor or the athlete became a star through a series of achievements—*the accretion of associations built up in an exchange with their audiences over repeated performances.... The shift from the star to the celebrity* involves the shedding of much of that significance. Where the star developed their meanings over time, the celebrity erupts into prominence and may disappear just as quickly. (27-28, emphases mine)

Both MacCabe and Turner are right to suggest that the word *star* occupies an important position within the semantic cluster that evolves alongside and in connection with *celebrity*. But it is a misstep, I think, to construct a lineage in which celebrity actually *post*-dates the stardom of the early- to mid-twentieth century.

Turner's formulation is particularly misleading. He posits that a "shift" from *star* to *celebrity* occurred in the mid- to late-twentieth century, very nearly "displac[ing]" the word *star* altogether. (On several occasions, for instance, he refers to "the star" in the past tense.) This supposed "shift" becomes even more problematic given the unconvincing distinctions Turner makes between *star* and *celebrity* in the first place: echoing Boorstin, he argues that stars "had an appropriateness" to society and a "certain authenticity" rooted in "a series of achievements" which late-twentieth-century celebrities lack. Defining celebrity in this way—as an absence, as a "shedding of...significance"—reveals little about what celebrity actually *is*, how it works, and what it means as a cultural phenomenon. But celebrity is actually the opposite of vacuity or circularity: it overflows with the competing, contradictory meanings of fame, notoriety, stardom and heroism. By jumping from the emergence of the celebrity-as-individual usage in the late-1840s to the prominence of *star* in the early- to mid-twentieth century, Turner obscures a key part of *celebrity*'s semantic history and by extension, a formative moment in the history of modern celebrity culture itself—the Graphic Revolution.

### **Sketching the Graphic Revolution**

From a contemporary perspective, it could be easy to take for granted that celebrities are seen as much as, if not more than, they are talked or written about. Before the mid-1830s, the majority of Britons had comparably limited "visual access" to representations of well-known writers (Braudy *Frenzy* 279; Anderson 19-20). Over the next seventy years, however, Britons witnessed what Boorstin calls the "Graphic Revolution"—the "great, but little-noticed" technological revolution that enabled man "to make, preserve, transmit, disseminate precise

images” (14). For Boorstin, this increased capacity to reproduce images confused rather than clarified the world:

While that Revolution has multiplied and vivified our images of the world, it has by no means generally sharpened or clarified the visible outlines of the world which fill our experience. Quite the contrary. By a diabolical irony the very facsimilies of the world which we make on purpose to bring it within our grasp, to make it less elusive, have transported us into a new world of blurs. By sharpening our images we have blurred all our experience. The new images have blurred traditional distinctions. (213)

“Diabolical irony” aside, Boorstin is right to acknowledge that the image “blurred traditional distinctions”—most notably between existing conventions of fame and emerging conceptions of celebrity. It is no surprise, then, that the concretization of the word *celebrity* coincides historically with the material transformations of the Graphic Revolution: *celebrity* is concretized precisely because well-known individuals could be seen in concrete ways—as actual, living people.

Victorian audiences became visually acquainted with authors through new media and in varied contexts: in illustrated periodicals as well as in memorial sculptures; in advertisements as well as in portrait galleries; in frontispieces as well as in photo albums.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to the application of Thomas Bewick’s process of wood engraving in the early-1830s, well-known individuals, including authors, became visible in the emerging periodical press of the Victorian

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<sup>33</sup> Detailing both the technological and social history of printed images in the Victorian era—not to mention the emergence and development of photographic technologies—is well-documented by numerous other scholars. For further reading, on Victorian print culture and illustration see Mayol 636-707, Brake and Demoor *Lure* 1-17, Maidment *Reading* 1-27, and Thomas 1-21. On photography, see Newhall 1-65, Jussim 1-42, and Frizot 33-83. For work on Victorian conceptions of vision, see Flint *Victorians* 1-40, Otter 1-21 and Crary 1-25.

era.<sup>34</sup> Decades before photography became a commercially viable mass medium, weekly publications such as Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine* utilized woodblocks to print high-quality images alongside movable type. Wood engraving sped production and decreased cost because it was cheaper to engrave on wood than on steel or copper, and because it was in relief, so it could be printed at the same time as text. Steel and copper engravings, on the other hand, were intaglio processes and therefore had to be printed separately from accompanying type.<sup>35</sup> Further, to prevent the degradation of the wood engraving, Knight employed the use of plaster stereotypes from which near-endless reproductions could be printed. By 1833, the techniques of wood engraving and stereotyping, coupled with the increased speed of a steam printing press, enabled the *Penny Magazine* to print roughly 200,000 copies per issue, and sell those copies at a lower price than any previous illustrated publication (Mayol 638; Jackson 279; Anderson 50-84). Chief among the images included in the magazine were portraits of "exemplary individuals"—a testament to Knight's didactic belief that bringing art to the masses would provide a moral education and a spur to self-improvement (Anderson 57).

Though the *Penny Magazine* folded in 1845, the mid-nineteenth century marked a sharp increase in the production of printed material across the board, especially illustrated periodicals. The repeal of the Advertising Tax in 1853, followed quickly by the elimination of the Stamp Act

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<sup>34</sup> Though often used interchangeably, for clarification on the distinction between the terms "woodcut" and "wood engraving," see Griffiths 135 and Ashwin 362. I use the term "wood engraving" here to refer to Thomas Bewick's process of using end-grain boxwood and a burin to produce a relief print. "Engraving" is somewhat of a misnomer; wood engraving was not an intaglio process like steel or copper engraving, but called such because the process required the use of an engraver's tool—the burin.

<sup>35</sup> For a thorough description of how wood engraving was used in illustrated periodicals, see Jackson 314-321. On the significance of creating stereotypes to extend the life of wood engravings, see Ashwin 362.



in 1855 and paper duty in 1860—as well as the shift to esparto paper in 1860 and then to wood pulp paper in 1880—all helped bring the overall cost of printed material down. As a result of these two factors, the rise in newspaper production alone rose 600% between 1856 and 1881. Further, the technological advances in printing increased the rate of production from 4,000 sheets an hour in 1827 to 20,000 sheets an hour in 1857 (Williams *Long* 190-192).<sup>36</sup> These factors, along with the wood engraving and stereotyping techniques pioneered by the *Penny Magazine*, greatly expanded the average Briton’s “popular pictorial experience” (Anderson 16). According to an anonymous contributor to *Chambers’s Journal*, by 1888, “the practice of giving ‘portraits,’ of eminent men in newspapers” had become so ubiquitous that “one [could] hardly pick up a copy of any provincial journal without seeing one or two specimens of this kind of illustration” (“Pictures of the Imagination” 32).

Not only were there substantially *more* images in periodicals, but there was also a much wider *range* of images, varying in content, quality and style. More expensive weekly newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News* and its later rival, the *Graphic*, both sold at sixpence a copy and aimed to provide high-quality pictures that rendered notable public events and people with “naturalistic precision” (Jackson 296-300; Clarke 247; Ashwin 364). Cheaper newspapers like the *Penny Illustrated Paper* and the *Illustrated Police News*, founded in the early 1860s, catered to a “much lower level” of readership interested in “crime, disasters and violent death,” and

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<sup>36</sup> Williams notes that the rising volume of production was sustained largely because the increasing incomes of both the “middle and lower middle classes,” coupled with labor reforms, gave the population more disposable income and more leisure time for things like reading. It is worth pointing out, then, that all the publications discussed here were issued every Saturday. Williams also highlights the significance of the railway system in providing the infrastructure necessary for increased distribution of printed material to rural areas. For more on this, see Williams *Long* 189-193.

sacrificed quality for cost and accuracy for sensational appeal (Clarke 247-250). Alongside these more news-oriented publications arose a “second generation” of penny illustrated magazines which used the same printing techniques as Knight’s *Penny Magazine* but with less lofty, more commercial goals (Anderson 84, 94). The *London Journal*, *Reynold’s Miscellany* and *Cassell’s Illustrated Family Paper* focused less on the high-quality reproduction of fine art or the accurate portrayal of weekly news, and more on churning out eye-catching illustrations to accompany light serial fiction—illustrations which often took prominent positions on the front page (Anderson 84-85, 101-102). Not to be forgotten, comic illustrated publications, most notably, *Punch*, used wood engraving to satirize and caricature the events and people of the day. Beyond *Punch*, a whole host of other cheap, illustrated magazines followed suit—*Fun*, *Judy*, *Moonshine*—prioritizing cartoons over naturalistic representations of real-life events or people. Features across this wide array of weekly newspapers, magazines, and humorous publications helped make celebrities and celebrity authors a staple of the Victorian reader’s “pictorial world” (Anderson 17).<sup>37</sup>

Alongside portraits and cartoons in illustrated periodicals, two key advancements in photographic technology helped make celebrity authors even more visible in the second half of the century: the invention of the so-called “wet plate” negative process and the application of stereoscopic principles. Though “daguerrotypomania” swept across France and the United States in the 1840s, Louis Daguerre’s method produced a unique image, photo-chemically developed directly onto a metal plate, making the image difficult and expensive to duplicate at a guinea an

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<sup>37</sup> The frequency of the publication (e.g., monthly, weekly or daily) generally determined the kind of illustrations it included. Sunday features and monthly magazines, for example, did not need to be printed as furiously as daily editions and therefore included more, higher-quality illustrations.

image (Linkman 22-26).<sup>38</sup> In 1851, however, Frederick Scott Archer introduced the wet plate negative process: by coating the photographic plate with collodion—a wet mixture of light-sensitive chemicals—photographers could produce images that exceeded the detail of the daguerreotype and reduced the exposure time to mere seconds. As exposure times declined, so did the degree of rigid formality in portraits, as sitters were no longer required to hold an uncomfortable pose for a minute at a time. Most importantly, rather than developing a single, positive image on metal, Archer’s process produced an original negative from which the photographer could generate a seemingly infinite number of positive reproductions (61).<sup>39</sup> The creation of a negative, combined with Louis Blanchard-Evrard’s invention of albumen-coated paper in 1850, meant that paper positives could be printed cheaply and quickly without quality loss. Art historian Audrey Linkman estimates that within six years of Archer’s innovation and the introduction of albumen paper, the number of commercial photographers in Britain grew by over a thousand percent, from about twelve in 1851 to 155 in 1857 (28).

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<sup>38</sup> Though a single daguerreotype could not be reproduced on a mass scale, engravings, etchings and woodcuts of daguerreotypes—and later, of albumen prints—appeared in illustrated periodicals. For instance, a photograph of Tennyson taken by J. E. Mayall (c. 1856) was engraved, if crudely, for the *National Magazine* in November of the same year. Likewise, an 1864 portrait taken by William Jeffrey appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on February 13, 1864. For more, see Ormond *Early* 454-55. For a discussion of how “daguerrotypemania” bottlenecked somewhat in Britain due to Robert Beard’s patent monopoly, see Linkman 24-26.

<sup>39</sup> When Archer’s method was introduced, William Henry Fox Talbot filed a lawsuit against him, claiming that his own existing patent on calotypy included the process of printing positive images from a single negative. Ultimately, in 1855, the courts ruled in favor of Archer, who had not patented the wet plate process. For more on this patent dispute and its relation to the growth of photography in Britain, see Linkman 28-31 and 60-61.

As the number of photographers increased in Britain, so too did the number of photographs these new practitioners could print quickly and cheaply.<sup>40</sup> Capitalizing on the principles of Sir William Brewster's lenticular telescope and the incredible popularity of stereocards in mid-century Britain, Frenchman Andrew Adolphe Eugene Disderi patented a technique that enabled photographers to expose more than one negative per plate.<sup>41</sup> By mounting four lenses on a camera instead of one, photographers could expose eight smaller negatives on a standard-sized plate instead of generating one, larger negative (Linkman 61). Disderi's application of stereoscopic technology helped spark the *carte-de-visite* "craze" or "cartomania" that swept across France and Britain in the early-1860s: using his method, a single negative yielded eight tiny prints per page, each roughly two by three inches in size. Once cut apart, each portrait was mounted onto cardstock, which often doubled as an advertisement for the photographer or photographic studio. Not surprisingly, celebrities became prime subject matter for *cartes-de-visite* almost immediately. "Published in the thousands," celebrity *cartes* "could be purchased individually from a wide range of outlets including print shops, stationers, booksellers, fancy goods and novelty emporia, and even from vendors in the street." Priced at roughly a shilling each, *cartes-de-visite* proved massively profitable because their cost was so

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<sup>40</sup> For more on how these photographs were engraved for book collections and its relation taxonomies of fame in Victorian Britain, see Prescott 28-71.

<sup>41</sup> Based on the premise of binocular vision, this hand-held device used dual lenses to reconcile a pair of images into a single, three-dimensional image. In their earliest iterations, stereographs, or "stereocards," simply depicted two identical line drawings on paper. However, Linkman records that less than four years after the establishment of the London Stereoscopic Company in 1854, the company housed over 100,000 card negatives and nearly 500,000 stereoscopes had been sold. Anticipating the widespread enthusiasm for cheap photographic portraits, the London Stereoscopic Company changed its official title in May 1856 to the London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company. For more on stereoscopic technology and the popularity of stereocards, see Linkman 64-5.

low and their sales so high. For instance, J. E. Mayall published his “Royal Album” containing fourteen cartes depicting members of the Royal family, including Queen Victoria herself. Seen as a kind of royal endorsement, Mayall’s images sold in staggering numbers: according to Linkman, “In the years between 1860 and 1862, some three to four million cartes were sold of Victoria alone, and over two million copies of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra following their marriage in 1863” (Linkman 65-67, Darrah 4-7). Alongside royalty, celebrity authors such as Charles Dickens, William Thackeray and Anthony Trollope dominated the market, so sought-after they were deemed “sure-cards” in the trade (Wynter 135).<sup>42</sup>

Though cartes-de-visite had fallen out of fashion by the 1880s, the stage had been set for the marriage of these two, towering developments in the Graphic Revolution. With the introduction of halftone block printing and photogravure in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, photojournalism became the new standard in both Britain and the United States. In 1897 the New York *Tribune* became first newspaper to use the halftone printing process to reproduce a photograph in a daily newspaper (Taft 446). Though it would be nearly seven years before a British publication, the *Daily Mirror*, included photographs, the combination of the pictorial press and photography (including Kodak’s introduction of the first personal-use camera) established the infrastructure for celebrity in the twentieth century (Clarke 250).

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<sup>42</sup> In addition to the rise of photography and the pictorial press, the mid- to late-nineteenth century also witnessed an important development in promotional culture—the use of images in advertisements. By the end of the nineteenth century, the style of magazine advertising had changed from the largely textual “classified” to illustrated and graphic forms akin to that of posters. Most notably, the 1887 Christmas issue of the *Illustrated London News* included a color advertisement for Pear’s soap using Sir John Millais’ painting, “Bubbles” (1885).

## Public Intimacy and the Trouble with Seeing Literary Celebrities

Celebrity's emergence in the nineteenth century tracked and was tracked by these technological and commercial advancements of the Graphic Revolution—this much is evident. Less obvious, however, is the central role authors played in both the Graphic Revolution and *celebrity's* semantic history. In the inaugural issue of *Celebrity Studies* (2010), the first interdisciplinary journal devoted to research on celebrity, Graeme Turner contends that literary scholars have “virtually no theoretical interest in, or any methodological approaches appropriate to, the analysis of popular culture.” He goes on to claim that increased interest in celebrity studies is a case of academic “bandwagoning.” The study of literary celebrity, as he sees it, is largely a “side-show” to the “heart” of celebrity studies research taking place in communications departments (“Approaching” 13-14). Viewed in the context of *celebrity's* semantic history, however, Turner's position seems somewhat ironic: when *celebrity* took on its meaning as concrete noun in the 1840s, one of its earliest and most common usages referred specifically to *literary celebrities*. In his own *New Keywords* entry, Turner defines *celebrity* through a process of negation, as a catchall term to denote individuals who are not famous and not “stars.” In doing so, he not only expunges the literary from *celebrity's* semantic history, he also minimizes how *celebrity* has come to mean in such complex ways.

To begin, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the following quotation from Charles Maurice Davies's collection, *Unorthodox London* (1873), as one instance of “celebrity” used in the concrete sense: “Thronged with the spiritual celebrities of London” (“Celebrity,” def. 4). A regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph* on matters of religion, Davies recounts his experience attending a lecture—a lecture that he expected to be “thronged” by many well-known religious

figures of the day. Upon arrival, however, Davies admits that although he had "got to know them [spiritual celebrities] pretty well by sight," he was amazed when he "did not recognize one" in person (Davies 168).<sup>43</sup>

Davies' sentence provides a useful starting point for a discussion of the phrase "literary celebrities" because it captures an important trend in the concrete usage of *celebrity* more broadly. *Celebrities* is used in conjunction with an accompanying adjective as much, if not more than, it is used on its own. The adjectives describe what the celebrity is "known for," to use Boorstin's phrase, where he/she is from, when he/she is celebrated and to what degree he/she is renowned. To use the language of the *Keywords Project*, we could say that the concrete usage of *celebrities*, "under-specifies what it denotes to such an extent that its use calls for narrowing or modulation in different contexts." This seems to be precisely what happens in the case of the formation "literary celebrities." More broadly, Victorians almost always designated their celebrities by kind, locality, or degree, which is not so surprising given the Victorians' penchant for taxonomy. For a point of comparison, consider usages of *fame* during the same period: while *fame* is occasionally used with adjectival modifiers (e.g., someone may be "of sporting fame;" a writer may yearn for "literary fame"), on the whole, *fame* and *famous* appear in generalized or universalized terms. The "great" or "famous" man joins the ranks of other "great" or "famous" men in a pantheon that cuts across time and place, across different fields of production, action or achievement.

In George Wilman's short biographical collection, *Sketches of Living Celebrities* (1882), celebrities are divided into four sub-categories with respect to type of work, or, to borrow Pierre

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<sup>43</sup> The *OED* may be misquoting Davies slightly here, as in the 1874 printing of *Unorthodox London*, Davies actually writes "spiritualistic"—rather than "spiritual"—celebrities.

Bourdieu's phrase, with respect to their "field of cultural production"—"Our Living Actors," "Our Living Authors," "Our Living Dramatists," and "Our Living Artists" (v-vi). (Among those included are Henry Irving, Wilkie Collins, W. S. Gilbert, and John Everett Millais.) Descriptors indicating what the celebrity is "known for" as well as where he/she is from and to what degree he/she is celebrated appear early on in celebrity's semantic history and extend throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest usages of this kind are generally neutral or positive and can be divided roughly into four categories—sporting celebrity, theatrical celebrity, and, most importantly for my purposes, literary celebrity. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, for instance, *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (one of the first and most successful sporting journals of the period) refers repeatedly to "chess celebrities," "cricketing celebrities," "turf celebrities," and even "canine celebrities"—indicating the prized dogs of shows and local dog clubs ("The Game of Chess" 1, "Lord's Ground" 6, "The Turf" 4, "Canine" 7). Significantly, one 1850 reference to "chess celebrities" includes a note alerting correspondents to an "excellent print" of the "chess phenomenon, M. Harrwitz, lithographed with much ability" available for purchase at Ries's Grand Cigar Divan for a "little half-crown" ("The Game of Chess" 5). The phrase "theatrical celebrities" likewise appears in the British periodicals by mid-century. In an article from *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, the writer reports on a recent fundraiser for Drury Lane Theatre, noting that the attendees were "numerous and included several theatrical celebrities" ("The Recent Gold Dust Robbery"). Even as the word "star" becomes more prominent later in the century, use of the phrase "theatrical celebrities" persisted, as evidenced by *The Era's* column, "Letters of Theatrical Celebrities," running from June 1877 to October 1880 ("Letters of Theatrical Celebrities").



At least as common as these pairings, if not more so, is the term "literary celebrities." Though some might argue that the study of literary celebrity in the nineteenth century is anachronistic, my usage research demonstrates clearly that *literary* celebrity was, in fact, a phenomenon in the Victorian era—perhaps even more so than in the twenty-first century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does include an addition to the entry on celebrity—"celebrity novelist." The "celebrity novelist" is both "(a) famous public figure who publishes a novel, esp. one expected to sell on the strength of his or her celebrity" and "(b) a novelist who has become a celebrated public figure" ("Celebrity," def. C3). Unfortunately, the *Oxford English Dictionary* only dates this usage only to 1986. The phrase "literary celebrity" might be rare in common usage today, but the twentieth-century phrase "celebrity novelist" is surely indebted to this nineteenth-century phenomenon.

Literary production and celebrity status were coupled together as early as 1839, but by mid-century, the link was nearly ubiquitous. ("An Autobiography of the Medical Adviser"). In 1857, for example, *The Lady's Newspaper* reports on William Howard Russell's Crimean War lectures, stating that the audience included "nearly all the literary celebrities who figure in the London world" ("Mr. W. Russell's Lectures" 311). (Russell himself gained considerable celebrity as a foreign correspondent for *The Times*.) In the same year, the London correspondent for the Scottish newspaper, the *Inverness Courier*, contributed a short column titled, "London and Literary Celebrities" in which he discusses briefly Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and again, William Russell, as it was rumored he would soon be dispatched to report on conflicts in India. (He was.) By 1864, the *Penny Illustrated Paper* included a multi-page, fully-illustrated feature on "American Literary Celebrities." In this case, use of "celebrities" seems to reinforce traditional conceptions of literary fame: it only depicts figures such as

William Cullen Bryant, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and Bayard Taylor in carefully framed three-quarter length busts, but also includes a spring of bay laurel figuring prominently in the center of the portraits. Additionally, as in classical paintings of famous authors, the illustration incorporates both a lyre and an open book, indicating that the group of “American Literary Celebrities” includes poets as well as fiction and non-fiction writers. It is important to note, however, that literary celebrities, whether British or American, were as popular (if not more so) than their theatrical, artistic, scientific and sporting counterparts. Significantly, the only image included in Wilman's *Sketches of Living Celebrities* is the frontispiece, not of Wilman himself, but of novelist Wilkie Collins.

As the century progressed, however, the abundance of different spheres in which one might attain celebrity becomes a topic of ridicule. For the Victorians, the issue was less that celebrities were “known for well-knownness”—although this was a concern—and more that celebrity itself had been diluted because practically anyone in practically any field could garner recognition. The power of celebrity, in other words, presented the Victorians with another critical problem: if anyone can become a celebrity, how can one determine who is actually worthy of celebration? For instance, compare the use of the phrase “canine celebrities” from *Bell's* in 1851 to the *Daily News's* coverage of a gallery opening featuring portraits of "canine celebrities" in 1897. In *Bell's*, the usage is largely neutral, if not positive-leaning—it refers to actual, prize-winning dogs. The *Daily News* piece, however, harbors a much more critical connotation. Though the writer praises the artist, Maud Earl, and her works (Earl is best known for her painting of Queen Victoria's white collie, “Snowball”), he begins the piece with a note of sarcasm: "It is an old saying," he writes, "that every dog has its day, and in these times of glorification for even the Dicks, Toms, and Harrys of humanity it would be hard indeed if the

dogs did not share in the universal fashion of hero worship" ("Some Canine Celebrities"). It would seem that by the close of the nineteenth century, many Victorians were resigned to the idea that anyone and everyone could become well-known—the Dicks, the Toms, the Harrys and their dogs.

Nowhere is the censure of celebrity more prominent than in *Moonshine*'s cartoon series, "Days with Celebrities." Begun in 1879, the founding editor of the illustrated weekly, Charles Harrison, fancied that the conservative, comic paper would eventually match the success of *Punch* (Brake and Demoor *Dictionary* 425). The "Days with Celebrities" series ran from June 1881 until December 1897, producing 562 full-page cartoons each of which depicted a day in the life of the subject. From 1886 onward, the features were elaborately illustrated by Alfred Bryan (most famous for his contributions to the theatrical paper, *The Entr'acte*), and very nearly matched the wit of *Punch*'s satirical social commentary. Though the far too numerous for a complete treatment here, the vast array of "celebrities" lampooned in the series includes Lord Alfred Tennyson, John Ruskin, Charles Darwin, William Gladstone, Bernard Shaw, Dion Boucicault—even the Royal Family. What makes the *Moonshine* series so significant, however, is that such famous figures appear alongside other "celebrities" of the day—"The Cook," "The Family Doctor," "The Donkey," "The Postman," "Jumbo," "The Daily Paper," "The Booby," and, my personal favorite, "The Christmas Pudding."

The most telling of all the series is the cartoon for January 24, 1885: "A Celebrity" (see figure 1). Subverting the expectations of seeing a celebrity in an illustrated periodical feature, *Moonshine*'s cartoon leaves the face of "a celebrity" blank. By the 1880s, being a "A Celebrity" does not mean being a unique or worthy individual, but a faceless, generic amalgamation of typical "celebrity" activities—attending "first nights," meeting "His Royal Highness," having



DAYS WITH CELEBRITIES (188).  
"A CELEBRITY."

Figure 1. "Days with Celebrities—A Celebrity (188)," Moonshine 24 Jan. 1885: 37.

one's "portrait in the shop windows," and so on. Though there seems to be a necessity for class position and enough money for cape, white tie, tails and top hat, not to mention for being male, *Moonshine* suggests that celebrity itself has become a generic type. He is recognized not because his face is unique but because he does the things that celebrities are expected to do. In other words, he ticks all the boxes of the newly minted celebrity genre. Presaging Boorstin's critique of celebrity over seventy years later, the moon in the bottom right corner of the illustration quips: "Moonshine would like to know who some of these celebrities are though!" The joke here seems multivalent: on the one hand, "Moonshine" can no longer keep track of what each celebrity is "known for," because anyone and everyone can become "a celebrity"; and on the other, that the generic celebrity of the day is not "known for" anything extraordinary at all. While our contemporary understanding of celebrity is almost entirely focused on individuality, the faceless figure at the center of this cartoon highlights just how generic celebrities can and could be, even in the 1880s. By casting anyone and everyone as celebrities—from the Poet Laureate to the Christmas pudding—*Moonshine* mocks the promiscuity with which celebrity status is conferred and minimizes the perceived significance of otherwise "great" figures.

As "A Celebrity" suggests, literary celebrity comes under particular scrutiny in the 1880s—according to the top left vignette, every celebrity "of course has written a book." An onlooker in the background whispers, "There goes \_\_\_\_\_ the celebrated author," to which his incredulous companion replies, "Author of what?" Being a renowned author had not only lost its exclusivity—the "fill-in-the-blank" indicates as much—but also its connection to the works themselves. One could become a literary celebrity simply because he or she *published* a book—any book—not because the book itself was of quality or even widely read. In other words, "A Celebrity" captures a growing ambivalence towards what the *OED* has more recently

dubbed the “celebrity novelist:” it does not indicate whether, on the one hand, the figure has become a celebrity *because* he has written a well-received book, or, on the other, the figure has written a book *because* he is already a celebrity. Given the tone of the cartoon, the latter seems more likely.<sup>44</sup> Whether or not *Moonshine*’s “celebrated author” deserved his literary fame is left intentionally ambiguous. What is certain, however, is that “A Celebrity” must be highly visible to his less-than-adoring crowd. In almost every vignette, “A Celebrity” is surrounded by onlookers: he is “seen sometimes in a private box” and “recognized by the pit”; his likeness appears “in the shop windows”; he is “a first-nighter,” gawked at by the crowds, and he “sups at Romano’s” while being gaped at by his waiter.

Looking back to MacCabe’s *Keywords Project* entry, it becomes clear that *celebrity* contains within it not only the twin connotations of famousness and notoriety, but also the dual inflections of sight and sound. The entries for “famous,” “celebrity” and “star” function as semantic nesting dolls with “famous” referenced in the definition for “celebrity,” and “celebrity” in the definition for both “star” and “stardom” (“Star,” def. 5a, “Stardom”). But fame and famous are always oriented toward orality, toward either the act of reporting, talking and gossiping or the condition of being reported, talked or gossiped about. *Star*, however, hinges on visual metaphor. The first figurative instance of “star” dates to 1824 and refers to “an actor, singer, etc. of exceptional celebrity, or one whose name is prominently advertised as a special attraction to the public” (“Star,” def. 5a). By 1829, the usage broadened somewhat, denoting “one who ‘shines’ in society, or is distinguished in some branch of art, industry, science, etc.” (“Star,” def. 5b). By the mid-1840s, “starring” is used as a verb, and by the mid-1860s, “stardom” is used to refer to

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<sup>44</sup> For an excellent representation of this phenomenon, see volume three of George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* 3: 95-96.

“the status of a celebrity or star performer in other spheres of activity.” Though “star” and “stardom” expanded to include even those celebrities *not* seen in live performance, each word continues to carry within it the context of seeing and being seen.

The *Historical Thesaurus* also semantically links “celebrity” and its cousin “star” to other commonly used words from the period, many of which have visual roots or connotations: “illustrious,” “luminary,” “lion,” and “éclat.” The noun “éclat,” for instance, comes into English in the mid-to late-seventeenth century by way of the Old French *esclater* (“to burst, burst out”). Though now an obscure, its earliest usage referred to “brilliance, radiance, dazzling effect” (“Éclat,” def. 1). By the mid-eighteenth century, éclat took on a different meaning—“‘lustre’ of reputation; social distinction, celebrity, renown”—that, again, figuratively yokes celebrity with visibility. But in the same way Boorstin disparages celebrity because of its relation to “image-thinking” in the twentieth-century, so too does éclat acquire the derogatory connotations of “‘false glitter’ or showy brilliance” in the nineteenth century (Boorstin 197; “Éclat,” def. 3a). Similarly, to call someone a “lion” or a “literary lion” in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain invoked the exotic, animal attractions of the Royal Menagerie, where crowds came specifically to *look at* the captive creatures.<sup>45</sup> (Indeed, many contemporary celebrities might liken their experience in the spotlight to being in a kind of zoo.) To be a celebrity in the Victorian era meant that one was known not only by name and narrative—that is, by being much talked or written about—but also by a highly recognizable image. And such visibility has been deeply entangled with questions of false value and power for well over two thousand years. In short,

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<sup>45</sup> For an excellent analysis of the “literary lion” in early-nineteenth century Britain, see Salmon’s “Physiognomy,” 60-79. For a more general history of the Royal Menagerie and the lions at the Tower of London, see Blunt 14-25.

public visibility is the hallmark of nineteenth-century celebrity culture, literary or otherwise—even if the celebrity on display is nothing more than a blank face.

But the stakes of being seen were and still are different for literary celebrities than for celebrities in other fields of cultural production: among other things, celebrity's requisite exposure clashes with masculine constructions of literary fame and high-brow conceptions literary production. Martha Gever, a scholar of gender and media studies, points out that since its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century, celebrity has been coded as feminine because of its entanglement with being seen in consumer culture and on stage, especially in melodrama.<sup>46</sup> Celebrities were seen as individuals who lacked both reason and authority over their public image, existing only as products to be passively consumed, rather than as active producers of their own identity.<sup>47</sup> Unlike theatrical or sporting celebrities whose renown necessarily depends on being seen, the celebrated author could, in theory, separate his visibility as a celebrity from the seriousness of his literature. But as *celebrity's* semantic history shows, it was not always so easy for literary celebrities to keep their heightened-visibility siloed from their literary production.

In July 1862, *Fun* magazine printed an illustration that encapsulates these tensions—“Lines by a Young Author, On Hearing that His Carte-de-Visite is ‘Out’” (see figure 2). The cartoon and its accompanying poem scrutinize the literary celebrity for his/her affiliation with

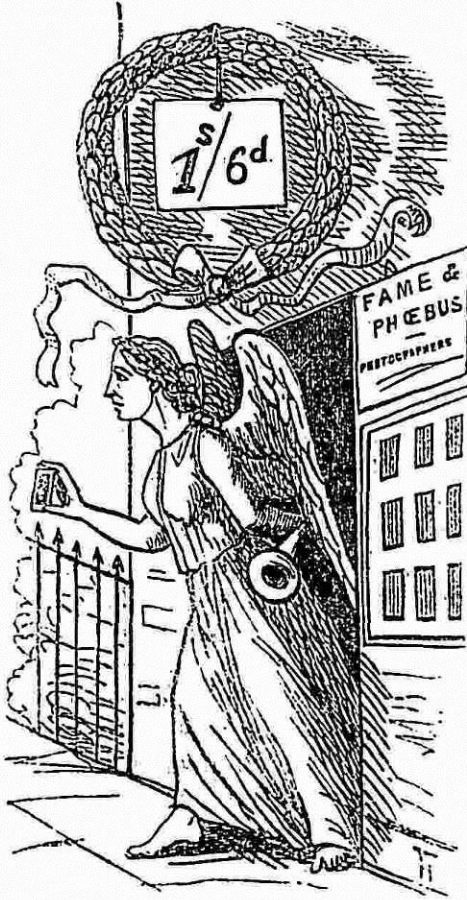
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<sup>46</sup> This trend of feminizing the image is of course not limited to celebrity alone. As art historian W.J.T. Mitchell reminds, the image has historically and theoretically been gendered as feminine, while the word has been gendered masculine. For more this relation between gender and genre, see *Iconology* 108-130 and feminist film critics such as Mulvey 6-18.

<sup>47</sup> For more on masculine conceptions of fame in antiquity, see Braudy *Frenzy* 125 and Brock 1-14. For more on literary celebrities' ostensible loss of masculine author-ity, see Loren Glass' reading of Norman Mailer's career 175-194.



LINES BY A YOUNG AUTHOR,  
ON HEARING THAT HIS CARTE DE VISITE IS "OUT."



H! mighty photographic Fame,  
With honour hast thou crowned my name :  
I hear my fortune with joy intense—  
My *carte* is published at eighteen-pence,—  
At eighteen-pence, at eighteen-pence ;  
You can purchase my *carte* for eighteen-pence.

Ho! TUPPER, for your laurels quake,  
Ho! SPURGEON, in your bluchers shake,  
My *carte*'s for sale, like yours, from hence,  
I'm considered, like you, worth eighteen-pence,—  
Worth eighteen-pence, yes, eighteen-pence ;  
You can purchase my *carte* for eighteen-pence.

Fame sings our praises wide and far,  
The *carte*'s her new triumphal car ;  
If this is renown, what man of sense  
Would object to be sold for eighteen-pence ?  
For eighteen pence, for eighteen-pence,  
You can purchase my *carte* for eighteen-pence,

Apollo, patron of the pen,  
Helps Fame to photograph great men ;  
I will purchase renown—confound the expense—  
I will buy my own *carte* for eighteen-pence,—  
For eighteen-pence, yes, eighteen-pence.—  
Will somebody loan me eighteen-pence ?

Figure 2. "Lines by a Young Author," *Fun* 19 July 1862: 177.

the printed portrait in general and the carte-de-visite photograph in particular. Unlike earlier visualizations of Fama in Virgil's *Aeneid* or Chaucer's *House of Fame*, which focus on rumor and depict the goddess as "a terrifying enormous monster" covered with feathers, eyes, ears, and tongues, the *Fun* illustration shows an angelic, laurel-wearing figure emerging from the dark interior of what appears to be a photographer's studio (Braudy *Frenzy* 123-125, 241-243). Above the shop hangs a large sign surrounded by a wreath, presumably of laurel, that advertises cartes-de-visite for sale at "1s. 6d." The studio's name—"Fame & Phoebus"—partners Fama not with gossip but with the god of light, a reference to the necessity of sunlight to expose a photographic negative successfully. The trumpet, Fama's most important symbol, is stowed behind her. Rather than heralding the renown or spreading the name of the unnamed "young author," Fama holds in her right hand a small, palm-sized carte-de-visite. The lack of a name reinforces the notion that the image, not his name or his works, are of utmost importance to the young author's success. Fama projects the small card outwards with an extended arm, displaying the unnamed "young author's" photograph to the world—or at least to pedestrians on the city street. Her horn remains conspicuously silent. As the accompany poem states, "Fame sings our praises wide and far, / The carte's her new triumphal car." The irony is precisely that fame no longer *sings* one's praises—she *shows* them. The illustration signals a key shift in the medium of fame: no longer carried on the winds of Fama's trumpet, the image is the vehicle of literary celebrity.

The cartoon's verse, apparently written by the "young author" himself, offers a biting commentary on this new medium and its relation to promotional culture and literary fame. The poem is occasioned not by the "young author" publishing anything worthwhile, but by his carte-de-visite being "out." Accordingly, the verse begins with the "young author" singing the praises of "photographic Fame," which has "crowned [his] name" with "honour." No matter the quality

of his works, only “photographic Fame” has the power to bestow him with laurels—and monetary reward. Just as the focal point of the illustration is the price of the carte-de-visite, so too is the poem’s motif centered on commercialism: “I will purchase renown—confound the expense,” says the young author, implying that literary greatness could now be bought for the price of a carte-de-visite rather than earned. The refrain, altered slightly in each sestet, reiterates the significance not only of the image, but also its cost, a move that links the reproducible portrait with a literal and figurative cheapening of literary fame. The young author claims that with this new portrait he can “hear [his] fortune with joy intense,” playing on the double-meaning of “fortune.” On the one hand, “hearing” his fortune approaching could mean his future, his destined path to literary renown; on the other, “hearing” his fortune implies the young author’s preoccupation with money—he hears the jingle of “eighteen-pence” per portrait. The refrain of the first three stanzas reads like a kind of advertisement: the use of the second-person address reaches out to the reader, alerting him/her that this “young author’s” carte is available for purchase. In the poem, the “young author” has taken on Fame’s role: he spreads the word about himself. In this way, the illustration and verse also demonstrate a Bourdieu-esque argument: the young author is outside his proper “field of cultural production”—the literary world—that purports to be untethered to the circulation of capital. Instead the “young author’s” work is tainted or muddied by his enthusiasm for the commercial appeal, not of his books, but of himself.

As prevalent as concerns about commercialism and promotional culture, however, were questions about how the Graphic Revolution was changing the relation between the renowned individual and his/her unrenowned audience: did the printed image provide more intimate access to celebrities, and if so, was this public intimacy desirable? In January 1862, *Once a Week* published a short article from contributor Andrew Wynter that considers the rewards and dangers

of increased visual access to images of celebrities, not just for the subjects themselves, but for their ever-watching audiences, too. Writing at the height of the *cartes-de-visite* “craze” in the early-1860s, Wynter describes a visit to the recently established National Portrait Gallery (1856):

We wonder how many people there are in London who have actually seen the National Portrait Gallery! [...] We question, indeed, if one man in a thousand knows where the effigies of England's departed great are deposited; and even those who seek the whereabouts of the gallery are as likely as not to be disappointed in obtaining admission, for...the gallery is permitted to be open only three days in the week. [...] The result is that scarcely a dozen persons in the day wends their way to the private house...where the portrait gallery is established; indeed, we have often been in the room for a couple of hours without hearing the echo of any footsteps but or own. (134-35)

Interestingly, in contrast to the deserted halls of the National Portrait Gallery, Wynter actually privileges the shop window *over* other “official” sites of display, which he derides as a space full of “pompous rooms in which pompous attendants preside with a severe air over pompous portraits.” For him, the shop window offers a site in which (or rather, outside which) “social equality is carried to its utmost limit,” enabling men and women of all classes to become visually “acquainted” with the “great and noted Englishmen” of the day (134-137).<sup>48</sup>

Admittedly, Wynter exaggerates both the democratizing and the didactic effects of the *cartes-de-visite*. He does, after all, say that their price enables purchase by the “better middle

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<sup>48</sup> Wynter’s position is somewhat contradictory in that he emphasizes the egalitarian features of the shop window, while simultaneously championing its potential to instruct a presumably uneducated, crowd of viewers. Moreover, he claims that the price of the *cartes de visite* enabled their purchase by the “better middle class.” See Wynter 135.

class” (135). His description of how the abundance of these images changes the perceptual relationship between viewer and subject anticipates Benjamin. “The cartes-de-visite,” he argues, has had the effect of making the public thoroughly acquainted with all its remarkable men. We know their personality long before we see them. Even the cartes-de-visite of comparatively unknown persons so completely picture their appearance, that when we meet the original we seem to have some acquaintance with them. ‘I know that face somehow,’ is the instinctive cogitation, and then we recall the portrait we have a day or two past seen in the windows. (137)

When seen in the National Portrait Gallery, works of art (in this case, portraits of famous men) are surrounded by what is, for Wynter, an off-putting, “pompous” aura, an aura created in part by the fact that people must “wend their way” to an authorized location in order to view an original image. With the “street galleries” of shop windows, the roles are reversed. The portraits come to the viewer through the process of mass-reproduction and as a result, a kind of leveling occurs between the great man and the viewers who look to (or at him): seeing the repetition of celebrity portraits in shop windows actually enables viewers to recognize a great man when they see the “original”—that is, when they see him in the flesh. Viewers already have some “acquaintance” with the “greatness” of the original precisely because of the increased availability of the copy.

The difference between painting and reproducible photography is, of course, not only one of place and price of viewing, but also one of medium and evidence of the artist’s hand. Wynter, for instance, writes somewhat disparagingly of Joshua Reynolds’s work, saying, “no man or woman ever came from his easel with a mean look,” and as a result, the Victorians’ “knowledge of the faces of the last century is purely conventional.” Cartes-de-visite photographs,

however, individualize their subjects, revealing the “the very lines that Nature has engraven on [their] faces” such that “no two of them [cartes-de-visite] are alike” (135).<sup>49</sup>

Less than a decade before Wynter’s editorial appeared in *Once a Week*, an anonymous contributor to *The Leisure Hour* proposed a similarly optimistic take on the shop window as a site of celebrity display: for him (or her), the space constituted nothing short of the “consummation of worldly ambition—the summit of Parnassus—the very pinnacle of fame” (668). Unlike Wynter, however, this writer suggests that the shop window also spurs a degree of “melancholy reflection” on the (im)permanence of renown. He confesses that viewers are reminded constantly of

a whole phalanx of celebrities who have looked out upon us from the crystal clear panes in times past, and are now no more seen. [...] And reputation is a bubble after all, and, whether it be measured by a few square inches in a shopkeeper’s window, or by a lofty pedestal and a colossal statue, melts into nothing, sooner or later. (668)

What is important to note here is that the writer does *not* create a neat dichotomy in which the transience of the shop window is pitted against the permanence of the public monument. Instead, the constant freshening of shop-window faces actually exposes the *instability* of traditional sites of display, and by extension, the contingencies on which existing networks of celebration (e.g., fame and/or heroism) were built.

For Wynter, making the visual “acquaintance” of “great men”—whether in shop windows or in the flesh—is desirable, perhaps even educational. But his contemporaries,

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to point out, however, that in the same way Wynter overestimates the populist implications of the cartes-de-visite, so too does he minimize the medium’s conventionality and the frequency with which photographs were retouched. On retouching, see Linkman 80-81. For more on conventionality, see Novak 6 and Boyce 105-106.

especially Victorian celebrities themselves, generally did not share his enthusiasm. Rather than corroborating their greatness, illustrations and photographs of—as well as face-to-face meetings with—celebrities often *undermined* what one anonymous contributor to *Chambers' Journal* termed “pictures of the imagination” in 1888. “Everyone,” the author claims, “is addicted to drawing imaginary portraits—of picturing how such and such man must look, in spite of an experience which tells us that those portraits [imaginary ones] will in all probability be totally unlike the original [the physical body of the person].” According to the contributor, readers often generate mental pictures of authors as “geniuses” with “an abundance of flowing locks and uncomfortable-looking cloaks”—an image surely informed if not by Byron specifically, then by portraits of Romantic writers in general (Piper 91-146). Though some may live up to readers’ visual expectations (the author cites Tennyson as an example), he claims ultimately that, “as a rule, photographs of eminent men are very disappointing” (“Pictures of the Imagination” 31). And despite their growing ubiquity, periodical illustrations were equally dissatisfying: “Of late years,” the contributor writes, “the practice of giving 'portraits' of eminent men in newspapers has enormously increased, until one can hardly pick up a copy of any provincial journal without seeing one or two specimens of this kind of illustration. Unfortunately, however, [...] many well-known men have been anything but flattered by some of these crude attempts at illustration.” Even when such illustrations were derived from photographs (or perhaps because they were often derived from photographs), they were still “decidedly bad” and “[did] much to destroy imaginary portraits and create false impressions” (32).

Similarly, in a piece written for *The Globe* several years earlier, a contributor weighs the potential satisfactions and disappointments of celebrity visibility—and shop windows are once

again a crucial site for the validation (or, perhaps the creation) of one's celebrity. Addressing the reader, the author writes,

You may have some vogue outside of them [the shop windows], but not the widest and the highest. In the photographs and prints and illustrated papers of the day you achieve the greatest honour that the world has to give you. To figure in them is your best advertisement, your keenest association. If he who runs may read, he who gazes is impressed. You are seen in close proximity to accepted celebrities, and at once you bound into fame. (134)

The writer treats this “shop window celebrity” with more ambivalence than Wynter had over twenty years before. He acknowledges the “drawbacks” of seeing literary celebrities in particular, admitting that in photographs, “your poet often turns out 'pudgy,' your lady novelist is frequently not 'nice.’” Again, authors' hair is of particular importance, as one often sees “lank hair where there ought to have been luxuriant locks” (135-6). Even though the literary celebrity cannot “always 'live up to' the level of his or her productions,” the writer argues, “it is better to be in the shop windows than not to be there. It advertises your books; if it hands down to posterity your physical peculiarities.” He also remarks that the public is “not exclusive in its tastes,” yet he notes a “sensation of pride at the thought that this little island should possess so many persons of distinction, in so many walks of life.” Though he claims that “figuring in the public” is somewhat “undignified” and “a little ignoble” for the eminent men and women of the day, he ultimately finds the practice “defensible” because it sells more books—the shop window, he argues, is the modern temple of fame.

Returning to the *celebrity* entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the following quotation from Dinah Mulock Craik's novel, *The Ogilvies* (1849), is cited as one of the earliest examples



of *celebrity* used in the concrete sense: “Did you see any of those ‘celebrities,’ as you call them?” (“Celebrity,” def. 4). As MacCabe points out in his *Keywords Project* entry, this usage is particularly revealing because of the use of quotation marks around the word *celebrity*—an indication, he suggests, of both its “novelty” and its “ambiguity” (“What is a ‘Keyword’?”). On one hand, the quotation marks signify the speaker’s unfamiliarity with the term, and on the other, they imply a value judgment—that is, a degree of sarcasm or diminution underpinned by the notion that “celebrities” may not deserve the attention and/or status afforded them. For my purposes, this quotation also illustrates perhaps the most important feature of Victorian literary celebrity: its connection to visibility and disappointment. Significantly, the speaker does not ask, “Did you *hear about* or read about any of those ‘celebrities,’ as you call them?” Most importantly, the context from which *The Ogilvies* quotation is drawn describes a profound sense of disappointment with seeing literary celebrities, especially in the flesh.

Katharine Ogilvie, the novel’s sentimental sixteen-year old protagonist, is scheduled to make her societal debut at a “formidable literary soiree” in London. From years of isolated reading, she had “formed various romantic ideas” about this “*unseen* world of society” (6, emphasis mine). Though her cousin and later husband, Hugh, tells her that only “a few of the minor lights of the aristocracy” will be in attendance at the party, Katharine nevertheless hopes to “see great writers, great poets, great painters”—Katharine’s sight was, in many ways, clouded by her sentimentality for heroism, fame and “greatness” (8). Like the “imaginary portraits” described by the *Chambers’* contributor, she envisions all her “poetical heroes” will look like Keats: “his likeness, which Katharine had hung up in her room, haunted her perpetually, and many a time she sat watching it until she felt for this dead and buried poet a sensation very like the love of which she had read.” When she finally arrives at the soiree, Katharine’s eyes are

“dazzled and pained by the sudden transition from darkness to light”—the “‘fine gentlemen’ of a modern drawing-room did not at all resemble the heroes with which the romance-loving girl had peopled her world.” The only man who eventually stood out from the “moving mass of gay attire” was Paul Lynedon, whose face “strongly resembled the head of Keats, which had been [Katharine’s] dream-idol for so many months” (9). That Craik describes Katharine’s experience in almost exclusively visual terms is not unsurprising, nor is it purely metaphorical. The change in Katharine’s mode of perception—from “imaginary portraits” and likenesses of Keats to in-person encounters—precipitates a change in the way she understands those whom she celebrates.

As Katharine Ogilvie learns, the desire to reconcile the representations of a celebrity with his/her physical presence can be destructive, if not dangerous. Even if a physical meeting between a celebrity and a fan were to occur, the reality rarely lives up to the representation, destroying any sense of glamour or charisma the celebrity might have had. In the late-nineteenth century, as in the twenty-first, seeing a celebrity “in the flesh” often evokes a sense of dissonance for audience members; the physical embodiment is not at all like the representations. Being in the physical presence of a celebrity even seems to “shatter” or undermine the representation. The clichéd line, “I always thought he’d be taller,” captures this sentiment perfectly. Few people want to know if their favorite celebrity is shorter, heavier or dirtier in person than in representations. More often than not in the nineteenth century, even the representation itself was found unsatisfying, especially when compared to earlier schools of idealized portraiture. With the push to exploit burgeoning photographic technologies to create ever more naturalistic images, the limitations of “verisimilitude” were thrown into question, both in the world of fine art and in popular imagery. As Francis Frith put it in his 1859 paper, “The Art of Photography,” photography is often “*too truthful*. It insists upon giving us ‘the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth.’ Now, we want, in Art, the first and the last of these conditions, but we can dispense very well with the middle term” (71-72, emphasis in original).

Frith’s observation holds true in the world of celebrity, too. It is precisely this dissonance between representation and presence that characterizes the relation between the printed image and public intimacy in Victorian celebrity culture.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the proliferation of the printed image did not provide a main line to intimacy with the celebrity; in fact, more often than not, the printed image actually undercut audiences’ “pictures of the imagination.” As a keyword, then, *celebrity* was used not only in visual contexts but also with derogatory connotations deriving from that very visuality. According to one *Chambers’s Journal* contributor, this discord was especially true for literary celebrities. Despite readers’ perpetual disappointment, he argues that “everybody is addicted to drawing imaginary portraits—of picturing how such and such a man must look, in spite of an experience which tells us that those portraits will in all probability be totally unlike the original.” “It ought to be known by this time,” he continues, “that the character or the personal experience of an author cannot be judged from his writings, any more than the subjects of those writings affords any clue to the circumstances under which they were written.” In other words, popular Victorian authors had to contend with “crude attempts at illustration” in pictorial periodicals, but so too did Victorian audiences: the contributor reminds that “the old piece of advice, ‘Never read the life of your literary hero,’ is as full of significance now as ever it was; and it is because this injunction has

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<sup>50</sup>On the relation between representation and presence in celebrity culture, see Marcus 1003-4 and Roach *It* 3, 16-17.

been disregarded, that so many pictures of the imagination in connection with literary men have been destroyed” (“Pictures of the Imagination” 31-32).<sup>51</sup>

As technological advances of the photograph marched toward ever-more precise images, Victorian audiences were increasingly aware that the medium could also be used to deceive as much as it could be used to “capture” the truth, further disrupting the printed image-public intimacy connection.<sup>52</sup> Beyond the fact that images of authors were often found to be unflattering—or, as Mrs. Bedwin of *Oliver Twist* says, “a deal too honest”—writers such as John Hollingshed fictionalized the very real possibility that pictures of celebrity authors could be inauthentic (91). In his 1858 short story, “A Counterfeit Presentment,” he recounts the story of a once-anonymous author blackmailed into having his portrait made and distributed to the masses. Told in the first-person, the narrator begins his story with the telling line, “My *name* is not unknown to the British public” (emphasis mine). After publishing his letters and an apparently controversial volume of poetry, he claims he “became a literary lion” who enjoyed whispers of admiration when spotted by passersby on the street. While the narrator welcomed name recognition, and even the occasional recognition in person, his growing celebrity made him a target for what he calls, melodramatically, a “tide of persecution” from the masses: “a public demand,” he says, “existed for my portrait,” but for “reasons of a physical nature,” he refuses to satiate that desire. “My face and head,” he continues diplomatically, “are of that peculiar character, that, under no possible combination of lights and attitude could they be agreeable in a

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<sup>51</sup> Notably, the writer also claims that women are particularly susceptible to constructing these “imaginary portraits,” especially of “authors, actors, well-known divines, and professional beauties.” See “Pictures of the Imagination” 31.

<sup>52</sup> For an excellent rebuttal to claims of photographic “truth” in the Victorian era, see Daniel Novak’s reading of Wilde and traditions of art and composite photography 118-146.

photographic portrait or give any correct idea of the original.” Despite his claims to the contrary, one could infer that the narrator is afraid not of misrepresentation, but of accuracy. This author, it seems, had a face for fiction.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the piece, Hollingshed simultaneously perpetuates and satirizes the ferocity of the public’s desire to see the author. On the one hand, the author is being “attacked,” but on the other, he is being “attacked by the implements of photographic art”—not exactly the deadliest of weapons. As Hollingshed crafts it, the entire plot hinges on a somewhat underwhelming conflict. After escaping the tenacity of the proto-paparazzi, those “waiting with the necessary apparatus round the corner,” the narrator is presented with a choice: the villain of the story, a photographer, demands that the narrator either sit for his portrait or have another person’s stock photograph substituted for his own. “When demand reaches a certain height,” the photographer explained, “it must be supplied.” The story closes with the author “sitting helplessly, under a broiling sun...composing [his] countenance according to the imperious instructions of the relentless photographer” (71-72).<sup>54</sup> As Hollingshed’s piece suggests, by mid-century, being seen—whether in painting, print or in person—was a requisite part of being a literary celebrity. But more importantly, it proposes that being seen did not necessarily equate to greater intimacy between audience and author. The conclusion of “A Counterfeit Presentment” is comically foreboding for both the narrator *and* the public: with the dissemination of his image, the narrator’s fans are about to learn that neither authenticity nor accuracy are always attractive.

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<sup>53</sup> For other articles with similar themes, see *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*, see Curtis “Dickens” 233-235.

<sup>54</sup> For an excellent reading of Hollingshed’s story in the context of George Eliot’s celebrity, see Fionnuala Dillane’s comparison of what she calls “embodied authenticity” versus “counterfeit presentment” in Victorian celebrity culture, 147-154.

Perhaps the greatest irony of Hollingshed's piece, however, is the advertisement that follows it in *Household Words*. In large type immediately below the closing lines of "A Counterfeit Presentment," readers are reminded that, "Mr. Charles Dickens will read at St. Martin's Hall." Juxtaposed to a story that complicates the relationship between in-person encounters, printed images, and public intimacy, the advertisement raises questions about even the best-loved literary celebrity of the Victorian era. Will Dickens' visibility compromise his celebrity in the same way it does for Hollingshed's narrator? Will dozens of Katherine Ogilvies be in attendance at the reading, and will they, too, be disappointed with the Dickens they find? What "pictures of the imagination" will his audience bring to the reading, and what shaped those expectations? In Dickens' case, such "imaginary portraits" were imaginary not only because they were envisioned by his audience, but also because printed images of Dickens depicted him *as* a kind of imaginary figure, as a characterized version of himself—as Boz. No doubt Dickens cultivated a powerful bond of public intimacy with his readership and with a nation, but that closeness was tied more to a persona and less to a person. In the next chapter, I will explore how the all-too-real flaws of the man played against his printed image, potentially undermining not only his celebrity, but also his legacy of characters.

### 3.0 CHARACTERIZING DICKENS: MAINTAINING THE FICTION AND THE CELEBRITY OF “BOZ” AND MR. PICKWICK

The rhetoric of public intimacy is nowhere more prevalent than in scholarship on Charles Dickens’ celebrity.<sup>55</sup> Scholars such as Lyn Pykett emphasize that his success as a literary celebrity depended crucially on his ability to cultivate an intimate, “special relationship” with readers akin to that of friendship. She argues that Dickens became a “towering mid-century celebrity author” precisely because of his ability to “[establish] a special relationship with his readers by becoming a regular part of their lives” via the regularity and cheapness of serial publication, and by “[employing] a range of rhetorical and narrative devices” within his works to simulate a real-life “bond” with readers from beyond the page (“The Novelist” 187-89; Tillotson and Butts 16).<sup>56</sup> Though staunchly reticent about his private life, Dickens leveled the relation between author and reader in his fictions. His narrative voice often suggests a familiarity, a “bond of knowingness,” between author and reader: not the thinly-veiled autobiographical divulgements of, say, Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*, but rather an alliance that authorizes readers to participate in mocking and even criticizing common enemies—bureaucracy, imposture and

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<sup>55</sup> Patrick Brantlinger challenges the near-ubiquitous rhetoric of intimacy in Dickens scholarship, arguing that the growth of the mass-reading public was also seen as a threat, alienating the writer from the reader. For more on this, see Brantlinger 13-17.

<sup>56</sup> For more on Dickens’ celebrity during this period, see Pykett, *Charles Dickens* 15-35.

injustice (Dennis 223). As such scholarship has shown, Dickens secured his celebrity through this textual performance that engendered intimacy and served as a proxy for those readers he could not see in person.<sup>57</sup>

Dickens himself suggests as much in his preface to the inaugural issue of *Household Words*, a weekly publication he began “conducting” in March 1850. He announces that through the magazine, “We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people...*on whose faces we may never look*” (*Amusements* 175, emphases mine). Use of the plural pronoun aside, Dickens likens the writer-reader relationship to a deeply significant bond. His continued references to the “privilege” and “responsibility” of his position indicate an ethos that was both towering and humble. For those readers Dickens did see in person, he cited cultivating their “friendship” as one reason for undertaking his first for-profit public reading tour in 1858. Dickens maintained that his public readings would provide a “means of strengthening those relations—I may almost say of personal friendship—which it is my great privilege and pride, as it is my great responsibility, to hold with a multitude of persons *who will never hear my voice nor see my face*” (qtd. in Johnson 68-69, emphasis mine). Dickens need not have worried about making himself visible to his readers; Victorian audiences *did* see his face, and frequently. But seeing Dickens, whether in print or in person, did not always engender public intimacy with readers in ways we might expect—if at all.

In this chapter, I examine how Dickens was visually represented in print during his early years—what John Forster calls his “first five years of fame”—and question how those depictions complicate our understanding of literary celebrity as a phenomenon driven by public intimacy

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<sup>57</sup> For another approach to reading Dickens in the context of celebrity culture, see Marsh “Rise” 98-108.



with the author. Rather, I argue that Dickens became visible to and intimate with his readers primarily as a fictional figure—that is, as Boz. Early printed images of Dickens positioned him as a kind of character, as part of the fictional worlds he created in his writings. These visual representations evoked a sense of public intimacy through fiction: Dickens’ “authentic” self was exposed more through his characters and his narrative persona, Boz, and less through images of him as living, embodied author. Added to this equation is the fact that the popularity and recognizability of Dickens’ fictional characters—especially Mr. Pickwick of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-7)—made them very real celebrities in early-Victorian popular culture, connected not only to commerce, but to the “original” people on whom their characters were presumably based. Finally, I propose that a kind of backlash emerged against Dickens’s presence as an actual, embodied author: the more he “appeal[ed] to the real,” the more he was seen as a potential threat to the fictional world of his characters and to his own persona (Curtis “Dickens” 240-241). No doubt Dickens was acutely aware of the complexities of the Graphic Revolution that surrounded him, as well as the position he occupied within that culture—a literary celebrity on display before an increasingly attentive press and public. Yet, his celebrity as a man nevertheless endangered the bond of intimacy he had established with his readers as Boz and perhaps more importantly, the relationship his audiences had developed with the characters in his fictions.

### **The “First Five Years of Fame:” Picturing Dickens and/as Boz**

As the concrete usage of the word *celebrity* welled to the surface of Britain’s linguistic landscape in the late 1830s, Charles Dickens had already become one of the most widely read authors of the period. Serialized from April 1836 to November 1837, *The Posthumous Papers of*

*the Pickwick Club* (edited by “Boz”) rocketed Dickens and his characters to renown. Though his early contributions to *Monthly Magazine*, *Bell’s Life in London* and the *Evening Chronicle* garnered the attention of readers and critics, the adventures of Mr. Pickwick, and perhaps more importantly, Sam Weller, achieved unprecedented popularity nationally and internationally: *Pickwick* was a “runaway success” reaching sales upwards of 40,000 for its last installment (Sanders 19; Patten “Sales” 625-629). Yet less than a year after the first issue of *Pickwick* appeared, the already prolific Dickens chose not to use the moniker that had made him famous, “Boz.” Instead, in October 1839, he issued the final installment of *Nicholas Nickleby* using not only his proper name, but also his portrait and signature, effectively establishing a trifecta of brand authenticity that would stay with him, if in many iterations, for decades to come (Sanders 21).<sup>58</sup>

Dickens was also one of the most highly visible authors of this period, as evidenced by the outpouring of images after his death at Gad’s Hill on June 9, 1870.<sup>59</sup> In a special Christmas number issued the same year, *The Graphic* ran what has, in years since, become one of the most famous memorial images of (or rather, *not* of) the author: a print from Samuel Luke Fildes’ watercolor, *The Empty Chair* (see figure 3). Striking in its simplicity, Fildes’ carefully detailed sketch (according to him, a “very faithful record of his [Dickens’] library”) signifies the author’s legacy by calling attention to the lack, to the void left behind by his death (qtd. in Thomson 28). The composition’s focal point—the chair—is turned outward toward the viewer in an awkward,

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<sup>58</sup> For an exhaustive analysis of Dickens’ assertion of his proper name and the issue of copyright during this period, see Patten *Dickens and ‘Boz’* 1-78 and Douglas-Fairhurst 135-163.

<sup>59</sup> I use the term “visible” here figuratively and literally: Dickens’ physical body is publicly visible in the sense that he is seen in the flesh and figured visually in print, and he is figuratively visible in the sense that he is much talked about, a public presence from the mid-1830s onward.

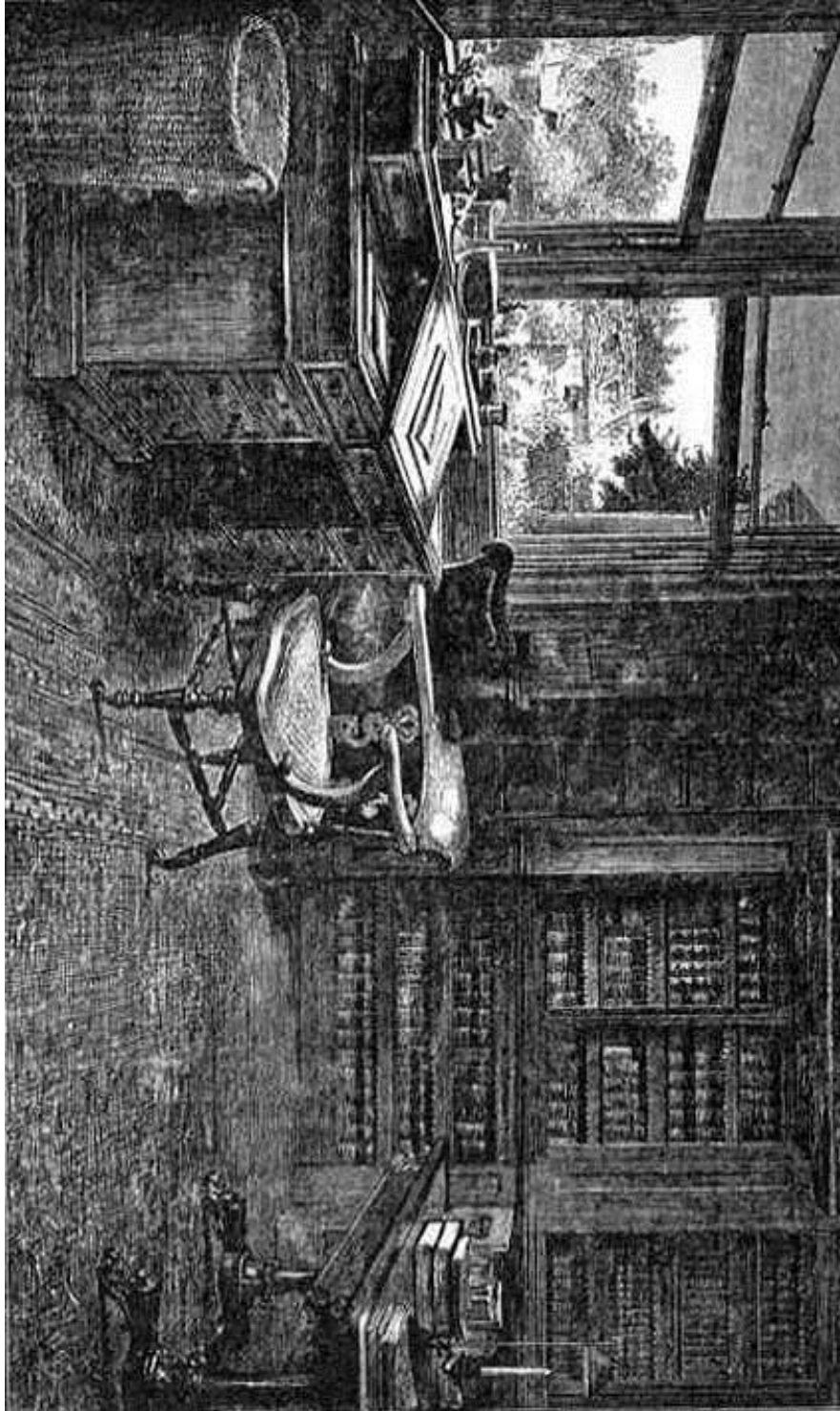


Figure 3. Samuel Luke Fildes, "The Empty Chair, Gad's Hill—Ninth of June 1870," *The Graphic* (24 December 1870): Issue 56.

tipped perspective, at once welcoming and foreclosing the possibility that the blank seat could be filled by anyone but Dickens himself.<sup>60</sup> In the over forty years since the serial publication of *The Pickwick Papers*, audiences had become accustomed to seeing Dickens almost everywhere, especially toiling away at his writing desk or posing before a lectern.<sup>61</sup> Writing in 1924, William G. Wilkins estimates, “probably no author ever lived of whom more portraits have been made, both during his lifetime and since his death, than Charles Dickens. There has perhaps never been an author whose features, from early youth to the time of his death, are so familiar to the reading public [...]” (Wilkins and Matz iii). Though Wilkins’s assessment is likely colored both by Dickens’s death in 1870 and by the centenary of his birth in 1912, his point is well-taken: even before the availability of fast, cheap photographic reproductions like cartes-de-visite and before the outpouring of memorial portraits such as Fildes’, images of the “Inimitable” were sketched, painted, etched, printed, circulated and parodied across Britain and beyond. The power of Fildes’ picture, then, hinges on the assumption that Victorian viewers would be familiar enough with Dickens’ image to recognize its absence. In this way, *The Empty Chair* not only captures the magnitude of Dickens’ legacy in memoriam, but also indicates the ubiquity of his likeness during his lifetime.

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<sup>60</sup> This detail is especially significant, as in Fildes’ original watercolor, the chair is turned side-on to the viewer, facing the desk. Its change in position may be the work of the engraver, as the difference is unique the print version.

<sup>61</sup> The image of Dickens at work was so ubiquitous that the desk itself took on a kind of mythical quality in cultural memory. For more on how Wilkie Collins’ inheritance of Dickens’ desk functioned as a kind of endorsement, see Yates *Celebrities* 3: 145. For a broader examination of how images of Dickens at his desk marked a shift in the iconography of authorship, see Curtis *Visual* 143-150.

But if *The Empty Chair* had an occupant, what would he have looked like to audiences? Much excellent scholarship has been done on how Victorian visual culture informed Dickens' aesthetics—the motifs of novels, his narrative style, his modes of characterization—to say nothing of the incredible body of scholarship devoted to analyses of the texts' illustrations.<sup>62</sup> Surprisingly, fewer scholars have taken up question of how the author himself was figured within the visual and print culture of the period, and those that have done so, often focus primarily on his appearance in photographs (e.g., those taken by Jeremiah Gurney during his second tour of North America in the late 1860s).<sup>63</sup> A significant amount of scholarly attention has been paid to Dickens' appearance in and opinion of photography. Aside from a few outliers, most of the sustained studies of Dickens iconography date from the turn of the century, most significantly, Frederic G. Kitton's *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil* (1889-90) and William G. Wilkins and B. W. Matz's *Charles Dickens in Caricature and Cartoon* (1924). This gap in study is important not only because it minimizes the massive circulation of Dickens' likeness before photographic processes became cheap enough and fast enough to be commercially viable in the early 1850s, but also because it overlooks how Dickens would have been seen by Victorian audiences at the height of his celebrity.

During what Forster calls his “first five years of fame” between 1836 and 1841, Dickens became visible to his audience as a kind of character—as “Boz,” the “editor” of *Pickwick* and

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<sup>62</sup> For more on Dickens and Victorian visual culture, especially resonances between the novel and film, see Flint *Dickens in Context* 148-157, Flint *Victorians* 1-40, 139-166, Marsh “Dickens and Film” 204-223, Groth *Moving* 100-125, Meisel 97-141. On illustration, see Cohen *Dickens* 3-11 and Stein 167-188.

<sup>63</sup> One notable exception is Sutherland 111-130.

*Bentley's Miscellany* and “sketcher” of scenes and characters in *Sketches by Boz* (1:128).<sup>64</sup> During this early period, representations of Dickens/Boz appeared within his fictional works and alongside his fictional characters, forming a critical part of his iconography, and, in turn, shaping aspects of his celebrity for at least the next twenty years. The public intimacy he cultivated through his narrative voice and serial publication was complemented by visual representations of him as Boz.

Before beginning an analysis of Dickens’ early images, it is necessary to discuss briefly how and why Boz came to be, as well as to explore how scholars have understood Boz and his function in Dickens’ early fictions. At this point in his career, Dickens’ short sketches such as “The Election for Beadle” appeared in numerous periodicals including *Bell's Life in London*, the *Evening Chronicle* and *Monthly Magazine*. It is in the latter publication that readers first saw the name “Boz” in print in August 1834. According to Dickens, he derived the moniker from the nickname “Moses” given to younger brother, though it would be more than ten years until the public knew these familial origins (Easson 13-14; Patten *Birth* 37; Forster 104).<sup>65</sup> Scholars generally agree that Dickens used Boz as a way to consolidate his fictional writings under one heading without putting his own proper name or his career as a reporter on the line. In other words, Dickens wanted to make a name for himself, but he was not yet ready to assert his authorship using his proper name (Douglas-Fairhurst 161; Patten *Birth* 38; Chittick 57).

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<sup>64</sup> That Dickens became visible and recognizable to his audience in illustrated form is not unsurprising, especially given that, during the early years of his career before the 1842 tour of North America, those who illustrated his fictional works—namely, George Cruikshank and Hablot “Phiz” Browne.

<sup>65</sup> Patten also makes the point that the pseudonym “Boz” places Dickens in the echelon of “single name celebrity”—like Shakespeare or Homer, for example. For alternatives to this official story of Boz’s origin, see Patten *Birth* 39-45.

Alongside Boz's appearance as the author of the *Sketches*, he also served as the "editor" of *Bentley's Miscellany*, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, and as the ostensible author of *Oliver Twist* (Easson 13-14).<sup>66</sup> As such, readers came to know Dickens almost exclusively as Boz during this formative moment of his celebrity.

Scholars continue to struggle to pin down exactly who, or what, Boz actually was, and explain the role he occupies in Dickens' early fictions. Is it simply a pseudonym? Is he a character? A persona? Dickens himself?<sup>67</sup> Robert Patten proposes that while Boz may have started out as a pseudonym to "protect against failure," he also presented a unique set of advantages: "one could invent a persona, fill up the null set of 'Boz' by giving him a character, a personality, a range of interests, and an idiosyncratic take on things" (*Birth* 38). But to what degree is Boz "given a character"? Or, put more elegantly, to what degree does Boz have "an independent fictional existence?" (Easson 13). Patten himself acknowledges that "'Boz' did, as a pseudonym, develop something of a personality in its own right" (Patten *Birth* 42). (Patten's use of "its" instead of "his" would seem to indicate his underlying position on the issue.) In his analysis of *Sketches by Boz*, Easson compares him to Joseph Addison's "Mr. Spectator," conceding that Boz "is not a consistently realized persona." Nor is he a "character" in the fullest sense of the word; readers learn nothing about his backstory or personal life, and he rarely, if ever, interacts with the scenes he observes around him. Yet Easson goes on to assert that "he [Boz] still emerges from time to time *as something more than a pen name to a mere authorial*

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<sup>66</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst points out that in the Preface to the first volume of *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens seems to assert an authorial identity other than Boz. For more on this, see 161.

<sup>67</sup> One vocabulary that helps describe the distinction between Dickens and Boz is Wayne Booth's conception of the "implied author." See Wayne Booth 74-75, 138 and Alison Booth 177-191.

*narrator.*” As readers, he continues, “we are aware at times of a person we take to be distinct from Dickens himself” (14, emphasis mine). Robert Douglas-Fairhurst makes a similar claim, suggesting that, by 1836, “Boz started to take on the independent life of a fictional creation” (153). Douglas-Fairhurst stops short of saying “fictional character” here. However, in his reading of Boz’s narrative traits, he likens him not to the flâneur, but to one of the most recognizable celebrity characters of all time—Sherlock Holmes. Remarking on Boz’s ability to glean entire personalities and histories from a single detail, he argues convincingly that “Boz is like a young Sherlock Holmes in training” (153-156).<sup>68</sup>

Douglas-Fairhurst’s comparison to Sherlock Holmes is telling: though scholars might be hard-pressed to provide enough textual evidence to substantiate Boz’s “independent fictional existence” as a character, he still *felt* like one. Boz had a signature narrative style that became familiar to readers: they could anticipate what Boz might say, what Boz might see, what Boz might do, if he was real—or, at the very least, if he was a real character. As Eason puts it, “Boz is a way of seeing and speaking rather than a developed personality” (18). This is certainly true within the confines of the text. Boz is not a “developed personality,” or a realized character, or even a consistent narrative persona. But outside the lines of the *Sketches*, Boz did begin to take shape as something more than a disembodied, if recognizable, narrative voice. The printed images of the period realize Boz through the body of Dickens, giving what had started out as a “null set” pseudonym a physical form. During these early years, the “intimate relationship” between Dickens and his readers—the hallmark of his celebrity—was triangulated by the presence of Boz.

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<sup>68</sup> For more on where Boz falls in the tradition of the flâneur, see Patten *Birth* 43.





Figure 4. "Extraordinary Gazette," *Bentley's Miscellany* 1 (January 1837): 1.

During the period between March 1837 and late 1839, at least six different images of Dickens were in print circulation, and all of them, in one way or another, blur the distinction between person and persona. One of the first and most famous, is an illustration advertising Dickens/Boz as the new editor of *Bentley's Miscellany* (see figure 4). The image appeared on an “advertising leaflet” inserted in the third issue of *Bentley's*, promoting the publication’s new editor (Wilkins and Matz 18). The figure of the editor has features that are now recognized as indicative of Dickens’ likeness—his parted hair, his deep forehead, his manner of dress—but it is far from a naturalistic portrait. Nor is it an exaggerated caricature: Dickens' features, for instance, are not treated with the same comic effect as the “porter” behind him (as one can observe in illustrations of Dickens in his later years [i.e., those based on the famous Gurney photographs with an over-sized head, for instance]). Instead, the porter behind Dickens, the enthusiastic readers sketched on the sides, and the text accompanying the leaflet all suggest a fictional world: one in which the large, cubed body of the porter is dwarfed only by the pallet of the papers atop his back, a world in which people clamor over one another to get a copy of *Bentley's* with little concern of being trampled. In the text accompanying the image, an unnamed “reporter” recounts the “Speech of his Mightiness”—the editor—on the publication of the second installment of *Bentley's Miscellany*. It is worth noting, too, that while the text mentions neither Boz nor Dickens by name, calling him “his Mightiness” seems comically mismatched with the figure in the illustration: “his Mightiness” actually seems diminutive alongside the porter and the huge pallet of print.

Though “Boz” leads the way, announcing the publication of the paper with a flourish of his hand, his figure is not rendered according to linear perspective. His body is nearly the same size as those of the crowd around and behind him, and his step is awkwardly rendered, left-foot

first across his body, in a peculiar kind of contrapposto. Though his face seems turned backwards towards the struggling porter, his eyes look not at the viewer, but at some destination ahead. The pallet of print, not its editor, is centered compositionally, the eye is drawn to its blankness, to the excess white space on which the words "Bentleys Miscellany" are written. The leaflet, then, is more an advertisement for the periodical and less a piece of "puffery" promoting Boz himself, though it is certainly calculated to trade on the recognizability of the name as an endorsement. As Patten examines in great detail, Richard Bentley was "consciously and deliberately hiring 'Boz'"—not Dickens—in order "tap into that non-partisan, sentimental, comic market" which had made the *Sketches* and *Pickwick* so successful (*Birth* 134-136).

As a point of comparison, consider an image from the April issue of *Court Magazine*, a popular ladies' monthly. The octavo-sized, seated portrait was also rendered by Phiz and appeared only a month after the *Bentley's* Boz—in fact, the two images were derived from the same study (Kitton 23). The face and head of the figure in the *Court* woodcut resemble that of the *Bentley's* picture: cheek-length hair parted on the right, exposing a prominent forehead, head turned to the left with eyes cast to the far-right, averting the viewer's gaze. The clothes, too, are nearly the same. But rather than placing Dickens in an exaggerated, cartoonish setting, the *Court* portrait emphasizes his existence as a living, working author: like *The Empty Chair*, Dickens appears sitting at a desk. Though Phiz later denied the *Court* image (it is not particularly flattering), the artist's signature appears clearly in the right-hand corner. In F.G. Kitton's assessment, the cartoonish style of *Bentley's* portrait succeeds at capturing Dickens' character, far more so than the attempt at naturalistic accuracy in *Court*. Kitton states, "In this by no means striking likeness [the *Court* portrait], the drawing is very indifferent, which is the more surprising when we consider what excellent work 'Phiz' was then doing for 'Pickwick,' and the fact that he

had, a short time before, made a beautiful little portrait of ‘Boz’ for the publisher *Bentley*.” In Kitton’s assessment, the *Court* portrait was “by no means a striking likeness” of Dickens and was ultimately “unsuccessful.” Kitton says, “‘Phiz’s’ forte was evidently not portraiture, and though characteristic in some respects, this effort [in the *Court Magazine*] is devoid of the refinement which constitutes so essential a distinction of the earlier portraits” (emphases mine). The *Bentley*’s picture, however, receives his praise: it is a “beautiful little portrait of ‘Boz’” (23). Kitton admires Phiz’s illustration a portrait of Boz-the-persona and not of Dickens-the-man. Phiz’s attempt to render a portrait true “to the life” of the man was, for Kitton, a failure. But, when given the latitude afforded him by fictional illustration, Phiz succeeded.

Kitton’s critique of these two images is particularly telling given that the *Court* portrait—a failed attempt to render the man behind the fictions—actually identifies its subject as Boz, *not* as Charles Dickens. In the caption below the image, “Boz” is engraved in a decorative script, no doubt chosen to evoke the idea of a signature or autograph. Strangely, the more naturalistic of the two images labels the author by his narrative handle instead of his proper name. The *Court* article’s contributor adds to the irony, referring to Dickens by his proper name in the first paragraph, but calling him “Boz” throughout the rest of the piece (“Some Thoughts” 185-6). Most importantly, the writer claims that the accompanying portrait offers an exclusive look at the real-life author behind the well-known works:

With the sketches of ‘Boz,’ we take it for granted that all classes of our public, gentle and simple, are intimately acquainted. We, this month, *give our readers an opportunity of looking upon the face of that rare ‘cogger,’* taken in a mood of inward contemplation; his spirit at the moment communing, doubtless with Sam Weller...or, perhaps, cogitating

upon the grievance of *Oliver Twist*, or the sublime series of surprises that are developing monthly in the philosophical enquires of Mr. Pickwick. (186, emphasis mine)

Despite its aesthetic shortcomings and its “Boz” caption, the *Court* contributor promotes the portrait as an accurate likeness of the living, embodied author. Further, he references the “face of that rare ‘coger’” and his “cogitating upon the grievances of *Oliver Twist*” to draw attention to Dickens’ alleged participation in London’s so-called “Coger Club”—a Fleet Street society for political debate and free speech founded in the eighteenth century (Rayleigh 1-26). The “coger” joke is significant because it requires that readers know about a potentially obscure aspect of Dickens’ real life outside his narrative persona, outside the world of “Boz,” in order to be funny.<sup>69</sup> As both the *Court* portrait and the *Bentley’s* Boz show, while readers of the period may have been “intimately acquainted” with Dickens’ works, getting an intimate look at the author himself proved far more complicated.

A similar signature-subject mismatch appears in another image from the period, now known as “the ‘Boz’ portrait” in Dickens iconography. Circulating alongside the *Bentley’s* and *Court* images, though in far smaller numbers, Dickens’ friend and noted artist, Samuel Laurence, sketched the now-famous portrait “from the life” sometime in 1837. Though fairly well known today, the bust-sized, chalk drawing was likely less familiar to audiences of Dickens’ time. According to Kitton, Laurence was “faithful to the last in keeping possession of the original drawing,” but “he sold many hundred impressions of the lithographic copy.” It is possible that Laurence guarded the original so closely not only because of his friendship with the

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<sup>69</sup> For more on the history of the Coger Club, including the claim that Dickens participated in the club during his time as a parliamentary reporter and derived characters of *The Pickwick Papers* from watching the old “cogers,” see Rayleigh 1-26, 145-148. The word “coger” in the club’s title apparently bears no relation to the word “codger,” instead referring to the Latin *cogitare*, meaning “to think.”

author, but also because Dickens endorsed the sketch with his own signature, a rare assertion of his proper name in these early years of his celebrity. However, when well-known lithographer Isaac Weld Taylor reproduced the Laurence portrait for sale in 1838, it bore the signature of “Boz”—not a facsimile of Dickens’ signature (Kitton 20-21). As Taylor tells the story,

The first acquaintance I had with Dickens was when I asked him if he objected to having his portrait published, for at that time the author of *The Pickwick Papers* was scarcely known to the public. Instead of objecting to my proposal, he was, on the contrary, very much pleased with the idea, for he had been sitting for his portrait to Mr. Laurence, and I was present at one of those sittings.... His [Laurence’s] portrait of Dickens was, I think, the first published one, *and Mr. Dickens wrote the word ‘Boz’ for me, although he was half inclined to have his own name—but I think he was guided by my opinion that his name was at that time scarcely familiar enough for the public, whereas everybody was acquainted with the writings of ‘Boz.’*” (Kitton *A Supplement* 3-5, emphasis mine)

Taylor’s suggestion that Dickens write “the word ‘Boz’” for his lithograph runs counter to what we might expect of a celebrity today: if a celebrity signs a photograph of themselves—or anything for that matter—the autograph takes on its own, unique value as a relic of the person him/herself. Even when mass-reproduced, the autograph still seems to provide some degree of intimacy with or hidden knowledge about the person.<sup>70</sup> Autograph-hunting was certainly not unfamiliar to the early Victorians, so it is reasonable to assume that a facsimile of the portrait bearing Dickens’ signature might have generated high demand. But if we are to trust Taylor’s

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<sup>70</sup> For more on the history of autograph hunting in celebrity culture, see Giloi 41-51 and Plakins Thornton 86-92. On the history of handwriting and its relation to Romanticism and physiognomy, specifically Edgar Allen Poe’s criticism of William Cullen Bryant based on his “chirography,” see Plakins Thornton 78-86.

recollection, then during the early years of Dickens' celebrity, an artefact of the man behind the fictions was actually *less* desirable than a token of "Boz." Granted, the circulation of the Laurence-Taylor lithograph pales in comparison to *Bentley's* and the *Court Magazine*. Nevertheless, the lithograph, like the *Court Magazine* portrait, did the semantic work of attaching the moniker, "Boz," with an image of Dickens, the embodied author.<sup>71</sup>

The liminality of Dickens' celebrity identity is perhaps best encapsulated in an adaptation of the Laurence portrait included as the title page in Robert Tyas' *Heads from Nicholas Nickleby* (1839-1840), a collection of portrait engravings of the novel's characters.<sup>72</sup> In his study of book illustration and the Victorian "art of seeing," art historian Gerard Curtis observes that novel-related merchandise frequently used *fictional* characters' names and/or images in order to authenticate or endorse their products (*Visual* 112). For example, on Tyas' wrapper, illustrated by Joseph Kenny Meadows, the "heads" for sale are pitched as being "from drawings by Miss La Creevy"—the good-natured landlord and portrait miniaturist from Dickens' novel (see figure 5). The bold centerpiece of the ad features Miss La Creevy with her pallet and brush, but rather than painting one of her subjects from *Nickleby*, she appears to have just completed a portrait of Dickens himself—a portrait that mirrors the Laurence lithograph issued less than a year before, right down to a facsimile of the "Boz" signature.

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<sup>71</sup> The issue of the Boz/Dickens signature on the Laurence portrait is mentioned briefly by Patten *Birth* 181-182. For an in-depth examination of *Nickleby* extra illustrations, see Calé 8-32.

<sup>72</sup> An advertisement for the collection was included in the "Nicholas Nickleby Advertiser," a section of advertisements bound in with each serial part of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Similar advertising sections were included in Dickens' other serial publications and usually took their name from the novel's title—the "Copperfield Advertiser," for example. For more on the advertisements included with Dickens' serials, see Russell 5-6 and Darwin 1-11.

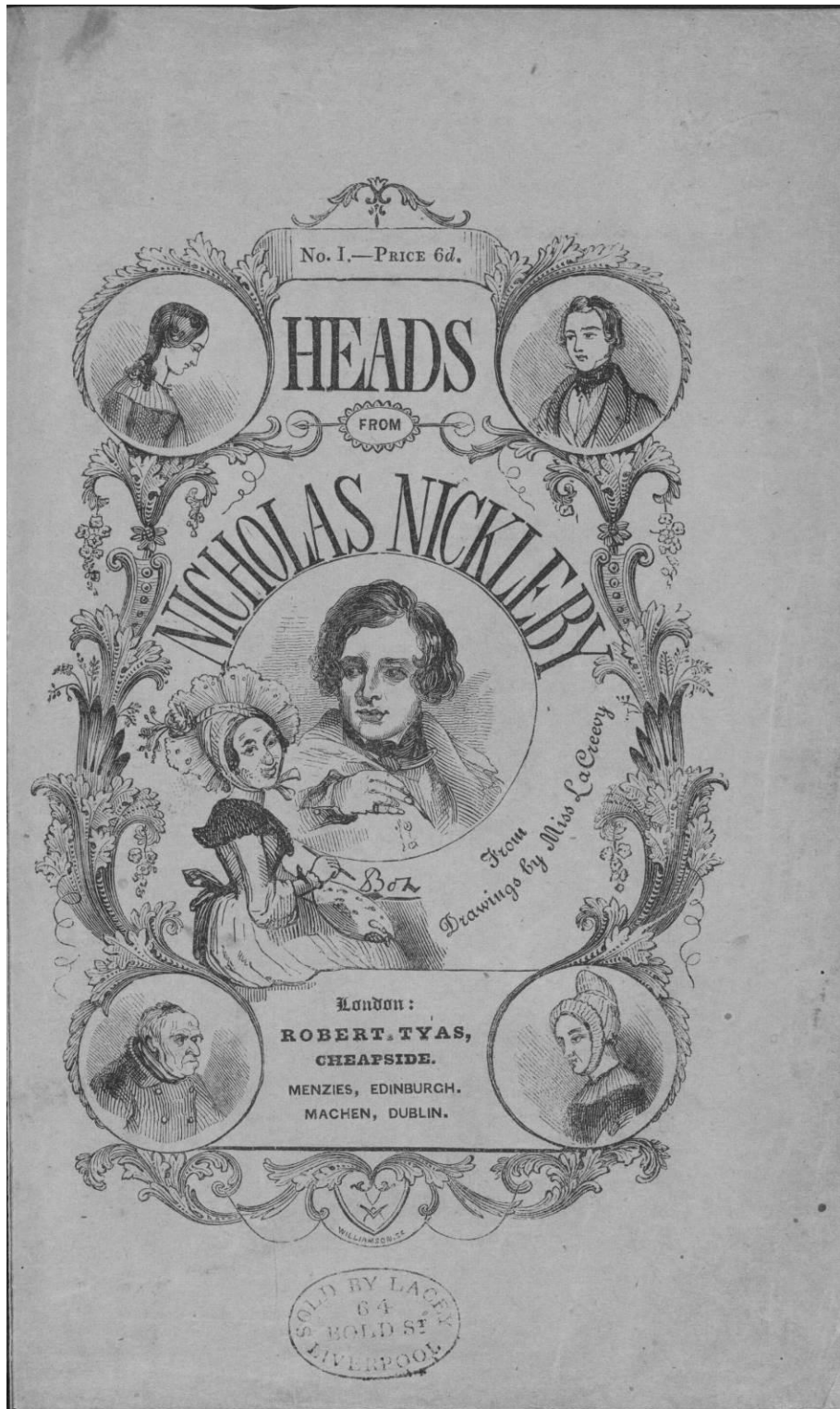


Figure 5. Joseph Kenny Meadows [pseud. Miss La Creevy], *Heads from Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Robert Tyas, Cheapside, 1839-1840) Wrapper.



It seems no coincidence that when readers are introduced to Miss La Creevy in *Nickleby*, the narrator notes that among her other miniatures, she also displayed one of a “literary character with a high forehead, a pen and ink, six books, and a curtain” (17). The props contextualizing Miss La Creevy’s subject would suggest that the “literary character” in the portrait is, in fact, an author, perhaps even a prolific one. Yet, as readers learn later, most of Miss La Creevy’s miniatures do not offer authentic depictions of their subjects. As she paints what the narrator calls Kate Nickleby’s “counterfeit countenance,” Miss La Creevy explains that the uniformed subjects in her miniatures are “not real military men.” Her sitters have engaged in a kind of role-playing: they are “only clerks and that, who hire a uniform coat to be painted in and send it here in a carpet bag.” “Some artists,” Miss La Creevy continues, “keep a red coat, and charge seven-and-sixpence extra for hire and carmine; but I don’t do that myself, for I don’t consider it legitimate” (77-78).<sup>73</sup> In the same way John Hollingshed’s “Counterfeit Presentment” throws the “verisimilitude” of photography into question, so too do Miss La Creevy’s character portraits raise doubt about the degree to which any celebrity images can give us an intimate, or even an authentic, look at the person behind the public face.

The advertisement’s portrait of Dickens self-consciously plays on this ambiguity between the embodied author, his narrative counterpart, and his fictional characters. Blended into Dickens’ lapel is a quill: readers are called on to practice and hone the “art of seeing,” as Curtis calls it, in order to identify who signed the name Boz—Miss La Creevy or Dickens himself. The

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<sup>73</sup> For more on performance and self-representation in *Nickleby*, see Banerjee. On the influence of popular forms of performance on Dickens’ works more broadly, see Schlicke 1-87.

play between fiction and non-fiction here is layered and intentionally unclear.<sup>74</sup> Are we to think La Creevy not only painted her creator, but also titled the portrait with the name “Boz”? At a glance, the image suggests as much, drawing our visual attention to her brush, which almost seems to be pointing to the name, indeed, very nearly touching it. Or, are we to assume that La Creevy’s portrait somehow came to life after she painted it, reached down out of its oval frame, and signed using his popular moniker? This too, would seem possible, as the name is clearly drawing on Boz’s unique signature from the Laurence lithograph—perhaps a suggestion that the “Heads” for sale are authorized by Boz himself? Yet, whether Miss La Creevy or “Boz” authored the image, neither acknowledge the proper name of Charles Dickens. The advertisement re-inscribes the embodied author within the very fictional worlds he created. In Curtis’ words, “Such joint visualizations of authors and characters served to collapse the distance between real and fictive worlds” (117, 173). While images such as the Tyas advertisement may “collapse the distance” between real and fictive worlds, they also increase the divide between the literary celebrity and his/her readership, adding another layer of publicity to be peeled back in the (apparent) search for an intimate glimpse of the person behind the persona.<sup>75</sup>

Such a glimpse came for Dickens’ readers when the last number of *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared in October of 1839, complete with a frontispiece of the author himself. Dickens’ publishers, Chapman and Hall, commissioned Daniel Maclise to paint a new portrait of the

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<sup>74</sup> Similar scenes in which paintings seem to come to life and blend with the subjects they depict occur in *David Copperfield* when the narrator describes meeting the Wickfield family for the first time and in *Oliver Twist* when Oliver wakes from his fever to see Mrs. Bedwin and the portrait of his mother, Agnes Fleming. See *David Copperfield* 230-234 and *Oliver Twist* 91.

<sup>75</sup> For a theorization of this self-perpetuating cycle of “revelation and concealment” in the discourses of early Hollywood, see DeCordova 73.

author for the frontispiece rather than recycling Samuel Laurence's well-known sketch, perhaps because Laurence's work was already associated with the name "Boz" (Cohen *Dickens* 160; *Birth* Patten 217). Engraved by William Finden, the image positions Dickens within a more Romantic tradition of literary portraiture, intimating his genius while simultaneously establishing his material existence—and asserting his claims to fame.<sup>76</sup> The accompanying title page features Dickens' proper name and a facsimile of his signature—signed "Faithfully Yours"—linking the figure of Dickens not only with his fictional works, but also with his corporeal form. Moreover, it advertises prints of the Maclise-Finden portrait for sale (Curtis 240-242). In this way, Dickens' face, name and signature act as endorsements for one another and for the print. The frontispiece is an attempt on Dickens' part, or on the part of his publishers, to discard the moniker "Boz" and any visual characterizations associated with it.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the frontispiece positions Dickens, for the first time in his career, as a living, breathing author, rather than as a persona or character existing within his own fictions (Patten *Birth* 220; Chittick 137-138). Dickens invents a version of himself that exists outside the fictional world in order to establish his authorial identity beyond "Boz" and guarantee the authenticity of his works over and above the rampant knockoff "Bozzes" (Patten *Birth* 221-222).

The *Nickleby* frontispiece marks a crucial moment in Dickens' celebrity, but not only for the reasons we might think. On the one hand, the Maclise-Finden portrait clears the way for Dickens' celebrity as a living author and affords him a greater measure of control over his own

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<sup>76</sup> For more on frontispieces' long association with authorial fame, see Mayol 144-5. On Romantic traditions of literary portraiture, see Piper 91-145.

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed examination of the Dickens' relationship with his publishers regarding *Nickleby*, see Patten *Publishers* 178-225.

image, the idea being that “the more popular ‘Boz’ became, the less he [Dickens] could control what others made of him” (Douglas-Fairhurst 142). To be sure, “Boz” had, in many ways, been hijacked by opportunistic imitators, publishers like Bentley, and even the readers themselves. So the *Nickleby* frontispiece was a kind of clean slate, setting the stage for readers to engage directly with Dickens himself rather than through “Boz.” And engage they did: the demand for prints of the Maclise-Finden portrait was so high that “the plate suffered such depreciation through excessive printing that it became necessary to execute a replica (Kitton 29, italics in original). Establishing Dickens’ “non-fictive” identity would seem to be a necessary condition for public intimacy between him and his readers; after all, Dickens can neither assume a god-like mantle nor a friendly, “faithful” façade if his readers do not see him as existing outside his fictions in the first place (Curtis *Visual* 240).

But on the other hand, the Maclise-Finden frontispiece also reinforces the fictionality of his celebrity.<sup>78</sup> Thanks in large part to the Graphic Revolution’s revival of cheap, woodcut illustrations, Victorian book publishing saw a resurgence in the use of elaborately decorated, sometimes hand-colored, frontispieces. Historically, the frontispiece occupies a complex paratextual position in that it has been used as a space to visually allegorize a work’s moral, to depict characters or scenes from the work, *and* to present images of the work’s author. While Gerard Curtis suggests that the rise in frontispieces indicated a growing interest on the part of Victorian readers “to observe the ultimate voice of creation” behind the fiction, Robert Patten reminds that, at the time *Nickleby* was published, it would have been just as likely for audiences to anticipate an illustration of the book’s central characters, scenes and/or themes—especially

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<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Dickens’ attitude towards portraiture and names changed from *Oliver Twist* to *Nickleby*. For a comparative reading of the two works, see Patten *Birth* 190-210.

since earlier frontispieces, like *Pickwick's*, did just that (Curtis *Visual* 242; Patten *Birth* 218). Interestingly, F.G. Kitton notes that Maclise's original painting was, in 1888, "place[d] among other portraits of *public characters*" in the National Portrait Gallery (Kitton 29, emphasis mine). No matter how naturalistic the portrait, Dickens and his gallery companions are still regarded as playing a kind of role. In the frontispiece of *Nickleby*, Dickens is still caught somewhere between the celebrity of his characters and his own celebrity as an author.

Dickens' attempt to minimize "Boz" only replaced one "public character," one persona with another—with the celebrified Image of "Dickens." Though Dickens-the-celebrity and Dickens-the-person shared a proper name, the former was not necessarily any more "real" than Boz. In her discussion of Dickens' later photographs, Melissa Kort argues that, "Dickens's general dissatisfaction with the photographs of him suggest that the face being seen by the public *was itself a kind of fiction*" (88, emphasis mine). Quoting art historian Robert Sobieszek, she writes, "'Celebrity portraits may, like other 'type' photographs, be indexical, but what they index has nothing to do with the model photographed; rather they are indices to our fantasies, our passions, and our dreams'" (Sobieszek 140, qtd. in Kort). While I hesitate to concede that celebrities are somehow reflections of their audiences' "fantasies," "passions," and "dreams," Sobieszek's point is dead-on—and not just with regard to photography (though photographs are loaded with the import of indexicality in ways that illustrations or paintings are not). The Maclise-Finden frontispiece functions similarly: it provides a physical image of a corporeal form—rather than the fictional, cartoonish figures drawn by Phiz or Cruikshank—to which a proper name could be attached and from which a new celebrity Image could be constructed. Ultimately, Boz's celebrity complicates not only the assumption that public intimacy depends on

the illusion of a connection to the “real” person behind the persona, but also the idea that printed images inherently grant audiences greater access to the embodied author.

### **Realizing Characters: The Persistence of *Pickwick***

Just as “Boz” and Dickens straddled the divide between fictional figure and embodied author, so too did Dickens’ characters blur the boundary between the fictional and physical worlds of celebrities: they were recognized and realized as celebrities in their own right, existing beyond either their narrative or pictorial texts of origin. During the period under consideration, no character exemplifies this extra-textual life more so than Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37). Though one of the primary critical debates surrounding Dickens's works has been whether or not his characterizations are anything more than "flat" caricatures—F. R. Leavis's indictment being perhaps the best known—characters such as Oliver Twist, Ebenezer Scrooge, Pip and Estella, and so on, have thrived in popular culture to the present day. In many ways, even referring to Dickens’ characters with the possessive pronoun "his" presents a problem: the characters took on lives that circulated, and continue to circulate, without Dickens's imprimatur. While Dickens struggled to emerge from behind the fictional mask of Boz and establish an authorial/celebrity identity, audiences developed a deep public intimacy with characters like Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller. But the public intimacy of *Pickwick*’s celebrity characters differs from the kind of public intimacy experienced by Dickens as a flesh-and-blood figure: audiences are not driven only by a desire to expose, but also to produce, to construct, a more robust cultural life for a figure who could, in many ways, be considered their own.

“Character celebrity,” as Elizabeth Hodgson Anderson proposes, is essentially a question of what makes a character “conducive to appropriation.” The breadth and variety of such appropriation enables celebrity characters to “transcend embodiment” in ways that historical celebrities often cannot (946). In this way, we can see *Pickwick*’s public intimacy as more additive than investigative (though it certainly was the latter, too.)<sup>79</sup> Celebrity characters are measured more by what audiences do with them than what audiences find out about them or their “private” lives. In the same way readers could, for the first time, buy serial fiction and bring it into their homes, so too could people buy images of and merchandise related to their favorite characters. If the material transformation of serialization gave the sense that Dickens “*belonged* to his readers,” as Robert Patten puts it, then the commercialization of his characters likely generated a comparable sense of ownership among audiences (“Serial Fiction”). The accretion of celebrity around *Pickwick*’s characters and “Boz’s” existence as a fictional figure mutually reinforced one another. Indeed, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller became such fixtures of everyday Victorian life that Dickens, championed though he was, encroached upon and even threatened their celebrity—a point to which I will return below.

Returning to Fildes’ *The Empty Chair*, one can see that the painting reminds viewers that Dickens’ death necessarily signaled the end of his writings as well.<sup>80</sup> A quasi-religious light streams in from the open window, highlighting the seat and seatback of Dickens’ chair, as well as the blank sheet of paper and untouched pen resting on the center of his desk. It is no accident

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<sup>79</sup> For more on Robert Seymour’s son’s claim that he originated Mr. Pickwick, see Fitzgerald 38-39. Several scholars mention briefly that readers dressed up as either Mr. Pickwick or Dickens’ other characters. See Douglas-Fairhurst 205 and Ford 3-20 and Zboray and Zboray 176.

<sup>80</sup> The end of Dickens’ works was especially significant for Fildes as he was in the process of illustrating Dickens’ unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, at the time of his death.

that, of all the objects in the painting, only the chair and the paper and pen are graced with this (apparent) sunlight. Just as the light emanating from the chair draws viewers' attention to the absent figure of Dickens' body, so too does the light glowing from the desk evoke the loss of any future fictions. The suggestion, it seems, is that readers would have no more Sam Wellers, Oliver Twists, Ebenezer Scrooges, or Mrs. Gamps—a loss at least as significant as the loss of both Dickens-the-person and Dickens-the-celebrity. In the tremendous outpouring of images after Dickens' death, one cannot overlook the parade of recognizable scenes and characters from his works. Whether they spring from his inkstand, stream in through a window, or encircle his countenance in a wreath-like frame Dickens' death is very nearly offset by the prominent depictions of his fictional characters. For instance, only weeks after Fildes' monochrome had been printed in *The Graphic*, an adaptation appeared in the London weekly, *Judy*. The *Judy* version crops and reproduces Fildes' "empty chair" almost exactly, but adds as a wide, cloud-like border of vignettes derived from Dickens' most famous fictions: the first appearance of Sam Weller in *Pickwick*, Oliver "asking for more," and so on ("The Empty Chair" 90). In this way, the success of *Judy*'s commemoration depends not only on the ubiquity of Dickens' likeness, but also on the audience's visual familiarity with celebrated scenes and characters from his works.

Similarly, in a drawing by J. R. Brown (aptly titled *Dickens Surrounded by His Characters* [1889-90]), the desk chair is no longer empty and the characters are no longer confined to a cloud-like border as in the *Judy* image. Instead, Brown's scene is somewhat unnerving: Dickens sits woodenly, very nearly overtaken by the seemingly frenetic, miniature characters at his feet, on his desk, and in the background. Though they appear to be making a kind of pilgrimage, presumably, to their place of "birth," neither the characters nor the author seem to take notice of one another. To be sure, both *Judy*'s and Brown's versions of *The Empty*



*Chair* play on the trope of authorial immortality through one's literary legacy. Yet, in both adaptations, the compelling vacancy of Fildes' watercolor has all but disappeared. Instead, these images suggest the very opposite of vacuity: even in death, Dickens' characters and their adventures spring forth with such vitality that they fill, crowd, overflow, and perhaps even overshadow, the "Inimitable" himself.

As *Judy's* and Brown's memorial images suggest, audiences took such ownership of Dickens' characters that they circulated outside the bounds of his fiction, becoming cultural phenomena in their own right. But the energy and seeming autonomy of characters such as Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller was set in motion long before Dickens's death: they were appropriated in extra illustrations, imagined continuations and dramatic adaptations of *Pickwick*. While *Pickwick* was still in its original serial run (August 1836 until November 1837), for example, several publishers released numerous unauthorized, "extra" illustrations. During 1837 alone, Ackermann and Co. enlisted Alfred Crowquill (otherwise known as Alfred H. Forrester) to produce forty additional colored lithographs, titled, "Pictures Picked from the Pickwick Papers"; Gibson & Grattan employed Thomas Onwhyn to produce thirty-two colored etchings, marketed as "Sam Weller's Illustrations to the Pickwick Club"; and Thomas McLean commissioned William Heath for twenty etchings (Grego 2:x, 2:371). All these sets were issued in monthly parts and could be purchased and bound with Dickens's serials as a supplement to Phiz's illustrations. In each case, the collections depicted scenes that had not been illustrated in *Pickwick's* original printing; as such, these images were still tied to Dickens' narrative for meaning. However, as early as March 1838, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller were excerpted and featured in *Bell's Life in London's* long-running "Gallery of Comicalities."

The cheap imitations of Dickens' *Pickwick*, as well as works which continued Mr. Pickwick's adventures, were well known and widely circulated in the period—much to Dickens' very vocal dismay.<sup>81</sup> Most memorably, perhaps, were Thomas Peckett Prest's *Penny Pickwick* (1839) by "Bos" and *Pickwick in America!* (1839). Priced at a penny an issue, these plagiarisms "helped expand the audience for Dickens' plots and characters" (Humphreys 32). Though more expensive than the penny Pickwicks, works such as *Pickwick Abroad; or, the Tour in France* (1837-8), "edited" by G. M. M. Reynolds and illustrated, incidentally, by Alfred Crowquill, also helped breathe life into the title character through appropriation. Perhaps the most contentious instance of the adaptation of *Pickwick* is William Thomas Moncrieff's burlesque *Sam Weller; or, The Pickwickians*, produced at the Strand theatre in July 1837. That the production opened in July 1837 is significant: the final installment of *Pickwick* would not appear for four more months, beating out the "authentic conclusion" to be provided by Dickens (Grego 2:8). The adaptation was so successful that it even prompted illustrations of the actor, W. J. Hammond, in Wellerian costume, serving to make Sam Weller's character all the more recognizable outside the parameters of the serial (Grego 2:24-25).

Though Joseph Grego lambastes almost all those who "continued" or "adapted" *Pickwick*—they were "recklessly disfiguring, hacking and altering the creatures of his [Dickens's] fancy"—the extra illustrations, continuations and adaptations of *Pickwick* served to make Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller instantly familiar figures in popular culture: Mr. Pickwick, with his "extraordinary bald head, and circular spectacles," his "eloquent" posture with "one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat, and the other waving in the air," his "tights and

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<sup>81</sup> Dickens famously sued Prest's publisher, Edward Lloyd, over these works—and lost. See Humphreys 32-33. On the projected circulation of these issues, see Schlicke 33.

gaiters,” and Sam Weller, with his “coarse-striped waistcoat, with black calico sleeves and blue glass buttons,” his “bright red handkerchief” tied “round his neck,” and his “old white hat carelessly thrown to one side of his head” (*Pickwick* 3, 118). These unauthorized images did the cultural work of making these two characters visually recognizable figures that could exist, even thrive, outside the world of their source text.

In addition to the authorized illustrations of the characters by Robert Seymour and Phiz, the unauthorized appropriations primed the market for an unprecedented outpouring of *Pickwick* merchandise. If Dickens “belonged to his readers,” as Robert Patten has said, so too did his characters—even more so, thanks to their appropriation and commercialization. The proliferation of *Pickwick* “chintzes” meant that people could literally *own* Mr. Pickwick, or at least a piece of him, no Charles Dickens required. F. G. Kitton, for instance, recounts how “*Pickwick* chintzes figured in linen-drapers’ windows, Weller courderoys in breeches-makers’ advertisements, and the *Pickwick* cigar—known to this day as the “Penny *Pickwick*”—was introduced, as a complement to our author, by a London tobacco manufacturer” (Kitton “True Story” 669.). In his detailed account of the book, *The History of Pickwick* (1891), Percy Fitzgerald notes also the variety of items that, while they did not depict Mr. Pickwick’s likeness, were advertised as merchandise like that appearing in the serial: “There were seen ‘*Pickwick* canes,’ ‘*Pickwick* gaiters,’ ‘*Pickwick* hats,’ with narrow curled brims” and so on. Moreover, Fitzgerald notes that much of his own book about *Pickwick* “[had] been written, appropriately, with a ‘*Pickwick*’ pen” (24-25).<sup>82</sup> The “*Pickwick* pen”—a steel nib produced by Scottish stationer MacNiven and Cameron—was, according to Fitzgerald’s footnote, “advertised for years in the familiar couplet:

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<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of how and why late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century readers “transacted” with literary characters through such appropriations, see Lynch 1-20.

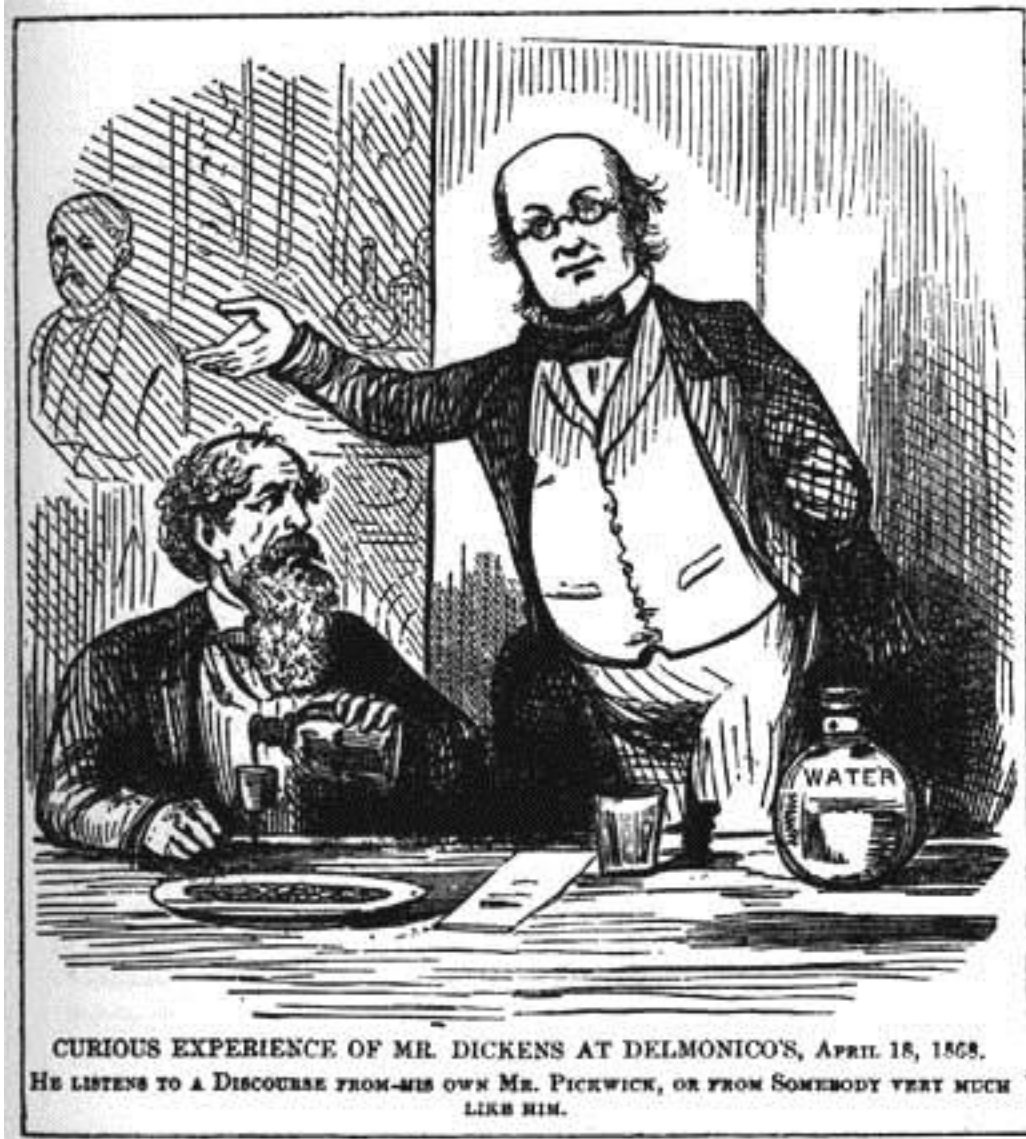


Figure 6. "The Curious Experience of Mr. Dickens at Delmonico's," 18 April, 1868.

‘They come as a boon and a blessing to men, / The Waverly, Owl, and Pickwick pen’” (25). The advertisement promotes more than just the pens themselves: through the process of commercialization and commoditization, it places Dickens in a lineage of famous authors including Sir Walter Scott and Henry Fielding.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps more importantly, these appropriations reinforce Pickwick’s name and the identifying features of Pickwick’s person, materializing his character in the “real world.”<sup>84</sup>

The degree to which Mr. Pickwick became a stand-alone celebrity character can be observed in the cartoon, “Curious Experience of Mr. Dickens at Delmonico’s,” which appeared in an unidentified periodical, potentially an American one, in April 1868 (see figure 6). Published only two years before his death, the image anticipates many of the posthumous portraits of Dickens which emphasized the lives of his characters. Yet, “Mr. Dickens at Delmonico’s” suggests something more than the independence of Mr. Pickwick’s celebrity: the humor of the cartoon hinges on the *dominance* of Mr. Pickwick over Dickens, oblivious though the character is. The scene references a press reception held for Dickens at Delmonico’s restaurant in New York City to celebrate the close of his second American lecture tour in April 1868. His plate cleaned, the author pours a(nother) drink as he is subjected to listening “to a discourse from his own Mr. Pickwick, or from somebody very much like him.” Pickwick’s posture—standing, leaning slightly forward, hand raised—recalls Robert Seymour’s first plate illustrating the opening scene of the *Pickwick Papers*, “Mr. Pickwick Addresses the Club.” What

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<sup>83</sup> The “Waverly Pen” refers to Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly* (1814). The “Owl” refers to Henry Fielding’s *Tumble-down Dick; or, Phaeton in the Suds* (1736).

<sup>84</sup> For mention of how audiences dressed up as Dickens’ characters, see Zboray and Zboray 120. In his review of actress Mary Anderson’s 1896 memoir, George Bernard Shaw makes brief reference to those who dressed up as Dickens’ characters for profit as part of the literary tourism industry. See Shaw “Mary Anderson” 380.

is striking and funny about the cartoon is that Pickwick, in classic Pickwick fashion, takes center stage in the frame, towering over Dickens compositionally. The highlights of the image draw viewers' attention not to the famous author, but to the roundness of Mr. Pickwick's belly and bald head. Dickens' brow is furrowed as he looks up at the notoriously long-winded Mr. Pickwick, suggesting a mixture of exasperation and resignation at the celebrity of his own character.

Whether Dickens himself felt annoyed by his inextricable attachment to Mr. Pickwick is unclear, but he certainly understood that even thirty years after the publication of the *Pickwick Papers*, his fans still wanted him to "play the hits," as it were. As Dickens' manager, George Dolby, recalls of his second American lecture tour, the author would still "revel" in his portrayal of the famous "Bardell v. Pickwick" court scene, a reading he had given so much over the years "that he often strayed from away from the actual text, and indulged in the habit of an occasional gag" (175). In her diary, American writer Annie Adams Fields recounts an instance during Dickens' second American reading tour in which the aging author forgot to read the part of Sergeant Buzfuz as advertised. Despite Dickens' failing health and obvious exhaustion, Fields recounts that "one tall man raised himself up in the gallery and said, 'Look here, we came to hear Pickwick and we ought to hef [sic] it'" (138-140). For better or worse, Dickens' "faithful" relationship with his readers ultimately left him beholden to the popularity of his most famous characters.

Mr. Pickwick's "peregrinations" exceeded even those of Dickens himself, famous ambulator though he was. After Dickens' death in 1870, the appropriations and commercialization of Pickwick (and others) continued, helping to realize the fictional character as a celebrity even while he "transcended embodiment," as Hodgson says. The market for

postcards, playing cards, cigarette cards and so on that depicted Dickens' characters existed well into the twentieth century. Perhaps the most prolific producer of this ephemera was artist James Clayton "Kyd" Clarke. What interests me most are not just the pictures Kyd produced, but the way his collections were marketed. Consider, for example, an 1889 advertisement for his collection of twenty-four full-page watercolors, *Characters of Charles Dickens*:

The characters of Charles Dickens are something more than fictional creations, mere creatures of the imagination; *they breathe and live in real flesh and blood, they exist in our very midst*. We know, or seem to have known them personally; we have smiled with Sam Weller, we have sympathized with Tiny Tim, we have wept with Little Nell. They will cease to charm us only when the English language is forgotten, or human nature ceases to exist. (qtd. in Grego 2:463, emphasis mine).

The advertisement appeals to the characters' existence as "real flesh and blood" and their familiarity as personal friends to readers. Owning Kyd's portrait collection, then, is not entirely unlike the Victorians collecting cartes-de-visite of real-life family, friends and acquaintances with whom they have also "smiled," "sympathized," and "wept." Unlike the advertisement for Robert Tyas' "Heads" in the *Nickleby Advertiser* fifty years earlier, which used fictional characters to endorse its product, the ad for Kyd's watercolors argues for the realness of the characters outside of Dickens' texts.

This rhetoric of realness appears in the critical or historical discourses surrounding Dickens and *Pickwick* as well, and it is linked closely with the language of intimacy. In Forster's recollection of the Pickwick phenomenon, for example, he maintains that the novel's popularity could only be attributed to something "over and above the lively painting of manners," to something that "left a deeper mark" on its readers. For Forster, this "deeper mark" is made in the

moment when readers, "become conscious, in the very thick of the extravaganza of adventure and fun set before us, *that here were real people*. It was not somebody talking humorously about them, but they were there themselves." Dickens' paradoxical ability to make "Boz" seem at once present and transparent renders the boundary between fictional character and "ordinary reader" permeable, enabling characters like Mr. Pickwick to be "added to his [the reader's] *intimate and familiar acquaintance*" (Forster 1: 131, emphasis mine).

Writing over twenty years later, Percy Fitzgerald reiterates and expands on Forster's position: "We may look around in vain," he says, "for any work of modern times which has excited such interest or prompted so much commentary, except it be the *Life of Johnson*. But Boswell's hero *lived*. Mr. Pickwick, however, is quite as familiar to us as Boswell's idol, and almost as living" (vii, emphasis in original). Mr. Pickwick is rendered "almost as living" as the "Good Doctor" because of Dickens' ability to make his characters seem real: "So real are the characters and scenes that in reading it [Pickwick] over and over again, we find no more sense of familiarity or sameness than we do in meeting friends or acquaintances. In these fictitious beings, as in real life, we seem to discover on further intimacy fresh points of interest that have escaped us before" (4-5). For Forster, readers make the "intimate and familiar acquaintance" of the Pickwickians—"intimate" and "familiar" are almost synonymous, in this case. But for Fitzgerald the distinction between "intimate" and "familiar" is subtler. Though he concedes the characters are "fictitious beings," he also argues that Dickens' characters are made real because the more intimate with the characters one becomes, the more they defy the stagnant "familiarity or



sameness” of other fictional characters. Like real-life friends or acquaintances, the characters’ personalities, habits, and manners continue to unfold and evolve over time.<sup>85</sup>

In 1882, publishers Robson and Kerslake released *Twenty-four Illustrations to The Pickwick Club*, etched by Frederick W. Pailthorpe. Unlike the extra illustrations that appeared contemporaneously with *Pickwick* or the imaginative continuations that emerged after its final number, Grego praises Pailthorpe’s work: he refers to the artist as “ingenious and talented,” as one who “enjoys an exhaustive knowledge of the famous epic [*Pickwick*].” He writes:

The sentiment in which Mr. Pailthorpe has approached his author is obviously that of a reverential disciple; without descending into plagiarism, or, as it may be expressed, ‘waking away with other men’s clothes,’ his highly trained artistic and receptive faculties have enabled him to produce numerous freshly humorous pictures, illustrating episodes in the resourceful chronicles of the *Pickwick Club*; incidents which, until his own graphic powers had given them pictorial embodiment, had never before been illustrated.” (Grego 2:449-50)

Grego goes on to praise both the publishers, Robson and Kerslake, and Pailthorpe, saying they “admirably succeeded” in their endeavors, rendering “absolutely original” images derived from passages of *Pickwick* “which had hitherto escaped the artistic zeal of previous Dickens illustrators.” They are “thoroughly in harmony with the first series of plates to *Pickwick*, to which these etchings are a corollary or supplement; they seem so completely in place between

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<sup>85</sup> E.D.H. Johnson’s chapter, “Presentation of Characters,” analyzes aspects of Dickens’ method of characterization which help make his characters “real in the same way that characters in plays are real, and in the same way, perhaps, that living people seem real to each other.” Johnson 115-120.

the suites executed by Seymour and Phiz as to suggest that the artist must have designed these pictures contemporaneously with the original monthly parts, as issued in 1836” (2: 450).

What is most interesting about Pailthorpe’s works, however, is the frontispiece Grego himself uses for his own *Pictorial Pickwickiana* (see figure 7). Like the title page of Robert Tyas’ *Nickleby Heads* in which Miss La Creevy, the character, paints her creator, “Boz,” this illustration positions Mr. Pickwick both inside and outside the fictional world. The illustration is modeled on Phiz’s original frontispiece for the *Pickwick Papers*, which depicts Mr. Pickwick sitting at a table, leaning forward with feet propped up, and reviewing books with Sam Weller. (What books he is looking at remain unclear, though the implication seems to be that he is looking at the papers of the Pickwick Club.) Phiz’s illustration, however, is surrounded by an elaborate theatrical border with Tupman, Snodgrass and Winkle featured in miniature frames below, and two jesters holding back a curtain to reveal the scene inside. The frontispiece to Grego’s volume shows the transformation of Mr. Pickwick in the fifty years since his initial appearance. The scene is clearly drawn from Phiz’s: Mr. Pickwick sits at his table in the same position, but rather than reviewing unmarked books, he looks on with pleasure at a large portrait of himself, taken apparently from Pailthorpe’s own water-colour illustrations displayed in the bottom left-hand corner of the image. In the same way Robert Tyas and other used fictional characters such as Mrs. La Creevy to endorse products for sale in real life, so too does Pailthorpe use Mr. Pickwick as a kind of spokesman for his own works. The portrait Mr. Pickwick studies depicts him in the classic pose of “addressing the club,” a picture that by the latter-nineteenth century would have been instantly recognizable. Rather than being surrounded by text as he is in Phiz’s frontispiece, Mr. Pickwick is flanked by portraits of other characters from the novel—Sam Weller, Mr. Weller, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle. But the Pickwickians are

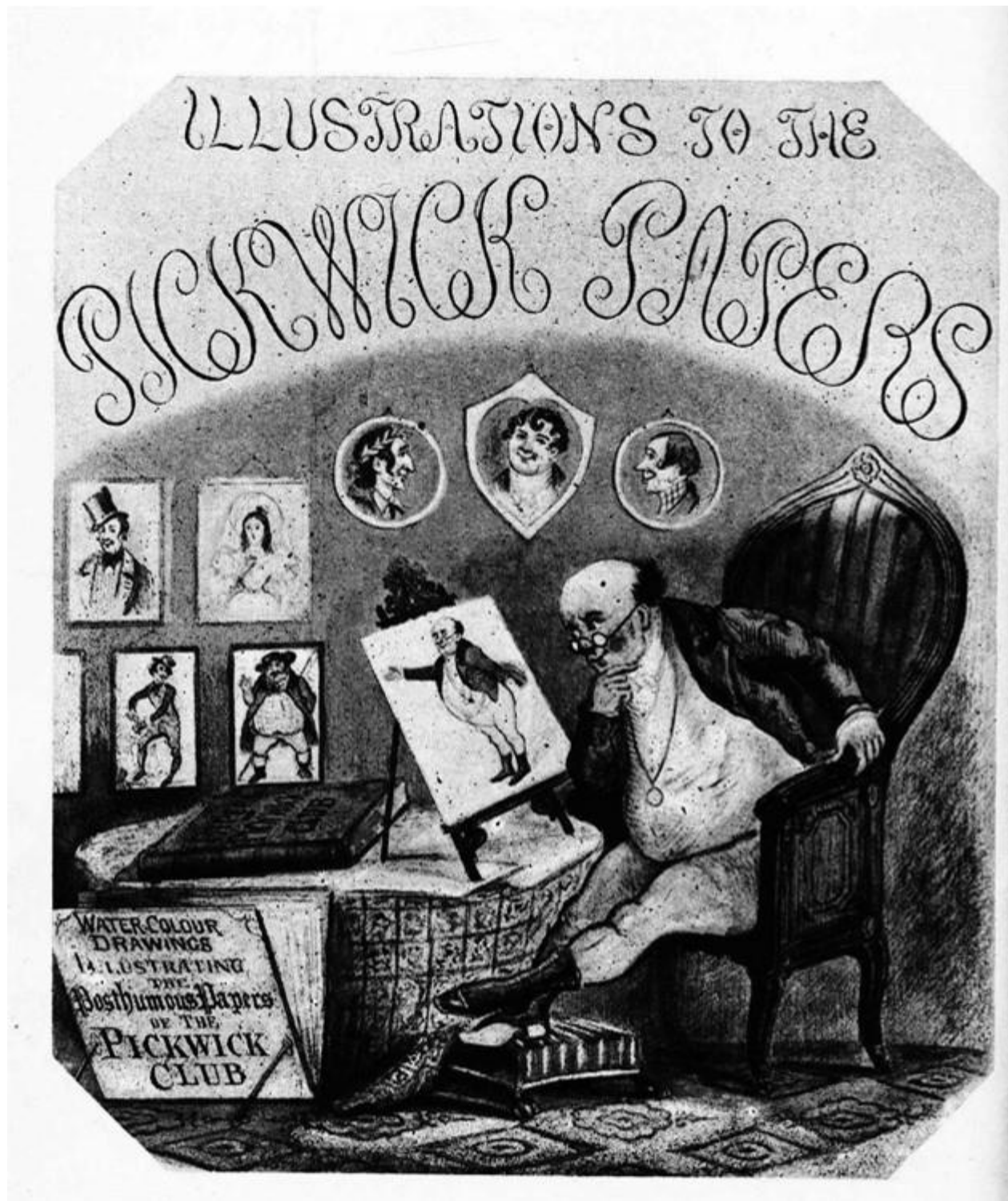


Figure 7. Frederick Pailthorpe, Title page to *Pictorial Pickwickiana: Charles Dickens and his Illustrators*, Ed. Joseph Grego, Vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899)

no longer relegated to frames in the picture's periphery; they now occupy a prominent position on Mr. Pickwick's own wall. (Notably, the frame shapes—two circles and a shield—and ordering are exactly the same as the Phiz illustration.) Pailthorpe's picture employs metafictional devices to emblemize the degree to which Mr. Pickwick has become a stand-alone celebrity character who exists beyond the reach of even Dickens himself. Through the appropriation and circulation of his likeness, he has become aware of his own popularity and significance as a cultural icon.<sup>86</sup>

Dickens seemed to understand the epitextual lives of his characters, that their existence as “real” people had placed them in a tier of celebrity, if not above his own, then certainly equivalent to it. In a letter to Forster in September 1858, he professed that he realized he had achieve true fame when, during one of his well-known “perambulations” about London, a reader approached him on the street, and according to Dickens, said, “Mr. Dickens, will you let me touch the hand that has filled my home with so many friends?” (qtd. in Alexander 1). Whereas today, we often hear the trope of a newly minted celebrity judging his or her renown by being recognized in the street, Dickens, at least in this moment, judges his celebrity not by his recognizability, but by the seemingly real relationships readers had developed with his characters.

### **Maintaining the Fiction(s)**

Mr. Pickwick's history as a celebrity character helps us resituate our understanding of authorial celebrity as a phenomenon that is inherently intertextual. Celebrity itself can be read as

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<sup>86</sup> For more on metafiction and the novel, and specifically its origins in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, see Alter 1-30. The link to metafiction is particularly interesting given critical comparisons of *The Pickwick Papers* to the picaresque genre generally and *Don Quixote* in particular.

a kind of multi-authored fiction, not created or controlled by any one person—not even by the person whose physical body and/or proper name indexes its meaning. In Dickens’ case, as Victorian readers grew more attached to the persona of “Boz” and characters such as Mr. Pickwick, he became somewhat of a fifth wheel in his own celebrity. More than that, his presence as an embodied celebrity became a threat to the public intimacy readers had developed with “Boz” and his characters.

The dissonance between “authorial Boz and authorial body,” as Robert Patten puts it, emerged as early as December 1836. Before readers were acquainted with Dickens’ name, they had developed an idea, an “imagined portrait,” of what Boz looked like. But as we will see with both Tennyson and Wilde, the embodied author rarely lived up to readers’ expectations. On top of that, many readers, Patten reminds, “believed in the transparency of his [Dickens’] narratorial identity” (*Birth* 73-74). That is, they believed that when they met “Boz” in person, the body would match the voice with whom they had become so familiar. The readers’ surprised reactions did not go unnoticed by Dickens: for example, at the premiere of his play, *The Village Coquettes* (by “Boz”), the audience expected to see a “middle-aged, solitary, melancholy figure”—the figure of Boz—and instead they found an early-twentysomething with “curly hair, flashing eyes, and high spirits” (Patten *Birth* 72-73). Similarly, in Ronald and Mary Zboray’s excellent archival study, they trace instances of incompatibility between images of Dickens (both mental and printed) and his physical presence during his first American reading tour in 1842. For many American audiences, Dickens’ “unpretending,” “agreeable,” and “affable” demeanor matched his unpretentious narrative voice and characters (qtd. in Zboray and Zboray 120). But Zboray and Zboray also point to reports of disappointment and annoyance as well: “Dickens’ visit to the United States summoned up, in microcosm, all the permutations of celebrity worship, and its

opposite, celebrity toppling” (122). American audiences used Dickens’ works and his visit to make sense of these competing impulses embedded within celebrity culture and its mechanism, public intimacy. On the one hand, American audiences bonded with one another by talking about the sense of intimacy they felt with Dickens, taking pleasure and comfort in Boz’s heart-warming ordinariness, in the idea that even great men could be “one of them.” On the other, they banded together to uncover artifice and mock shortcomings, to expose celebrities as imposters of greatness.<sup>87</sup> Dickens’ looks, for example, were dismissed as “average;” one writer even commenting that “his [Dickens’] face is one that must improve upon acquaintance” (qtd. in Zboray and Zboray 121). Like the “postmodern” viewers Joshua Gamson identifies in contemporary celebrity culture, even some Victorian audiences operated with a kind of “engaged disbelief.”

Dickens comments on these kinds of author-audience encounters when, in the sixth installment of *The Pickwick Papers*, he places Mr. Pickwick and his club in a celebrity soiree of their own. While lodging in Eatansville, Mr. Pickwick is invited by Mr. Leo Hunter, on behalf of his wife, to join a breakfast costume party attended by guests “who have rendered themselves celebrated by their works and talents” (198). The appropriately-named, lion-hunting couple had “heard of [Mr. Pickwick’s] fame” (exactly how is unclear) and hoped to expand their circle of distinguished acquaintances. As is so often the case in *The Pickwick Papers*, Mr. Pickwick’s earnestness and affability serve as a comic foil for the less-than-noble motives of characters like Mrs. Leo Hunter. Her party is an attempt to “render herself” more celebrated, not by her own

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<sup>87</sup> It is interesting to note that many of the letter writers and diarists the Zborays cite refer to Dickens almost exclusively as “Boz,” even in the context of him as living, breathing author. See Zboray and Zboray 117-123. For other examples of fans’ disappointment with their favorite authors, see 116-117.

“works and talents,” but by her association with those she believes to be famous. After all, the self-proclaimed “authoress” is best known for her poetry, most notably, “Ode to an Expiring Frog,” appearing in local papers. The ridiculousness of the party becomes apparent even before the characters arrive on the scene: the narrator admits that some may say costume parties are “not adapted to the daylight,” yet the gathering is scheduled to take place in the morning rather than at night; Mr. Pott, editor of the *Eatansville Gazette*, “confidently predicted” and published details of the party’s success a day before it even occurred; and Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman nearly come to blows when Pickwick “reiterate[s] the charge” that his comrade is “too old” and “too fat” to go dressed as a bandit (201).

Of all the attendees at the party, only Mr. Pickwick chooses not to wear a costume. Unlike the other Pickwickians, he rejects the idea of dressing up as “Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, or Pythagoras”—“all founders of clubs,” Mr. Leo Hunter points out. Mr. Pickwick refuses to “put [himself] in competition with these great men” by “presum[ing] to wear their dress.” Pickwick’s humility and lack of pretense do not extend to his friends, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle, all of whom use Mrs. Leo Hunter’s party as an opportunity to pose as heroic versions of themselves (203). This is in keeping with our introduction to the characters in the first issue: according to the notes of the “secretary,” Mr. Pickwick addressed the club and “observed...that fame was dear to the heart of every man. Poetic fame was dear to the heart of his friend Snodgrass, the fame of conquest was equally dear to his friend Tupman; and the desire of earning fame, in the sports of the field, the air, and the water, was uppermost in the breast of his friend Winkle.” Mr. Pickwick himself “would not deny, that he was influenced by human passions, and human feelings;” however, also he claimed that “if ever the fire of self-importance broke out in his bosom the desire to benefit the human race in preference, effectually quenched

it” (17).<sup>88</sup> The “fire of self-importance” certainly burned bright for Tupman, Snodgrass and Winkle, as their costumes suggest—a Brigand, a Troubadour and a Sportsman, respectively. Yet none of their costumes, or anyone’s for that matter, accurately signify their intended personae, especially not in the cold light of day. For example, the narrator tells us Mr. Winkle “could not possibly be mistaken for anything but a sportsman, if he had not borne an equal resemblance to a general postman” and Mrs. Pott “would have looked very like Apollo if she hadn’t had a gown on” (203). Mrs. Leo Hunter is particularly susceptible to the puffery of fame, as readers and Mr. Pickwick find out when she proudly introduces the villain of *The Pickwick Papers*, Alfred Jingle, as the famous Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall. At the party full of “D-list” celebrities, Jingle’s arrival confirms what the reader has known all along: none of attendees at the party are actually worthy of fame, and their posturing only exposes their shortcomings.

It is in the context of Mrs. Leo Hunter’s party that we meet literary celebrities such as Count Smorltork, who is writing a “great work on England” (but who has only been in the country for two weeks). “There were hosts of these geniuses [at the party],” the narrator tells us, “and any reasonable person would have thought it honour enough to meet them.” “But more than these,” he continues,

there were half a dozen lions from London—*authors, real authors, who had written whole books, and printed them afterwards*—and here you might see ‘em, walking about, like ordinary men, smiling, and talking—aye, and talking pretty considerable nonsense too, no doubt with the benign intention of rendering themselves intelligible to the common people around them. (204, emphases mine)

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<sup>88</sup> To be sure, claiming to benefit the human race could be interpreted as self-important. But over the course of the novel, Mr. Pickwick makes good on his claims of humility and his earnest desire to do good.



In the hierarchy of “geniuses” and “lions” in attendance, the narrator singles out “authors, *real* authors” as the most exceptional. Here the narrator editorializes what he observes, referring to the authors at the party with exaggerated reverence, and draws attention to the joke by setting it apart from the body of the sentence with dashes. On one level, the refrain, “*real* authors,” suggests the rarity of seeing an author in person (at least in the late 1830s). The act of seeing confirms the author’s bodily existence and collapses the distance between him/her and the reader, a distance formerly mediated by the disembodied voice of the text.

On another level, the repetition implies a question—are there “fake” authors? Can people who have “written whole books” but *not* “printed them afterward” be considered authors at all? At Mrs. Leo Hunter’s party, the answer is surely yes. Meeting these lions in person may confirm their bodily existence, but it also exposes the ridiculous incongruence between them and the truly great figures whose costumes they wear. They are “walking about, like ordinary men” precisely because they *are* ordinary men. The narrator’s irony, coupled with the use of the direct second-person address (“you might see ‘em”), lets the reader “in” on the joke: Mrs. Leo Hunter’s guests are not “real” authors, no matter how much they try to convince us and themselves otherwise—and the same could be said of other self-proclaimed lions roaming around in readers’ real lives. Adding to the humor is the narrator’s slippage into more working-class, almost Weller-esque language including “‘em” and “aye.” These inflections contrast with the “benign” but “pretty considerable nonsense” spoken by the lions of Mrs. Leo Hunter’s party. Again, the gag is on the literary celebrities. In attempting to “[render] themselves intelligible to the common people around them,” they betray themselves, revealing that they probably speak “pretty considerable nonsense” all the time. The voice of the “common people,” by contrast, is the voice that exposes

imposters. Ultimately, the narrator mocks not only those who pose as great authors, but also those viewers who are star-struck enough to believe in their posturing.

Just as Mr. Pickwick is a crusader for uncovering artifice, so too does Dickens participate in “celebrity toppling,” a move that endears him all the more to audiences like those he encountered on his first American reading tour. As the Zborays put it, Dickens “somehow broke through the show, and turned the tables of celebrity upon readers” (118). In portraying Mrs. Leo Hunter’s party, Dickens mocks the celebrity culture of which he will become an integral part. But the everyman alliance Dickens had built with his readers had limitations. There was a line of too much authenticity, a line beyond which his ordinariness became less than charming.

In June 1858, Charles Dickens formally separated from his wife of over twenty years, Catharine Hogarth. The break was “formal” in that both parties’ lawyers contractually negotiated the terms of the separation. Though Catharine Hogarth threatened to pursue the matter in court on the grounds of the Divorce Act of 1857, the separation was not a legal divorce (Ackroyd 809-813). Hogarth was also the mother of his ten children, whose care was determined in the separation settlement. However, within days of the split, Dickens embarked on a preemptive public relations campaign, releasing a statement—titled simply “Personal”—on the front page of *Household Words* on June 12. Further, he sent the same statement to a number of major newspapers, including *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle*, in an apparent attempt at a kind of media blitz (Leary 306). Appealing to his “faithful,” decades-long relationship with readers, Dickens defends his decision to reveal “[his] own private character” on the basis that doing so is his only means of “circulating the Truth.” “My conspicuous position,” he writes,

has often made me *the subject of fabulous stories and unaccountable statements.*

Occasionally, such things have chafed me...but, I have always accepted them as the

shadows inseparable from the light of my notoriety and success. *I have never obtruded any such personal uneasiness of mine, upon the generous aggregate of my audience.*

(“Personal” 5, emphases mine)

By today’s standards, it might seem that Dickens did the right thing by “getting out in front of” the potential scandal and addressing his audience with sincerity; he had, after all, just begun a potentially lucrative commercial reading tour across Britain. Prudent though it may seem, Dickens made one major miscalculation when he released this statement: he failed to consider that his “generous aggregate” of readers had little, if any, knowledge of the “domestic trouble” to which he referred (Slater 11-13; Leary 307). As a result, the attempt to preserve his image—not just as the embodiment of hearth and home, but as the exposé of imposters—added fuel to what was not yet a fire in the first place, sparking the curiosity of press and public and generating rumors that Dickens was having an affair with his then sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth. (He wasn’t.) Instead, after his separation from Catherine, he spent the rest of his life with actress Ellen Ternan, a woman almost thirty years his junior.<sup>89</sup>

One reaction to Dickens’ personal statement provides insight into questions about the limitations of public intimacy in literary celebrity.<sup>90</sup> Writing only days after the editorial appeared in *Household Words*, a contributor to the weekly periodical, *John Bull and Britannia*, offered his commentary. Given the current state of celebrity culture, one might expect that the writer would demand more intimate details of Dickens’ marital situation. In fact, the opposite seems true. The article actively rejects speculation on Dickens’ private life and focuses instead

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<sup>89</sup> A full account of Dickens’ relationship can be found in Claire Tomalin’s controversial biography, *The Invisible Woman*.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed examination of the press reaction to the so-called “Dickens Scandal” in both Britain and the United States, see Leary 305-325.

on whether the author should have brought the issue to the public's attention at all. The contributor opens almost apologetically, conceding that the "subject" of Dickens' marriage was one to which he "had not thought of alluding." Yet, he feels compelled to offer comment because it has been "*forced upon our notice*" (emphasis mine). Within the first paragraph, the writer quickly quashes any further inquiry into the content of Dickens' statement, stating, "We unreservedly say that we believe, and are willing and glad to believe, this declaration on the part of Mr. Dickens." The commentator "[accepts] with implicit faith... [Dickens'] excusatory statement," but he "[regrets] the he should have made it" in the first place. He goes on to question Dickens' judgment, denying the author's assumption that "whatever tends to bring a public man face to face with his audience is good." The *John Bull* contributor worries that pursuing the issue further might uncover salacious, potentially damning details that could compromise Dickens' image and, in turn, Dickens' relationship with readers. In short, "people will feel humbugged out of their idolatry" ("Mr. Charles Dickens" 377).

On the one hand, he admits that the British, "are a nation of hero-worshippers; and, being also a domestic people, we certainly prefer to have our heroes at least as good as ourselves in a domestic point of view." On the other, the word "prefer" implies that if a hero does not live up to the nation's domestic standards, it is best the public not know. In much the same way early-twentieth century audiences expected a Hollywood actor's on-screen character to correspond with his/her behind-the-scenes personality, so too does the *John Bull* writer call for harmony between Dickens' public persona and his private life—even at the expense of the truth. For him, Dickens has,

committed a grave error in telling his readers how little, after all, he thinks of the marriage tie. *He has destroyed the pleasing illusion which he has kept up*, Heaven knows

with what effort, for many years. *He has quite spoilt our taste for that greatest of all the Dickens fictions—himself.* Who would believe that a man who wrote so beautifully about the home affections could have the smallest cramp-bone of a skeleton in a corner of any one of his closets? (“Mr. Charles Dickens” 377, emphases mine)

What is at stake for the writer is not why Dickens separated from his wife or even whether he is romantically involved with his sister-in-law, Georgina—a relationship which Michael Slater reminds would have been considered incestuous by Victorian legal standards (35). Rather, the contributor is more concerned that the “pleasing illusion” of Dickens will be marred by his over sharing. The suggestion here is not that Victorian audiences had been duped into whole-heartedly *believing* Dickens’ public face—or any public face for that matter—was entirely truthful. Audiences understood that Dickens’ celebrity image was, like his works, a great fiction, a web of “fabulous stories” and “unaccountable statements.” Nevertheless, the *John Bull* contributor suggests that audiences would prefer to be spared from having their hero’s dirty laundry aired in public.

After the initial buzz surrounding Dickens’ personal statement dissipated, it appeared the issue had been put to rest, an uncharacteristic blip in an otherwise steady celebrity career. However, the scandal was reignited three months later, in August, when a letter slandering Catherine was leaked to the press. The circumstances surrounding the publication of this “Violated Letter,” as it has come to be known, are murky at best. Written by Dickens in May—weeks before the release of his personal statement—the letter had been sent to the manager of his reading tour, Arthur Smith. Appended to the letter, Dickens included a statement giving Arthur “full permission to show this [the letter]...to anyone who wishes to do me right, or to anyone

who may have been misled into doing me wrong.”<sup>91</sup> Unlike the intentional vagueness of the “Personal Statement,” the “Violated Letter” goes into significantly more detail about the reasons for the dissolution of Dickens’ marriage. Beyond his assertion that he and Catherine were “wonderfully unsuited to each other,” he claims that Catherine had not served as a mother to their ten children, and that she suffered from a “mental disorder.” He then describes in detail the living arrangements for his ten children, and vows that his relationship with each of them remains good despite his separation from their apparently less-than-stellar mother. If all this were not enough, he goes on to refute rumors that his separation was in any way related to his relationship with an unnamed “young lady.” (It is unclear whether such rumors had been circulating widely enough to warrant a public response.) In contrast to the unflattering portrait he paints of his own wife, Dickens insists that “there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature than that young lady” (qtd. in Slater 195-197).

Overlooking Dickens’ astonishingly disrespectful portrayal of his wife, the response to the publication of the “Violated Letter” once again throws into question audiences’ desire to know intimate details of celebrities’ private lives. A week after printing the letter, the *Morning Chronicle* ran a follow-up piece titled simply, “The Dickens Dispute.” Even more strongly than the *John Bull* contributor before him, the *Chronicle* writer uses the rhetoric of force to describe the way in which Dickens’ separation had been brought to light. “If, in defiance of good taste and common sense,” he begins, “Mr. Dickens will persist in obtruding his matrimonial trouble on the public, he must needs take the consequences. And these consequences are likely to be

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<sup>91</sup> Slater speculates that Smith may have released the letter in the hope that Dickens’ marriage dispute would not affect the success of his reading tour. See Slater 36. On the letter’s original publication in an American newspaper and the differing responses of American readers and British readers, see Leary 305-325.

very different from those which the accomplished author may think himself entitled to expect.” The columnist continues lambasting Dickens, declaring that the author was “impelled by vanity” to once again “thrust himself and his family disputes before the eyes of the public” and, later, “to force his domestic squabbles on the public notice.” Neither public nor press sought these intimate details, at least according to this single respondent; rather, Dickens dragged the public into his private affairs against their will. Despite the contributor’s sympathy for Catherine, who he believes had been “mercilessly exposed to public notice,” he nevertheless finds the image of Dickens in a domestic spat particularly unappealing:

The world at large did not know—did not care—whether he had a wife at all. It would not be pleasant to think that the author of *Barnaby Rudge* and *Little Dorrit* was subject to be “—preached at in a gown, / Or lectured in a night dress;” and, accordingly, the world preferred to remain in blissful ignorance of Mr. Dickens’s ménage. (“The Dickens Dispute” 5)

The implication here is that few people want to think of Dickens being “preached” at or “lectured” to, and certainly not by his wife. When seen at home, the Inimitable not only becomes unattractively pedestrian—he is emasculated as well.<sup>92</sup>

Generalizing from Dickens’ unique case, the *Chronicle* columnist extends his criticism, maintaining that,

A celebrated writer—especially a writer of fiction—*should never be visible to the public eye*. His movements, his occupations, his very person, should be enshrouded in a misty

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<sup>92</sup> The contributor’s assertion that readers “did not know” that Dickens had a wife is an overstatement, especially considering the fact that Catherine Hogarth had published a moderately well-received cookbook, *What Shall We Have for Dinner?*, in 1851. See Nayder 184-188. For an alternative view praising Dickens for his candor in coming forth with the letter, see Slater 16-18.

haze. Even a passing glimpse of his physiognomy takes away more or less of *the prestige of his works*. We never knew anybody who was not, in some degree, disappointed on the first sight of an eminent author. The only celebrities who bear to be looked at are generals, great orators, and popular preachers—provided always that they never put their pen to paper. (5, emphases mine)

Contrary to repeated assertions that Victorian audiences longed to see authors in person, this article suggests that becoming “visible to the public eye” is as undesirable for the viewer as it is for the celebrity on display. On a physical level, the body and/or face of an author—“his very person” or “his physiognomy”—can prove disappointing, as Dickens’ face did for some American audiences. Figuratively, the columnist implies that seeing the body and/or face of an author is tantamount to exposing the unattractive or uninspired aspects of his/her private life.

But why is seeing the celebrity author so undesirable? And why “especially the writer of fiction?” What is at stake for writers of fiction that is not at stake for “generals, great orators, and popular preachers” who “never put their pen to paper”? Perhaps even more dangerous than seeing Dickens as flawed and/or feminized, exposing a literary celebrity’s shortcomings can detract from the “prestige” of his/her works. The *Chronicle* writer’s primary concern is that Dickens’s separation from his wife would detract from the enjoyment of his fictional works and characters—many of whom, like Mr. Pickwick, had become celebrities in their own right. It would seem that Dickens’s celebrity began to encroach on the epitextual lives of his most famous characters, who fans had deemed as their “friends” as much as they did Dickens himself. “It would have been better for Mr. Dickens,” the writer concludes harshly, “that he had never written a word than that he should have published this letter.”



Though the *Chronicle* contributor estimates that the publication of the “Violated Letter” “must be injurious to the writer’s fame,” neither Dickens nor his characters suffered greatly from this brush with scandal (“The Dickens Dispute” 5). But the reactions to Dickens’ personal statement and the “Violated Letter” offer an account of Victorian audiences’ impulse to turn away from, rather than gaze upon, the celebrity author, to maintain the fictions of celebrity rather than pursue realities that are too revealing. As John Forster reminds us, Victorian audiences saw Dickens as most authentic, not when his personal life was exposed to the public, but rather when he was “in character.” “In quick and varied sympathy, in ready adaptation to every whim or humour, in help to any mirth or game,” he writes, Dickens “stood for a dozen men.” “If one may say such a thing,” Forster continues, “he [Dickens] *seemed to be always the more himself for being somebody else, for continually putting off his personality*” (2:285, emphasis mine).<sup>93</sup> Writing in 1872, the same year Forster’s biography was published, Charles Kent says much the same in his account of Dickens’ public readings.<sup>94</sup> Remembering the performances, Kent recalls that “character after character appeared before us, living and breathing, in the flesh, as we looked and listened. *It mattered nothing, just simply nothing, that the great author was there all the while before his audience in his own identity.*” Though Kent admits that audiences “knew by heart” Dickens’ face from what would have been, by that time, the author’s “ubiquitous photographs,” he maintains that such recognition was “of no account whatever.” Rather, “while he [Dickens] stood there unmistakably before his audience...his individuality, so to express it,

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<sup>93</sup> For visualizations of Dickens’ impersonality, especially during his public readings, see Douglas-Fairhurst, figure 23.

<sup>94</sup> On Dickens’ method of “impersonation,” see Andrews 99-125. The most detailed and complete study of Dickens’ readings, including his set, day-to-day tour management, and audience reaction, can be found in Andrews 126-177.

altogether disappeared, and we saw before us instead...Mr. Pickwick, or Mrs. Gamp, or Dr. Marigold, or little Paul Dombey or Mr. Squeers, or Sam Weller, or Mr. Peggotty, or some other of those immortal personages” (31-32, emphases mine).

Dickens, in other words, became an impersonator of characters who had assumed a public life of their own, Mr. Pickwick being the chief example. (It is no surprise that, in his list of characters who “appeared before” audiences, Kent lists Mr. Pickwick first.) Public intimacy with Dickens was rooted less in exposure—or even individuality, for that matter—and more in fiction. He thrived as a literary celebrity because he called on audiences to negotiate the boundaries of fiction and reality and to play out the epistemological, ethical and aesthetic pleasures of differentiating between the two. In some ways, then, Samuel Luke Fildes’ “The Empty Chair” speaks volumes about Dickens’ public image: though his likeness was highly recognizable in Victorian popular culture, his celebrity hinged on his ability to efface, or at the very least, defer his individuality in favor of his celebrity characters, including Boz. Printed images of Boz show that public intimacy need not be rooted in a historically “real” person to generate celebrity, and perhaps more importantly, that the fiction of celebrity itself could be more desirable than the ugly realities of authentic, intimate knowledge about the individual.

#### 4.0 PROFILING TENNYSON: CLASSICALITY AND THE CELEBRITY TOO

##### MUCH AT HOME

In contrast to the scholarship on Charles Dickens' celebrity, few, if any, critics have accused Alfred Tennyson of courting public intimacy or a "special relationship" with Victorian readers, whether from behind a narrative persona, through a popular character, or otherwise. As a point of comparison, consider the following scene from Dickens' funeral: on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1870, five days after his death at Gad's Hill, the novelist was interred at Westminster Abbey in an unpublicized memorial service attended only by family and close friends. Despite his request to be buried "in a strictly private manner" with "not more than three plain mourning coaches," his grave remained open for three more days to appease "literally thousands" of mourners who poured into the church (Forster 2:421). The burial location leaked to the public within hours of the interment; whether Dickens would be buried in Poet's Corner or near Rochester, according to his wishes, had been a topic of speculation in major newspapers the day before. So began the long procession of mourners who, bringing flowers, came to pay their respects and "take one last look" at Dickens—or rather, at his casket ("The Funeral of Mr. Dickens in Westminster Abbey" 3). The scene at Westminster was so striking that less than a week later, the *Illustrated London News* printed a full-page depiction of the crowds: packed nearly shoulder-to-shoulder, the throngs seem subdued and contemplative as they lean over the wooden railing to peer into the

hollow opening of the grave (“The Grave of Charles Dickens in Poet’s Corner” 652). Even after the tomb was closed, mourners continued to pack into the church until the following Sunday when Dr. Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster, delivered a special sermon inspired by the nation’s “friend” (Martin 488-9; Stanley 147).

Among those present at the sermon was then-Poet Laureate, Alfred Tennyson. According to an anonymous companion who joined Tennyson that day, the pair arrived, made their way through the “immense congregation” and took their place inside a small, cordoned off sanctuary closest to the pulpit. Once Dr. Stanley’s service concluded, the men stood to leave, fully expecting the masses around them would do the same. But instead of slowly making their way toward the Abbey’s exit, the people apparently “flocked toward the altar, pressing closer and closer up the Sacarium.” As the aisles became more and more congested and “the chances of getting out became less and less,” the anonymous companion recalls,

[I] turned to Tennyson and said, 'I don't know what all this means, but we seem so hemmed in that it is useless to move as yet.' Then a man, standing close by me whispered, 'I don't think they will go, sir, so long as your friend stands there.' Of course I saw at once what was happening—it had got to be known that Tennyson was present, and *the solid throng was bent on seeing him*. [...] I was obliged to tell him what was going on, upon which he urgently insisted on being let out some quiet way and putting an end to the dilemma. (Page *Interviews* 123, emphasis mine).

Whether a “solid throng” actually mobbed Tennyson at Dickens’ funeral is, of course, up for debate, especially given the anecdote’s unknown origin. The Laureate himself had a habit of complaining—loudly—about the torment he endured at the hands of newspaper men, admirers and tourists to his home: as early as sixteen, Tennyson criticized the public as a “many-headed

Monster,” and biographer Robert Bernard Martin suggests that by the time he died in 1892 he had become “nearly paranoiac” about his privacy (Ricks 16; Martin 564). Exaggeration on the poet’s part aside, if any literary figure of the period could have upstaged Dickens at his own funeral, it certainly would have been Alfred Tennyson. In the decade following Dickens’ “domestic dispute” in 1858, the average Briton witnessed the next phase of the Graphic Revolution; cheap illustrated periodicals and photographic portraits became a part of everyday life for the masses. Thanks to the continued drop in price and increased frequency of illustrated periodicals, coupled with the advancement of photographic technologies, it seems no surprise that, by 1870, Tennyson’s likeness had become a central part of the Victorian visual landscape.

Alongside Dickens, Tennyson was, without question, one of the most highly-recognizable literary celebrities of his day. Although the first published portrait of the poet did not appear until 1842—nearly fifteen years after he issued his first volume of poetry in 1830—David Piper estimates that, “from the time of his laureateship in 1850 till his death in 1892 there is hardly a year in which he [Tennyson] is not recorded in one medium or another, and often a year would see several portraits of him” (174). Shortly after Tennyson was appointed to the laureateship in 1850, portrait painters, sculptors, and photographers alike embarked on a near paparazzi-esque campaign to capture the Laureate’s likeness—both for the benefit of contemporary viewers and, significantly, for posterity. Like Dickens before him, Tennyson was the subject of several portraits in oil, rendered by renowned painters such as Samuel Laurence (c. 1840), James Everett Millais (1881) and G. F. Watts, the latter painting the poet on three separate occasions—in 1857, 1859 and 1890 (Ormond *Victorian* 448-449; Lord 70). But unlike the popular novelist, Tennyson’s official position as the Poet Laureate also made him “a proper subject for the monumental medium of sculpture” (Piper 167). Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas

Woolner, for example, spent over twenty-five years creating medallions and busts of Tennyson, and at least five other sculptors fashioned busts and/or statues of the poet during his lifetime. Alongside these more traditional forms of visual representation, Tennyson was also pictured in an impressive array of photographs taken by some of the leading commercial photographers and photographic studios of the day, including J.E. Mayall, famous for his cartes-de-visite of the Royal family, and the London Stereoscopic Company. Significantly, many of these cheap photos were engraved for print publication, which meant they circulated within popular culture on an even more massive scale. Tennyson's increasingly bearded face—paired with his eccentric black cloak and wide-brimmed hat—remained a staple of Victorian photography for nearly three decades (Cheshire “Tennyson” 8-19).

Given his exceptional level of public exposure, it is almost impossible to avoid invoking anecdotes like the one above when talking about Tennyson. The poet's self-perpetuated narratives of celebrity persecution—of his attempts, often in vain, to retreat from the public's ravenous advances—form a critical part of the scholarship on Tennyson's celebrity. Among others, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, for example, characterizes Tennyson as “gawked at by day-trippers and pursued by celebrity-hunters, even when he hid himself away in his study, he found himself the object of unwelcome attention” (*Tennyson* 1). Boyce has argued that the poet could be considered “the first celebrity to become known as much for his hatred of this obsessive, fanatical pursuit of acclaimed figures as for his work” (2). Some scholars, however, have highlighted the degree to which Tennyson actively promoted his works and himself, even if he did so begrudgingly. For instance, Kathryn Ledbetter revisits Tennyson's numerous publications in the periodical press, arguing that, at the very least, the poet's “desire for financial aggrandizement” often trumped his belief in the Romantic ideal of an “isolated poet-priest,”

divorced from the machinations of publicity (46-47). Similarly, Lorraine Janzen Kooistra offers a long-overdue analysis of how illustrated editions of Tennyson's works circulated in the Victorian gift-book market. Despite his "antipathies toward illustration, the publishing 'trade' (as opposed to the gentlemanly occupation of writing poetry), and celebrity culture," Kooistra shows that Tennyson nevertheless "published a significant amount of original work in these popular forms" and in doing so, "dominated and helped shape each of these image-making fields of nineteenth-century visual culture" (178).

Yet Tennyson's own stories of celebrity persecution often prevail, perpetuating the idea that Victorian audiences clamored for more and more intimate access to the poet. Tennyson was surely one of the most *seen* literary figures of his day, but he cannot be considered the author with whom the public felt most personally connected. On the contrary, printed images of Tennyson, ubiquitous as they were in the latter half of the century, argued for a relationship of distance and reticence rather than one of proximity and intimacy—a posture that, in 1870, the *Illustrated Review* dubbed Tennyson's "classicality." This chapter will examine the classicality of Tennyson's celebrity as it relates to the proliferation of the printed image and the cultivation of public intimacy. First, the poet's classical pose raises questions about the correlation between sheer volume of printed images, on the one hand, and greater public intimacy, on the other. Specifically, the ceremonial and commemorative qualities of Thomas Woolner's sculptures—and the widely-reproduced prints derived from them—appeal to a version of the past in which the poet is an idealized hero, distanced from his readers. In keeping with the broader Victorian project of creating a usable past for posterity, sculptural representations of Tennyson—and even some photographs—attempted to create and ensure the Laureate's posthumous legacy while he was still alive. By looking to the future, the poet was made a celebrity in the present, a kind of

walking memorial. Tennyson's celebrity was thus displaced in (or rather, out of) time, not entirely unlike the characters in some of his most famous poems: Mariana in the "lonely moated grange," the Lady of Shallot surrounded by the "four gray walls" of her tower, the Lotos-eaters who opt out of their epic journey and "return no more" (Tennyson 36, 41, 77).

Most importantly, while scholars acknowledge that Tennyson's cries of martyrdom were at least partly exaggerated, the focus on his persecution obscures the degree to which his classical pose also became comically anachronistic. Attempts to eschew public intimacy in favor of a kind of ostentatious reticence made Tennyson an easy target for ribbing from the press, especially on the rare occasions when the poet descended from his lofty position to engage with popular celebrity culture. In Tennyson's case, the very portraits designed to subvert celebrity and promote classical fame resulted in a kind of premature commemoration that made the Poet Laureate the object of ridicule in popular press. Even photographs of Tennyson—ubiquitous as they were from the mid-1860s onward—did not necessarily yield more intimate access to or a closer connection with the poet. Tennyson's conspicuous old age, for instance, was seen less as an admirable admission of human frailty and more as fodder for jokes about his waning relevance and unfulfilled promise, the "sinecure" of his Laureateship as one newspaper claimed ("Alfred Tennyson" 52). He neither died young, as his Romantic predecessors such as Shelley had, nor retained the timeless classicality professed by his celebrity image. Further, popular periodical features such as the "at home" interview—and the caricatures derived from them—suggest that it was *audiences* who were persecuted by the author's overexposure as a celebrity, not the other way around. Ultimately, the attention given to Tennyson's age in the latter decades of his life highlights a different dimension of public intimacy in celebrity culture: rather than exposing scandalous details about the celebrity's private or domestic life, technologies of the



mass-produced image afforded audiences the intimate privilege of witnessing every stage of a celebrity's life—birth, childhood, old age, and even death—whether or not they actually wanted to see that timeline in its entirety.

### **In Memoriam: The “Classicality” of Tennyson’s Early Celebrity**

In October 1870, only months after Dickens’ death, the *Illustrated Review* ran a cover story profiling the Poet Laureate:

The chief characteristic of Mr. Tennyson...is his *classicality*, which is gorgeous and yet chastened, till his poetry resembles...the statuesque beauty which lived and breathed in the old Greek tragic choruses. Not merely are many of his poems steeped in classical perfection...but many of his separate expressions owe much of their charm to the vividness with which they recall their ancient prototypes. (53, emphasis in original)

Though it is unclear whether “classicality” is the “chief characteristic” of Tennyson, his poetry, or both, the gist of the term is evident: classicality is the quality that imbues poetry and/or people with the “statuesque beauty” of the ancient past. But “gorgeous” as it may be, classicality “lacks the full inspiration of the seer,” according to the contributor. In contrast, the true poet-prophet “chooses one of the great realities of existence as a subject to be clothed in immortal impassioned song with a strength that shall *move* in the world” (53, emphasis mine). For the *Illustrated Review* critic, classicality is beautiful but static, ancient but not timeless, “chastened” rather than “impassioned.”<sup>95</sup> After his death, Tennyson himself would be remembered as a kind of living statue—a comparison due in large part to the classicality of his celebrity in life.

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<sup>95</sup> The publication’s cover advertises it at three-pence an issue and biweekly frequency—fairly reasonably priced—though certainly not as cheap as the penny illustrated periodicals of the day.

In Tennyson's case, classicality provided a way to resist intimacy while also securing celebrity. He may not have wanted to *appear* possessed by what Leo Braudy calls "the devil of purposeful fame-seeking," but he sought public acknowledgement nevertheless.<sup>96</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Braudy mentions Tennyson only once in his epic study of the history of fame, and when he does, he places the poet in a lineage with more overt author-performers. "The hankering toward performance of such nineteenth-century authors as Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Whitman, and Mark Twain," he writes, "is the mirror image of the ostentatious withdrawal with which we associate Keats, Shelley, the Bronte sisters, and Emily Dickinson" (*Frenzy* 449). For Braudy, the latter group exemplifies what he famously formulated as "the posture of reticence and the sanction of neglect"—a sincere antipathy to public recognition or literary success in life in favor of "true" greatness achievable only after death. Tennyson, however, stands in a kind of awkward contrapposto, one foot in Dickens' camp and one in Keats'. As Martin puts it, the poet was "always divided in his reactions" to audiences' gawking: "furious of stared at, worried if he were paid no attention" (410). Publicly, he embraced the "posture of reticence," but in practice, he could not bring himself to commit fully to the "sanction of neglect," even if doing so was a prerequisite for future fame. As the *Illustrated Review* contributor notes, Tennyson's classicality only "resembles" that which is actually classical; rather, it is a classical pose.

Though the timeline of Tennyson's life and career overlaps fairly neatly with Dickens'—the former published his first volume, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, in 1830 and the latter contributed his first periodical fiction circa 1833—the trajectories of their renown differ markedly. The differing arcs of their celebrity are due, in some part, to Tennyson's orientation towards

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<sup>96</sup> For more on Braudy's now-famous formulation of "the posture of reticence and the sanction of neglect" by authors such as Emily Dickinson, see Braudy *Frenzy* 390-449.

classicality.<sup>97</sup> Whereas Dickens' celebrity exploded almost immediately upon the publication of *Pickwick*, Tennyson remained largely out of the public eye until at least the early-1840s. It was not until 1850, when he published *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and succeeded William Wordsworth as Britain's Poet Laureate, that the poet received national recognition (Martin 140).<sup>98</sup> His resultant celebrity was the culmination of a long "march of reputation," as Arthur Hallam put it—a march that in its early stages was characterized as much by stagnation and retreat as it was by advancement (qtd. in Martin 148).<sup>99</sup>

Tennyson's early renown was confined almost entirely to the company of the Cambridge Apostles, an exclusive society at Trinity College who embraced the young Lincolnshire poet and his eccentricities. But to say that Tennyson had a "following" among the Cambridge Apostles would be imprecise. At this stage in his life, Tennyson did not lead enough to have followers; rather, he had proponents, friends like Arthur Hallam, James Spedding, and Edward Fitzgerald who supported him, sometimes financially, during the nearly two decades of "discontent and restlessness" the poet endured after leaving Cambridge (Martin 140).<sup>100</sup> (The harsh reviews of

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<sup>97</sup> After the middling critical reception of *Poems* (1833) and Arthur Hallam's death in 1833, Tennyson receded from publication for nearly ten years. This self-imposed decade of silence significantly affected the timeline of his celebrity. For more on this, see Martin 169-172.

<sup>98</sup> It is worth pointing out that before the first proper edition of *In Memoriam* was published, Edward Moxon circulated fragments of the poem without identifying Tennyson as the author by name. Everyone reading these fragments was already in a close-knit literary circle, however, and knew that it was Tennyson's work. For more on this and on Tennyson's name more broadly, see Barton 54-56.

<sup>99</sup> For more on Hallam's characterization of Tennyson's early years, see Martin 149-50.

<sup>100</sup> Reflecting on the Apostles' role in Tennyson's successes, Aubrey de Vere remarks that the poet's advocates could only "raise the sail high enough to catch what breeze might be stirring. The rest depended on the boat." For more on de Vere's comments, see Tennyson *Memoir* 208.

his second volume, *Poems* [1832], were particularly debilitating for him.) Unlike Dickens before him or Wilde after, Tennyson resisted aggressively marketing himself or his works to a popular readership—and if he did so, it certainly was not until at least mid-century.<sup>101</sup> Christopher Ricks, for instance, refers to Hallam as Tennyson’s “informal literary agent” during the early 1830s (Ricks 63). Instead, his reclusiveness and refusal to publish (ten years elapsed between his second and third publications) stoked the embers of his growing fame. A “haze of mystery” surrounded Tennyson during this period, and according to Martin, his erratic comings and goings in literary circles “helped cast him in the unlikely role of lion and man-about-town” (241). In short, during the early decades of Tennyson’s career, his scarcity attracted as much or more attention than his presence.<sup>102</sup>

The same might be said of Tennyson’s reputation with the public, even just a handful of years before he was named Poet Laureate. At mid-century, poems such as “Marianna,” “The Lady of Shallot,” and perhaps most famously, “Locksley Hall” began to garner popularity among a broader, middlebrow readership. Yet, in R.H. Horne’s *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), the profile on Tennyson begins by questioning just how widely the poet is known by “general readers:”

Tennyson, as a poet of fine genius, is now thoroughly established in the minds of all sincere and qualified lovers of the higher classes of poetry in this country. But what is the position of the public mind? Or, rather, to what extent is he known to the great mass of

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<sup>101</sup> For evidence of Tennyson’s engagement with more popular and commercial forms of publication, see Ledbetter 45-101 on the periodical press, and Ledbetter 7-45 and Kooistra 11-45 on illustrated gift books.

<sup>102</sup> For a further exploration of the paradox of the author-recluse, see Moran 54-75 and 105-130.

general readers? Choice and limited is the audience, we apprehend, to whom this favoured son of Apollo pours forth his melodious song. (Horne 2:4-5)

Interestingly, the contributor to Horne's collection does not find fault with the public for not recognizing Tennyson's genius—a claim so often leveled against the "great mass of general readers."<sup>103</sup> Instead, he/she argues that "the public may be excused for not knowing more about his poems than they do" because it has taken the critics themselves so long, well over a decade, to warm to his work. The Horne contributor goes on to assert that, by the mid-1840s, "the *name of Alfred Tennyson* [was] pressing slowly, calmly, but surely—with certain recognition but no loud shouts of greeting—from the lips of the discerners of poets [...] along the lips of the less informed public, 'to its own place' in the starry house of names" (Horne 2:1-7, emphasis mine).

While Tennyson's name may have been "pressing slowly, calmly, but surely" into the public consciousness, his image remained largely unrecognizable outside his small social circle until at least the mid-1840s. According to art historian Richard Ormond, before 1850, Tennyson's likeness had been captured only in private drawings—by his life-long friend James Spedding, for example—and in oil, by Samuel Laurence circa 1840.<sup>104</sup> Though the poet was not particularly pleased with Laurence's work, famously remarking that the portrait made him look "blubber lipt," Edward Moxon nevertheless used the image as the frontispiece for *Poems* (1842), complete with a facsimile of Tennyson's signature (qtd. in *Page Illustrated* 80). Engraved by J.C. Armytage, the "haze of mystery" that surrounded Tennyson's person is transmuted into the frontispiece. Like many of his Romantic predecessors, the poet appears young and brooding—

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<sup>103</sup> This entry is widely believed to have been written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. For more on Horne and Barrett's collaborations, see Paroissien 274-81.

<sup>104</sup> For the circumstance of Tennyson's sitting for Laurence, see Martin 240.

even provocative—with more than a touch of the Byronic in the furrow of his brow, the intensity of his gaze, the chisel of his nose, and the part of his lips. Lacking any gilded, oval frame, the portrait frontispiece hovers on the page, highlighting the wispy edges of Laurence's strokes and giving Tennyson an ethereal aura. Over the course of a few years, *Poems* (1842) fanned the slow burn of Tennyson's celebrity: one bibliography estimates that roughly eight hundred copies were sold within the first year—hardly a best-seller—but as Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, “one might almost say that his [Tennyson's] last volume succeeded.” By July 15, 1846, Robert Browning reports that Moxon recorded sales upwards of fifteen hundred copies in a year. With the success of the 1842 volume, Laurence's portrait of Tennyson was beginning to make the rounds in larger and larger circles, and the poet was already rankling at his increased visibility. In April 1845, for instance, he pleads that Laurence's original *not* be exhibited at the Royal Academy. Interestingly, despite the poet's self-professed “morbid hatred of the exhibition,” no record exists of Tennyson objecting to Moxon's use of the portrait—another indication of his ambiguous relationship to publicity (Lang and Shannon 236).

When Horne presented Tennyson as one of the most prominent “new spirits of the age,” the Laurence-Armytage portrait was, arguably, the only likeness of the poet available. Without commissioning a new portrait, an idea to which Tennyson likely would have objected, Horne's choices were limited. Thus, the Laurence-Armytage portrait from *Poems* (1842) was reproduced as the frontispiece to the second volume of *A New Spirit of the Age*. That Horne chooses Tennyson to be featured in the frontispiece is somewhat unexpected, especially given the thirteen other better known luminaries included in the volume—among them, Thomas Carlyle, Robert Browning, and William Wordsworth. (Predictably, Dickens' portrait formed the frontispiece for

the first volume.)<sup>105</sup> In the end, no amount of famous names could save *New Spirit*; it was considered a critical failure, censured by more than half a dozen reputable publications, and at twenty-four shillings, its cost prohibited it from circulating in significant numbers. (According to advertisements, however, it was available at lending libraries.) Yet, the choice to reproduce an existing image of Tennyson for the frontispiece likely added to the mystery surrounding the poet's growing reputation, highlighting the scarcity of his likeness in the celebrity marketplace. Despite his pictorial debut in *Poems* (1842) and *A New Spirit of the Age*, Tennyson's presence in the Victorian visual landscape remained scant until the mid-1850s.

In 1850, Tennyson's long march of reputation, the slow pressure of his name, finally began to yield results (Martin 337). Though Tennyson remained hesitant, his publisher Edward Moxon nevertheless issued *In Memoriam, A.H.H.* in May 1850, and in the short span of five months, renown was upon him. In Martin's estimation, "the publication of *In Memoriam* had made him easily the most famous poet in England, and Dickens was the only literary man of any kind whose fame exceeded his" (350). Later the same year, Tennyson was chosen to succeed Wordsworth as Poet Laureate, compounding his celebrity status and securing, at the very least, a nominal place in British literary history—and all this at the comparably young age of forty-one. (Wordsworth, Tennyson's predecessor, had been appointed in his seventies.) The swell of recognition from critics and crown inaugurated a decade of increasing public visibility for Tennyson, a decade in which the poet truly was on display for the first time. Years before the photography of J. E. Mayall or Julia Margaret Cameron, Tennyson appears before the public in a

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<sup>105</sup> Dickens' portrait was done by Samuel Laurence at nearly the same time as Tennyson's, but Horne chose a different portrait of the novelist as the frontispiece for the first volume of *New Spirit*—the portrait by Margaret (Mary) Gillies with whom Horne was friends.

medium of visual representation most often associated with commemoration and memorialization—sculpture. Unlike either Dickens or Wilde, Tennyson's officially-sanctioned position as Poet Laureate meant that "as a person of eminence and standing, he should be immortalised," and "to be sculpted was somehow more special and less common" than a portrait in oil, which, by this time, could be commissioned by almost anyone of high social standing (Lord 69). In short, Tennyson's celebrity not only begins with the publication of *In Memoriam*; it begins "in memoriam" itself, by sending the poet "into memory," with an eye toward how the poet would be remembered by future generations rather than how he would be seen by contemporary audiences.

The first widely-distributed portraits of Tennyson were taken "from the life," but designed with posterity in mind. In 1856, sculptor Thomas Woolner, one of the seven founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, completed his second portrait medallion of the Laureate and began his first portrait bust. A bronze version of the portrait medallion was displayed at the Royal Academy's summer exhibition in 1857, and in the same year, the bust was shown at the *Art Treasures of the United Kingdom* exhibition in Manchester, which more than 1.3 million people visited in the span of a few months (Cheshire "Tennyson" 10). Such forms of visual representation may seem at first to fall outside the purview of this study; indeed, these objects could not be copied or circulated without a fair amount of effort, and therefore reached a smaller, more exclusive audience.<sup>106</sup> But sculptural forms could be and often were depicted in print. In fact, during the 1850s, the circulation of Tennyson's image in Britain was limited to two engravings, both based on Woolner's sculptures: the first, of the portrait bust, appeared in the

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<sup>106</sup> For a detailed description of the processes for replicating sculpture, especially on a reduced scale, see Read 65.



*Illustrated London News* in November 1857; the second, an engraving of the portrait medallion, formed the frontispiece for the now-revered "Moxon" edition of Tennyson's *Poems*, also published in 1857 (see figure 8).<sup>107</sup>

In the Pre-Raphaelite mission to revive lost artistic forms and introduce new artistic subjects, Thomas Woolner dedicated nearly two decades of his career to the creation of portrait medallions of famous men and women. Inspired by the portrait medallions of Renaissance Italy, these single-sided casts, roughly twelve inches across, depicted subjects in full-profile relief and could be framed for wall decoration. The sculptor cast his first medallion of the poet in bronze in December 1850, just after Tennyson had been named to succeed Wordsworth as Poet Laureate (Ormond *Tennyson* 4). Five years and twenty-five medallions later, Woolner began work on a second portrait of the poet at Emily Tennyson's request (and, possibly, after being commissioned by Edward Moxon) (Woolner 104-5). Completed in 1856, this new, more refined medallion captured the contours of Tennyson's angular nose and prominent chin—still whiskerless—as well as the tension of his brow and broadness of his forehead. "Numerous copies of this medallion were cast," writes Leonee Ormond, "and some of these went to friends of sitter or sculptor, most of whom expressed themselves delighted with the likeness" (Ormond *Tennyson* 9). Writing to Emily Tennyson, Woolner boasts that Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were "immensely pleased" with the medallion and "meant to have it framed and carry it about with them wherever they went." "Browning," he continued, "said no likeness could possibly be better" (Woolner 115).

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<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, some American editions of Tennyson's works published by Ticknor and Fields did not use the medallion frontispiece, instead reproducing the Laurence-Armytage engraving. This might point to differences between Tennyson's celebrity image in the U.S. and Britain.

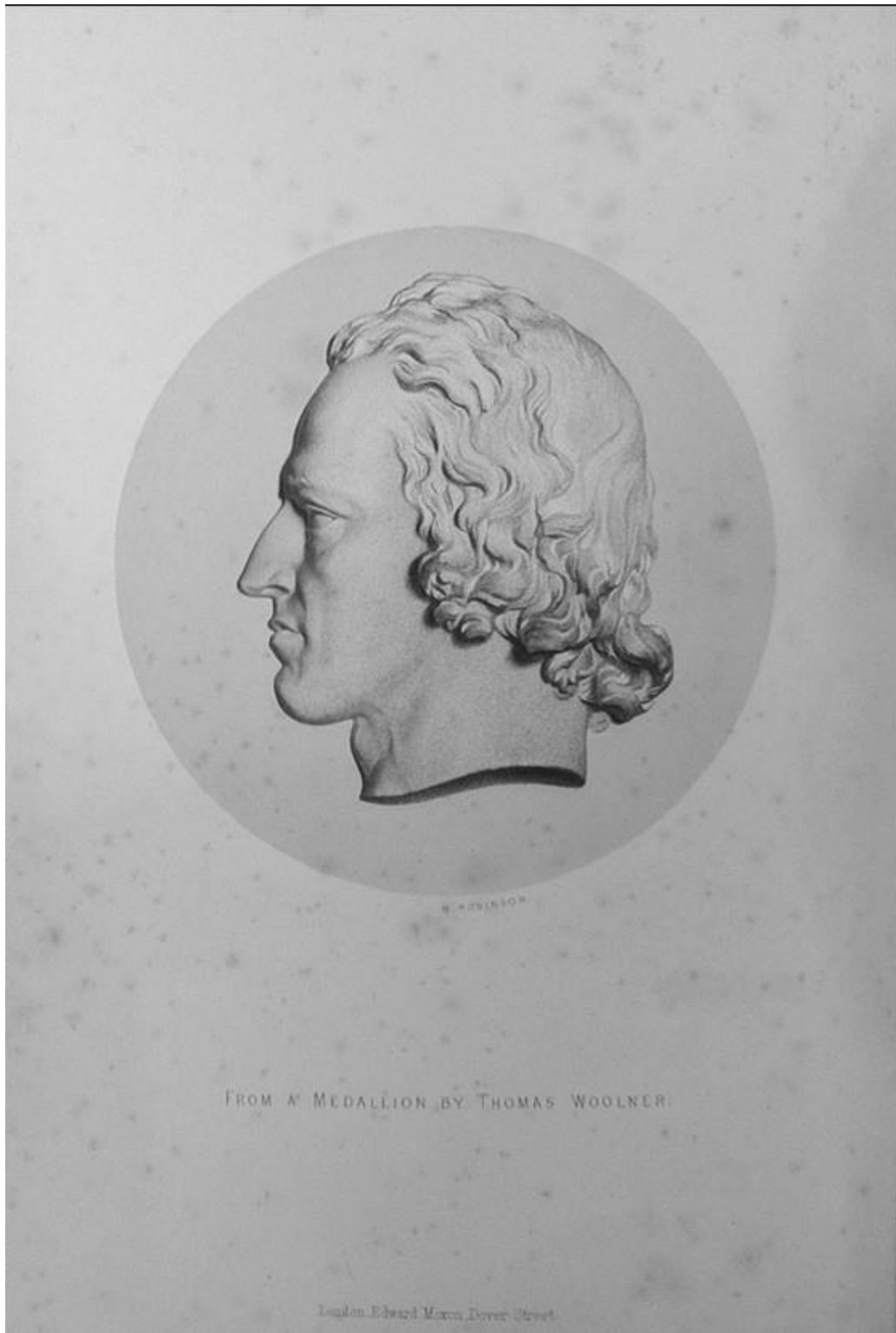


Figure 8. Frontispiece from a medallion by Thomas Woolner and engraved by Henry R. Robinson, Alfred Tennyson, *Poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1857).

With his second medallion of the Laureate a confirmed success, Woolner angled for the opportunity to model Tennyson's bust. Despite the poet's complaints to and outright avoidance of the sculptor, Tennyson finally consented to the sittings, and work began in February 1856.<sup>108</sup> After over a year's effort, Woolner displayed the marble bust at the *Art Treasures* exhibition, where it garnered attention not only for its striking naturalism, but also for its distinctiveness as "the only depiction of a living poet" in sculpture (Cheshire "Tennyson" 10).<sup>109</sup> Like the medallion, the bust lacks the trademark beard of Tennyson's later years. It did, however, introduce audiences to the eccentric manner of dress that would come to define Tennyson's image until his death, specifically, his unkempt collar and dramatic black cloak.<sup>110</sup> As Cheshire observes, "the coat with a button unfastened, the collar with one corner turned up, these touches, while in one sense naturalistic, were also romantic, even Byronic, appropriate to a portrait of a great poet, but the overall effect is brooding, not careless" (14). The bust "soon became a popular image of Tennyson" not only because of the record number of visitors that attended the *Art*

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<sup>108</sup> Edward Moxon's involvement is also significant here, as he reportedly told Woolner he would commission the bust in marble if business continued well. The publisher's involvement in commissioning the statue speaks to the kind of public image Moxon helped create and hoped to perpetuate for Tennyson. Emily Tennyson was immensely influential in convincing her husband to sit for the bust, as seen in her correspondence with Woolner. See Woolner 108-112.

<sup>109</sup> According to Jim Cheshire, two other portraits of Tennyson were also displayed in the photographic section of the *Art Treasures* exhibition. This section housed early photographs of "politicians, statesmen and artists," but "writers were not numerous." Exactly which photographs of Tennyson were exhibited is up for debate, but Jim Cheshire speculates that one was taken by James Mudd and the other by Cundall & Downes Photographic Company. Both were likely taken during Tennyson's visit to Manchester in 1857. See Cheshire "Tennyson" 10, "Poet" 137.

<sup>110</sup> Tennyson acquired the cape-like overcoat twenty years earlier during his trip to Spain with Arthur Hallam—the same time he acquired his broad-brimmed wideawake hat, sometimes referred to as his sombrero. Perhaps even more conspicuous than his cloak, Tennyson's hat is not featured in widely-distributed images until the 1860s.

*Treasures* exhibition, but also because the *Illustrated London News* featured Woolner's sculpture in a cover article on November 21, 1857 (Ormond Tennyson 15). At the time, the *ILN* averaged roughly 200,000 per week in sales, so the woodcut of Woolner's sculpture would likely have been seen by upwards of a million people. The engraving, executed by Orrin Smith, preserves many of Woolner's sartorial "touches"—the folds of the cloak around button, the loose shirt collar—even if it does reduce the "delicately worked curls" of Tennyson's hair to a lifeless, wavy mass.

Both the medallion and the bust lose some of their aura in the translation from cast to engraving to print—the tactile connection to the subject, for instance. They do not, however, lose the cultural weight signified by sculpture as a form of visual representation. Woolner's use of the portrait medallion was both a practical and rhetorical choice. The single-sided, "profile image" of a medallion was easier, faster and cheaper to produce than a three-dimensional bust; it also hearkened back to coinage of the Roman Empire and to the commemorative medals of the Early Italian Renaissance (Lord 70; Read 178-9).<sup>111</sup> Braudy, for instance, points to Augustus as the first to mass-produce coins on which his own likeness had been crudely struck, and such images—usually of a statesman in profile—have continued to authorize coinage as official currency since (Braudy *Frenzy* 103-106). Though portrait medallions were privately commissioned from the fourteenth century onward, the form still implies a state sanction. On one level, then, the portrait medallion is uniquely appropriate to Tennyson's official position as

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<sup>111</sup> The intricate medals of the Italian Renaissance were most often two-sided, heavily inscribed with an image of the individual on the obverse side and a scene or symbol which indicated the reasons for the individual's fame on the reverse side. Woolner's medallions, however, are most often uni-face, with a stark, unadorned image of Tennyson in full profile. They do not include a scene or figure on the reverse side to indicate why or how the individual depicted "earned" his/her fame. They even lack identifying inscriptions, like a name.

Britain's Poet Laureate. On another level, it acts as a reminder of the poet's individual greatness. With the advent of the Italian Renaissance came a desire to recognize and record individual achievement and to "do so in a way that would survive *the erosion of time and fragility of men's memories.*" The physical materials of sculpture—bronze or marble, for example—provided a "*durable* means of attaining earthly immortality," in contrast to the ephemerality of print (Scher 13-16, emphasis mine). As such, portrait medals were "almost exclusively commemorative in nature" (Scher 13). It goes without saying that the Victorians were deeply invested in creating a "durable" legacy in the face of the "great vistas of geological and astronomical time," and new technologies of photography, while highly accurate, did not provide a fool-proof answer to the problem of longevity: during the 1850s, albumen paper was still vulnerable to fading and deterioration over time, not to mention its inherent vulnerability to water or fire damage (Ricks 226; Linkman 30).

To illustrate the significance of the medallion frontispiece in particular, consider Moxon's alternatives. In arranging the illustrations of the so-called "Moxon Tennyson," the publisher had lengthy interactions with Pre-Raphaelite artists such as D.G. Rossetti and William Holman Hunt (Ormond *Early* 454-457). If Moxon (or Tennyson) did not want to use the Laurence-Armytage frontispiece from *Poems* (1842) yet again, why not commission a new portrait by one of the many artists with whom he was in conversation? By choosing Woolner's medallion as the frontispiece for this edition of poems, Moxon not only commemorates the poet's ascendancy to an official position as Poet Laureate, but also makes the implicit argument that his individual greatness should be, and would be, remembered. Further, one might reasonably assume that once engraved, Moxon would have included the phrase "from the life" beneath the medallion—a caption commonly included on portrait frontispieces and photographs

in the latter half of the century. (Tennyson's name and title as Poet Laureate are included on the facing title page.) The only text on the page, however, is name of the engraver, the name of the publisher, and, in larger type, the words, "From a Medallion by Thomas Woolner." The choice to print "From a Medallion by Thomas Woolner," rather than something like "from the life," highlights the layers of distance between the poet and his public. Whereas "from the life" positions the image as a kind of conduit for intimate access to the author, "from a medallion" situates the portrait as a second- or even third-hand artifact, far removed from the poet himself.<sup>112</sup> A viewer could just as easily be looking at an engraving of a medallion from antiquity.

The same implications ring true for Woolner's portrait bust of Tennyson, but with the added significance associated with the tradition of library bust sculpture and with poetry as a genre. Even more so than with the portrait medallion, Woolner aimed to "do such a likeness of a remarkable man that admirers of his [Tennyson's] centuries hence may feel it to be true and thankful to have a record which they can believe in" (qtd. in Lord 71). Further, the sculptor saw his work as a "duty" owed to Britain: "For in some future age," he asked, "how many would regret if there were no adequate representation of him [Tennyson]?" (Woolner 109). Following the early Pre-Raphaelites' adherence to "near photographic realism" and "truth to Nature," Woolner created a bust not with generalized or idealized features, not with Tennyson in timeless, generic robes or bare-chested (though other sculptors did), but in the manner of dress appropriate to the period and Tennyson's own eccentricities (Read 85-91). But sculpting Tennyson's bust carried even more tradition with it than did even the portrait medallion, particularly because it

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<sup>112</sup> For more on the significance of the medal to late-nineteenth century art, see Attwood 1-35.

placed the poet in a long line of great literary predecessors—Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, and so on.

Given the lineage of the genre in which he worked, Woolner's bust demanded a degree of solemnity and reverence due uniquely to the Poet (not to the reporter-novelist-editor Dickens, of whom no sculpture was made during his lifetime). As an artistic form, the portrait bust was "very much tied up with its classical origins," while at the same time being part of a long tradition of being used to represent literary figures, and especially being placed in libraries (Read 171-72). John Lord reminds us, for example, of William Kent's eighteenth-century Temple of British Worthies, in which busts of Shakespeare, Milton and Pope appeared alongside those of Queen Elizabeth I and King Alfred. But as Lord points out, "these were posthumous memorials and Kent's inclusion of Pope, then still living in his Temple of British Worthies, was exceptional" (Lord 69). Woolner's bust of Tennyson was likewise deemed premature, even presumptuous, by the council of Trinity College in 1859. In 1858, a year after the bust was displayed at the *Art Treasures* exhibition, a group of students at Trinity proposed to buy the bust and display it in the Wren Library, alongside the busts of figures such as Isaac Newton and Lord Byron. The council, however, refused the students' request, noting that their proposal was "declined chiefly because he is a *Living Poet*" (qtd. in Ormond *Tennyson* 12, emphasis in original). After petitioning the council, the students finally persuaded the council to accept the bust and place it the "corridor leading to the new library" (Ormond *Tennyson* 14). Depicting a living poet in a form most often reserved for posthumous memorial again signals not only the gravitas of Tennyson's position, but also the degree to which the poet's renown offers a somewhat strange blend of old and new, of reverence for the past and posterity and desire for contemporary hero-worship.

The story of Tennyson's bust and Trinity College even made it into the pages of *Punch* the same year, raising broader questions about the modes of recognition and commemoration appropriate to living celebrities. The first line of the poem, "The Laureate's Bust at Trinity (A Fragment of an Idyll)," seems to set up Tennyson (and his proponents) as the chief object of parody in the conflict. Riffing on the first line of Tennyson's poem, "The Palace of Art" (1832), it begins, "—So the stately bust abode / For many a month, unseen, among the Dons."<sup>113</sup> But within just a few lines, the speaker's position on the whole affair becomes clear; it is the Dons who are at fault, not the poet. They are "hard / And narrowed in their honour to old names / Of poets, who had vogue when *they* were young / And not admitting later bards" (emphasis in original). Throughout the piece, the Dons' inflexibility is likened to that of Tennyson's bust itself: they "fixed their faced hard, and shut the doors / Upon the living Poet." The final stanzas of the poem shift to an imagined dialogue between Tennyson and the Dons, who chime the refrain "Too soon, too soon! You cannot enter now" in response to the poet's pleas. Speaking to the council, Tennyson concedes, "I am not dead: of that I do repent," yet he implores the Dons to recognize that "Honor that comes in life is rare as sweet; / I cannot taste it long: for life is fleet." Whether Tennyson actually wanted his bust placed in Wren Library is questionable, but the motif of the Dons' stone-like stubbornness is not. Readers are left with an image of the Trinity council as the gargoyle-esque gatekeepers of literary fame. The Laureate pled his case in vain, "while all stonily / Their chins upon their hands, as men that had / No entrails to be moved, sat the stern Dons" (194).

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<sup>113</sup> The similarities between the first line Tennyson's "The Palace of Art" and the opening of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" have not gone unnoticed by critics. For more on this, see Hellstrom 8-9.



In some ways, Woolner's sculptures and their aesthetic of classicality position the Laureate as existing outside of the realm of publicity, insulated from exposure to the unwanted gossip and press attention which Tennyson saw as characteristic of both Victorian literary and celebrity culture. Especially in the early years of his career, before reproducible images had become a commonplace feature of Victorian life, Tennyson understood the circulation, accretion, and destruction of fame in terms of being talked or written about rather than being seen. For example, in a now-famous but unpublished fragment from 1839, the poet broods over the necessity of sharing his poetry with an audience he perceives to be, at best, flippant, and at worst, borderline sadistic. The poem opens with a guiding question: "Wherefore, in these dark ages of the Press / ...should I, / Sane mind and body / wish to print my rhyme, / Fame's millionth heir-apparent?" In response, Tennyson finds no reason to redeem publishing. Instead, he spends the remainder of the fragment lambasting the periodical press and its readership, ruminating on the punishments of literary publication, and girding himself to continue doing just that. In the litany that follows, Tennyson uses metaphors of speech to outline his grievances about the state of fame in "these dark ages of the Press." He contemplates the horror of becoming "a popular property, nauseate, when my name / shot like a racketball from mouth to mouth / and bandied in the barren lips of fools / may yield my feeling organism pain." On one level, Tennyson is physically sickened by the thought of becoming a much-discussed "popular property." On another, the gossip he imagines is cast both as a careless act of sport ("a "racketball") and as a kind of projectile word vomit from the "barren lips" of those who have never had the courage to "lay the nerve of self bare" in print. Rather, his conception of fame, "if just, is a peculiar fame," one answerable only to his own "Art-Conscience" and not "the general throat." This "Art-Conscience" reminds him that, "all ages, sample-rife, / have preacht a truism, that nine-tithes of

times / too rathe a harvest of the public voice / forgoes the latter Lammas of a name.” Blending pastoral and speech metaphors, Tennyson condemns popular recognition from the “public voice” as “rathe” or premature, while praising the enduring legacy of “a name” as a more fruitful celebration—the end-of-summer Lammas harvest festival (qtd. in Ricks 148-9). It would seem that, in Tennyson’s mind at least, fame still circulated with the blast of a trumpet, not the flash of a camera.

In this sense, Tennyson cannot be seen as “anti-publicity” so much as he was “anti” any publicity that did not shore up his image of timeless classicality. Yet, the irony of his publicity-for-classicality’s-sake stance is that, of all the literary celebrities of the Victorian period, Alfred Tennyson was photographed as much—if not more than—any of them. From the *carte-de-visite* craze of the 1860s onward, the poet sat for some of the most significant photographers of the period including Oscar Rejlander, J. E. Mayall, and, of course, his neighbor and friend from his home in Freshwater, Julia Margaret Cameron, not to mention his sessions with some of the foremost commercial studios in London: Elliot & Fry, Cundall & Downes, and the London Stereoscopic Company (Cheshire “Tennyson” 8-20). Tennyson’s turn to photography in the 1860s raises a complicated question: could these emerging photographic technologies be used to perpetuate his image of classicality, the image Woolner had arguably established in sculpture in the decade before?

In his retrospective essay, “A First Sight of Tennyson” (1912), the prolific biographer, critic, and poet Edmund Gosse frames his first in-person encounter with the poet in the context of just such a question. While working at the British Museum in 1871, Gosse was called up (literally, from the basement “hell” where he claims he was “palely baking, like a crumpet”) to

meet the Laureate, then “the English living poet *par excellence*...the one survivor of the heroic chain of masters” (130). Echoing John Keats’ “Hymn to Apollo,” Gosse remembers:

The feeling of excitement was almost overwhelming: it was not peculiar to myself; such ardours were common in those years. [...] Tennyson was scarcely a human being to us, he was the God of the Golden Bow; I approached him now like a blank idiot to be slain, ‘or was I a worm, too low-crawling for death, O Delphic Apollo?’ It is not merely that no person living now calls forth that kind of devotion, but the *sentiment of mystery* has disappeared. *Not genius itself could survive the kodak snapshots and the halfpenny newspapers.* (130-131, emphasis mine)

Despite, or perhaps because of, Gosse's star-struck state, meeting Tennyson in the flesh did not disappoint. Even painted portraits by Samuel Laurence and G. F. Watts could not do the poet justice, could not capture "the singular majesty of his figure, standing in repose" among the grand statues and busts of the museum's First Sculpture Gallery. Other men, Gosse insists, "seemed to dwindle before his magnificent presence, while Tennyson stood bare-headed among the Roman emperors, every inch as imperial-looking as the best of them" (132).

Though Gosse acknowledges the dangers of “unrestrained panegyric” and “extravagant obsequiousness” (critical opinion of Tennyson soured with the turn of the century, in part due to this kind of unchecked deference), he nevertheless recalls his meeting with more than a hint of nostalgia. In his youth, he argues, a poet could still command the reverence once reserved only for gods and emperors.<sup>114</sup> By the twentieth century, the “chain of heroic masters” was broken, and for Gosse, Tennyson remained the only link to this lineage of poet-heroes. The Laureate had

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<sup>114</sup> For a review of the mixed critical response to Tennyson’s poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Mazzeno 31-65.

“survived” the first wave of media violence, attacked on the one side, by a cheaper, more frequent, and more heavily illustrated periodical press and on the other side, by technological advances that enabled photographs taken in a studio to be reproduced and sold on a mass scale, specifically in the form of cartes-de-visite. Through all this, he managed to maintain the “sentiment of mystery” that Gosse suggests is required for “*that kind* of devotion” (emphasis mine). Tennyson’s successors had not been so fortunate, however, apparently taken down by the invention of the personal-use box camera (the “kodak snapshots”) and even cheaper, even more frequent periodical publication (the “halfpenny newspapers”). In the short span of a few paragraphs, Gosse simultaneously elevates and demotes Tennyson: he is at once a towering figure in literary history, a living statue at home among gods and emperors, and the last of his kind, an embattled relic from an unrecoverable era pillaged by the transformations of the Graphic Revolution.<sup>115</sup>

The implication that the periodical press and photography (both personal and studio) somehow violate or minimize the sanctity of artistic genius is not unfamiliar, especially after the 1890s, when widespread use of the halftone printing process made it possible to reproduce high-quality photographs *in* periodicals themselves. This line of reasoning is even more pronounced in Tennyson’s case, as demonstrated by art historian David Piper. In his chapter—titled tellingly, “The End of Fame: Tennyson and After”—Piper claims that Julia Margaret Cameron’s portrait of Tennyson in his self-described “Dirty Monk” garb “shows the drawbacks of the photograph: its ability to catch not the skull beneath the skin, the essential, so much as the enlarged pores

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<sup>115</sup> Gosse’s experience with the Laureate seems somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, he disparages photography for destroying the aura that supposedly surrounds great men such as Tennyson. On the other hand, when he met Tennyson in person in 1871, photographs of the poet were already as numerous and as widely circulated as they would ever be—and yet the poet retained his majesty and mystery.

amongst it, the disturbing superficial incidents” (174). This is compared to what Piper argues the painter and sculptor are able to achieve: “to portray the mind, to catch the soul, within the lineaments of the body” (172). Piper argues that from mid-century onward, “the potency of the ceremonial portraits—the paintings and the sculptures—seems proportionately to diminish,” replaced by the “informality that the camera could offer, though it was still often somewhat contrived” (176). Indeed, Piper notes that the curtain had been pulled back to reveal the artifice of these “ceremonial portraits,” and their long-standing conventions began to seem “rather exhausted” as the nineteenth century wore on. Tired as these ceremonial portraits were, Piper somewhat overestimates the “informality” of portrait photography in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially when photographs were posed in a studio setting (as opposed, say, taken by an itinerant photographer); with subjects holding poses for close to ten seconds at a time, these photos were more than just “somewhat contrived.”<sup>116</sup> Despite his nods to the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, he remains hesitant to acknowledge the possibilities of photography as a medium capable of rendering individual greatness. For Piper, the shift away from the ceremony of sculpture and painting and towards the “informality” of photography marks “the end of fame” and a “decay of the poet’s image” (182). “Photography,” he contends, “does not accommodate the heroic, the ideal, very easily” (180).

Admittedly, positions like Piper’s and Gosse’s deserve the context of a much larger conversation about the nature and history of photography, a conversation much too complex and

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<sup>116</sup> Linkman argues convincingly that the advent of seaside photographs begins “the erosion of formality” typical of professional studio portraits. For more, see Linkman 174-176.

far-reaching for this venue.<sup>117</sup> For my purposes, however, they represent an important, if now commonplace, attitude towards photography as it relates to literary celebrity—that photographs of celebrities are, by definition, ephemeral, informal, and most importantly, intimate. Photographs are taken quickly, reproduced widely, and discarded easily once a celebrity's renown has flared out. (Digital photographs of the twenty-first century however, seem to bear a frightening possibility of permanence.) And, as opposed to the aura of media like sculpture, photography evokes what Walter Benjamin called the “trace”—“the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be” (*The Arcades Project* 377 [M16a, 4]). Inhered with these properties, photographs would seem nearly incapable of perpetuating the kind of classical image deemed appropriate for a highbrow literary figures such as Tennyson.

In contrast, Charlotte Boyce usefully identifies another, alternate position towards photography during the Victorian period in her recent study of Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits of Tennyson: the new technology could be used to "capture" and preserve the "great men" of the day for posterity. From this perspective, photography could be reconciled with the more ceremonial, commemorative aims of, say, Woolner's sculptures. For one thing, Boyce reminds readers of the “social construction of photographic truth” during the period. Photographic technology was seen as having a kind of "representational superiority over painting" because it could generate "accurate" rather than idealized records of significant individuals. Of course, the Victorians were certainly familiar with and concerned about the ways in which photographic subjects could be misrepresented by the camera, as seen, for instance, in

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<sup>117</sup> For excellent summaries these debates they relate to the Victorian era, see Green-Lewis 2, Groth *Photography* 1-19, Armstrong 1-16, and Novak 1-35.

John Hollingshead's "The Counterfeit Presentment" (1858).<sup>118</sup> But Boyce is right to remind scholars that during the period, photography was also seen as having considerable "claims to verisimilitude," claims which made it a useful tool for Victorians looking to archive themselves as they wished to be seen by future generations (102). "From its earliest inception," she writes, "photography was invested with a special *memorialising* [sic] power," in large part because of its perceived fidelity to nature (emphasis mine). Like commemorative sculpture, photography could also be recruited to the cause of historicizing, preserving and recording "great men" for future generations.

Boyce cites, for instance, Elizabeth Barrett's oft-quoted description of daguerreotypes from December 1843. Writing to Mary Russell Mitford, she exclaims, "It is not merely the likeness which is precious...but...the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there *fixed for ever!*" (emphasis mine). Additionally, she examines the language of Sir Frederick Pollock's "presidential address to the Photographic Society" from 1855:

To varied objects to which Photography can address itself, *its power of rendering permanent that which appears to be as fleeting as the shadows that go across the dial, the power that it possess of giving fixedness to instantaneous objects, are for the purposes of history...a matter of the greatest importance.* It is not too much to say that *no individual...need now perish; but may be rendered immortal* by the assistance of Photography. (qtd. in Boyce 102-103)

In other words, photography as a medium did not necessarily bring about the "end of fame" for poets. Rather, like the more durable, unique media of sculpture and painting, it could render

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<sup>118</sup> For a compelling argument about the significance of composite and art photography to the Victorian conception of photographic "truth," see Novak 118-146. On prevalence of retouching, see Linkman 80-81.

renowned individuals “permanent” and “immortal” for “the purposes of history.” In Boyce’s words photography could make its subjects “exalted, timeless and enduring” (100). For theologian F.D. Maurice, literary figures in particular could benefit from advances in photographic technology. Writing to his friend, Julia Margaret Cameron, in 1866, he praised her portraits of Tennyson and postulated that “had we such portraits of Shakespeare and Milton, we should know more of their own selves. We should have better commentaries on Hamlet and on Comus than we now possess, even as you have secured to us a better commentary on *Maud* and *In Memoriam* than all our critics have given us or ever will give us” (qtd. in Ritchie 7). Whether photos enable us to “know more” of an author’s “self,” and whether such knowledge could enhance literary criticism, is still very much up for debate. But Boyce’s core argument remains: “The visual memorialisation of eminent figures,” she maintains, “was embraced by the Victorians as a way of asserting Britain’s past and present greatness, and of ensuring the continued recognition of that greatness in the future”—a venture not entirely out of sync with Woolner’s sculptures of the Poet Laureate (103).

In Tennyson’s case, the advent of cheap, reproducible photographs did not bring about the “end of fame,” at least at first. In fact, some photographs of Tennyson were used to continue the “medallion tradition” that began with Thomas Woolner in 1856 (Cheshire “Poet” 111).<sup>119</sup> No doubt many photographs of Tennyson inadvertently diminished his stature, an important point I will explore below; but others attempted to use the medium to reinforce an idealized image of Tennyson as the picture of classicality, an image in harmony with the statues of Gosse’s British

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<sup>119</sup> For example, Woolner’s third medallion, which formed the frontispiece for *Enoch Arden* (1866), was based on a photograph commissioned by the new manager of Moxon and Co., James Bernard Payne, and taken by the London Stereoscopic Company. The medallion itself was also sold separately as a decorative collectible in an array of materials from oxidized silver to bronze. For more on this, see Cheshire “Poet” 118-119, 143.



Museum. One prominent London photography studio, Elliot & Fry, produced an array of cartes-de-visite of the poet during the 1860s. Most portraits taken during this period—whether taken by London Stereoscopic, Elliot & Fry, J.E. Mayall, or others—pose the Laureate seated, clad in his signature black cloak, with head turned in three-quarter profile, eyes gazing contemplatively at some point outside the photo's edge. (Interestingly, most portraits of Tennyson in the 1860s do not picture him wearing his wide-brimmed, Spanish-style hat—a feature that, like his cloak, would become nearly ubiquitous in portraits of the 1870s and 1880s.) Elliot & Fry, however, produce one notable exception in their series of carte-de-visite from 1865—a striking image of the Tennyson with shoulders turned, in full profile (see figure 9).<sup>120</sup> Like so many others, the portrait homes in on the poet from the chest up and centers on his (apparently magisterial) head. Even more than the three-quarter poses, this view emphasizes the breadth of the poet's forehead. Coupled with his now-significantly receding hairline, his brow seems exaggeratedly bold, powerful. According to Cheshire, this “visual emphasis on the poet's forehead” often served as a reminder “of the imaginative power of the author,” especially in the context of nineteenth-century interest in physiognomy (“Poet” 127). The full profile also highlights his deep-set eyes, his prominent, chiseled nose, and the ever-deepening crease of his cheek. But perhaps the most conspicuous feature of the photograph is Tennyson's hair. The Laureate's facial hair would have been familiar to audiences by the time Elliot & Fry photographed him—his whiskers had been a staple of his image since at least 1857 and would be until his death in 1892. The hair on his head,

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<sup>120</sup> There are a few other notable exceptions to the dominant three-quarter pose. In their 1864 series, London Stereoscopic also posed Tennyson seated, wearing his cloak and in full profile. However, this image does not appear to have been widely reproduced in the press or as a frontispiece, unlike several other three-quarter portraits from the same session. Additionally, Julia Margaret Cameron's unforgettable 1865 portrait of Tennyson as, what he named, “The Dirty Monk” also depicts the poet in full profile.



Figure 9. Elliot & Fry, albumen carte-de-visite of Alfred Tennyson, c. 1865.

however, takes center stage in this portrait: stringy and tangled in light curls, it refuses to lie flat. Rather, Tennyson's hair looks like it has been blown back, away from his head and neck, by some innate, electric force. The eye is drawn to the frayed outline of stray hairs and the wide, blunt crop at the collar.<sup>121</sup>

Most importantly, the photograph's composition evokes (or at least attempts to) the ceremonial-quality of a medallion, if not of Woolner's specifically, then of classical sculpture generally. Much like medallions and coinage, the full-profile pose suggests some degree of officially sanctioned commemoration. Overall, the profile creates a flattening effect, and emphasizes Tennyson's head while minimizing his body: for example, the poet's head seems to stand alone, occupying nearly half the frame, and the focal point of the image falls on Tennyson's exposed earlobe (a feature that will be reproduced in later illustration and caricatures). Aside from the slightly awkward foreshortening of Tennyson's left shoulder, nothing below the neck is particularly striking. Indeed, because the color of his jacket and the color of the photograph's background appear nearly identical, Tennyson's chest and shoulders are almost washed out entirely. His torso seems to recede into the background, drawing attention to the contrasting black of Tennyson's beard and mass of hair. Like a medallion, the Laureate's head appears to stand on its own, disconnected from any from any earthly body. Given the full-profile pose and this kind of emphasis on the poet's head, it certainly seems as though Elliot & Fry were trying to portray Tennyson with the same sense of idealism and ceremony evoked by Woolner's medallions—while at the same time trying turn a profit by selling it as a *carte-de-visite*. Classically, it seems, could also be a commercially successful pose. Yet, paradoxically,

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<sup>121</sup> Records of Tennyson's opinion on this photograph in particular or on his experience with Elliot & Fry in general, are scarce. But the fact that the poet sat for the firm again in the 1870s suggests that he approved, at least tacitly, of the earlier series of portraits.

Elliot & Fry use photography to position Tennyson as a figure whose rightful place is beyond the very media in which he is depicted, beyond photography and its ties to celebrity culture, fandom, and commercial success.

As the medallion frontispieces, the Trinity bust affair, and the Elliot & Fry photograph suggest, such visual representations of Tennyson put the poet's renown at once in and out of sync with the historical moment, caught between traditional conceptions of fame and emerging celebrity culture. At this stage, Tennyson's celebrity image is characterized not by public intimacy, but by public commemoration. He is popularized in life with forms reserved for the dead, "immortalized" in sculpture not only while he is alive, but while he is comparatively young. It would seem that at the birth of his celebrity, artists begin preparing for his death—and perhaps this was by design. If the Laureate was as anxious about publicity as his 1839 fragment suggests, then projecting an image associated with classicality and death seems like a fair workaround: after all, the dead do not speak, and few people are willing to speak ill of the dead, at least in public. As Christopher Ricks argues, this is the pervading theme of both Tennyson's private life and his poetry: the "paradox of a life that is not life; the sense of time heavy with waiting," of a life that either "waits for death" or escapes the agony of waiting through suicidal heroism (Ricks 134; 42). Characters such as the Lady of Shallot and most obviously, Marianna, all experience a state of existence that is either stagnant or suspended "in drunkenness, and in madness, and in extreme old age," as Ricks puts it (41). Not entirely unlike the narrator of *Maud*, Tennyson finds himself buried alive so to speak, memorialized at the very beginning of his public life. A similar argument can be made for Tennyson's celebrity. Preceded by the early deaths of Romantics such as Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and, most notably, John Keats,

the Laureate's celebrity was always underwritten by the sense that he had lived too long—a feeling only exacerbated by the fact that he did live a very, very long public life.

### **Tennyson Too Much at Home?**

From the mid-1860s onward, Tennyson's celebrity profile began to change. In contrast to the visual representations that had established and reinforced his classicality, the illustrated press profiled the Laureate in far less reverent ways. As was the case with Dickens' celebrity, public intimacy with Tennyson became less than flattering, especially in the last two decades of the poet's life. But unlike Dickens, whose quickly-squelched extramarital affair gave audiences an unsolicited glimpse into his private life, no personal scandal marred Tennyson's image. Instead, Tennyson's visibility as a celebrity exposed what was in plain sight—his increasing old age, and along with it, his waning relevance as a poet in Victorian culture. As Audrey Linkman has usefully observed, the advances of the Graphic Revolution made it possible, for the first time, to put a single life on display from the moment of birth to the moment of death—what she calls the “portrait cycle.”<sup>122</sup> Yet, aging remains strangely out of sync with the speed of celebrity culture (107-119). This ability to expose the deeply personal (and yet universal) experience of aging affords audiences a different kind of intimate look at the celebrity, one not rooted in domestic scandal.<sup>123</sup> One might imagine that the shared experience of aging would bring audience and celebrity closer together, but in the Laureate's case, it serves only to highlight the anachronism of his classicality and his poetry. Tennyson's celebrity becomes a cautionary tale—or rather, a

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<sup>122</sup> For one analysis of the “life on display” phenomenon in the twentieth century, see Gabler *Life* 192-244.

<sup>123</sup> One way to characterize the vulnerability of Tennyson's aging might be Joseph Roach's conception of stigmata. See Roach *It* 39.

cautionary image—of the persistence of an outdated ideal of fame. The writer of *Punch*'s "The Laureate's Bust at Trinity" may have been right in joking that Tennyson needed to "repent" for the sin of still being alive, even as early as 1858.

According to David Piper, "by the time of his [Tennyson's] death [in 1892], the concept of immortal fame was already shrinking fast" and "interest in ideal or heroic or commemorative images of the poets waned simultaneously, and portraits became commonplace and endlessly reduplicated" (180). Tennyson, who had been depicted as heroic and immortalized in sculpture only fifty years before seemed increasingly old-fashioned by the end of the century, an artifact of a past generation. The Laureate betrayed the classicality that characterized his celebrity not only by still being alive, but also by being publicly visible in old age.

For example, only a few years after the Elliot & Fry photograph was taken, illustrated periodicals seized on the carte-de-visite and appropriated it in order to poke fun at the full-profile portrait and its outdated—perhaps even undeserved—air of classicality. For example, in its September 1867 issue, *Fun* magazine printed its fourth installment in a series titled, "Our National Portrait Gallery." Accompanied by a brief poem, "Little Addresses to Big Names," the half-page illustration mocks the ceremonial, commemorative quality of Tennyson's profile picture. In the tradition of caricature, the illustration exaggerates the poet's head—note the earlobe making another appearance—and makes it entirely disproportionate to his tiny body and legs. The poet sits atop a wine cask with lute in hand, clad in striped stockings suggestive of a minstrel costume, indicating that perhaps the poet should come down from his "lofty" position as bard and actually write something again (at this point, Tennyson had not published anything completely new in nearly five years). Overall, though, the illustration seems generally benign, as the background references some of Tennyson's most popular characters and scenes—The Lady

of Shalott floating down the river, Excalibur rising from the lake, a cross hung with a wreath bearing the initials "A.H.H." Additionally, a large house is depicted in the background, a house that seems to be drawn directly from photographs or a first-hand view of Tennyson's home at Aldworth. Alluding to the Laureate's well-known desire for privacy, a sign is planted on the far left side of the picture, stating clearly, "Trespassers will be Prosecuted."

The title of the *Fun* poem suggests some humility on the part of the speaker, even as it previews the good-natured teasing to follow. Indeed, the title of the poem itself offers a sideways glance to the humor of the illustration above: the speaker claims to offer a "little address" to a "big name," but it Tennyson's name is actually printed in smaller type than the title of the poem. Clearly, the biggest thing on the page is Tennyson's head. The poem begins with the speaker longing for poetic inspiration, for "Pegasus...to trot me through a short and sweet epistle," and for "Apollo" to "bring a lyre" so he might put away his "penny whistle." But neither Pegasus nor Apollo appear to the speaker, and as such, he uses the next two stanzas to muse about where else Pegasus might be—perhaps with Swinburne, Browning or Martin Tupper. Then he alights on the answer, and asks, "Why is the Laureate idle / When Pegasus waits at his door, / Ready with saddle and bridle / Either for mountain or moor?" He continues: "Let him, for love or for glory, / (What has a poet to do?) / Give us a song or a story, / Give us an idyll or two." Despite the jabs at the poet's years of idleness and at his perceived leisure time, the speaker ultimately ends on an adulatory note, wishing that other poets could match the caliber of Tennyson's works. But "until they do," he writes, "We shall always be happy to hear from you!" On one register, "Little Addresses to Big Names" pays the poet a compliment. On another, it demotes Tennyson from the lofty position of the poet-hero, above the literary marketplace, to an aging jester, contracted to serve the crown and her subjects by producing verse for the people.

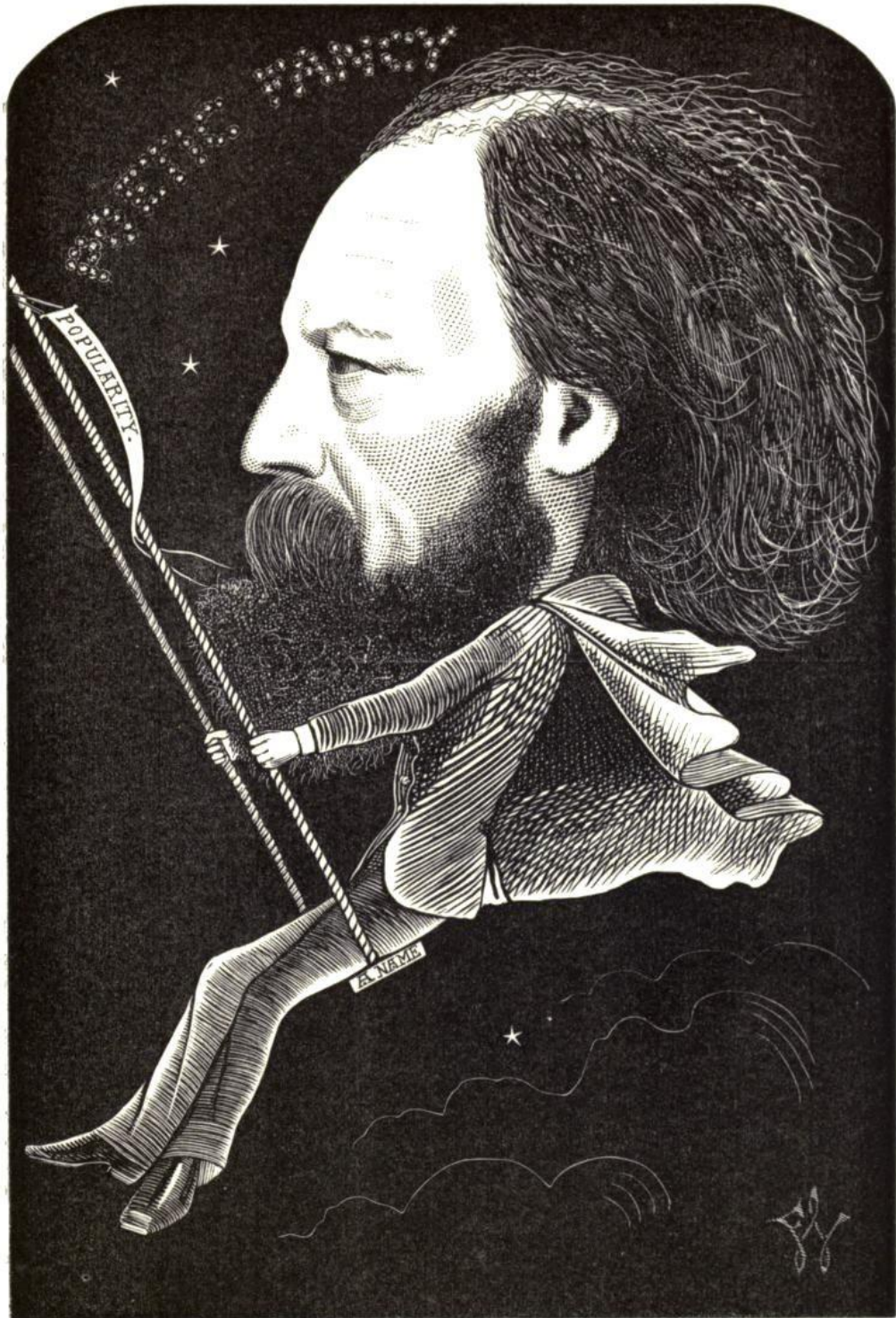


Figure 10. Frederick Waddy, "Alfred Tennyson." *Once a Week* 9.224 (13 April 1872): 342.



A second, better known, appropriation of the Elliot & Fry photograph appeared in *Once a Week* in April 1872 (see figure 10). An article on the Poet Laureate appeared as part of an ongoing series in the periodical which profiled famous men of the day and provided a high-quality caricature of each subject executed by Frederick Waddy. Like the feature in *Fun* magazine, the *Once a Week* column is not particularly malicious. Beginning as a kind of retrospective on the poet's career up to 1872, the writer reminds readers of the attack on Tennyson's *Poems* (1833) by the *Quarterly Review*, an attack which the *Once a Week* writer claims had two root causes: first, in his early career, Tennyson, "had drawn much of his turn of thought and imagination from the author of 'Endymion,'" John Keats, and second, the *Quarterly Review* author, John Wilson Croker, had a well-known aversion to the so-called "Cockney school" of poetry, as evidenced by his scathing review of Keats' "Endymion." This distaste was (mis)placed on Tennyson: Croker calls him "a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger" (Croker 81, emphasis in original). Tennyson, the *Once a Week* contributor argues, became the fall-boy for critics ready "to annihilate any new victim" it deemed associated with Keats' style. Claiming that "it is useful sometimes, if only for the benefit of poets yet unfledged, to point back to the rough handling which men who have now made their names encountered at the outset of their careers," the *Once a Week* writer goes on to quote extensively from Croker's piece, ultimately conceding that Tennyson's "youthful effusions" were indeed "overladen to a degree with affections" (343). For the columnist, Croker's critique was humorous in its degree of disgust, but not entirely off base in its criticism, at least of the poet's early works.

Waddy's image accompanies the *Once a Week* column, and, like the illustration from *Fun*, draws directly from the Elliot & Fry portrait of Tennyson in full-profile.<sup>124</sup> As in most of his images from this series (Waddy also did caricatures of Anthony Trollope, Mark Twain, and others), the poet's head is enormous, round and elongated, with slim limbs and body. But more than that, Waddy's Tennyson also exaggerates some of the most unflattering features of the Elliot & Fry photograph. Though set against the black background of a night sky, the artist takes care to highlight stringy strands of Tennyson's dark but thinning hair, and he makes Tennyson's large, sagging earlobe a visual point of focus on the page—indicators of age Keats did not live long enough to enjoy. The poet swings across the heavens—a Keats-ian "milky way"—his cape billowing behind him, and a constellation that reads "Poetic Fancy" arcs above his forehead. Neither Waddy's overt comparison of Tennyson to Keats nor the reference to poetic fancy are as aggressively critical as Croker's criticism in the *Quarterly Review* article. That is to say, poetic fancy in itself, the hallmark of the "Cockney School" of poetry of which Keats was allegedly a part, do not seem to be what is at stake here. Rather, Waddy seems to suggest that Tennyson is a false follower of the school: he breezes across the sky waving a tiny a banner marked, "Popularity," while the seat of his swing reads "A Name." Further, Waddy chooses not depict what the poet's celestial swing is anchored *to*. That fixed point lies outside the picture's frame, leaving readers to speculate that the Laureate's swing hinges on Keats' star. Tennyson, it would seem, approaches Keats' magnitude in only the most superficial ways. Interestingly, though Waddy implies that Tennyson's lofty posturing is based more on his name and Keats' legacy, and less on the quality of his own work, the caricaturist himself is also complicit in the perpetuation

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<sup>124</sup> It is important to note that part of the reason the Elliot & Fry profile portrait was reproduced in illustrated periodicals may be a practical one: images in profile were simply easier to engrave than others.

of Tennyson's image, an image that likely helped to shore up his dual-position as poet-hero and poet-prophet.

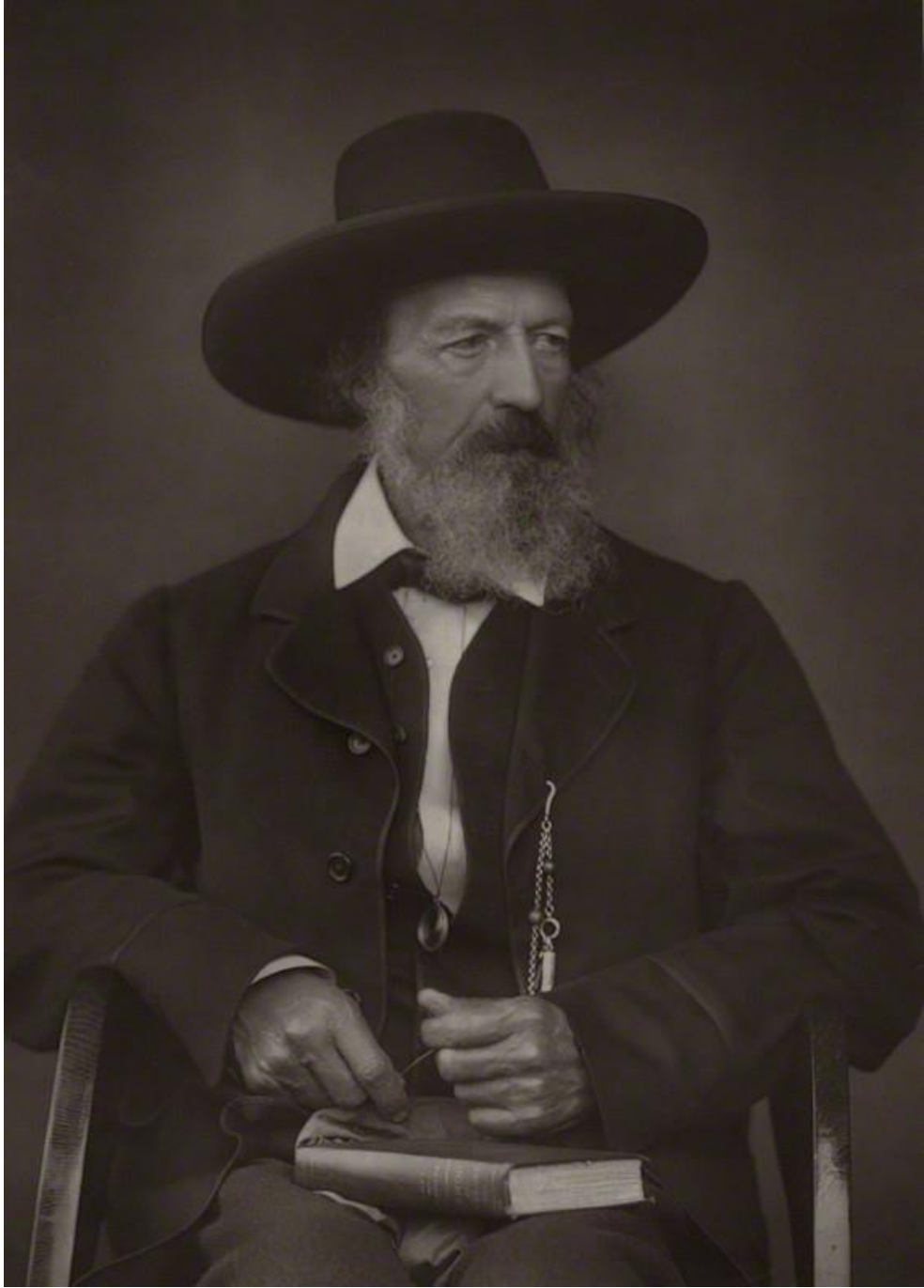
These appropriations of the Elliot & Fry photograph are significant because they showcase the fault line between, on the one hand, an increasing connection between photography and public intimacy in celebrity culture, and on the other, Tennyson's persistent classicality. By placing him in full profile, the Elliot & Fry photographers at the very least *attempted* to extend the aesthetic of classicality Woolner had established in his sculptures and preserve the poet's likeness for posterity. But these photographs, especially those in carte-de-visite form, also aimed to capitalize on the public's perceived desire either to have more intimate access to the living Laureate or to own a kind of preemptive relic to cherish upon his death. These dual impulses grate against one another, and their resultant tensions are, in part, what drive the humor of the *Fun* and *Once a Week* illustrations. They mock the affected formality of the Elliot & Fry photograph specifically and the increasing awkwardness of Tennyson's classicality in Victorian era celebrity culture. This is not to say that Tennyson's classicality was fundamentally incompatible with the medium of photography or that photography was incapable of rendering its subjects in heroic or idealistic ways, as Piper and Gosse have intimated. But the illustrations do challenge the idea that photography, as a medium, necessarily affords viewers more intimate access to the subject depicted, and the related assumption that public intimacy is always attractive or even desirable. Instead, by reproducing the markers of Tennyson's age—his baldness, his brittle hair, his drooping earlobe and jowls—the *Fun* and *Once a Week* images point to the ways in which Tennyson had already begun to outlive his classicality.

One of the last photographs of Tennyson, taken in 1888 by London photographer Herbert Barraud, captures the visual markers that had come to identify the poet in the 1870s and 1880s—

his whitening beard, his wide-brimmed hat, his ever-present spectacles and pipe (see figure 11). (Notably, it does not feature Tennyson's signature cloak, though other photographs from this period did.) Even more so than in the Elliot & Fry photograph, one cannot help but notice the deep lines of Tennyson's jowls and the bags cupped beneath his eyes. But unlike the profile portrait, which retains some sense of ceremony and power, Barraud's image embraces such features as markers of frailty. The poet is posed so as to appear more informal, more "at home." Props such as the copy of Homer's *Odyssey*, conspicuously closed on his lap, and Tennyson's own spectacle necklace suggest not only that the poet's eyesight is declining, but also that he has been "caught" in the act of reflection. The wide-brimmed hat would seem to betray the scene—few people would leave their hat on while reading at home. However, the choice to photograph Tennyson with his hat plays on the fact that viewers already knew the poet had long since gone bald. The hat implies that Tennyson knows he is being photographed and wants to hide something which causes him embarrassment.<sup>125</sup> This admission of self-consciousness makes him appear all the more exposed, all the more vulnerable. Yet, such intimate access to the notoriously reclusive poet did not endear him to his audience. Instead, photographs such as Barraud's were often used as fodder for jokes about the posture of classicality Tennyson had assumed earlier in his career. Tennyson is no longer the brooding Romantic of Samuel Laurence's portrait or the sculpted hero of Woolner's bust and early medallions. The implicit assertion that he was somehow immune to the effects of old age now seemed more self-important than ever, and the press certainly would not let him "live it down," so to speak. In some ways, images like

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<sup>125</sup> It is important to note that in other photographs from the same sitting, Tennyson does remove his hat.



**Figure 11. Herbert Rose Barraud, Carbon print of Alfred Tennyson, c. 1881.**

Barraud's could be seen as undoing the work of the past fifty years, compromising the mission to preserve the Poet Laureate's classicality for future generations.

If the classicality of Tennyson's celebrity was designed to exempt him from the whims of the "general throat" and "public voice," as he called it in 1839, even the Laureate himself understood that no image—even one chiseled in stone—could shield fame from the expanse of time itself. As Christopher Ricks has elegantly argued, Tennyson himself was acutely aware that no matter how classical his image, how timeless he appeared, how many medallions or busts or photographs captured his likeness, fame would be "lost and emptied in the great vistas of geological and astronomical time." Analyzing Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (1852) in the context of Victorian scientific discoveries about the age of the earth, Ricks suggests that as early as mid-century, "Tennyson did not, as he perhaps once had, really believe in the eternity of such an honour" (226). By 1874, the Laureate says as much in a few unpublished lines, titled simply, "Fame:"

Well, as to Fame, who strides the earth  
With the long horn she loves to blow,  
I know a little of her worth,  
And I will tell you what I know—  
This London once was middle sea,  
These hills were plains within the past,  
They will be plains again, and we,  
Poor devils, babbel 'we shall last.' (qtd. in Tennyson *Memoir* 79)

As in the "dark ages of the Press" fragment from 1839, Tennyson again characterizes Fame in more traditional terms, "with the long horn she loves to blow." Yet, whether blowing a horn or

developing a photograph, neither medium holds up to change on a geological scale. Fame's "worth" is eclipsed by the cycles of time. Using "this London" and "these hills" as seemingly solid, fixed points of the present moment, Tennyson looks to the past—when the city was "middle sea" and the hills were plains—and the future—when the hills "will be plains again." In the short span of three lines, Tennyson dwarfs the idea that fame can allow individuals to "last" beyond death.

In terms of Victorian celebrity culture, one need not wait for the vast expanse of millennia to erode someone's image. The advent of cheaper, faster photographic technologies allowed viewers to witness the physical decay of a single person over time; if epochs leave their mark by striating cliffs, then decades etch themselves into the celebrity's face. In the trajectory of Tennyson's celebrity image, the deterioration of his body fused with the perceived deterioration of his literary reputation.<sup>126</sup> In the October 1881 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, W.H. Mallock responded to claims about the decreasing quality and relevance of Tennyson's poetry. "It has been thought by many," he claims, "that, for a number of years past, Mr. Tennyson's powers have been more or less declining; and the decline they date probably from the publication of 'Enoch Arden'" in 1864. Rather than dismissing such accusations altogether, Mallock argues that the "decline" is misattributed: the world has changed, not Tennyson's ability. The poet of genius, he contends, should serve as a mirror for the times, but the times have changed in the course of Tennyson's laureateship. Unlike Robert Southey, whose late-in-life failures Mallock attributes to "a certain change...in his brain," Tennyson's mental faculties remain intact. "No change is involved in the brain of the man in question," he insists,

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<sup>126</sup> For more on this perceived decline and its relation to the "Reaction against Tennyson" to follow after his death, see Mazzeno 20-30.

MR. TENNYSON'S "BOGIE."



ACCEPT my benison,  
Mr. TENNYSON,  
Whom of poets we most  
adore ;  
Leave groans and frown-  
ing  
To Mr. BROWNING ;  
*Do* be natural, please, once  
more.

Not for venison,  
Mr. TENNYSON,  
Nor for Burgundy, choice  
indeed,  
Would I ever  
Again endeavour  
Your last terrible work to  
read.

Mr. TENNYSON,  
There's not any son  
Of this land we more highly prize ;  
But, your bardship,  
'T is a great hardship  
To peruse folly in wisdom's guise.

Mr. TENNYSON,  
Mr. TENNYSON,  
No more rhymes for your name I ken ;  
With your laurel  
I have no quarrel,  
But *do* be natural once again.

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Figure 12. Alfred Bryan, "Mr. Tennyson's 'Bogie,'" *Judy* 23 November 1881: 237.



“His powers may still exist in all their earlier vigour” (468-470).<sup>127</sup> Just how widespread the growing backlash against Tennyson was during the 1870s and 1880s remains up for debate. Laurence Mazzeno contends, for instance, that “among his own generation, and among many in the succeeding one, Tennyson rose in stature with every work he published.” Yet, Mazzeno also acknowledges that during the last quarter of the century, “the seeds for what has come to be known as ‘The Reaction against Tennyson’ were being sown while the Laureate was at the height of his popularity” (20).

Whatever the case, Tennyson’s supposed physical and mental degradation made him an easy target for parody in the popular press. Mallock’s appeals to the Laureate’s “vigour” stand in stark contrast to the visual representations of Tennyson at the time. In 1881, for instance, the same year Mallock published his defense of the poet, *Judy* ran a poem and illustration called “Mr. Tennyson’s ‘Bogie.’” Scathing as the poem is—with its promise to never read the poet’s “last terrible work” and its refrain begging the Laureate to “be natural once again”—the accompanying image of the Laureate commands visual attention (see figure 12).<sup>128</sup> Hunched beneath his black cape, eyes bulging behind his glasses, Tennyson hovers in the page’s corner. He looks almost crazed, scowling and pulling at his tangled hair as he, apparently, attempts to write a poem. The feather of what appears to be a quill pen rests in his mouth, though at first glance, the feather looks much more like phlegm—perhaps a suggestion that his recent works have been little more than drivel. The title of the piece sheds light on the comically grotesque

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<sup>127</sup> For a response to Mallock’s claims, see “Mr. Tennyson’s Poem on Despair” 9.

<sup>128</sup> The reversed “AB” in the bottom right corner of the picture is the signature of noted Victorian illustrator, Alfred Bryan, who also caricatured Oscar Wilde. As in his later caricature Wilde, Bryan draws the eye towards his initials by making Tennyson’s right hand function as kind of arrow pointing towards the letters.

depiction of the poet, considering that during the period “bogie” referred to “an object of terror or dread,” “a bogle or goblin,” and “the evil one, the devil” (“Bogy,” def. 1-3).<sup>129</sup> On one level, because the title, “Mr. Tennyson’s ‘Bogie,’” is possessive, the implication seems to be that the Laureate has a personal “bogie” of his own; perhaps he is horrified by his waning ability to write anything of note. On another, the poem also seems to suggest that the Laureate himself has become a kind of “bogeyman” to the public, an unnatural (or perhaps supernatural) being terrorizing audiences with his overwrought verse, moralizing tone, and aging countenance.<sup>130</sup> Seen in this way, Tennyson’s celebrity image has gone from classical poet-hero to laughable, if lovable, menace—a particularly ironic twist given the poet’s own complaints about being harassed by hero-worshipping fans.

Beginning in the 1870s, about a decade before Tennyson’s “bogie” appeared in *Judy*, the genre of the celebrity “at home interview” became a ubiquitous feature in many British periodicals.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps more than any other genre, the rhetoric of the “at home” interview exemplifies the paradox of public intimacy. Set in the subject’s home, the interview uses the physical features of the dwelling and its furnishings to expose details about the owner’s private life and personality—information that would be otherwise inaccessible to the public. As historian

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<sup>129</sup> It is unclear why the word “bogie”—a fairly common term from the 1840s onward, according to the *OED*—appears in quotation marks in the title. It is possible that the punctuation is used simply to draw attention to the joke. Though the term “bogey” is not used to refer to nasal mucus until the 1930s, perhaps there is some connection between the “bogie” of the title and the odd conflation of Tennyson’s quill with what appears to be mucus.

<sup>130</sup> For further context on “Mr. Tennyson’s ‘Bogie,’” as it relates to criticism of Tennyson’s 1881 poem, “Despair,” see Postma 64-66 and Ledbetter 94-96.

<sup>131</sup> For an excellent analysis of this genre and its relation to Henry James’ “The Death of the Lion” (1894), see Salmon “Physiognomy” 159-170.

Deborah Cohen notes, from the 1850s onward, Britons demonstrated a near obsession with household possessions and interior decoration. For the mid-Victorians, the domestic interior could actually threaten the morality of its inhabitants if the wrong furnishings were not chosen “tastefully.” As the century progressed, however, household possessions offered the physical means by which one could express individuality—and, as Cohen points out, the objects of the home could be “both deliberately constructed and unintentionally revealing.” Used in the figurative sense, the phrase “at home” also implied that familiar surroundings of the house put the celebrity “at ease” in a way he/she could not be in other, more public venues (“Home,” def. P1a).<sup>132</sup> Leveraging this double meaning, the interviews suggest that each home is a symbolic space where the celebrity is relaxed, where he/she is comfortable, and where, as a result, he/she is more likely to disclose “true” elements of his/her personality (Cohen *Household* 19, 125).

Given such potential for exposure, being seen “at home” might seem in direct competition with the classicality of Tennyson’s celebrity. Striking a statuesque pose in an at-home interview might prove difficult, especially for someone in his/her late sixties. But in his 1885 autobiography Edmund Yates—founder and editor of the weekly journal, *The World*—had this to say about his publication:

Undoubtedly one of the most attractive features of *The World* is the series of “Celebrities at Home,” of which nearly four hundred specimens have already appeared, and which seems to be practically inexhaustible. [...] For *the historian of the future*, these articles will...enable our descendants to picture to themselves all the exact social surroundings

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<sup>132</sup> Chase and Levenson suggest that this semantic expansion was spurred, in part, by Dickensian depictions of the English home as a space of comfort, especially in the Christmas tales. See 7-13.

and daily lives and labors, the habits and manners, the dress and appearance, of the men of mark in the present day. (*Fifty Years* 440-442, emphasis mine)

For Yates, the “Celebrities at Home” series—spanning from 1877 to 1879—carries on the spirit if not of commemoration, then of documentation, for future generations. Considering Tennyson’s rants about the intrusions of hero-worshippers and literary tourists, it seems odd that he would allow himself to be exposed in an at-home interview. “Why does one want to know about a poet’s life?” the poet reportedly asked Julia Margaret Cameron. “The less you know the better; he gives you his best in his writings. I thank God day and night we know so little about Shakespeare” (qtd. in Cornish 478). Despite such objections and his “nearly paranoid” worry about invasions of his privacy, Tennyson nevertheless appeared in one of the first “Celebrities at Home” interviews published in *The World*, written in 1877 (Martin 564).<sup>133</sup>

The profile opens with a look at Aldworth, Tennyson’s home at Haslemere, from afar—it appears as a picturesque “rugged common, furze-clad and purpled over with brightest cinerea” (Yates *Celebrities* 1:21). The dwelling, however, is only accessible by a beautiful but seemingly dangerous path that “lies along a ridge, and on either side steep combs dip down into somber wood valleys” (1:21). After a rich two-page trek up the hill, the interviewer finally finds himself in view of Tennyson’s mansion, a place “of welcome solitude away from the haunts of the crowd and safe from the intrusion of the curious” (1:23). (Except, of course, from the prying eyes of well over 20,000 readers of *The World*.) The writer interprets Tennyson’s choice to place his home high on a hill not only as a defense mechanism against intrusion, but also as an indication

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<sup>133</sup> An illustration depicting Tennyson inside the study of his Aldworth home can be found in *The Graphic*’s “Celebrities of the Day” series from March 1884. Accompanied by a short biography profiling the lord, the newspaper included a detailed, full-page illustration of the room’s interior and a facsimile of Tennyson’s signature.

of the poet's own "yearning for lofty things" (1:23). As the interviewer continues to approach, the home, as well as the perils of its landscape, actually seem *less* visible up close than at a distance: the "groves" surrounding the estate "dip suddenly down into deep gorges" and "nothing of the house but the chimney-tops or gables...can be seen from any point near at hand" (1:24). Tangled overgrowth, "hardly less impenetrable than stone walls," surrounds Aldworth, making it almost impossible to glimpse the "bright flower-gardens and pleasant glades" hidden behind—for an outsider, at least. The architecture of the home, "whose gables and pinnacles break the sky-line picturesquely," has, in the writer's estimation, just a touch of "an affectation of aestheticism *not quite in keeping with the spirit either of modern or medieval life*" (emphasis mine). The parallels to Tennyson's public persona as a recluse are hard to miss: like his home, the poet remains hidden beneath what has become an unkempt, often thorny, image that seems strangely out of sync with his age.

Once across the threshold, the interview shifts focus to detailed descriptions Tennyson's household objects: "high backed chairs," remarks the interviewer, "of ancient and uncompromising stiffness, flank the table, typifying the poet's sterner moods; while in cosy corners are comfortable lounges that indicate a tendency to yield sometimes to the soft seductions of more effeminate inspirations" (1:25). Interestingly, after describing the furnishings, the interviewer turns to focus on "one room in which *all that is most interesting* in the house centres. [...] The occupant of the chamber comes forward to meet you, the inseparable pipe between his teeth" (1:25-26, emphasis mine). The occupant is, of course, Tennyson, and the room from which he emerges would seem to be a kind of interior within an interior, a private space within the (supposedly) already private space of the home. This emphasis on an even *more* private space than the interior of the home adds another layer of complication to the genre of the

at-home interview: the article seem to suggest that the objects of the home may be revelatory of the celebrity's personality to *some* degree, but a private "truth" remains undiscovered inside his/her "inner sanctum" even further within the home. Household objects, in short, were not always reliable indicators of personality. By the 1890s, interiors could be decorated and redecorated—and personalities constructed and reconstructed—at will. "Since rooms could be read like faces," Cohen writes, "it was all the more important that their owners communicate the message *intended*," not, I would point out, that their owners communicate a "true" message about character (*Household* 140, emphasis mine). If "Celebrities at Home" enacted a kind of physiognomy of the domestic interior as Cohen implies, then the potential for misreading household possessions and the potential for a celebrity to "pass" as someone they were not adds another layer of mystery around the celebrity.

When Tennyson finally does emerge from the "inner sanctum" to face his interviewer, readers get to see the Laureate in a different way—not at home "among the gods and emperors," to borrow Edmund Gosse's phrase, but at home in his old age. His stone-like pose of classicality, the defining feature of his celebrity two decades before, was beginning to erode:

The figure, though slightly bent, bears the burden of its sixty-six years lightly; the dark mass of hair falling backward from the broad high forehead, and the 'knightly growth fringing his lips,' are but sparsely streaked with silver; and the face, though rugged and deeply lined with thought, is full of calm dignity and of a tenderness strangely at variance with his somewhat brusque tone and manner.... His suit of light gray hanging about him in many a fold, like the hide of a rhinoceros, the loose ill-fitting collar and carelessly-knotted tie, the wide low boots, are not worn, you may be sure, for artistic effect, or with the foppishness of a Byron." (Yates *Celebrities* 1:26).

A far cry from the crazed, decaying phantom of “Mr. Tennyson’s ‘Bogie,’” the interviewer strikes a balance between ignoring the Laureate’s aging image, on the one hand, and viciously mocking him for it, on the other. Like the Barraud photograph, the tone of the *World’s* profile is one of empathetic documentation rather than obligatory commemoration, depicting the poet as he is rather than as he demands to be remembered. His body is “slightly bent,” not stiffly hunched; his hair is “sparsely streaked with silver,” not coarse with gray; his face is “rugged and deeply lined with thought,” not weathered and wrinkled with time. Ultimately, the “Celebrities at Home” interview chips away at the monolith of Tennyson’s classicality rather than smashing it altogether.

Despite its subtlety in this sketch, the *World’s* profile of Tennyson nevertheless perpetuates the notion that audiences yearned for more ever-more intimate access to the celebrity poet. In the opening sequence describing his approach to Haslemere, the interviewer speculates that during his trek, he might encounter a dejected hero-worshipper, “returning from the shrine of her fruitless pilgrimage” (1:22).<sup>134</sup> This detail not only lends credibility to the interviewer as someone with exclusive access to the poet—he was allowed in the house while she was not—but also perpetuates an image of the (female) public as craving intimacy with the celebrity. Though the *World* interviewer maintains that, “Few poets have been exposed to the same kind of persecution as the Poet-laureate,” parodies of the at-home interview turn that claim on its head: it was the audience, inundated with intimate exposures, who had been persecuted by Tennyson (1:26).

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<sup>134</sup> That the writer chooses the feminine pronoun “her” is worth noting. For a reading of the feminization of fandom and celebrity culture in *Idylls of the King*, see Finnerty 215-221. On fandom, gender, and “hysteria” in Lord Byron’s case, see McDayter 1-25. On fandom and marginalized populations more broadly, see Fiske’s “The Cultural Economy of Fandom” 30-50.

CELEBRITIES (VERY MUCH) AT HOME.  
No. 5.—LORD TENNYSON.



*(Fragment of an Unpublished Poem.)*

“The rain had fallen : the poet arose ;  
He marched o’er the moorland full many a mile.  
The West Wind had whistled wherever he went ;  
And he sat himself down on the top of a stile,  
And he sang this song as he marched along.  
Come again, come again, Wind of the West !  
Roam again ! home again come with a smile,  
Son of Æolus, with blessing thrice blest—  
*Great Scotus ! it’s collar’d my best Sunday tile.*”

Figure 13. “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home—Lord Tennyson,” *Judy* 27 Jan. 1892: 44.



If at-home interviews “cater[ed] to *the cultural desire to fuse with Tennyson through seeing his homes*” and “functioned as intermediaries between the author and his audience, providing and selling the ‘illusion of intimacy,’” as Boyce claims, then there was an opposite, if not always equal, reaction to resist that closeness through parody (9, emphasis mine). Beginning in 1891, for example, *Judy* began a bi-weekly run of caricatures titled, “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home.” Though the series began nearly fifteen years after the first installment of “Celebrities at Home” in the *World*, the referent could not be clearer. Though the original series reached the height of its popularity in the late 1880s, its form was widely emulated and developed in publications like the *Strand* and the *Idler* in Britain, as well as *Harper’s* in the United States where Anne Warrington Witherup wrote twelve pieces under the same title in 1898. No doubt “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home” stands as a testament to the far-reaching influence of the *World’s* flagship series on Victorian popular culture. But more importantly, it reminds us that the technologies of the Graphic Revolution were used to critique public intimacy for the *audience’s* sake, as much as they were used to perpetuate celebrity culture (see figure 13). Tennyson’s appearance in the series shows the aged lord in an exaggerated action shot, hunched over in pursuit of his “best Sunday tile”—blown away, so the accompanying poem goes, by the “West Wind” he had praised only moments before (44). Gangly and bald, he chases the lost hat toward the viewer, so intent in his pursuit that it seems he would be willing to run out of the frame and off the page if it meant retrieving his wide-awake. But the Laureate is as oblivious as he is determined: he is running straight toward a cliff, not unlike the “steep gorges” that surrounded his home at Haslemere. Carried forward by his own momentum and his wind-swept black cape, Tennyson is already past the point of no return. His eccentricity and vanity will lead him over the edge.

Though the illustration does not depict Tennyson's physical home, as in the *World* interview, it does exaggerate the potentially embarrassing possibilities of being seen "very much" at home, of being seen in a compromised position—ridiculously chasing one's hat into a gorge while being tangled up in one's cloak. On one level, the series is deeply invested in mocking Tennyson himself. The poet is so fond of his hat that he would run off the edge of a cliff to retrieve it, reminding readers of the Laureate's well-known anxieties about going bald, and publicly. Further the loss of his hat interrupts the composition of a poem, the "fragment" of which is reproduced in the *Judy* cartoon. That the lines are from "an unpublished poem" is a dig at Tennyson's lack of literary production over the years. In this case, the Laureate's preoccupation with his hat got in the way. On another level, *Judy's* illustrations also ridicule the notion that seeing a celebrity "at home" is always attractive. Exposing scandalous details of celebrities' private lives, or in Tennyson's case, the day-to-day bumbles of an octogenarian, have undesirable results, and not just for the author's own image. Readers and viewers who had championed Tennyson's classicality in his heyday now see their poet-hero reduced to an eccentric old man who cannot finish a poem. In Tennyson's case, seeing him "at home" does not present a threat to his characters in the same way Dickens' marital scandal did. For the Laureate, the fear is not uncovering a dirty secret; the surface is enough. Seeing his exterior is itself a kind of exposure: it reveals his classicality as at once premature and dated. Unlike "Mr. Tennyson's 'Bogie,'" in which audiences were inundated with subpar poetry, "Celebrities (Very Much) at Home" suggests that audiences were also inundated with overly-intimate exposures all phases of a celebrity's life. "Celebrities (Very Much) at Home," in other words, would seem to highlight a reaction against the informality and indignity of seeing Tennyson and other celebrities too much "at home."

In conclusion, Tennyson's case points to several important and often overlooked aspects of the relation between celebrity, public intimacy and the Graphic Revolution. The frontispieces and photographs emphasizing Tennyson's classicality show that printed images of celebrities, even when circulating in great numbers, could be used to discourage public intimacy as much as they could be used to engender it. Additionally, the characterizations of Tennyson's age in periodical illustration suggest that, at least for the Victorians, there was an upper limit on the quantity and kind of knowledge audiences wanted to gain about their celebrities. As much as there may have been a desire to gain intimate access to celebrities such as Tennyson, so too was there a desire to look away, to avert one's gaze when faced with celebrity (over)exposures. Advances in photographic technology meant that Tennyson's aging could be broadcast to and mocked by a much wider audience than ever before, raising further questions about how public intimacy functions horizontally, across a celebrity's life span, as well as vertically, into his/her private life or personality. If fame fixes the individual, immortal at his/her peak, celebrity holds its gaze even in the most compromising moments—and sometimes viewers prefer the statuesque over the pedestrian.

## 5.0 FORGING WILDE: THE ART OF CELEBRITY AND *THE PORTRAIT OF MR.*

### *W. H.*

In the case of both Dickens' and Tennyson's celebrity, there appears to have been at least some nostalgia for *less* public intimacy on the audiences' part, perhaps even a conscious effort to overlook domestic disputes in favor of fictional "friends" or old age in favor of a timeless, heroic ideal. The same does not apply for Oscar Wilde. By the time he was convicted of "gross indecency" and incarcerated at Reading Gaol in 1895, illustration had become a requisite feature not only of comic periodicals like *Punch* and *Judy*, but also of sensational newspapers such as the *Illustrated Police News*, a publication which featured Wilde on its cover more than once. Wilde remains recognizable today thanks to the now-iconic series of photographs taken by Napoleon Sarony in 1882, but by the turn of the twentieth century, these same portraits—originally shot to promote Wilde's North American lecture tour—had been co-opted as exemplars of sexual deviance (Novak 63-95) With Kodak's introduction of the personal-use camera looming on the horizon and the refinement of photogravure and halftone printing processes not lagging far behind, the technologies of the Graphic Revolution were primed to integrate image and text in ways that not only made scandal an ever-present danger for public figures, but also blurred the boundaries between invention and imitation, original and copy in celebrity culture for at least the next century.

Oscar Wilde was, if not the first, then certainly the most tragic casualty of the celebrity

culture he helped create. Yet, the publicity surrounding Wilde's lecture tour and his trials cannot be explained by any apparent "desire" on the part of the audience to feel closer to the man who would ultimately leave the Old Bailey in shackles and in shame. In their study of celebrity and the history of British theatre, Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody summarize Joseph Roach's formulation of public intimacy as "the illusion which mediates the relationship between stars and audiences" and which "makes possible *the creation of desire, familiarity, and identification*" (5, emphasis mine). While this is certainly true for many celebrities who possess or cultivate what Roach calls "It," public intimacy also makes possible the creation of disappointment, disgust, and repudiation. In 1877, Wilde wrote that he aimed to acquire "success: fame or even notoriety"—and with the advantage of hindsight, we know he got much more of the latter than he bargained for (*Holland Wilde Album* 44-45). As Wilde understood, Victorian celebrity culture carries within it the twin potential for both fame and notoriety, for hero-worship and fandom, on the one hand, and fascinated disgust and a kind of schadenfreude-driven curiosity, on the other. In this way, public intimacy both risks personal disappointment and fuels the pleasure of deconstructing or judging the spectacle: looking too closely at a celebrity can reveal *unwanted* realities that do not corroborate the desired image, but it can also offer the self-congratulatory satisfaction of being able to expose a fake.<sup>135</sup>

In his 1938 preface to Frank Harris's controversial biography, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (1916), Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw maintains, "that Wilde's permanent celebrity belongs to literature, and only his transient notoriety to the police news" ("Preface"

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<sup>135</sup> For more on schadenfreude in contemporary celebrity culture, see Littler and Cross 395-417.

3:353).<sup>136</sup> Though Shaw’s juxtaposition of the phrases “permanent celebrity” and “transient notoriety” may seem odd to contemporary readers (“permanent celebrity” is almost oxymoronic in itself), scholars have no doubt secured a permanent place for Oscar Wilde in both literary and celebrity history over the last quarter century. Unlike Lord Byron, who claims he awoke to find himself famous, scholars often cast Wilde as the agent of his own celebrity, positioning him as a “self-inventor,” “self-fashioner,” and “self-promoter.” Regenia Gagnier has argued that Wilde marketed himself as a dandy—a figure who exists apart from the “life world” of bourgeois society—by participating in the very commodity culture aestheticism purported to condemn (6-8); Jerusha McCormack has highlighted the reciprocal relation between Wilde’s (re)inventions of himself and his invention of the fragmented identity that is modern Irishness (2); and Shelton Waldrep culls together aspects of Wilde’s artistic philosophy, sexuality, and celebrity into what he calls an “aesthetics of self-invention,” which, when coupled with Wilde’s “skills at self-promotion,” laid the groundwork for twentieth-century figures such as David Bowie (xvii-xx).

Perhaps the boldest expression of the invention claim comes in David Friedman’s book-length study of Wilde’s American lecture tour. Citing, among other things, evidence that Wilde practiced and memorized many of his famously off-the-cuff epigrams, Friedman proposes that Wilde

devis[ed] a groundbreaking formula for manufacturing fame—one that is still used by many aspiring celebrities today, whether they know it or not. Decades before Norman

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<sup>136</sup> Shaw’s preface is less a meditation on Wilde’s literary legacy and more a defense of Frank Harris’s biography. Since its initial publication in 1916, Harris’s biography—and Harris himself—had received criticism from fellow Wilde-biographer Robert Sherard. In 1937, Sherard published *Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris, and Oscar Wilde*, in which he attacked both Shaw and Harris. As a result, Shaw’s preface is largely a response to Sherard and a defense of Harris and his biography.

Mailer, Wilde knew the value of “advertisements for myself.” Decades before Andy Warhol, he saw the beauty in commerce and the importance of image in marketing. Decades before Kim Kardashian, he grasped that fame could be fabricated in the media.

(16)

In this line of argument, Wilde “invented” modern celebrity by inventing his own celebrity image, by “manufacturing” his own fame years before he had anything to be “known for,” as Daniel Boorstin would say.

During his 1882 lecture tour across the United States—a tour designed to promote the American run of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan’s satirical opera, *Patience*—Wilde no doubt drew crowds and publicity worthy of comparison to Kim Kardashian. There are two problems, however, with the repeated references to Wilde as “self-inventor” (self-inventor though he surely was). First, Wilde’s celebrity in the United States depended as much on American audiences’ *doubts* about his inventiveness, on their *doubts* about his authenticity as the inspiration for the most popular Aesthetic caricatures of the period as it did on his ability to dazzle them with his originality. Was Wilde the “original” on which George Du Maurier’s *Punch* caricatures and Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* star, Reginald Bunthorne, were based? Was Wilde the “real deal,” so to speak, or just a poser? Could Wilde possibly be as exaggerated in person as Du Maurier and Gilbert and Sullivan’s parodies made the Aesthete out to be? Or would he be disappointingly pedestrian? These distinctions between original and copy, invention and imitation, authenticity and forgery were categories Wilde troubled at almost every opportunity; nevertheless, they constitute the fundamental terms on which Wilde was received by the American press.

The second issue with upholding Wilde as the exemplar of self-invention is the term

itself. Especially in popular usage, “invention” has a tendency to evoke so-called Romantic tenets of autonomy, originality, and genius, smoothing over Wilde’s own complicated understanding of artistic creation, which refuses uniformity by design.<sup>137</sup> In his reading of Wilde’s collection of genre-defying critical essays, *Intentions* (1891), Laurence Danson describes Wilde’s conception of personality as “a kind of self...whose potency comes precisely from being not only itself, not (that is) self-consistent, but rather from being (or accepting the state of being) the many moods, the masks and poses, by which it fleetingly makes and remakes itself.” In this way, Wilde’s “idea of personality as multiplicity and surface challenges the earnest Victorian idea of the singular and self-contained individual” (18). Wilde’s idea of self-invention, as Danson sees it, is shot through with the “contradictions between a selfmaking and an always made self, a creative and a created personality,” and exists “in the zone of greys that descends from absolute originality of thought through influence to derivation to copy” (18-19). Wilde’s originality, then, “is an originality founded *on the already made*” (26, emphasis mine). On his United States lecture tour—a decade before the publication of *Intentions*—Wilde practiced, lived these aesthetics: because American audiences’ expectations for Wilde were shaped by Du Maurier’s and Gilbert and Sullivan’s parodies of the Aesthete, he had to forge his celebrity by appropriating the images that preceded him. As Anthony Jenkins puts it, “Initially, Wilde fired the public’s imagination as a mere poseur. Nevertheless, *he invented himself out of*

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<sup>137</sup> For a succinct summary of George Steiner’s *Grammars of Creation* (2001) and the distinction between “to create” and “to invent,” see McFarlane 1-6. Though the alignment of “to create” with Romantic originality and “to invent” with the classical rhetorical definition of choosing the most appropriate arguments for the occasion is useful, in popular usage, “invention” seems nearly synonymous with “creation,” carrying with it the properties most often associated with Romanticism—autonomy, genius, and originality. See, for example, *OED* “Invention” 3a, 9. For a focused comparison of these two modes of literary creation in Victorian discourses on plagiarism and literature, see McFarlane 18-49.



*the imagery of the aesthetic movement* with such self-conscious calculation and conviction that he became a living artifact” (197, emphasis mine). But rather than seeing Wilde as an inventor of his own celebrity, it might be more useful to see his celebrity as a kind of artistic forgery for which no original exists.

Determining how public intimacy and the Graphic Revolution coalesce in Wilde’s celebrity is inextricably bound to these questions of original and copy, invention and imitation, authenticity and forgery. In this chapter, I argue that the celebrity image of Wilde’s American lecture tour functioned as a complex artistic forgery that disrupts assumptions about the desirability of public intimacy, but that also speaks to his later works such as *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* and to the “gross indecency” that ultimately resulted in his incarceration. Current scholarship focuses on how celebrity is driven by audiences’ desire for more intimate access to the “real” person behind the publicity, but, as I show in part one, in the case of Wilde’s U.S. lecture tour, audiences *did not* always want to see the “real” man behind the mask—they wanted to see the cartoon in the flesh. The illusion of public intimacy with Wilde functioned not as a way for fans to get closer to the celebrity they loved, but as a way for American audiences to get close enough to determine whether he warranted the “hype” that preceded him or whether he should be exposed as a sham, as a spectacle with no substance. In many instances, the press coverage surrounding Wilde’s tour indicates disappointment with the Professor of Aesthetics in-person appearances: if British audiences expected Tennyson to be a living statue, American audiences wanted Wilde to be a walking caricature. Despite his best efforts, there were times when Wilde could neither “live up to” the blue china which adorned his rooms at Oxford, nor the caricature of the Aesthete, the celebrity American audiences hoped to gawk at (Ellmann 32).

Given the circumstances surrounding his public reception in the U.S., I suggest that

Wilde forged his celebrity as much as he invented it: he created an image that was meant to obscure the concept of a single, authentic original and disrupt the logic of public intimacy. In part two, I explore how this art of forging celebrity dovetails with the aesthetics of forgery Wilde developed in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* In accepting Richard D'Oyly Carte's invitation to tour with the U.S. run of *Patience*, Wilde tacitly agreed to perform a kind of forgery, promoting himself as the unique "original" on which Du Maurier's and Gilbert and Sullivan's parodies were supposedly based—and American audiences received him on these terms. Similarly, the Victorians were committed to finding an "original" portrait of Shakespeare among the numerous forgeries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet the circularity of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*—the forged portrait of Willie Hughes and the theory of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* prove only the existence of one another—erodes the distinctions between original and copy, invention and imitation, authenticity and forgery altogether. In conclusion, I briefly discuss how the celebrity image Wilde forged during his American lecture tour reappeared during his trials and incarceration in 1895.

**“Ready-Made Fame:” Appropriating the Aesthete, Performing the Original, Forging Wilde**

In his divisive retrospective, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), American-born painter James McNeill Whistler recalls the December 1880 opening of his “Etchings of Venice” exhibition at the Fine Arts Society in London. Two of his then-friends were in attendance: French-born illustrator and caricaturist George Du Maurier and recent Oxford graduate and up-and-coming aesthete Oscar Wilde. (As the title of Whistler's book suggests, both Wilde and Du Maurier later became his “enemies.”) As the story goes, the two men were chatting with one

another—Du Maurier had, after all, been lampooning the Aesthetes in *Punch* for months prior to their meeting—when Whistler approached the pair, and “taking each by the arm,” quipped, “I say, which of you two invented the other, eh?” (Whistler 241; Pennell 161; Ellmann 136).<sup>138</sup> Two years after the encounter between Whistler, Wilde and Du Maurier and thousands of miles across the Atlantic, the *New York Times* ran a short article with the bold headline, “Did Sarony Invent Oscar Wilde?” (“Did Sarony Invent Oscar Wilde” 4). The article recounts details of the 1884 U.S. Supreme Court case in which photographer Napoleon Sarony sued Burrow-Giles Lithographic Company for the rights to twenty-seven publicity photos taken of Wilde during the self-proclaimed Professor of Aesthetics’ 1882 American lecture tour. Determining if Sarony retained copyright depended critically on whether or not he could prove that he “invented” the now-famous poses of Wilde.

Whistler’s anecdote and the *New York Times* headline capture an often overlooked aspect of Wilde’s celebrity: in the months leading up to and during his American lecture tour of 1882, he was not seen as the author or the “inventor” of his own image. Rather, his celebrity was seen as being invented by those who represented him visually—in caricature, on the stage and in photography, especially.<sup>139</sup> My point here is not to suggest that Wilde had no hand in making himself well-known—he did—nor do I mean to suggest that Wilde was particularly distressed by

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<sup>138</sup> Both Pennell’s *Life of Whistler* and Ellmann’s *Oscar Wilde* recount what Du Maurier wished he had said in response: “The obvious retort to that, on my part would have been that, if he did not take care, I would invent him, but he had slipped away before either of us could get a word out.” Du Maurier goes on to say that his parody of Whistler as Joe Sibley in *Trilby* (1894) was retaliation for Whistler’s “little jibe” in his book. See Pennell 161 and Ellmann 136.

<sup>139</sup> I limit myself in this section to a discussion of printed images. Paintings of Wilde, such as William Powell Frith’s, “A Private View at the Royal Academy” (1881), are fascinating, but outside the scope of this inquiry.

the vast array of visual representations that depicted or referred to him. That the young, self-proclaimed “Professor of Aesthetics” set out to become famous is without question. That he designed his own clothes, distributed his cartes-de-visite, and manuscripts to anyone who would have them, and requested lithographs to accompany his lectures during his American tour is likewise doubtless (Friedman 90). But the scholarly focus on Wilde as “self-inventor,” “self-creator,” and “self-fashioner”—attributions which, in most instances, are wholly deserved—overestimates the degree to which Wilde was seen as the sole creator of his celebrity image during his American lecture tour and the degree to which audiences were impressed by what they saw. To modify one of Wilde’s own epigrams, the question of whether his image imitated the Aesthetic type or vice versa—that is, whether he was *the* original or merely a copy—was what drove the formation of his celebrity, even during his first few years in London.<sup>140</sup>

In his controversial biography, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confessions* (1916), Frank Harris (editor of the *Fortnightly Review* and friend to Wilde) reports that when Wilde arrived on the London scene in 1879, three years before his American lecture tour,

he stepped boldly into the limelight, going to all ‘first nights,’ and taking the floor on all occasions.... He began to go abroad in the evening in knee breeches and silk stockings wearing strange flowers in his coat—green cornflowers and gilded lilies—while...proclaiming the strange creed that ‘nothing succeeds like excess.’ Very soon his name came into everyone’s mouth; London talked of him and discussed him at a

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<sup>140</sup> Goldman mentions this point, though he makes the distinction more clear cut that it may have actually been: he argues that Wilde was the “original” and Gilbert and Sullivan’s Bunthorne was his “copy.” But the discrepancies between this neat distinction and the multifaceted creation of Wilde’s image are precisely what drove Wilde’s celebrity during the period.

thousand tea-tables. For one invitation he had received before, a dozen now poured in; he became a celebrity. (61-66)

Though Wilde was “discussed...at a thousand tea-tables” in London—whether for his epigrams (“nothing succeeds like excess”) or his eccentric clothing—Wilde did not become a “celebrity” until he became visible in the British press between April 1880 and March 1881. The cartoons and caricatures of *Fun*, *Punch* and *The Entr’acte* made Wilde both visible and recognizable to a broader readership, not just a subject of gossip in fashionable London coteries. While Wilde’s visibility was crucial to the formation of his celebrity on an international scale, the image for which he became known was not entirely “his.” Like Dickens before him, Wilde did not become recognizable through naturalistic or physically “accurate” depictions of his likeness; he became recognizable to the public as a caricature of the Aesthetic type. Caricatures of the Aesthete in the British press and on stage shaped American audience’s expectations for Wilde’s image, and, in so doing, shaped his celebrity for decades to come.

Scholars generally look to George Du Maurier’s long-running cartoon series, “Nincompoopiana,” as the first instance of Wilde’s visibility in the press. On Feb 14, 1880, a new installment of “Nincompoopiana,” “The Mutual Admiration Society,” appeared, and Du Maurier introduced two characters “quite unknown to fame:” the artist, Jellaby Postlethwaite and the poet, Maudle. Though contemporary scholars recognize that Du Maurier largely modeled these characters on Whistler and Wilde, their faces, bodies and clothing remain generic amalgamations of recognizable Aesthete features (66). Significantly, the cartoons never attached Wilde’s proper name to any recognizable physical features. Du Maurier had a long-standing reputation of mocking the Pre-Raphaelites and the rise of Aestheticism for nearly a decade before the invention of Postlethwaite and Maudle, and “The Mutual Admiration Society” was a

continuation of that theme (Kelly 65; Bristow 14). Whether or not readers of *Punch* would have recognized Wilde as one of the many referents for Du Maurier's cartoons remains unclear.

The only cartoon where Du Maurier seems to draw directly from Wilde—if not from his physical features, then from his epigrams—is now-famous “The Six-Mark Tea-Pot” appearing on October 30, 1880 (see figure 14). In the sketch, an “Intense Bride” and her “Aesthetic Bridegroom” contemplate what appears to be a piece of blue china, when the “Intense Bride” exclaims, “Oh, Algernon, let us live up to it!” The face of the “Aesthetic Bridegroom” seems to resemble Wilde's with his droopy eyelids, oval face, and long hair (194). Though popular in Britain since the mid-1850s, the shawl-collared smoking jacket is also significant, as it will appear later in the 1882 Sarony series (Buck 197; Byrde 890).<sup>141</sup> Most importantly, however, the bride's exclamation is taken from Wilde's own speech: according to Hesketh Pearson's biography, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (1946), Wilde was well-known in London literary circles for having said that he “found it difficult to live up to his blue china” while at Magdalen (Pearson 42). Yet, as Joseph Bristow points out, the bridegroom's name, “Algernon,” is likely a reference to Pre-Raphaelite poet Algernon Swinburne. Bristow argues that by naming the bridegroom “Algernon,” Du Maurier was likely suggesting that, “Wilde's aestheticism owed much to a previous generation of artists and writers whose works had often been attacked for their presumed indulgence in sensuality” (14).

Whether Wilde was, for Du Maurier, a unique figure in London society or another iteration of the Aesthetic type, the illustrator does not hesitate to assert that Jellaby Postlethwaite

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<sup>141</sup> Whether Du Maurier saw Wilde in his smoking jacket, then illustrated him that way, or whether Wilde saw himself depicted in a smoking jacket, then wore it in the Sarony photographs of 1882 is unclear. Either way, the smoking jacket is generally worn at home, not in public.



Figure 14. George Du Maurier, "The Six-Mark Tea-Pot," *Punch* 30 October 1880: 194.

and Maudle—and perhaps even Wilde and Whistler—were inventions of his own mind. The sketch, “Frustrated Social Ambition,” which appeared on May 21, 1881, shows Maudle holding a crumpled newspaper as Postlethwaite cries into his friend’s shoulder. Also in tears, “Mrs. Cimabue Brown” looks on at the pair. (The figure of Mrs. Cimabue Brown is likewise a composite figure, a “parody of the taste for Pre-Raphaelite, Italian primitive artists,” apparently most popular among female audiences [Kelly 64-69]) According to the caption, Postlethwaite and Maudle have just “read in a widely-circulated contemporary journal that they only exist in *Mr. Punch’s* vivid imagination. They had fondly flattered themselves that universal fame was theirs at last” (229). In this, a bold close to the “The Mutual Admiration Society” series, Du Maurier argues implicitly for the agency of the press as both the creator and the destroyer of celebrity: on one hand, Postlethwaite and Maudle were created by “Mr. Punch” and, on the other, a “widely-circulated contemporary journal” tells them they have not achieved “universal fame.” And, in a meta-discursive move, Du Maurier draws attention to the materiality of *Punch* itself in order to suggest that celebrities may not “exist” as real persons at all. Wilde, like Postlethwaite or Maudle, was always already a figment of the press’s “vivid imagination.”

If Du Maurier’s cartoons incorporated only oblique references to Wilde’s physical features, mannerisms, or sartorial habits into the Aesthetic type, then Alfred Bryan—caricaturist for the illustrated weekly, *The Entr’acte*—made Wilde fully recognizable as a caricature by affixing his proper name to his image (see figure 15).<sup>142</sup> Though the Professor of Aesthetics had

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<sup>142</sup> Joseph Bristow cites Bowyer Nichols’s “Aesthetes v. Athletics” and Alfred Thompson’s “The Bard of Beauty,” published in the journal *Time*, as other examples of early caricatures that depict Wilde with these characteristic features. Though significant, these images—like Du Maurier’s cartoons—do not explicitly signal Wilde as the referent by naming him. See Bristow *Wilde Writings* 11-13.



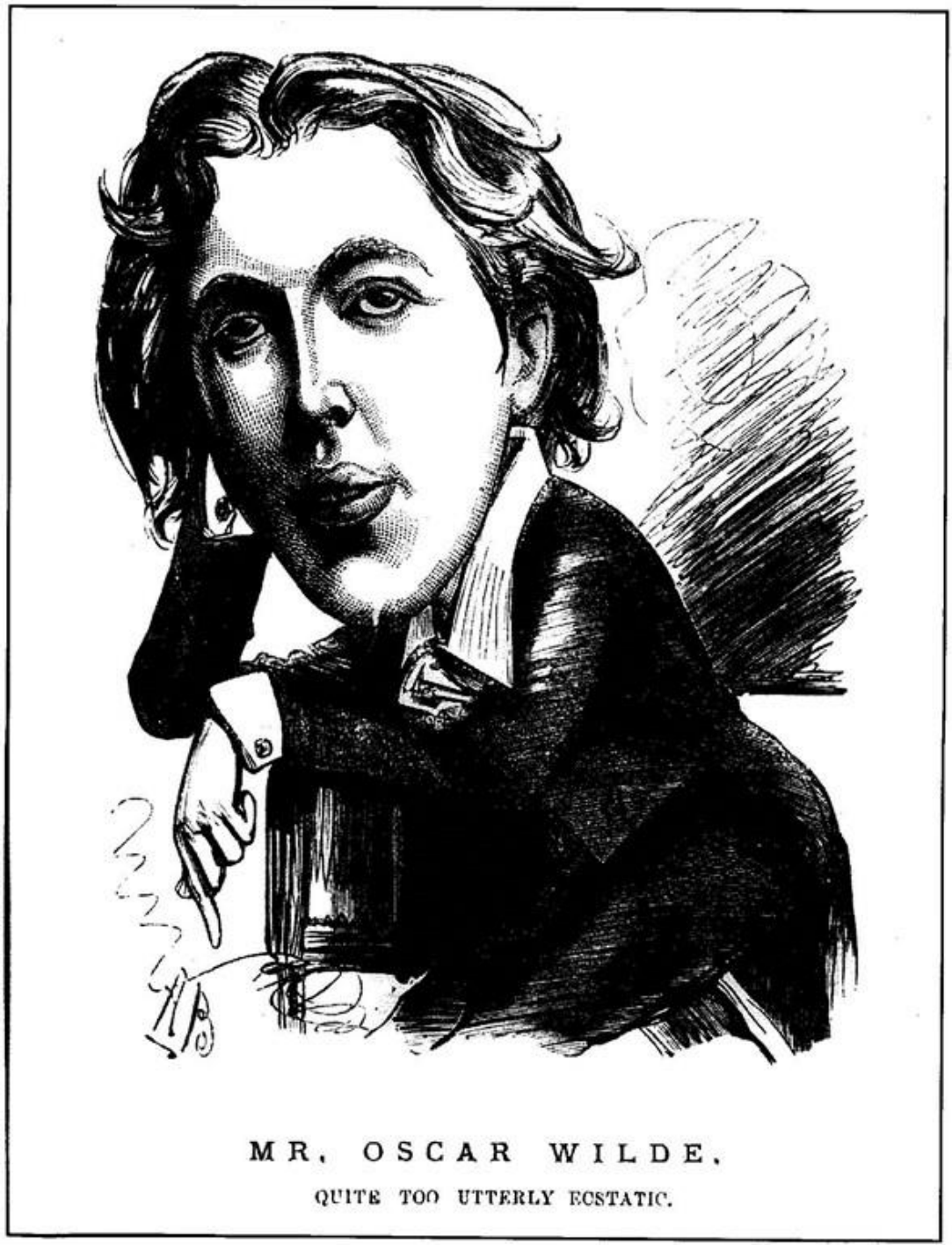


Figure 15. Alfred Bryan, "Mr. Oscar Wilde—Quite Too Utterly Ecstatic," *The Entr'acte*, 26 March 1881.

not yet published any literary works, the caricature, which appeared on March 26, 1881, establishes almost all of the exaggerated physical features on which later illustrations of Wilde would draw: Wilde's disproportionately large, oval-shaped head rests on his hand (a pose which would reappear in promotional photographs taken during his American lecture tour; his broad lips part slightly, barely revealing his teeth; his eyelids droop and his long, middle-parted hair loosely frames his face; his limp-wrist and thin fingers point downward, drawing attention to Bryan's signature in the left corner below—perhaps the illustrator's attempt to assert his own name and highlight the power he had over Wilde's image.<sup>143</sup> The caption to Bryan's caricature, "Mr. Oscar Wilde: Quite too utterly ecstatic," would likewise be appropriated by Thomas Shrimpton and J. B. B. Nichols in another now-famous caricature from 1881. Surrounded by actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt whose favor he so ravenously courted, Wilde peers down at the lily in his hand. Positioned only slightly to the right, the large inscription reads, "How Utter." Bristow has rightly noted that unlike Shrimpton and Nichols' image, Bryan gives Wilde a "certain dignity" by allowing him to fully face his viewer. However, I would argue that it is also important to note the apparent discrepancy between the caption of Bryan's image and the image itself: the phrase "quite too utterly ecstatic" may mock Wilde's "supposedly affected manner of speech," but it also grates against the droll look on Wilde's face (Bristow 13). Part of the illustration's humor, it seems, emerges from the fact that "Mr. Oscar Wilde" is *not* as "utterly ecstatic" as some might think.

Would Wilde have been "quite too utterly ecstatic" about seeing himself subsumed into Du Maurier's Aesthetic type? For one thing, it was likely a financially profitable move. Harris,

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<sup>143</sup> Wilde signed a contract with publisher David Bogue to publish *Poems* on May 17, 1881. For more details on this, see Ellmann 137.

for instance, claims that Wilde's recognizability in the press helped him get his first book of poems published: "He had been trying off and on for nearly a year to get it [*Poems*] published. The publishers told him roundly that there was no money in poetry and refused the risk." "But," Harris continues, "the notoriety of his knee-breeches and silken hose, and *above all the continual attacks in the society papers*, came to his aid and his book appeared in the early summer of 1881" (Harris 67, emphasis mine). Whether or not Wilde's first publisher, David Bogue, imagined the *Poems* would sell because of Wilde's existing notoriety is questionable. Writing to the manager of his American tour, Colonel W. F. Morse, in 1882, he boldly claims, "I regard all caricature and satire as absolutely beneath notice" (Wilde *Letters* 174). The irony, however, is that in the same letter, Wilde says first, that he is "displeased" by an article about him in the *New York World* and second, that "no mention should be made" of a caricature of him in the *Washington Post*. Numerous other letters—especially his continued correspondence with Ada Leveson and Max Beerbohm, both of whom parodied Wilde—demonstrate that he kept a close eye on how he was being represented in the press (Wilde *Letters* 528-627). Whatever the case, Richard Ellmann rightly asserts that Wilde was a willing participant in his own parody: "Wilde found ways to act and speak in full knowledge that they would could and would be mocked. To be derided so was part of the plan. Notoriety is fame's wicked twin: Wilde was prepared to court the one in the hope that the other would favor him too" (137).<sup>144</sup> If, as Lord Henry claims in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1894), "there is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that

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<sup>144</sup> For more on the subversive qualities of self-parody and dandyism, see McCormack "Wilde's Fiction(s)" 96-98.

is not being talked about,” then perhaps, for Wilde, the only thing worse than being parodied was not making it into the papers at all (Wilde 19).<sup>145</sup>

Given that *The Entr'acte* was a comic periodical dedicated to advertisements for and criticism of current stage entertainment, one might imagine that Bryan's image was an attempt to familiarize Britain's play-going public with Oscar Wilde before the upcoming opening of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, at the Opera Comique on April 23, 1881. It appeared in publication only a month before the opera's opening, which received such an enthusiastic response that it enjoyed a 587-show run and moved to D'Oyly's new Savoy Theatre on October 10, 1881. *Patience* endows its protagonist, Reginald Bunthorne (a "Fleshly Poet"), with all the standard features of the Aesthetic type as seen in caricatures from *Punch* and other periodicals: the love of the lily and the sunflower, the fascination with blue and white china, the long hair and limp wrist, and so on. Scholars continue to debate whether or not Gilbert and Sullivan modeled Bunthorne on Wilde or whether Wilde modeled himself on Bunthorne for his American lecture tour in 1882. Though Ellmann concedes that, in London at least, Bunthorne's character was "played" as Whistler rather than Wilde (with "black curls interrupted by a white lock of hair, mustache, tuft, eyeglass" and "the famous Whistler 'Ha Ha'"), he ultimately argues that Gilbert "could scarcely ignore Wilde as the most conspicuous representative" of the exaggerated Aesthetic type (135). In addition, Ellmann cites a letter from the opera's producer, Richard D'Oyly Carte, to booking agents in Philadelphia. In an attempt to sell Wilde's lecture tour as an accompaniment to the

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<sup>145</sup> Later in his career, Wilde's concerns about the press and public opinion grew. See, for example, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" 1186-1192 and "Pen, Pencil and Poison" 1101.

American run of *Patience*, Carte claims that, “[Wilde’s] name was often quoted as the originator of the aesthetic idea” on which Bunthorne was based (Ellmann 152).<sup>146</sup>

However, in her recent book, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Genre, Gender, Parody* (2011), Carolyn Williams has troubled the assumption that Wilde alone was the inspiration for Bunthorne. Instead, she looks to Du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons as the source material for the opera, citing Gilbert’s desire to “get Du Maurier to design the costumes” (Williams 164). Though she maintains that it is “notoriously difficult to tell who was copying whom on this topic,” she argues convincingly that

Carte’s marketing strategy created the semblance of temporal priority for the figure of Wilde. In relation to *Patience*...it has often been said that Wilde was the model for Bunthorne, while in fact the opposite was true. Bunthorne...was the model that Wilde attempted both to imitate and to prefigure on his American lecture tour. Wilde acted as Bunthorne’s avatar. In cultural history, ‘Wilde’ was in part a spin-off product. (165)

Williams’ argument is, I think, more convincing than Ellmann’s—especially since Ellmann acknowledges Bunthorne was not *played* as Wilde and since D’Oyly Carte was trying to *pitch* Wilde’s lectures to booking agents in the letter Ellmann cites. Though the adjective “fleshly” would later be used to describe Wilde on more than one occasion, Joseph Bristow likewise points out that when Bunthorne calls his poetry a “wild, weird, fleshly thing” in *Patience*, the referent is clearly *not* Wilde: rather, the term “fleshy” refers to Thomas Maitland’s [Robert Buchanan’s] 1871 polemic against Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Poems*, titled “The Fleshly School of Poetry”

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<sup>146</sup> On actor George Grossmith’s portrayal of Bunthorne at the opening of *Patience* in Britain, see Stedman 184 and Powell *Acting* 15-23. Stedman notes that both Rossetti and Whistler thought Grossmith’s Bunthorne was parodying them. During the D’Oyly Carte productions in the U.S., however, John Howson’s Bunthorne seems almost identical to Wilde’s Sarony photographs, from middle-parted hair to velveteen jacket and knee-breeches.

(Bristow 17). This patchwork of parodic referents— Whistler, Du Maurier’s Postlethwaite and Maudle, the “fleshly” Pre-Raphaelites with their love of flowers and more—all converge to construct the celebrity image of Wilde during his 1882 North American lecture tour.<sup>147</sup>

Commissioned by D’Oyly Carte in order to familiarize the American audience with the Aesthetic type parodied in *Patience*, Wilde arrived in New York on the *SS Arizona* in the late evening of January 2, 1882. Organized as a kind of publicity stunt, Wilde’s tour was, in many ways, an experiment in paradox. On the one hand, the American press cast Bunthorne and Maudle as the “originals” against which Wilde, the “copy,” was judged. To borrow reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss’s phrase, the American press’s “horizon of expectations” had already been determined by Du Maurier’s caricatures in *Punch* and by the opening of *Patience* in New York which preceded Wilde’s arrival by nearly three months (Wilde *Letters* 123). On the other hand, it seems that D’Oyly Carte wanted Wilde to *play* the part of the “original” for Bunthorne in a kind of cross-promotional effort to drive up the sales for both the lecture tour and the opera. In the lead-up to Wilde’s arrival, these questions of original versus copy loomed large in the American press and set the tone for a kind of celebrity in which public intimacy was used not by fans and hero-worshippers, but as a tool for skeptics to authenticate or discredit the image of the public individual.

Wilde did not come to the U.S. by popular demand, as other literary celebrities such as Dickens had. Rather, before his arrival in New York, D’Oyly Carte faced a problem: American audiences knew very little about Oscar Wilde. To address this issue, the producer organized a

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<sup>147</sup> Williams also suggests that Alfred Tennyson’s poetry was one of the primary inspirations for Bunthorne’s rival, Archibald Grosvenor, a character representative of idyllic poetry. See Williams 174-177. For more a more detailed discussion of Gilbert, the production of *Patience*, and its relationship to *Punch*’s representation of the Aesthetes, see Jane Stedman 165-186.

promotional offensive, sending out invitations for Wilde's Chickering Hall lecture scheduled for January 9<sup>th</sup>. To whom these invitations were sent or how many were printed is unclear, but their elaborate construction goes far beyond any mere flyer: all the necessary information—time, date, location, and costs of the lecture—was printed in red lettering on the exterior of a small mailing envelope. Tucked inside the envelope was an eight-page pamphlet titled "Oscar Wilde's Visit to America," which included a biography of Wilde, references to positive reviews of his works in Britain, claims to his "considerable celebrity" across the pond, and justifications that the tour was a response to "repeated and urgent invitations from friends and admirers" in the U.S. ("Copy of flyer for OW talk" 7-8). Suspicious as these "urgent invitations" may be, the inclusion of such a pamphlet necessarily undercuts its own claims: reading the insert, one would assume the recipient should *already* know plenty about Oscar Wilde, yet if that were the case, why would D'Oyly Carte need to include it with the advertisement in the first place? Perhaps the invitations were sent to representatives of the press, to provide them with "accurate" information to include in their coverage; perhaps they were for members of high society. Whatever the case, D'Oyly Carte's efforts created enough buzz about Wilde that he became a topic in the press well before he disembarked from the SS *Arizona*.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> The pamphlet closes with an odd defense of why D'Oyly Carte is managing Wilde's tour, in which the author chalks the association up to the fact that Wilde needed someone with knowledge of American business practices. He omits the fact that he was simultaneously producing the American run of *Patience*. The writer of the pamphlet connects Wilde's lecture tour with Aestheticism, but he does not explicitly connect it with the U.S. production of *Patience*. As I read it, this is a calculated move to lend a degree of authenticity to Wilde. By decoupling the lectures from the opera, Wilde's talks seem all the more un-ironic, all the more sincere, and therefore, all the more obvious a target for *Patience*'s parody. Though Williams' evidence shows that Carte wanted Wilde to play the "original," he may not have explicitly *promoted* him that way, at least in this pamphlet. Doing so would have actually undercut, rather than bolstered, Wilde's "authenticity." In other words, if Carte had associated Wilde directly

One of the earliest articles saved in the tour scrapbook of Wilde's manager, Colonel W.F. Morse, provides some context for D'Oyly Carte's advertisement. Published in the September 1881 issue of a periodical Morse identified as the *Standard Programme*, the writer begins by admitting that, "So far we [Americans] have heard only the distant sound of that wave of aestheticism which has swept all of England. We do not yet understand quite what it all is, either in origin or result, quite what has produced in England, the feeling that *Intensity* must be expressed in one's garments, one's literature, one's walls and carpets" (emphasis in original).<sup>149</sup> The writer then attempts to identify the origin of the aesthetic movement in England, looking primarily to the Pre-Raphaelites, and to differentiate between those with a "sincere" investment in the movement and those "Aesthetes" who had "pervert[ed] it." Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, he argues, emerged from the "chaos of a war between the real"—Aestheticism—"and the imitation"—the Aesthetes. In making this distinction, he traces Bunthorne back to Du Maurier's *Punch* caricatures, and the caricatures back to a "certain clever young Oxonian poet" who won the Newdigate prize ("Aestheticism and the 'Aesthetes'"). Though Wilde is not explicitly named in this article, this distinction between the Aesthete and Aestheticism, the imitation and the real, the copy and the original, establishes the themes that would characterize Wilde's celebrity in the U.S.—and the criteria by which he would be judged.

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with Gilbert and Sullivan's opera, it would have made his lectures seem *too much* like a publicity stunt. The best publicity stunts are, of course, those that do not seem like stunts at all.

<sup>149</sup> Where this article originated is ambiguous. Colonel Morse hand wrote the "Standard Programme" title above the clipping, but I have not been able to find a publication by that name in either British or American digitized periodicals from the year in question. The articles implicitly indicate they are from an American publication, despite the British spelling of "programme" Morse wrote as the title.



Just as Bunthorne is exposed as an “aesthetic sham” in *Patience*, the question of whether Wilde, too, was a sham dominated the press coverage prior to and throughout his lecture tour. American audiences had a fair degree of what Joshua Gamson calls “production awareness”—an understanding of how media apparatuses are involved in creating celebrities’ images and promoting products. Though audiences may not have had much familiarity with Aestheticism, they generally knew that “the same manager [D’Oyly Carte] ‘runs’ the lecture tour of the aesthete and the operatic company which heaps ridicule upon him” (“Oscar Wilde’s Lecture”). Similarly, *Puck* quipped that, “Clever speculators in the show business have seen that there is money in hiring Mr. Oscar Wilde to pose as the original of the caricatures in our esteemed London contemporary, *Punch*” (“Cartoons and Comments,” emphasis mine). This level of production awareness drove the media coverage of Wilde both prior to and during his lecture tour. Americans did not want to be humbugged by a fake: was Wilde anything more than a publicity stunt? Was he merely an Aesthete, or could he actually be a knowledgeable representative of Aestheticism? Was his tour just a mutually beneficial business venture? Or could he actually be the “original” of Bunthorne, as D’Oyly Carte claimed? And if he was the original, could he possibly live up to his own caricature?<sup>150</sup>

Though the *Standard Programme* article only identifies a “young Oxonian poet,” Wilde would not remain unnamed for long. Less than a month later, another article in the same publication describes the opening night of *Patience* at the Opera Comique in London. According to the writer, Oscar Wilde’s presence nearly upstaged the performance itself. “Celebrities of Society, Literature, and Art” attended the premiere, but “the cynosure of all eyes was on a tall,

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<sup>150</sup> For more on how American audiences’ familiarity with P.T. Barnum’s humbuggery and his “exotic curiosities” shaped Wilde’s celebrity, see Morris 27-33.

beardless, pale-faced, long-haired, self-contained young man.” When Wilde entered the theatre to take his seat, “a storm of ironical cheers greeted him, for every one present knew that he was Oscar Wilde, the apostle and bard of the ‘Aesthetic.’ It was a curious spectacle to see in the stalls in front, the *original*, and on the stage before his eyes, imitating his attitudes, motions and enunciations, the *caricature*” (emphasis in original). For the writer, the spectacle was made curious not only because the “original” came face-to-face with his caricature, but because he observed incongruities between Wilde and the actors “imitating” him. “Personally,” he writes, “Mr. Wilde is not a lean or sad young man, he is not fond of ‘lunching lusciously upon lilies,’ or finding his greatest delight in the ‘contemplation of a ten-mark-tea-pot,’ or ‘observation of all that is Japanese,’ preferring rather to nourish his muse upon plump beef-steaks, and fruity port.”<sup>151</sup> The effect of these dissonances can be seen in the way the writer goes on to talk about Wilde’s background. For instance, in a biographical gloss, the writer states that Wilde “has been recognized as the leader” of the Aesthetic movement—not that he “is” the leader—and that the “fantastic phrases” of the Aesthetes had been “attributed” to him, rather than emanating *from* him. The suggestion, however subtle, is that Wilde was somehow thrust into the position of becoming, not the face of Aestheticism, but the face of those “Aesthetes” who exaggerated the movement’s ideals—and the doubts about Wilde’s authenticity as an “original” only intensified as his arrival date approached (Untitled article in Colonel Morse’s scrapbook).

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<sup>151</sup> Roy Morris, Jr. argues convincingly that Wilde’s tour helped Americans reimagine what it meant to be masculine after the Civil War. Many newspapers, for instance, often focus on Wilde’s surprisingly “masculine” features, which began a cultural negotiation between those who attacked Wilde’s foppishness as a mark of degeneration and others who maintained that Wilde demonstrated Aestheticism and traditional conceptions of masculinity were not incompatible. For those in the latter camp, Wilde was admired, at the very least, for a brand of individualism consistent with American ideals. For more, see Morris 27-43, 50-70, 163-188.

For one *New York Sun* contributor writing in July 1881, these doubts were precisely what made the idea of Wilde's lecture tour intriguing. Speaking of Du Maurier's Postlethwaite and Maudle, the writer claims that "many people, on this side of the water at least, seriously doubted whether such fools ever were....But there were others who maintained that these drawling idiots really existed." According to the *Sun*, seeing Wilde in person offered an opportunity to set the record straight, so to speak:

Du Maurier and Gilbert and Sullivan have advertised him [Wilde] so conspicuously that he starts with his fame already made, and the question that the public will naturally be anxious about is whether this ready-made fame fits him—whether such a preposterous ass as Maudle could possibly exist. ("A New Aesthetic Poet" 2).

The writer goes on to praise Wilde's poetry, asserting that while "Mr. Wilde may dawdle about London drawing rooms, lily in hand," the quality of poems such as "Charmides" make him "a man to be respected and even admired" (2). Discussions of Wilde's poetry are comparably few in the press coverage leading up to and upon his arrival. Rather, suspicions about his "ready-made fame," whether he was falsely "advertised" by Du Maurier, and whether he was merely cashing in on Americans' unfamiliarity with "real" Aestheticism were what generated interest in his lecture tour.

When Wilde finally arrived in New York and gave his first lecture, "The English Renaissance," at Chickering Hall on January 9<sup>th</sup>, the moment of reckoning had come. In a *Nation* article published shortly after Wilde's lecture, the writer sums up his reaction in this way:

In the present days of easily-manufactured notoriety, a young man who has managed to *establish a doubt* in the minds of the public as to whether he is a profound thinker or an utter fool may be said to be on the high road to *a very good substitute for fame*, and this is

what Mr. Wilde had previous to his lecture succeeded in doing. (“Oscar Wilde” 29 emphasis mine)

In spite of Wilde’s association with the “utter” foolishness of caricatures like Bunthorne, the contributor finds the Professor of Aesthetics to be a very real, very knowledgeable proponent of Aestheticism, much like the *Sun* columnist before him had praised Wilde’s poetry: Wilde was, in fact, a “profound thinker” who used his “chameleon-like power of imitative reproduction” to expound on the works of other, well-respected poets and artists. However, discovering the intellectual heft behind the celebrity image is precisely what troubles the *Nation* contributor.<sup>152</sup>

On the one hand, the writer predicts it will be difficult for Wilde to “keep alive any curiosity” going forward—and thus maintain his celebrity—because he has revealed himself to be much more than a publicity stunt; on the other hand, he scolds Wilde for what we might call “selling out,” in today’s terms. For such a gifted mind to compromise the seriousness of his thought in order to become a celebrity, to draw crowds, to make money does a disservice not only to Wilde, but to the ideals of Aestheticism. “It makes little difference,” he continues,

Whether Maudle is the caricature of Mr. Wilde or Mr. Wilde a realization of Maudle. *It is the doubt which gives reality to both....* Now, it is true that all new movements in art and poetry have had their parodists and satirists. But it never occurred to any reformer before Mr. Wilde that it would be a good thing to *encourage parody and satire as a means of keeping the ball going....* It was left to Mr. Wilde to *discover the commercial value of ridiculing* the good cause. (29)

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<sup>152</sup> A clipping of this article appears in Colonel Morse’s scrapbook, but he cites it as being from the “Post.” Thankfully, several other scholars make reference to the same article published in the *Nation* on January 12<sup>th</sup>. It is possible Morse could have found the article reprinted in another publication, or it could be a simple case of misidentification. For other mentions of this article, see Harris 75, Morris 47, Lewis and Smith 61.

The *Nation* writer does not object to “the good cause” of Aestheticism itself, but to Wilde’s exploitation of caricature in order to advance the movement’s ideals—and to line his and D’Oyly Carte’s pockets in the process. Unlike some other “profound thinkers,” Wilde “knows the true way to attract attention to poetry is to shock people’s sense of decency...and that a very good substitute for fame is the notoriety attracted by silliness” (29).

In the conclusion of the *Nation* piece, the writer takes one final jab at Wilde, arguing not only that the Professor of Aesthetics’ methods are misguided, but that they will be ineffective with American audiences who wanted to get their money’s worth by seeing the caricature come to life. Even if the contributor agreed with Wilde’s approach—parodying his way to celebrity in order to spread the tenets of Aestheticism—he finds fault in the execution: “What he [Wilde] has to say is not new,” he argues, “and his *extravagance is not extravagant enough to amuse the average American audience*. His knee-breeches and long hair are good as far as they go; but *Bunthorne has really spoiled the public for Wilde*” (29. emphasis mine).<sup>153</sup> In other words, the writer believed Wilde would not be *enough* of an Aesthete to hold the attention of U.S. audiences; the “original” will not be able live up to his own caricature.<sup>154</sup>

Within the first days of his tour, pointing out the discrepancies between Wilde’s physical appearance and the image of the Aesthete became a nearly ubiquitous feature of the press coverage. The *New York Tribune*, for instance, reports that, “The most striking thing about the poet’s appearance is his height, which is several inches over six feet...Instead of having a small

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<sup>153</sup> The article also casts Wilde as a kind of evangelical, religious figure for Aestheticism, spreading the tenets of Aestheticism and “converting” listeners to his cause. See 29.

<sup>154</sup> Frank Harris, and more recently, Roy Morris, Jr. have both mentioned this passage, but dismissed it quickly. As Harris saw it, “The *Nation* underrated Americans curiosity.” See Harris 75, Morris 47.

delicate hand only fit to caress a lily, his fingers are long and when doubled up would hit a hard knock, should an occasion arise for the owner to descend to that kind of argument” (qtd. in *Holland Wilde Album* 95-100).<sup>155</sup> Similarly, a *New York Times* columnist pointed out that Wilde, “wore no flower in the lapel of his coat, but a dark blue handkerchief peeped from a breast pocket” (“Events in the Metropolis” 8). On more than one occasion, Wilde himself resisted the exaggerated association with lilies and sunflowers. When asked if he, like Bunthorne, had “walked down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in his medieval hand,” Wilde responded paradoxically, “To have done it was nothing, but to make people think one had done it was a triumph” (qtd. in Ellmann 135). Less ambiguous, however, was his claim in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that, “This talk about the sunflower and lily is nonsense, sir, especially as I am represented gazing fondly over it. I love flowers, sir, as every human being should love them. I enjoy their perfume and admire their beauty” (“Our New York Letter” 7).<sup>156</sup> Beyond the observation that Wilde did not carry a lily everywhere, one reporter noted “there was certainly nothing limp or languid in the hearty English grip with which he [Wilde] clasped the proffered hand” (“A Man of Culture Rare” 4). The “eccentricities” of Wilde’s dress had likewise been overestimated, so much so that the *Boston Herald* claims “if his [Wilde’s] personal peculiarities had not been repeatedly heralded from England, *it is hardly likely that they would have attracted unusual remark in this country*” (“Oscar Wilde” 7, emphasis mine). In many ways, it seems the

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<sup>155</sup> The *New York World* offered a similar description, claiming Wilde was “fully six feet three inches in height, straight as an arrow, and with broad shoulders and long arms, indicating considerable strength.” See “Oscar Wilde’s Arrival” 1.

<sup>156</sup> Admittedly, in an interview given a few weeks later, Wilde is effusive about his love of the sunflower, lily and rose. See “A Talk With Wilde” 2. Perhaps by this point he began to understand the role he was paid to play.

American press during this period shared a singular purpose: to either reconcile Wilde with the “numerous misrepresentations that preceded him” or debunk his celebrity entirely (“The Aesthetic Apostle” 5).

Criticisms such as those put forward in the *Times*, *Tribune*, *Boston Herald* and numerous other publications extended outside of print, however, as an episode from Wilde’s lecture at Harvard University demonstrates. Wilde had been invited to speak by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, then a professor at the institution. In a clever prank designed to protest Wilde’s lecture as a celebrity-driven publicity stunt unfit for the “serious” kinds of study taking place at Harvard, a group of students arrived on the scene dressed in full Aesthete garb and sat conspicuously in the front row of the Music hall. Wearing wigs, colorful neckties, and striking so-called aesthetic poses—no doubt derived from *Punch*’s caricatures and Bunthorne’s costume design—they made a spectacle of themselves in order to undermine Wilde’s own spectacle; they showed just how easy it would be to dress and act the part that was garnering Wilde so much attention across the country. Wilde understood that he could not outdo—or rather, “out exaggerate”—all the caricatures in print, on stage, and in the audience, so he turned the tables and subverted expectations: he strode on stage in a “conventional dinner jacket and trousers,” pretended at first not to notice the outlandishly-dressed students before him, then greeted the audience by saying, “I see about me certain signs of an aesthetic movement. I can see young men who are no doubt sincere, but I can assure them that *they are no more than caricatures*. I am impelled for the first time in my life to breathe a fervent prayer: ‘Save me from my disciples’”



Figure 16. Napoleon Sarony, Albumen silver print of Oscar Wilde, 1882.





Figure 17. Napoleon Sarony, Albumen panel card of Oscar Wilde, 1882.

(Lewis and Smith 122-126; Morris 81-82; Friedman 127-128, emphasis mine).<sup>157</sup>

Whether Wilde was copying Du Maurier and Gilbert and Sullivan's parodies or playing their original or both, the controversies surrounding Napoleon Sarony's publicity photographs confirmed that legally, Wilde did not "invent" the poses that helped make him famous (figures 16 and 17). Years before Wilde traveled to America, photographer-to-the-stars, Napoleon Sarony, had established a thriving studio practice in New York. Heralded as one of the most popular photographers of his day, Sarony dealt primarily in "cabinet photos"—approximately 5 1/2 x 4 inches in size—which gave the photographer a chance to "foreground facial expression" without crowding bodies and props into a smaller frame, as was the case with the cartes-de-visite of the 1860s (Darrah 164; Gaines 73). Though unlike the cartes-de-visite in size and style, cabinet photos still required a tremendous amount of direction from the photographer in order to turn out well. Sitters had to be carefully positioned by the photographer to create a successful image, and even then many were appalled at the sight of themselves (Gaines 74). Moreover, the backgrounds, props, and costumes in the image would have come almost exclusively from the photographer's collection: studios amassed rooms filled with "artistic rustic fences, gates and doorways" and more (Darrah 33). By the time Wilde sat for Sarony in the early weeks of January 1882, it was largely understood that in the studio, the photographer—and not the sitter—was responsible for the success or failure of the photograph. And the far-reaching circulation of

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<sup>157</sup> This was not the only instance where Wilde was greeted by parodists on college campuses, and on at least on occasion—in Rochester—he was unable to deal with the pranksters so handily. For more on these engagements, see Morris 87-91 and Lewis and Smith 119-156.

Sarony's photographs, like Du Maurier's caricatures and Bunthorne's costumes, would shape American audiences' expectations of what Wilde should look like in person.<sup>158</sup>

Even more than other photographers, Sarony had a reputation for exerting his artistic authority in the studio. As Kerry Powell has rightly noted, one need only compare the size of Sarony's enormous signature on the cartes to Wilde's much smaller, printed name to see that the photographer imagined himself in charge (*Acting* 21-28). Sarony's relationship with Adah Isaacs Menken (most famous for riding a horse across the stage in *Mazeppa*) corroborates the photographer's near-dictatorial control in the studio. As Sarony tells the story, Menken came to him at his first studio in Birmingham, England, desperate for a good picture. Because of several bad photographic experiences in the past, she insisted that she pose herself in all eight shots. Sarony humored her, on one condition: Menken had to let him pose her for a different set of eight images. Not surprisingly, when presented with the shots she posed herself, Menken apparently cried: "They are perfectly horrible; I shall never have another photograph of myself as Mazeppa as long as I live." Upon seeing Sarony's poses, however, the photographer claims that she, "threw her arms around me and exclaimed: 'Oh you dear, delightful little man, I am going to kiss you for that'; and she did" ("Napoleon Sarony" 9). Whether or not Wilde behaved like Menken in the studio is, of course, unclear. Little, if anything, is known about the interaction between Sarony and Wilde behind closed doors. But scholars have noted that Wilde allowed Sarony to photograph him for free—unlike Lillie Langtry (a Professional Beauty with whom Wilde associated himself in London) who received \$5,000 to relinquish the rights to her image

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<sup>158</sup> Exactly how many of Sarony's Wilde photographs were sold (or given away by Wilde himself) is unclear, but their circulation seems significant, especially considering that they were engraved for print in print in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* as early as January 12<sup>th</sup> 1882. See Marcovitch 58. For more on Sarony's photography, see Bassham 74-82.

(Friedman 231-232).<sup>159</sup> In the words of Powell, it would seem that Wilde allowed himself to *be posed* as much as he was posing on his American lecture tour.

In March 1884 (over a year after Wilde returned to Britain), the question of who posed Wilde's photographs was settled—legally at least. In December 1883, Napoleon Sarony sued Burrow-Giles Lithographic Company for the rights to the Oscar Wilde series of photographs. The lawsuit was prompted by the use of two poses—"Oscar Wilde no. 11" and "Oscar Wilde, no. 18"—in advertisements for Straiton and Storms' cigars and Ehrich's Trimmed Hat Department, respectively. As Jane M. Gaines explains, the critical argument for the prosecution hinged on whether or not Sarony could prove he had *authorship* of the image, and more specifically, that he had authorship of the *pose*. Burrow-Giles' defense, on the other hand, contended that Sarony could *not* have authored the photo; rather, the mechanical apparatus—the camera—mitigated any artistic intention he may have had (55). Authorship under the law was—for better or worse—synonymous with origin. The pose, the lighting, the props, all had to *originate* from one man's mind—the mind of Napoleon Sarony (63). In the tradition of the auteur, one must be able to recognize an "imprint of personality" (that is, an imprint of the author's, not the subject's, personality) on the mechanical production in order to determine its origin (47). In Gaines' words, "...the investment of personality is the crucial authorial deposit that turns preexisting material and immaterial property into intellectual property" (51).<sup>160</sup> Sarony

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<sup>159</sup> Langtry, however, was dissatisfied with Sarony's work. See Friedman 231-232. For an in depth discussion of how, during his time in London, Wilde's relationships with Lillie Langtry and Sara Bernhardt shaped his understanding of persona and celebrity, see Marcovitch 51-91.

<sup>160</sup> However, Gaines rightly points out that because Sarony was arguing for his own authorship of the pose, he could not "admit the influence of the melodramatic acting style" nor could he "acknowledge the theatrical convention of concentrating emotional material in the fixed pose." See Gaines 78.

proved his case time and again in circuit-level courts until ultimately, in 1884, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor. The Justices agreed that “Oscar Wilde, no. 18” was

[a] useful, new, harmonious, characteristic, and graceful picture, and that the plaintiff made the same...entirely from his own original mental conception, to which he gave visible form by posing the said Oscar Wilde in front of the camera, selecting and arranging the costume, draperies, and other various accessories in the said photograph, arranging and disposing light and shade, suggesting and evoking the desired expression [...]”. (*Burrow-Giles v. Sarony*, qtd. in Gaines 54)

While the ruling was seminal in the formulation of U.S. copyright law, it also stripped Wilde of the reproduction rights to his own likeness and added legal weight to the criticism that the Professor of Aesthetics was not the original on which the Aesthetic parodies were based. His celebrity, in other words, was an elaborate media production that exploited Americans’ curiosity.<sup>161</sup>

In many ways, Wilde simultaneously fulfilled and fell short of Americans’ expectations, as one reporter from the *St. Louis Republican* beautifully explains: caricatures of Wilde, he argues, “are like the reflection of the convex mirror, faithful yet distorted. No one seeing the true Oscar Wilde could fail to recognize him from them, and no one of any perception could fail to recognize just as clearly that the man *is not what has been described*. The pictures have at once

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<sup>161</sup> Wilde remained conspicuously absent with respect to the trial. As early as 1890, celebrities vied for the rights to their images on the basis of the newly-formulated “right to privacy”, yet Wilde did not claim ownership of the Sarony photographs, nor did he testify in the case. For more on this, see North 187. It is clear, however, that Sarony’s images of Wilde were widely appropriated in American advertisements and caricatures. The degree to which Wilde engaged in celebrity endorsements of products such as Ehrich’s hats or Straiton’s cigars remains somewhat unclear. For more on Wilde’s participation in his own advertisement, especially as it related to the Sarony case, see Friedman 83-98.

been true and untrue, *with the untruth predominating*” (“Oscar As He Is” 13, emphasis mine). At once recognizable and unrecognizable, inventor and imitator, original and copy, Wilde’s celebrity grew because public intimacy had turned into public spectacle—motivated less by a sincere desire on the part of audiences to gain “intimate” access to the “true Oscar Wilde,” and more by a judgmental drive to determine for themselves whether Wilde lived up to the hype of the Aesthetic caricatures created by others. In this way, Wilde was in a double-bind, destined to disappoint someone either way: if he *did not* live up to the caricature, then audiences were robbed of the opportunity to gawk at a real-life curiosity, and if he *did* live up to the caricature, then audiences missed out on the exciting possibility of exposing a phony.

Wilde’s celebrity thrived in the United States precisely because it was invented through a pastiche of imitation so complex it not only obscured but collapsed the very categories of original and copy on which it was based. To borrow a phrase from the *St. Louis Republican*, Wilde’s celebrity was not generated from the reflection of a single convex mirror; it was the sum of all the reflections in a hall of convex mirrors.<sup>162</sup> At one point on Wilde’s tour, the distinction between caricature and man (or rather, between the performance of caricature and a performance of that performance) became so blurred that even audiences could not always decipher the original from the copy. In an article from the *Sacramento Union* dated March 3, 1882, the correspondent tells the story of how John Howson, the Australian-born actor who played Bunthorne in the American run of *Patience*, played the part of Wilde off stage, too:

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<sup>162</sup> For a seminal discussion of the “rhetoric of authenticity” in celebrity and the hall of mirrors effect, see Dyer “A Star is Born” 136-144 and Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* 1-16. In Wilde’s case especially, looking to Dyer helps clarify the distinction between the desire for intimacy and the search for authenticity in celebrity culture—two ideas that, while related, are not identical.

Some of the crowds will probably be chagrined to now learn that the Oscar Wilde many of them saw [on his arrival] was not *the* Oscar Wilde, but was that inimitable comedian John Howson...who, being on the train, several times put on his 'Bunthorne' wig, contorted his features into an admirable resemblance of the ever-dwelling smile on Oscar's countenance, and showed himself at times to save his friend and to have a bit of fun on his own account. ("Oscar Arrives" 3)

Howson's gag emblemizes the impossibility of distinguishing between the inventor and the imitator of the Professor of Aesthetics' celebrity image—a breakdown Wilde himself likely would have appreciated. Just as Howson forged himself as Wilde and Wilde forged himself as Bunthorne, so too did Wilde's celebrity in the United States function as a kind of artistic forgery. Indeed, in the years after his tour, Wilde took great interest in the aesthetic possibilities and limitations of forgery—a criminal act explored most fully in his 1889 short story, *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, as merely "the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation" (302). As it turns out, the narrator's now-famous quip about forgery was not entirely Wilde's own invention—much like his celebrity.

**"Moonbeam Theories:" The Art of Forging Celebrity, Shakespeare's After-Image, and *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.***

Understanding Wilde's attitude toward forgery in his writings from the mid- to late-1880s has historically been a point of contention among scholars.<sup>163</sup> That Wilde was fascinated with the idea of artistic forgery is certain, but was he satirizing the crime or sincerely invested in its

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<sup>163</sup> Aside from the representations of forgery in his works, Wilde himself had been accused of plagiarism since he published his first work, *Poems*, in 1881. For an overview of Wilde's association with plagiarism, see Bristow and Mitchell 198-213 and Guy 6-23.

aesthetic possibilities? As is so often the case with Wilde, the answers probably lie somewhere in the middle. As Laurence Danson has observed, biographical interpretations, such as those by Frank Harris, have a tendency to overestimate the degree to which Wilde's interest in forgery can be read either as a personal identification with the criminals he depicts or a sincere desire to expose his own transgressions (86-87). Others have focused on how Wilde's representations of forgery are themselves forgeries of sorts, literary performances designed to comment on aspects of Victorian culture through satire. In her reading of "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," for example, Regenia Gagnier has argued that Wilde was trying on a mask, playing the role of a narrator whose biography of Wainewright—an artist, forger, and murderer—parodies how Aestheticism could be commodified in popular culture, misappropriated to such a degree that even murder becomes an artistic act (33-39). Similarly, Paul K. Saint-Amour focuses on how Wilde's representations of forgery and engagement with plagiarism (both of himself and other writers) flouted Victorian notions of individual intellectual property and championed Irish oral traditions (90-120). Still others see his exploration of forgery as an enactment of what Robert McFarlane calls Wilde's "aesthetics of salvage," an aesthetics in which "reuse was intrinsic, not inimical, to creativity" (McFarlane 169).<sup>164</sup>

Regarding *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* specifically, many critics have argued that its interpretation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*—read as an allegory of the playwright's love for a young, male actor in his company, Willie Hughes—supplied a vehicle for the expression of

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<sup>164</sup> For more on how Wilde fits into a broader historical trajectory of representations of forgery in nineteenth-century literature, see Malton 109-142.



Wilde's own unspeakable homosexual desire.<sup>165</sup> In this reading, the fictional frame of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is meant to insulate Wilde against allegations of overt sexual deviance. For other scholars, whether Wilde intended to use the story's theory of the *Sonnets* as a mask for homosexual desire is less important than its philosophical and/or historical underpinnings. Bruce Bashford, for instance, sees the *Portrait's* blend of fiction with criticism and narrative arc as an experiment in Wilde's theory of "art-criticism"—an experiment which revealed the potentially fatal dangers of influence (Bashford 412-37). Drawing on their discovery of Wilde's Oxford notebooks, Philip Smith and Michael Helfand propose that the *Portrait* allegorizes Wilde's own hermeneutic model, attempting to reconcile idealism with materialism, inspiration with evidence in interpretation (87-107). Most recently, Bristow and Mitchell argue that the story can be read as a kind of homage to Chatterton's forgeries, his suicide, and his place in the history of Romanticism (Bristow and Mitchell 245-292).<sup>166</sup>

It seems no coincidence that, with all the famous cases of forgery to choose from in history, Wilde often wrote about instances involving literary celebrities—Thomas Chatterton in his "Chatterton" lecture given at Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institute (1886); Thomas Griffiths Wainewright in "Pen Pencil, and Poison" (1889), and William Shakespeare in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* (1889).<sup>167</sup> Yet the relation between Wilde's literary representations of

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<sup>165</sup> Interestingly, the theory of Willie Hughes was first put forth by Thomas Chatterton's editor, Thomas Tyrwhitt, in 1780. See Bristow and Mitchell 251-256.

<sup>166</sup> According to William A. Cohen, readings such as these anachronistically map modern understandings of queer identity onto the story and Wilde, minimizing the importance of Hellenistic conceptions of male love. See Cohen *Sex Scandal* 212-13.

<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, no transcript of Wilde's Birkbeck lecture is known to exist. Hints as to what may have been included in the lecture have been derived from a notebook Wilde kept on Chatterton. As Bristow and Mitchell point out, Wilde's interest in forgery was not limited specifically to the crime of forgery itself, but rather expanded to include the idea "fabricating

forgery and his celebrity have not yet been fully explored. Indeed, in his biography of Wilde, Richard Ellmann ventures the argument that forgery is the “crime which perhaps seems closest to Wilde’s social presentation of himself” (299). Given D’Oyly Carte’s charge to play the “original” for *Patience*’s Bunthorne and Du Maurier’s Maudie, Wilde experienced celebrity not just as an artistic or theatrical performance, but as a criminal one—that is, as an act of forgery. Seen in this way, the popular debates about Wilde’s authenticity and originality during his 1882 American lecture tour dovetail with the representations of forgery in works such as *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* By focusing on two aspects of the *Portrait* that have received less critical attention, I argue the resonances between the story and Wilde’s own art of forging celebrity come into sharper focus: first, the most visible feature of piece, the portrait itself, and second, the historical context of the Victorians’ near-obsessive desire to recover authentic representations of Shakespeare’s *likeness*, as well as details about his life. Though the portrait of Willie Hughes provides the story with both its title and its narrative frame, scholars have yet to take its significance as an image into account. Why does Wilde choose a painting as (forged) evidence to support the theory of the *Sonnets*? Given that the characters spend countless hours scouring archives for instances of Willie Hughes’ *name*, why not make a document the object of forgery, rather than a painting (309)? (In the world of the story, the former surely would have been easier to fake and would have come under less scrutiny.) The answer may be related to the search for Shakespeare’s own image during the period. Just as the original-copy conundrum informed Wilde’s reception during his American lecture tour, so too did it complicate many of the “found” images of Shakespeare during the Victorian era: were these images copies of already

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lies, performing roles, and donning masks.” For more on Wilde’s inclusion of forgery in other works from the period, see Bristow and Mitchell 214-245.

authenticated likenesses? Or were they the originals on which those likenesses were based? When Wilde began writing *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* in early 1889, he had already experienced first-hand the friction between original and copy during his American lecture tour, and the reciprocity between the fiction and the lived experience can enhance our understanding of both: just as Wilde's celebrity in the United States sheds new light on the *Portrait*, so too does the *Portrait* provide a framework for understanding Wilde's art of forging celebrity.

Wilde's art of forging celebrity can be defined by at least two key features, both of which play out in *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* First, for all the self-fashioning and self-promotion Wilde did while on tour in the U.S., his celebrity was a work of art not entirely of his own making—it was less a self-portrait and more a multi-authored image, a web of intertextual relays, a “tissue of citations” generated by the periodical press Wilde simultaneously courted and resented (Marcus 1003; Gagnier 17-49). As the narrator of “Pen, Pencil, and Poison” admires Wainewright's “aesthetic eclecticism” in decoration—the “true harmony of all really beautiful things irrespective of age or place, of school or manner”—so too was Wilde's celebrity image derived from a collection of referents with varied sources and (re)shaped by the illustrated press and popular appropriation.<sup>168</sup> Further, this mode of forging celebrity—rooted in imitation, appropriation, parody, and pastiche—complicates the idea that any clear “original” exists in the first place: Wilde's celebrity image was not a direct, one-to-one copy imitation of Du Maurier or Bunthorne or Whistler or Swinburne, but an amalgamation and reimagining of a *type*—the

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<sup>168</sup> Waleska Schwandt has made a somewhat similar claim, suggesting that Wilde “plagiarized” stereotypes associated with the Aesthetic movement, especially the poses from Du Maurier's *Punch* series. See Schwandt 91-101.

Aesthetic type—that was more than the sum of its parts.<sup>169</sup> As Vivian observes in “The Decay of Lying,” it is “a great artist” who “invents a type,” then “Life tries to copy it, to reproduce it in a popular form” (1083-85). Whether Wilde was inventing the type or copying it in his celebrity, the idea of a definitive, stable referent on which the type is based does not seem to apply.

Second, without a single, authentic source for the forged celebrity, the dichotomy between real substance and superficial image breaks down. Wilde’s art of forging celebrity depended crucially on the disruption—or at least the complication—of the surface-depth model of interpretation on which the idea of public intimacy is based. Despite his own double-life, Wilde had, from his early days studying Hegel at Oxford, an aesthetic investment in what he calls the “externality” of art (Smith and Helfand 26)—the ability to make visible on the surface a perfect expression of interiority such that internal and external become one and the same. One anecdote about Wilde’s arrival in New York in 1882 offers an emblem of this idea: responding to a U.S. customs official, the “Professor of Aesthetics” quipped that he had “nothing to declare except his genius.” The epigram is significant because, as Jonathan Goldman argues, it indicates “the relocation of self-creation from inside the body to its surface” (24, emphasis mine).<sup>170</sup> In Wilde’s own collection of cautionary epigrams that preface *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), he writes that, “All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril” (17). This trio of statements does not necessarily propose that “all art” is purely superficial, but rather that any attempt to interpret art in terms of symbolic depth is (in some way) dangerous. The same would seem to apply to

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<sup>169</sup> For one reading of Wilde’s relation to “type,” especially after his trial, see Waldrep 23-47.

<sup>170</sup> As is the case with many of Wilde’s most famous epigrams, the jury is still out on whether he actually said these words or whether they were attributed to him after the fact. On this quip, see Harris 55, Ellmann 152.

Wilde's own forged celebrity: especially during his American lecture tour, he used wit and self-parody to deflect attempts to get beneath the surface of his image. The dark irony, of course, is that while Wilde professed outwardly that surface is reality, audiences and the press still relied on the hermeneutic of public intimacy to expose damning details about his private life.

*The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is a blend of fiction and criticism that begins, like so many of Oscar Wilde's works, with a lively conversation over after-dinner cigarettes. Originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine* and later expanded, the story hinges on a question posed to the narrator by his older companion, Erskine: "What would you say," he asks, "about a young man who had a strange theory about a certain work of art, believed in this theory, and committed a forgery to prove it?" (Wilde 303).<sup>171</sup> His interest piqued by such a question, the narrator listens intently as Erskine relates the story of his old friend, Cyril Graham, who claimed he discovered the true identity of the mysterious "Mr. W. H." to whom Shakespeare's *Sonnets* were dedicated. Using "purely internal evidence," Graham found the *Sonnets* were dedicated not to Lord Southampton or Lord Pembroke, as was commonly debated, but to a young, male actor in Shakespeare's company—Willie Hughes (305). Erskine admits that after hearing Graham's interpretation, he was "converted at once." "Willie Hughes," he tells the narrator, "became to me as real a person as Shakespeare" (308). But Erskine concedes that, despite his excitement, he told Graham the theory would not be taken seriously without "some independent evidence" as proof (309). Though frustrated by his skepticism, Graham began to look for some trace of Hughes' existence and within weeks, produced (miraculously) a portrait of Willie Hughes. With the

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<sup>171</sup> After its publication in 1889, Wilde expanded the story to nearly double its original length by 1893. This expanded version of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* was not published until 1921. The initial version was pitched to the *Fortnightly Review*, but Wilde's friend and then-editor Frank Harris refused to publish the piece because of its homoerotic undertones. See Danson 102-103.

young actor's existence proven, Erskine recounts how he and Graham began preparing the manuscript for publication, even planning to append an engraving of the portrait as a frontispiece (310). Their work was stopped short, however, when he stumbled on a drawing of "Willie Hughes" at a nearby print-shop—the portrait, he realized, had been a forgery all along. Erskine goes on to narrate how he confronted Graham immediately and how his friend committed suicide in order to prove his devotion to Willie Hughes. Cyril Graham, Erskine explains, willed the forged portrait of Mr. W. H. to him.

Upon hearing the story and seeing the portrait, the narrator is likewise "converted" to the theory, and resolves to pick up where Graham left off, despite warnings from Erskine: "You start by assuming the existence of the very person whose existence is the thing to be proved," he cautions (312). Ignoring his friend's advice, the narrator spends weeks expanding the story of Willie Hughes and re-interpreting not only the *Sonnets*, but Shakespeare's entire oeuvre as well. By combining close readings of Shakespeare's works with the history of English "boy-actors" and the Platonic philosophy of spiritual love, the narrator argues that Shakespeare found his muse in the young, beautiful Hughes. As such, Shakespeare encouraged Hughes to become an actor in his company, to become the vessel through which his greatest roles could be realized. Hughes agreed, according to the narrator, but was soon wooed away by a woman (the so-called "Dark Lady") and later by rival playwright, Christopher Marlowe. The artist and his muse were finally reunited before Shakespeare's death. Thoroughly convinced of Willie Hughes' existence, the narrator writes to Erskine, urging him to reconsider Cyril Graham's theory alongside his own explanations. But through the act of writing, the narrator loses all faith in his theory of the *Sonnets* and in Willie Hughes himself. His faith is, however, transferred to Erskine, who once again embarks on a search for evidence of the young actor's existence. Years later and ultimately

unsuccessful, Erskine writes back to the narrator, vowing that, like Cyril Graham, he will commit suicide in order to demonstrate his devotion to the theory. After his friend's death, the narrator learns that Erskine has committed a forgery of his own: he died of consumption, not suicide. And in a final ironic twist, the narrator—like Erskine before him—inherits the forged portrait of Mr. W. H.

In the same way the Aesthetic type is a combination of many “originals”—of Whistler, Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde and others—so too is *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* a mosaic of many referents: the forgeries of William Henry Ireland, Thomas Chatterton, or James Collier; the successful and somewhat controversial Stuart Exhibition in 1889; the revival of Thomas Tyrwhitt's theory of the *Sonnets* by C. Elliot Browne in 1873, and so on (Schroeder 100; Schoenbaum 319). Indeed, one of the story's most famous lines—that forgery is “merely the result of an artistic desire for perfect representation”—was itself derived from Theodore Watts' entry on Chatterton in the anthology, *The English Poets: Selections, with Critical Introductions* (1880).<sup>172</sup> Paraphrasing Watts, Wilde wrote in his Chatterton notebook: “*was he mere forger [sic] with literary powers or a great artist?* The latter is the right view....He had the artists yearning to represent and *if perfect representation seemed to him to demand forgery he needs must forge*—Still this forgery came from the desire of artistic self effacement” (Bristow and Mitchell 179, emphasis mine). That Wilde boils down Watts' original text into the simple question—“Was he mere forger [sic] with literary powers or a great artist?”—resonates with the questions of authenticity that surrounded his own celebrity in the United States. It seems possible

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<sup>172</sup> Though Bristow and Mitchell cannot definitively date the notebook, Wilde use material from it in short essays as early as July 1886. They also note the frequency with which this passage has been (mis)attributed to Wilde himself rather than Watts. See Bristow and Mitchell 167.

that Wilde heard, at the very least, faint echoes from his own celebrity experience in Watts' writing on Chatterton: had he been seen as a mere forgery, commissioned to enhance *Patience's* success, or did American audiences see in him the makings of a great artist? We cannot answer this question with certainty. However, it seems plausible that, during this period, Wilde's interest in the cultural and literary value of an author whose reputation was bound up with forgery may have been a personal as well as an aesthetic issue.

In the Victorian era, William Shakespeare's legacy—the most important source for *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*—was likewise entangled with questions about the forgery of his physical likeness. By 1826—nearly thirty years before the birth of Oscar Wilde in 1854—British critic Charles Lamb had already grown weary of images of William Shakespeare: “I have seen so much of Shakespeare on the stage and on book-stalls, in frontispieces and on mantelpieces,” he says, “that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition.” Lamb's discontent is, in many ways, both timely and premature. Visual representations of and reverence for Shakespeare *had* increased significantly since the mid- to late-eighteenth century due, in large part, to British actor David Garrick who organized the 1769 Stratford jubilee and commissioned sculptor Louis-Francois Roubiliac to create a full-length statue of the Bard. Yet even Lamb could not anticipate the full force of what George Bernard Shaw later termed “bardolotry” on the Victorian public: not entirely unlike the contemporary fetish for t-shirts, tote bags, and mugs emblazoned with the likenesses of famous authors, the Victorians reproduced, adapted and collected images of Shakespeare in print, wax miniature, porcelain, pottery, and more (Piper 148).

The after-image of Shakespeare was even superimposed on Wilde himself, as seen an illustration from *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (see figure 18). Paired with a less than glowing review of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which had opened at St. James'



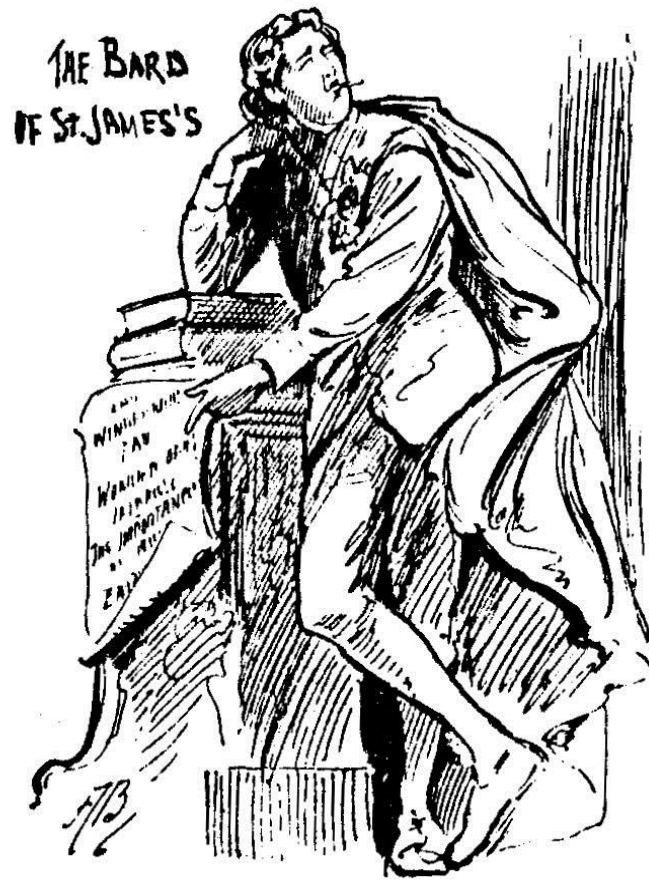


Figure 18. Alfred Bryan. "The Bard of St. James's," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 9 March 1895.

Theatre in February 1895, the illustration mocked Wilde's popularity as a playwright by depicting him as the most famous playwright of them all. Drawn by Alfred Bryan, who caricatured Wilde in *The Entr'acte* nearly fifteen years earlier, the image combines the most recognizable features of Wilde—the large oval head, the long-ish hair, the cigarette, and the sunflower in his lapel—with one of the best known visual representations of Shakespeare—the Poet's Corner monument, sculpted by Peter Scheemaker and erected in 1741.<sup>173</sup> Just as images of Wilde were an amalgamation and extension of the Aesthetic type, so too was the Scheemakers' statue a composite of classical sculpture and iconic, if unsubstantiated, images of Shakespeare. The head, for instance, is derived from engravings of the famous Chandos portrait, which was (and still is) generally considered to be taken “from the life” of the sitter. But confirming whether that sitter was in fact Shakespeare proved problematic for the Victorians (Marcus 1001; Piper 20, 79-80). As with Du Maurier's *Punch* caricatures, no proper name was attached to the Chandos portrait, so the source material for Scheemakers' head and for countless other representations of the Bard may or may not have actually been Shakespeare himself. Though the review of *The Importance of Being Earnest* meant to criticize Wilde by depicting him in the pose of Shakespeare's statue, the comparison highlights how both the image of the Bard and the image of Wilde were composites without a clear point of origin.

The popular drive to commodify and collect Shakespeariana was fueled, in many ways, by critical efforts to reconstruct Shakespeare's life and recover his likeness. Spurred largely by Romantics like Lamb himself, the Victorian era became, in the words of Samuel Schoenbaum, “the heyday of biographical criticism, when, by a curious inversion of priorities, men read the

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<sup>173</sup> Again, as in Bryan's other illustrations, Wilde's left hand, and the scroll he holds in it, points downward towards Bryan's initials.

letters for the sake of the lives” (181). Shakespeare’s works generally—and the *Sonnets* in particular—became a “battleground” between “personalist” and “anti-personalist” critics: James Boaden, Charles Armitage Brown, David Masson and even Wilde’s former teacher at Trinity College, Edward Dowden, all published books that used interpretations of Shakespeare’s works as “windows” (to borrow Thomas Carlyle’s phrase) into the life about which so little was known, while critics such as Thomas Kenny argued forcefully that the *Sonnets* were nothing more than “fanciful and fictitious” (200-202; 314-315; 359; 188).<sup>174</sup> Scholars and amateurs alike attempted to restore the seemingly absent center that was Shakespeare, to recuperate the presence of the man himself. But one woman—eccentric American author, Delia Brown—threw the Bard’s existence itself into question with her controversial book, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* (1857). In what has come to be known as the “Anti-Stratfordian” theory, Bacon asserts that Shakespeare was a “myth” rather than a man; his works, she argued, were written not by one man but by several different men including Sir Walter Raleigh and (conveniently) Francis Bacon (386-394).

Though Bacon drew some support, her book is significant because it served as a forceful reminder that, despite the tremendous attempts at biographical recovery through textual interpretation, Victorians still knew very little about Shakespeare’s life.<sup>175</sup> In his preface to *Life*

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<sup>174</sup> James Boaden published *On the Sonnets of Shakespeare: Identifying the Person to Whom they are addressed* in 1837, followed shortly after by Charles Armitage Brown’s *Shakespeare’s Autobiographical Poems* in 1838. Edward Dowden published perhaps the most significant biographical interpretation of Shakespeare’s works and life, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, in 1875. Though Dowden had been Wilde’s professor at Trinity, he later refused to endorse his former student’s early release from prison. See Ellmann 470.

<sup>175</sup> Strangely enough, Bacon was given various letters of introduction from Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, and Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a “tepid” preface for one edition of her book. See Schoenbaum 385-394.

*Portraits of William Shakespeare* (1864), British critic and novelist James Hain Friswell sharply criticizes the Anti-Stratfordians, while simultaneously acknowledging that, given the dearth of evidence, it might be easy for some to “join the facile and nebulous army of doubters, and declare him [Shakespeare] to be a myth, a shadowed nucleus around which glorious poetry had accidentally entangled itself, and had got wound into a perfect ball.” “But as we have no record of him,” Friswell continues, “it is natural that our desire should be more intense to know what manner of man he was” (vii-viii). For Friswell and others before him, demystifying Shakespeare—that “shadowed nucleus”—was as much about authenticating visual representations of the Bard as it was about biography. Knowing “what manner of man” Shakespeare was depended crucially on knowing what he looked like. As Karl Elze put it in his 1888 biography of Shakespeare, humans have “a desire to behold great and renowned men, face to face if possible, and if not to have their likenesses....For not only do we in beholding the countenance obtain a better understanding of their life and work, but we feel at the same time drawn closer to them, and...brought directly within the circle of their personal acquaintance” (548). Given the rhetoric of desire for physical presence and/or visual representation in both Friswell’s and Elze’s works, it seems no surprise that, as early as the mid-1820s, scholars were devoting entire books to the Bard’s image as well as to his works.<sup>176</sup>

But authenticating images of Shakespeare’s likeness was not as clear cut as simply exposing the fakes whose sole purpose was meant to deceive. The increasing number “found”

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<sup>176</sup> Such works include James Boaden’s *An Inquiry into the Authenticity of Various Pictures and Prints which from the Decease of the Poet have been offered to the Public as Portraits of Shakespeare* (1824), Andrew Wivell’s *Historical Account of all the Portraits of Shakespeare* (1827), James Hain Friswell’s *Life Portraits of William Shakespeare* (1864) and Joseph Parker Norris’ *The Portraits of Shakespeare* (1885).

portraits of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century raised more complicated questions about which images predated others, which were meant to defraud, and which were nothing more than benign copies—and it seems likely Wilde had the latter context in mind when writing *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* Consider, for instance, the most prolific Shakespeare forger in the early decades of the nineteenth century, F. W. Zincke. Capitalizing on the “everlasting repetition” of Shakespeare’s image to which Charles Lamb referred, Zincke painted what is now known as the Bellows portrait. A brazen forgery, Zincke mimicked the features of the well-known Chandos portrait and framed the picture by carving away the excess wood panel, literally, into the shape of bellows (Piper 148; “The Apocryphal in Portraiture” 194). He then advertised his creation—replete with fictional back-story—to an unsuspecting buyer, claiming he had come into possession of “the portrait of a man of whom...no portrait was ever painted” (Wivell 200). Before the Bellows portrait was exposed as a forgery in 1823, it was purchased by the great French actor, Talma, and excited such attention that even Lamb himself journeyed to Paris to see it in person, convinced of its authenticity (“The Apocryphal in Portraiture” 194).

Even well-known forgeries such as the Bellows portrait could be (re)discovered and heralded as new “originals” by future generations, as one anonymous contributor to *Chambers’ Journal* pointed out in 1856:

The first purchaser, finding he has been cheated, takes down the picture from its pride of place, and consigns it to some lumber-room, untenanted garret, or dark closet....Time rolls on, generations pass away, repairs or alterations are required in the old hall or manor-house, and, lo! An original Shakspeare [sic] is found, that may have lain hid, how long, ah, who knows how long! The local papers announce the interesting occurrence; letters are written to the leading literary journals...then a connoisseur, who know a Zincke

as well as he does a bank-note, sees the picture, and the bubble bursts, but in all probability not forever, as the same picture, in a similar manner, may turn up and be a nine days' wonder half a century afterwards. (194)

The *Chambers'* narrative is significant in that it traces the all-too-common way in which even the most shameless forgery could be mistaken for an "original Shakspeare." By mid-century, "finding" the Bard's likeness in an old shop, attic, or trunk had become such so clichéd that any such backstory invariably aroused suspicion from critics. It seems the Victorians were able to find lost portraits of Shakespeare just about everywhere. Though these found portraits were always tainted with the possibility of unsavory origins, the *Chambers'* contributor reminds readers that not all those who claimed to have discovered images of Shakespeare were motivated by deception or greed.

Such is the case with the picture discovered in 1860 at the home of William Oakes Hunt in Stratford-upon-Avon. Now referred to as the Hunt or the Stratford portrait, its history is not unlike the narrative outlined in *Chambers's*. William Hunt, then Stratford's Town Clerk, commissioned well-known restorer, Simon Collins, to refresh a bust of Shakespeare which had been sculpted by Gerard Johnson and erected in a Stratford church in 1623.<sup>177</sup> After Collins completed his work on the bust, Hunt commissioned him to restore several old paintings in his attic, including one he had allegedly used for target practice as a boy. Once cleaned, the target-practice painting miraculously revealed an image of Shakespeare, an image strikingly like the

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<sup>177</sup> The Stratford bust was (and still is) considered one of three authentic visual representations of Shakespeare. The others include the famous Droeshout engraving and the somewhat more controversial Chandos portrait. The bust was referenced in a prefatory poem by Leonard Digges that accompanied Shakespeare's First Folio. Though the bust, like the Droeshout engraving, was created posthumously, its mention in the First Folio verifies that the bust appeared within living memory of the Bard himself; as such, it most likely bears a reasonable resemblance to his actual physical likeness. See Piper 14-18.

Stratford bust: the hair, beard and red and black dress all matched the sculpture. Overjoyed, Collins took Hunt's portrait to London for further "restoration," and exhibited in his studio, intimating that it may well have been the original from which Gerard Johnson carved the bust. Though not considered an out-and-out forgery, as Zincke's Bellows portrait was, the Hunt portrait prompted the same question as other "found" portraits of Shakespeare had: could it possibly predate the earliest known depictions of Shakespeare—the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford bust? Victorian Shakespeare scholar Joseph Parker Norris remembers, "When the picture was first discovered it excited great interest, and much discussion took place as to *whether it was the original picture from which the Stratford bust was made, or only a copy of the latter....*Such resemblance either shows that the bust was made from the picture, or the picture from the bust, unless both were made from life" (141-145). Though Norris dismisses the latter suggestion as impossible, concluding that Hunt's portrait was a copy of the bust (likely commissioned for the Garrick jubilee) and not its original, his commentary exemplifies just how ubiquitous the original-versus-copy question was in discussions about "found" images of Shakespeare in the eighteenth-century—the Ely Palace portrait, the Grafton, the Flower, the Ashbourne, and more. Indeed, the original-copy debates about Shakespeare's portraits are not entirely unlike those which surrounded Wilde's image during his American lecture tour (Schoenbaum 336-337; Norris 141-145).

Just as the narrator of *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* longed to find some piece of physical evidence that would substantiate the intimacy he felt with Willie Hughes, the near-obsessive Victorian desire to find a single, original image of Shakespeare was also an attempt to get as close as possible to the physical presence of the man himself through a trace of his materiality. The discovery of the Kesselstadt Death Mask provided the Victorians with just such a relic, with

a physical link to the “shadowed nucleus” that was Shakespeare. In 1849, German artist Ludwig Becker brought a plaster cast from Mainz to the British Museum, claiming it was the death mask of none other than Shakespeare himself. It had been part of Canon Francis von Kesselstadt’s collection, Becker claimed, but had been sold off at auction and found in a broker’s shop. Though the Death Mask’s pedigree was shrouded in mystery (it could well have been a forgery either by Becker or the broker), some authorities suggested, as they had of Hunt’s target-practice portrait, that the mask might have been the original from which Gerard Johnson sculpted the Stratford bust. The myth surrounding the Death Mask became so prominent that, in 1857, English artist Henry Wallis (most famous for his “Death of Chatterton”) painted a scene of Johnson in the act of carving the bust: Shakespeare’s contemporary, Ben Jonson, stands alongside the unfinished sculpture, holding the Death Mask alongside the head of the bust as a model (Piper 154). The Mask was even exhibited at Stratford during Shakespeare’s tercentenary celebration in 1864. Tourists could, of course, purchase photographs of the mask as souvenirs (Schoenbaum 339).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the doubts about its authenticity, the Death Mask captivated the Victorians, promising the possibility of a kind of anachronistic communion with Shakespeare’s physical body. Much was made, for example, of the remnants of auburn colored hair still matted into the Mask’s plaster.<sup>178</sup> Though exaggerated for comic effect, Wilde himself acknowledged the frenzy for locks of his hair in several early letters from the United States: “A third [attendant] whose hair resembles mine is obliged to send off locks of his own hair to the myriad maidens of the city, and so is rapidly becoming bald” (Wilde *Letters* 126). The Victorian

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<sup>178</sup> As Joseph Roach, Chris Rojek, and others have demonstrated, the fetishization and sanctification of the celebrity’s body, clothes, and possessions—whether he/she is living or dead—has been common practice since at least the eighteenth century.



drive to authenticate the Kesselstadt Death Mask and found paintings such as Hunt's came to a head in the 1880s, when talk began of exhuming Shakespeare's bones. Suggested first by Norris and later by biographer Clement Mansfield Ingleby, proponents argued that an examination of Shakespeare's skull would settle the original-versus-copy debates once and for all. In a plea to the Mayor of Stratford published in 1883, Ingleby writes:

Beyond question, the skull of Shakespeare, might...at least settle two disputed points in the Stratford Bust; it would test the Droeshout print, and every one of the half-dozen portraits-in-oils which pass as presentments of Shakespeare's face at different periods of his life. Moreover it would pronounce decisively on the pretensions of the Kesselstadt Death-Mask, and we should know whether that was from the 'flying-mould' after which Gerard Johnson worked, when he sculptured the Bust....Why, I ask, should not an attempt be made to recover Shakespeare's skull?" (29-30)

Though Ingleby hoped the skull would be the final word on which image of Shakespeare was the original, which images were copies, and which were outright forgeries, the movement received significant push-back from figures such as Cardinal John Henry Newman, himself a celebrity of the period.<sup>179</sup>

Returning to *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* with this context in mind, it seems clear that Wilde's story was informed not only by the nineteenth-century debates surrounding Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, but also by the controversies surrounding Shakespeare's image. Admittedly, the forged portrait at the center of Wilde's narrative is *not* a portrait of the Bard himself, but several references in *Mr. W. H.* point to the influence of Shakespeare's after-image

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<sup>179</sup> Others hoped to recover the skull for its phrenological significance and its commercial value as an attraction for literary tourists. See Schoenbaum 340-41.

on Wilde's thinking. The narrator, for instance, makes explicit reference to the Kesselstadt Death Mask at one point, imagining it had been brought from England to Germany in 1617 and given to Willie Hughes as a "pale token of the passing away of the great poet who had so dearly loved him" (341). (Hughes, the narrator surmises, had gone to act on the German stage in 1611.) Moreover, in the opening paragraph of *Mr. W. H.*, the narrator tells how he and Erskine had been discussing the "somewhat curious topic" of literary forgeries—those of "Macpherson, Ireland, and Chatterton," in particular (302). Of the three eighteenth-century forgers mentioned, the reference to William Henry Ireland is significant because it directly links the characters' conversation back to a forged *portrait* of Shakespeare.

Like James Macpherson's Ossian poems and Chatterton's Rowley poems before him, Ireland had written an original literary work—the play *Vortigern and Rowena* (1796). But unlike Chatterton and Macpherson, Ireland attributed the "found" play to none other than Shakespeare himself. Before embarking on this full-fledged literary forgery, Ireland also forged several documents emblazoned with Shakespeare's signature. The narrative Ireland concocted to "authenticate" these forged documents is not unfamiliar: while in Stratford, Ireland met a man who was in possession of a large, wooden chest filled with centuries-old documents, a chest that contained, miraculously, legal documents signed by Shakespeare, love letters to Anne Hathaway (replete with a lock of the Bard's hair), and much more. In a convenient act of discretion, Ireland refused to disclose the name of the gentleman whose chest had borne such amazing relics, referring to him only as "Mr. H." But the chest produced more than documents: from it, Ireland also "found" a pen and ink drawing of Shakespeare with the poet's initials and coat of arms as well as a full-length oil portrait of the Shakespeare dressed as Shylock. Ireland likely sketched the rudimentary drawing himself, basing the Bard's likeness on the Droeshout engraving; the

painting was doctored to resemble Shakespeare from a portrait purchased in Butcher Row (Schoenbaum 133-167). Though eventually discredited by Edmund Malone, both Ireland's literary forgeries *and* his artistic forgeries resonated into the Victorian era. Wilde, for instance, might have known of Ireland's forged portraits through Ireland's own *Confessions* (1805), or perhaps more likely, through later works such as Friswell's on the authenticity of Shakespeare's portraits. (Friswell mentions the portraits Ireland forged.) Like the reference to the Death Mask, the mention of this other "Mr. W. H."—William Henry Ireland—demonstrates that *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* was informed, at least in part, by the Victorian debates surrounding Shakespeare's image—debates that were not entirely unlike those which surrounded Wilde on his American lecture tour.<sup>180</sup>

By foregrounding the significance of the forged portrait in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, the story's narrative structure begins to take new shape. In the past, critics have read *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* either as a five-act dramatization of Wilde's "theories on art and love" or as a three-part dialectic allegorizing Wilde's theory of the rise of historical criticism (Gagnier 43; Smith and Helfand 87-95).<sup>181</sup> Though these and other interpretations acknowledge that the portrait of Mr. W. H. literally frames *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, they have yet to consider the ways in which this portrait-like structure permeates *Mr. W. H.* itself. The unnamed narrator remains at the discursive forefront, but the story unfolds through a series of overlapping narrative portraits and narrative frames. As Smith and Helfand have pointed out, the story begins *in medias res*, opening

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<sup>180</sup> For a concise summary of the William Henry Ireland forgeries in the context of *Mr. W.H.*, see Bristow and Mitchell 257-267.

<sup>181</sup> The original version as published in *Blackwood's* is comprised of three sections rather than the five of the later version. The story, then, could be considered a kind of drama in either three or five acts.

with the narrator's account of his conversation with Erskine about literary forgeries (88). It is during this conversation that Erskine asks the narrator the startling question that presages the entire story to come: "What would you say about a young man who had a strange theory about a certain work of art, believed in his theory, and committed a forgery in order to prove it?" (302). But the opening scene is also significant because it introduces the object on which the rest of the narrative centers and by which it is structurally framed: that "small panel picture set in an old and somewhat tarnished Elizabethan frame" (302).

The narrator describes the full-length portrait in careful detail, musing over the beautiful, effeminate man depicted against the "peacock-blue background" (a reference, perhaps, to Whistler's famous "Peacock Room" [1867-77]). Clad in "late-sixteenth century costume," the as-yet unidentified man stands "by a table, with his right hand resting on an open book." With his "dreamy, wistful eyes" and "delicate scarlet lips", the man is the focal point of the frame; the masks of Comedy and Tragedy are painted with a "hard severity of touch," presumably somewhere in the portrait's background. Because the subjects of Elizabethan painting (and Victorian photograph, for that matter) were rendered identifiable not only by unique facial or bodily features, but also by a battery of recognizable emblems and poses, the narrator's attention to both the book and the masks is significant: from Chaucer to Dryden to Pope to Sir Walter Scott and beyond, poets and literary men have been visually depicted with books—reading them, resting them or simply holding them, as Sarony did with Wilde. Likewise, the inclusion of the tragedy and comedy masks signals that the man depicted was in some way affiliated with the theater, an actor or a playwright. Despite these cues, the narrator does not recognize the identity of the man in the portrait. Even when Erskine reveals that the man is the dedicatee of

Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Mr. W. H., the narrator continues to protest: the man in the portrait is "not a bit like Lord Pembroke," he says (303).<sup>182</sup>

At this point in the story, the narrator is completely ignorant of Cyril Graham's theory of the *Sonnets*, of any notion that a mysterious man, "Willie Hughes," may have been Shakespeare's intended dedicatee, rather than Lord Pembroke or Lord Southampton. Nevertheless, he admits that the "wonderful portrait...had already begun to have a strange fascination for [him]" (303). His musing over the image is cut short, however, as Erskine snatches the portrait away "rather abruptly" (303). The abruptness with which Erskine takes the portrait from the narrator suggests that even though he knew it to be a forgery—and even though the narrator knew nothing of Cyril Graham's theory—Erskine still feared the portrait might exude a kind of "strange," even fatal, power over the viewer. Both Graham and Erskine were "converted" to the Willie Hughes theory of the *Sonnets* before the image was forged (308). For the narrator, the roles are reversed—the portrait motivates his desire to hear Graham's theory as retold by Erskine. That the (forged) portrait precedes the theory from which it originated is

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<sup>182</sup> Interestingly, the narrator discovers that the portrait is of "Mr. W. H." by using a magnifying glass to examine the book on which the man's hand is resting. This closer inspection reveals the title page of Shakespeare's First Folio. That the narrator identified the man by the book, and not by his name, seems odd—especially given Erskine's description of the portrait later in the story. As Erskine describes his first encounter with the forged portrait, he remarks that "on the corner of the picture could be faintly seen the name of the young man himself written in gold uncial letters on the faded *bleu de paon* ground, 'Master Will Hews.'" This detail is rendered somewhat differently in the periodical edition of *Mr. W. H.*: Erskine says, "on the frame itself could be faintly seen the name of the young man written in black uncial letters on a faded gold ground 'Master Will. Hews.'" Perhaps even stranger is a detail about Cyril Graham's death omitted in the longer version. According to Erskine, when Graham shot himself, "some of the blood splashed upon the frame of the picture, just where the name had been painted." If Graham's blood obscured Willie Hughes's name in the first version of *Mr. W. H.*, it makes sense that the narrator would be unable to identify the subject of the portrait by name. However, because this detail is changed in the later version, it seems somewhat odd that Erskine would not have directed the narrator's attention to Hughes' name in the corner of the picture.

significant: it acts as an emblem, as a visual representation of the narrative to come. It prefigures Erskine's verbal "portrait" of Cyril Graham and his theory, and later, the narrator's portrait of Willie Hughes and Shakespeare. The narrator convinces Erskine to relate Graham's theory only *after* he likens it to the portrait of Mr. W. H.: "Tell it [the theory] to me of course," the narrator says. "If it is half as delightful as the picture, I shall be more than satisfied" (303-4).<sup>183</sup>

*The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* then proceeds in a series of narrative portraits: Erskine tells the story of Cyril Graham, his theory, and his death, a story so vivid that it converts the narrator to Graham's cause. The narrator leaves Erskine, determined to "take up the theory where Cyril Graham left it" and "prove to the world that he was right" (312). He then becomes immersed in his own kind of narrative portrait, outlining and filling in the details of Willie Hughes's life as an actor in Shakespeare's company. With "the whole scheme of the *Sonnets*...complete," the narrative returns to its frame: "cover[ing] sheets of paper with passionate reiteration," the narrator furiously transcribes his findings and eventually sends the manuscript to Erskine, who is, of course, reconverted to the theory. The narrator now unconvinced, Erskine constructs a final, powerful work of art: by imitating the narrative of Cyril Graham at the opening of the story, Erskine forges his own suicide. In the final lines of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, the narrator brings us fully into the present, leaving readers with an ominous reflection: "This curious work of art hangs now in my library, where it is very much admired by my artistic friends, one of whom has etched it for me. [...] I have never cared to tell them its true history, but sometimes, when I look at it, I think there is really a great deal to be said for the Willie Hughes theory of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*" (350).

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<sup>183</sup> On the distinction between Wilde's uses of the word "picture" versus "portrait," see Novak 136-39.

Just as the opening scene of Wilde's story begins with the portrait of Mr. W. H., so too does it end. In the final lines of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, the suspiciously tidy narrative frame is complicated by the portrait's persistence. It lurks silently on the wall of the narrator's library, waiting, perhaps, to re-exert its power, over either the narrator or one of his "artistic friends." Displayed openly in the narrator's home (unlike in Erskine's, where it was kept locked in a cabinet), the portrait once again provides the impetus for the theory rather than vice versa. It is only when the narrator *looks at* the forged portrait that he imagines the Hughes theory might still have some merit. Though the narrator claims he had "grown wiser" (349) since Erskine's death, the syntactical hesitance and understated tone of this final line grates against the near-manic intensity with which he imagined Willie Hughes only months before. The narrator thinks "a great deal" might be "said for" the Willie Hughes theory, but only "sometimes" and only when he looks at the forged portrait. In short, the final lines of *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* suggest a dark irony: could the narrator, like Erskine, be persuaded to explain the portrait's "true history" to one of his own young companions, beginning the cycle of fatal influence yet again? The threat of the forged portrait is heightened further by the indication that it had been etched, perhaps for the purpose of mass-reproduction. This detail—absent from the original *Blackwood's* version of the story—sheds light on how *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* might have looked had it been printed in book form during Wilde's lifetime. After its magazine publication, Wilde contracted with Bodley Head publishing to print an extended edition of the story, and he commissioned artist Charles Ricketts to paint a fictional portrait of Mr. W. H. from which an etching could be made for the frontispiece. (Ricketts and his partner Charles Shannon were responsible for the book-design of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1891] as well as many of Wilde's other short story collections [Holland and Hart-Davis 410n].) When Wilde saw Ricketts' portrait in the autumn of 1889, he

wrote to his artist friend, exclaiming, “My dear Ricketts, it is not a forgery at all...It is absurd of you and Shannon to try and take me in! As if I did not know the master’s touch, or was no judge of frames!” That Wilde or anyone else might have been “taken in” is not surprising, given the care with which Ricketts crafted the portrait, making it seem as authentic and original as possible: “Mr. W. H.” had been painted on a “decaying piece of oak” and framed by Shannon in a “fragment of worm-eaten moulding.” Bodley Head eventually backed out of the publication, and the portrait was sold for a guinea during the liquidation of Wilde’s possessions in April 1895. In an ironic twist, the portrait was listed in the auction catalogue as “an old oil painting of Will Hewes, framed.” To date, the Ricketts’ portrait has not been found. One could imagine that, like the forged images of Shakespeare, it might someday be found in an attic and mistaken, if only momentarily, for an authentic original of Willie Hughes (Wilde *Letters* 412; Ellmann 298; Schroeder 27-34).

Though never realized, Wilde’s plans for Rickett’s frontispiece suggest that *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*—at least in its extended book form—was designed as a kind of infinite recess. Just as Erskine’s portrait of Cyril Graham is framed by the narrator’s portrait of Willie Hughes, the etching of the fictional Mr. W. H. would have literally bound the text. The portrait would have lorded over the pages, over the theory of the *Sonnets* itself, and the narrator’s final intimation about the existence of Willie Hughes would have been all the more powerful, all the more menacing. Could the portrait somehow break the frame of the narrative and continue on, existing outside the pages of the text? In the early stages of publication planning, Wilde admits that he “prefer[ed]” *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* be published as a separately, rather than in a collection of other short stories—a “dainty little volume” that would stand alone (Wilde *Letters* 407). Though he does not say why he “prefer[ed] it to be separate,” it seems likely that placing the story in a



collection would compromise the integrity of the neat framing Ricketts' frontispiece would have provided. Though some might argue that the mass-reproduction of the etching would strip the portrait of its power rather than propagate it, Wilde's design seems to indicate just the opposite: the frontispiece would have drawn readers' attention to the materiality of the book, blurring the line between fact and fiction, criticism and art, and highlighting the portrait-like structure of the narrative itself.

But what, exactly, is depicted in *Mr. W. H.* if the multi-layered narratives ultimately add up to nothing? As Laurence Danson sees it, this blankness is precisely the point: "*The Portrait of Mr. W.H.*, a fiction in the form of a theory denied in its making, invites the reader to 'go beneath the surface' to explore an absence ('There is nothing in the idea of Willie Hughes'); what the reader finds is a reflection of his or her own interminable quest for meaning" (113). Read not only in the context of Wilde's celebrity image but also in the context of Shakespeare's controversial after-image, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* allegorizes the interpretive struggle to reconnect with an authentic original, with a physical presence that does not, cannot exist. Just as the search for the "original" Shakespeare was complicated by the forgery industry and "found" portraits, so too was the search for the original Aesthete complicated by the nature of typification: no one "original" could have provided the inspiration for either Du Maurier's caricatures or Gilbert's parody because the Aesthetic type was an amalgamation that resisted reduction to any singular source. To be sure, Wilde's physical features were folded into depictions of the Aesthete, just as depictions of the Aesthete provided Wilde with sources of appropriation. But during his American lecture tour, Wilde was commissioned to forge himself as *the* Aesthetic original—an original that never existed in the first place—and he was received by American audiences on these terms.

Like Wilde's art of forging celebrity, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* is driven by the hollow promise of a physical presence that might validate interpretation. For both Erskine and the narrator, believing in the theory of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* requires a connection to the physical, tangible presence of Willie Hughes. When Erskine describes the experience of being "converted" to Graham's theory, he does so in terms of presence: "Willie Hughes became to me as real a person as Shakespeare" (308). The narrator's experience is likewise characterized by the felt experience of presence, but in far more vivid detail. The morning after his formative conversation with Erskine, the narrator likens re-reading the *Sonnets* to touching Shakespeare, to resting his hand "upon Shakespeare's heart," and "counting each separate throb of pulse and passion." The *Sonnets* provide the narrator with a sensory link not only to Shakespeare but to Hughes as well. "I thought of the wonderful boy-actor," the narrator says, "and saw his face in every line" (313). In this way, Shakespeare's poems read as a textual portrait of someone who never existed. Though the narrator claims Hughes became a "kind of spiritual presence"—not a tangible one—he continually fixates on the "boy-actor's" physicality, imagining and re-imagining Hughes's hair, eyes, limbs and hands—even spattered with blood in death (319; 341). The narrator attributes the profound experience of Hughes's presence to Shakespeare's poetic skill, but once again, he does so in terms of visual media: "so well had Shakespeare drawn him [Hughes]," that he could even see Hughes "standing in the shadow of [his] room" (319). One wonders if the narrator could have envisioned Hughes so clearly had he not first been prompted by Graham's forged portrait.

In the same way the celebrity body is largely inaccessible to audiences, so too is Willie Hughes a "shadowed nucleus" around which the narrator generates elaborate, but ultimately empty, representations. In their first exchange, Erskine warns the narrator of the circularity of a

search for Hughes, advising him not to “follow a trail that leads nowhere.” The narrator’s passionate devotion to Graham’s theory is inherently fallacious because as Erskine points out, he “assum[es] the existence of the very person whose existence is the thing to be proved” (312). After months of searching, the narrator begins to feel the strain of always approaching but never fully realizing Willie Hughes’s presence. “Always on the brink of absolute verification,” the narrator is, in many ways, like a celebrity fan—always attempting to reconcile the celebrity text with the celebrity body, but never fully “verifying” the link between representation and presence, copy and original. After writing his passionate letter to Erskine, the narrator grieves the loss of his (imagined) connection with Hughes, characterizing him as only “a mere myth, an idle dream,” “a phantom puppet” (345; 347). Without faith in Willie Hughes, the plausibility of Cyril Graham’s theory likewise evaporates. “It is a sort of moonbeam theory,” the narrator tells Erskine, “very lovely, very fascinating, but intangible. When one thinks that one has got hold of it, it escapes one” (348). The narrator’s reference to a “moonbeam theory” is a beautiful encapsulation not only of Graham’s Willie Hughes theory but of Wilde’s art of forging celebrity. In the same way a “moonbeam” is only a reflection of light from a dangerous, unapproachable source—the sun—so too is the celebrity a fleeting, ungraspable entity only visible when refracted through the lens of the press.

In the thirteen years after his American lecture tour and before his incarceration in 1895, Wilde continued to perform his life in the public eye as an actor would perform for an audience, as a living work of art through which his aesthetic philosophies could be tested, shaped, realized. “Do you wish to know the great drama of my life?” Wilde asked French writer and friend, André Gide, in 1895. “I have given my genius to my life, to my work only my talent” (Gide 49). Though the seriousness of Wilde’s remark is, as usual, hard to pin down, few would argue with

the idea that he did, in fact, put his genius into his celebrity. As the narrator of *Mr. W.H.* says, drama was “Art’s most complete, most satisfying” form of expression, appealing to all the senses at once and culminating in a “spectacular form, in a play *that is to be looked at*” (323; 319, emphasis mine). Yet, in the letter from Reading Gaol now known as *De Profundis* (written barely two years after the above exchange with Gide), Wilde admits, “I thought life was going to be a brilliant comedy...I found it to be a revolting and repellent tragedy” (998). When Wilde returned to Britain from his tour in 1882, he worked hard to change his physical appearance, but he could not change the (forged) image that made him a celebrity.

As Ellen Moers points out, by the mid-1880s Wilde had completely done away with the velveteen jacket and knee-breeches of his American lecture tour, instead reviving the “out-of-date-dandy” of Brummel and D’Orsay. By the 1890s, his style had become “coldly and formally correct,” usually only embellished with a “single detail” (Moers 299). Ellmann attributes this dramatic change in Wilde’s life to his trip to Paris in January 1883, accompanied by his friend (and later his biographer) Robert Sherard: Wilde cut his trademark, middle-parted locks, restyled his hair to resemble the tight curls of a bust of Nero he had seen in the Louvre, and assumed a largely uneccentric manner of dress inspired by Frenchmen of the early 1880s. When praised by Sherard for shedding the celebrity image he had forged in the United States, Wilde remarked, “All *that* belonged to the Oscar Wilde of the first period. We are now concerned with the Oscar Wilde of the second period, who has nothing whatever in common with the gentleman who wore long hair and carried a sunflower down Piccadilly” (Ellmann 220).

The change in Wilde’s appearance did not go unnoticed by the British press, but his new look could not eclipse the image of the Professor of Aesthetics. In late March 1883, *Punch* ran the following “advertisement:”

To be sold, the whole of the Stock-in-Trade, Appliances, and Inventions of a Successful Aesthete, who is retiring from the business. This will include a large Stock of faded Lilies, dilapidated Sunflowers, and shabby Peacocks' Feathers, several long-haired Wigs, a collection of incomprehensible Poems, and a number of impossible Pictures. Also, a valuable Manuscript Work, entitled Instruction to Aesthetes, containing a list of aesthetic catchwords, drawings of aesthetic attitudes, and many choice secrets of the craft. Also, a number of well-used Dadoes, sad-coloured Draperies, blue and white china, and Brass Fenders....No reasonable offer refused. (qtd. in Ellmann 220)

The joke is strangely portentous, prefiguring the public sale of Wilde's possessions after his second trial in April 1895. Wilde realized early on that the Aesthetic type—created by Du Maurier and Gilbert and Sullivan, and photographically captured by Sarony—had come to define him publicly, had begun to circulate on its own as the image of Wilde-the-celebrity with little regard for Wilde-the-man.

Though Wilde tried to escape the role he so willingly played for years, he could never fully shake these early images—not even during his trials and incarceration in 1895. Like many caricaturists before him, Max Beerbohm perpetuated the trademark features of the Aesthetic type long after Wilde had finished his American lecture tour. Though Wilde cut his longish locks in 1882, Beerbohm's most famous caricature of Wilde, drawn over a decade later in 1894, depicts him with scribbles upon scribbles of long hair parted down the middle—not to mention Wilde's parted lips, oversized front teeth, limp, pudgy hand, and a ridiculously large carnation in his lapel. Eventually, Beerbohm came to regard his drawing as “cruel,” saying of himself “as a writer, I was kindly, I think—Jekyll—but as a caricaturist I was Hyde” (qtd. in Behrman 82).

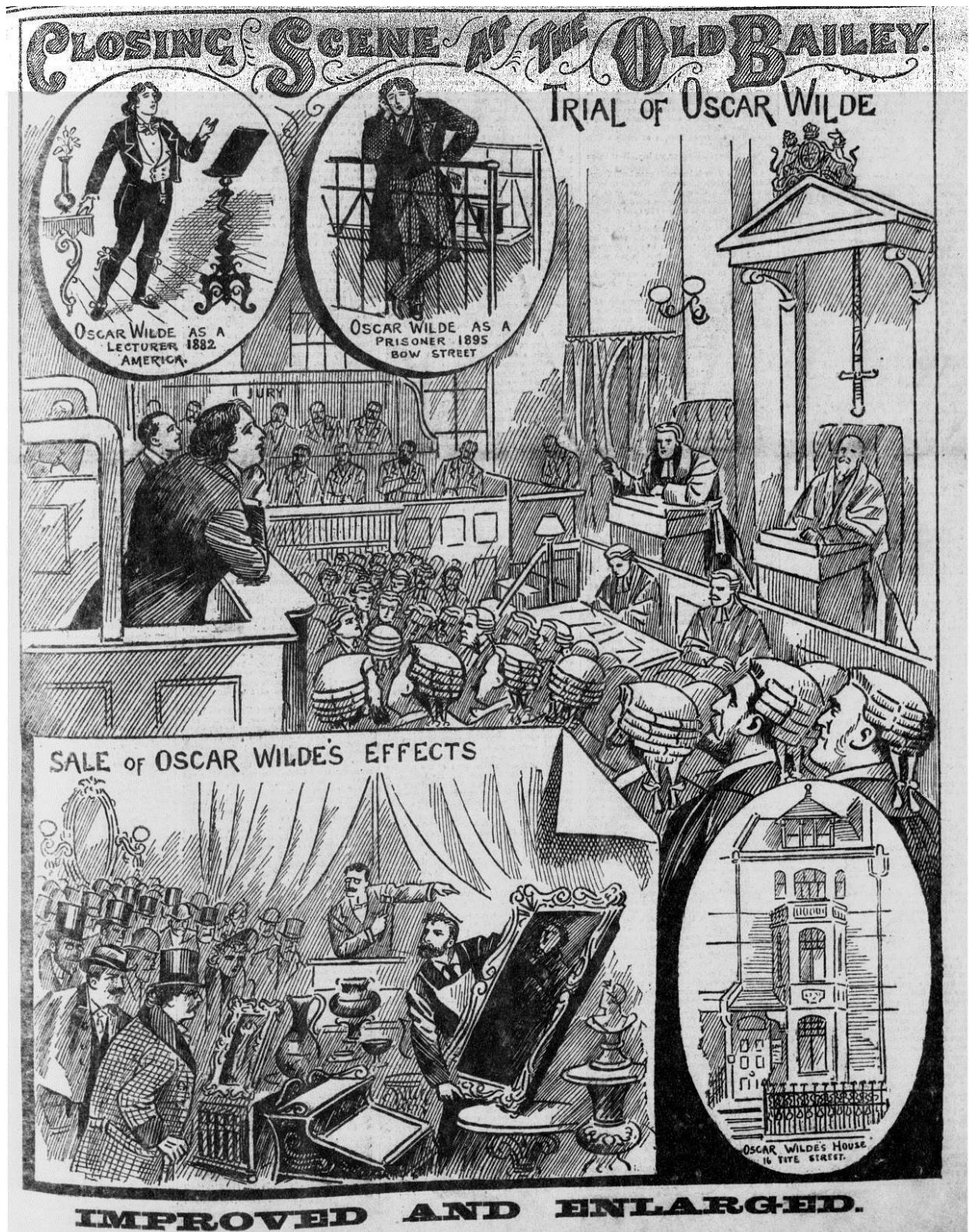


Figure 19. "Closing Scene at the Old Bailey," *Illustrated Police News*, 4 May 1895: 1.

After Wilde was arrested in 1895, Beerbohm visited him at the police inspector's office. What struck him most about the experience was not the sight of Oscar in jail. Rather, among a variety of other "criminal souvenirs—[...] knives, pistols, bludgeon—all the implements of crime," he saw his own caricature. Beerbohm recalls that until that moment, he had not realized "how wicked it was," and he felt as if he had "contributed to the dossier against Oscar" (qtd. in Behrman 85-86).

The promotional photographs of Wilde taken by Napoleon Sarony also came back to haunt him in the court of public opinion. Less than a week after Wilde's arrest on April 5, 1895, the *Illustrated Police Budget* had sketched the scene. Surrounded by what appear to be spectators, Wilde sits in his typical posture—long legs crossed—as the inspector reaches towards him. He wears no knickers, has no flower in his lapel, and rests no book on his knee, but one recognizable feature of the Sarony series remains: his coat, as seen in "Oscar Wilde, no. 14." The quilted lapels and cuffs, the unusually ornate clasps, all stand out starkly against the sensible jackets of others depicted in the illustration. A week later, the same publication printed an imagined illustration of Wilde in his prison cell. The quilted coat remains, but perhaps the most striking feature in this image is Wilde's posture. The illustrator poses Oscar with his head resting gingerly on his right hand. Though the hands are reversed, the posture is almost identical to "Oscar Wilde, no. 18" (Holland 168-170). The same pose reappears on the cover of the *Illustrated Police News* on May 4, 1895 (see figure 19). The two inset pictures in the top-left corner of the illustration draw a direct comparison between Wilde's U.S. lecture tour and his appearance in court. On the left, Wilde lectures in knee-breeches, and on the right, he stands in the docks in his new, more restrained dandy attire—but the hand-to-face pose of Sarony's photographs, by then over a decade old, remain.

In the same way Wilde was reduced to a single pose during his trials, so too was *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* reduced to a literal interpretation of Cyril Graham's theory of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. During the last trial, Edward Carson, legal counsel to the Marquess of Queensberry, cross-examined Wilde about *Mr. W.H.* directly, asking whether he had "written an article pointing out that Shakespeare's sonnets were practically sodomitical" (Holland *Real Trial* 93). In an impressive bit of lawyering, Carson managed to reframe *The Portrait of Mr. W.H.* as an "article," rather than a piece of fiction—and just as a forgery became evidence for a theory in *Mr. W.H.*, so too did the fiction become evidence in Wilde's conviction. For Wilde, the dangers of forgery and celebrity were one and the same—representation exerts a strange influence over reality, and publicity is all too often mistaken for intimacy. Imitating art, it seems, can be fatal. Writing from his cell in Reading Gaol, Wilde stated, "I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me" (*De Profundis* 1015). Wilde may have awoken the "imagination of [his] century," but he did not control the myth, the celebrity that was created around him.



## 6.0 CONCLUSION

For Daniel Boorstin, the celebrity is “a person known for his well-knownness” because of the medium by which he/she becomes renowned—the mass (re)production and circulation of the image. In his view, the Graphic Revolution produces only superficial, fleeting, and self-referential images, so any individual who becomes well-known by these means must also lack substance. In more recent celebrity studies scholarship, the celebrity is a person known for his/her intimate yet distant relation to the public. The same images Boorstin saw as fundamentally empty, these scholars interpret as a mechanism that generates closeness between audience and icon, however illusory that sense of proximity may be. But Victorian literary celebrities were *not* just “known for their well-knownness,” and neither should celebrity be “known” to scholars only as an expression of audience desire stoked by the technologies of the printed image. The Graphic Revolution shaped and was shaped by literary celebrity culture, but for some Victorians, printed images did not always grant intimate access to the celebrity. Even in the case of photography, with its ostensible claims to “verisimilitude,” images could mislead or embarrass. For others, even if a printed image or in-person appearance *was* thought to facilitate an immediate, “authentic” glimpse at the renowned individual, such intimacy was not always desirable. As features such as “Lines by a Young Author,” “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home,” and the “Days with Celebrities—A Celebrity” suggest, illustrations during this period were not always used in ways that fostered public intimacy; printed images were harnessed to complicate

and question authors' public exposure in Victorian popular culture as much as they were used to perpetuate it. In other words, public intimacy had limits: Dickens could have a "special relationship" with readers, so long as it did not interfere with the affection audiences had for the fictions of "Boz" and character such as Mr. Pickwick; Tennyson could lament the loss of privacy at the hands of literary tourists, so long as he died young enough to preserve his classical image; Wilde could draw crowds in the United States, so long as he lived up to the caricature audiences hoped to see.

I bookend this study with Dickens, on the one hand, and Wilde, on the other, not so much because these author's individual experiences with literary celebrity are exceptional—though they are that—but rather because they help demarcate a unique moment in the shared history of literary and celebrity culture—a kind of interregnum after the beginning of the mass (re)production and circulation of the printed image and before the emergence of the mass production and circulation of the moving image. In concluding this way, I hope to raise questions about how literary culture changes when authors are represented in and across new media (representations which may or may not be connected to the literary texts these authors produce), and about how the development of celebrity culture continues to shape and be shaped by authors. However, while there is still much we can glean from studying the experiences of individual celebrity authors, it is also important to consider alternatives to the "case study" model of inquiry that permeates much of the scholarship on literary celebrity specifically and celebrity more generally. Paradoxical as it may sound, one of the current limitations of the field is that too many scholars (myself included) take a celebrity-centered approach to celebrity studies; that is, there is a tendency to focus too much on the narrative of an individual celebrity's experience, whether that narrative is of the Romantic "self-inventor" who has "It," or the tragic train wreck who has

lost all control over his/her image. Instead, future studies might reorient the scholarly attention to examine how celebrity culture is represented in contemporary literature; how celebrity culture is (or is not) changing contemporary literary form; or how celebrity texts themselves function—extended analysis of long-running periodical features such as *Moonshine*'s “Days with Celebrities” might be one place to start.

As Patricia Anderson and Leo Braudy have argued, the technologies of the printed image gave nineteenth-century audiences “visual access” to representations of the world beyond their immediate view on a mass scale—access not just to public individuals, but to fine art, foreign places, distant wars, unseen poverty, horrific crime, and so on. But the network of relations between the Graphic Revolution, public intimacy, and literary celebrity becomes even more complex after the turn of the twentieth century. With the incorporation of halftone printing processes in periodicals, the rise of tabloid and photojournalism, and the emergence of a dedicated paparazzo ready to capture unauthorized, candid images of celebrities, the concept of public visibility—and public intimacy—takes on new dimensions. While features like “Celebrities (Very Much) at Home,” relied on the imagination and humor of the illustrator to sketch scenes of celebrities in compromising positions, halftone printing and the portable, personal camera took photography out of the studio, onto the street, and into the pages of publications like the *Daily Mirror*—the “world’s first tabloid,” begun in 1904 (Linkof 2, 54-138).<sup>184</sup> Twentieth-century viewers’ “visual access” to images of celebrities varies in kind as well as degree. In the fin de siècle, Thomas Edison’s development of the Kinetoscope and Vitascope, along with the Lumieres’ invention of the Cinematograph, laid the technological

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<sup>184</sup> Though Linkof offers an exceptional review of the rise of tabloid periodicals in Britain after the turn of the century, he likewise relies on the idea of audience “desire” to see more photographs within the pages of newspapers.

groundwork necessary for the emergence of the first commercial film industry in Hollywood (Musser 91-133; Dixon and Foster 1-52). In the decades before the transition to sound in the mid-1920s, the mass production, distribution, and exhibition of nickelodeons and full-length feature films gave audiences the opportunity to view a parade of moving pictures, as well as printed ones—and executives such as Carl Laemmle were quick to understand the commercial value of branding their studios by producing films featuring popular “picture personalities” and “stars,” and by promoting those “stars” in burgeoning trade magazines like *Photoplay* (Koszarski 259-314; DeCordova 59-116). But scandals of the 1920s—especially the murder of aspiring actress, Virginia Rappe, in 1921—made the stars “site[s] for the representation of moral transgression and social unconventionality,” much like the literary and theatrical celebrities who preceded them (DeCordova 117).

Given the significance of the Graphic Revolution to Victorian literary celebrity, it seems no surprise that many scholars have also explored how twentieth-century developments in print and film shaped authors’ understanding of and engagement with celebrity culture. Richard Salmon, for instance, examines representations of publicity and celebrity in Henry James’ fin de siècle and early-twentieth century fictions. Charting a course through works such as *The Bostonians* and “The Aspern Papers,” Salmon explores, among other things, James’ attitude towards authorial privacy in the age of New Journalism, advertising, biography. Other scholars such as Loren Glass, Aaron Jaffe, and Jonathan Goldman have focused on the intersections between celebrity culture and the modernist literary tradition. Despite the rhetoric of impersonality and the rejection of mass culture often associated with modernism, Glass, Jaffe, and Goldman demonstrate the degree to which authors engaged with the celebrity culture they so loudly criticized. Jaffe, for instance, contends that modernist authors found an alternative “means

of self-promotion” through the imprimatur—a unique “stylistic stamp” embedded within the text and designed to resist “the reified personality of the ‘real-life’ author” (20). Glass argues that authors such as Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway manipulated the genre of authorial autobiography to project “masculine” public personae that could exist “simultaneously within and against the feminized cultural marketplace” (18). Building on Jaffe’s work, Goldman looks to Oscar Wilde as the point of origin for a modernist model of literary celebrity. He maintains that authors such as James Joyce promoted themselves through a process of negation—by calling attention to the lack of authorial presence in the text—in order to disrupt the idea of a single, self-contained, and accessible subject on which celebrity was based (61-63). By the mid-twentieth century, the world of literary celebrity seems to collide with the constellation of stars in film, television, and politics. Figures such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, and Gore Vidal all engaged with celebrity and the moving image—to varying degrees and with varying levels of skepticism—adapting their works into feature films and circulating widely in pop culture networks of renown (Pugh 19-33; Voss 22-45; Moran 69-83, 100-114; Altman 17-28).

Comparing Victorian and twentieth-century iterations of literary celebrity raises questions about how transformations in the media of communication affect our understanding of renown in both literary and popular culture. As Luckhurst and Moody have pointed out, for instance, defining celebrity in terms of public intimacy overlooks how changes in media and context alter the relation between audience and individual. “In live performance,” they write, “the nature of proximity is experienced and mediated in different ways.” As such, theatrical celebrity differs from film celebrity in that it relies on “the uniqueness of the occasion and the impossibility of its reproduction” for its power (3-4). A similar question might be raised about

the limitations and/or applications of public intimacy when celebrity is mediated by the printed image as opposed to the moving image. This could shed some light on the blurred boundaries between the use of the terms “star” and “celebrity.” If, as I have suggested, there is something fundamental about the link between the printed image and the emergence of the word *celebrity*, then what might be said about the relation between theatrical performance, the moving image, and the term *star*?

As mentioned briefly in chapter one, use of the word *star* to refer to “an actor, singer, etc. of exceptional celebrity, or one whose name is prominently advertised as a special attraction to the public” (“Star” 5a) appears as early as the late-seventeenth century. By the early-1820s, this usage had become commonplace, as had its verb form, though the latter was still used almost exclusively with respect to live performers such as actors or singers: *star* meant “to appear as a ‘star,’ perform the leading part; to make a tour in the provinces as a ‘star’ of a dramatic company” (“Star” 8a). In this sense, the verb *star* alludes to the economic necessity of travelling theatre companies to drum up interest in their productions (Luckhurst and Moody 7). The applications of the verb *star* widened by mid-century to describe “any notable or distinguished personage when appearing in public,” though such usages were often “jocular” in nature—perhaps presaging the Boorstinian idea that anyone could *star* in the public performance of his/her own life without being “known for” any particular achievement (“Star” 8b). With this brief semantic history in view, it would seem that the link between *star* and the moving image may be related less to the medium of film itself and more to the kind of embodied movement that characterizes performance more broadly.

Most importantly, while the definition of *star* as a noun does suggest a kind of hierarchy—the star being someone of “exceptional celebrity”—it also points to the

intertextuality inherent in both. What makes a *star* a *star* is the fact that he/she is “prominently advertised as a special attraction,” and such advertising occurs within and across other media—reviews in illustrated newspapers or magazines, posters featuring photographs of the actor, spots on television talk shows promoting the movie, play, song, or book. Famous stage performers of the nineteenth century—Sara Bernhardt being perhaps the best example—became stars not only because they were seen live, but because they appeared in all kinds of other media as well. The same applies for the emergence of stars in early-twentieth century film: their performances in motion pictures were complemented, and complicated, by their simultaneous appearance in trade magazine features. Examining celebrity and public intimacy with respect to live performance or the printed image or the moving image is no doubt useful and important work. But it can also perpetuate the illusion that each of these media function independently of one another; the celebrity always stands in a multi-mediated relation to his/her audience.

No matter the period or medium in question, historical studies of literary celebrity always invite comparison to contemporary literary celebrity: how does what we observe now differ from and/or resonate with manifestations of literary celebrity in the past? Joe Moran is right to argue that authors “do more than simply ‘reflect’ or ‘react’ to their celebrity in their work,” but he also speculates that “celebrity is becoming an increasingly significant part of literary culture” in Britain as well as in the United States. Reflecting on what he calls the “Americanization” of the “British book market” in the 1990s, he follows critic Richard Todd in claiming that British readers now “live in a ‘meet the author’ culture” (149-150, 154). With book signings, literary festivals, and until recently, interviews with authors on *Oprah*, it would seem some elements of Victorian literary celebrity continue today. Whether rooted in “desire” or some other impulse, the intrigue of seeing a literary celebrity “in the flesh” persists: authors such as Neil Gaiman,

Stephen King, and Margaret Atwood continue to draw crowds for book signings and fill concert halls for readings or lecture tours.

Aside from the enduring popularity of meeting the author in person, literary celebrities continue to circulate in popular culture, both courting and rejecting media attention. The most incredible examples in recent years have been authors of young adult literature, specifically John Green and J.K. Rowling. Perhaps best known for his 2012 novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and its adaptation into a feature film, Green's readers have "visual access" to him on a daily basis via the three YouTube channels he hosts: "CrashCourse," an educational series for high schoolers; "Vlogbrothers," a video blog featuring the exploits of Green and his brother, Hank; and a series of digital content for *Mental Floss* magazine. "Vlogbrothers" alone has nearly three million subscribers, and its own unique fan following—the self-proclaimed "Nerdfighters" (Talbot 60-72). Though Rowling's celebrity is arguably greater than Green's, her attitude towards media attention falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. While she has made appearances on the red carpet at *Harry Potter* movie premieres and at the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics in London, she has also been notoriously tight-lipped about her personal history and private life (Parker 52-63). The attention Rowling has received from the press and paparazzi exceeds even Tennysonian levels, and in a 2011 inquiry into British media ethics, she testified that she had been driven from her home by photographers and reporters who had harassed her and her children, journalists even going so far as placing notes in her five-year old daughter's school bag (Parker 52-63; Halliday and O'Carroll).

The figure of the author-recluse—conspicuous for his/her inconspicuousness—is nothing new for literary celebrities, but it does seem somewhat more common in contemporary culture. In his reading of Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991), Moran suggests that the fate of the novel's



protagonist author, Bill Gray, gestures towards the idea “that an all-consuming culture of publicity has simply packaged and marketed the author-recluse for consumption like other kinds of celebrity” (124). Despite, or rather because of, his exceptional reclusiveness, critically-acclaimed author Thomas Pynchon has become a literary celebrity, and his forty years of media silence have, in many ways, been “packaged and marketed...for consumption” in popular culture. In 2004, for instance, Pynchon “appeared” as himself on two episodes of *The Simpsons*—“Diatribes of a Mad Housewife” and “All’s Fair in Oven War.” The author lent his own voice to the character, but not his face—in both episodes, he was drawn wearing a brown paper sack with a question mark on it over his head. Pynchon caused another stir in 2014, when speculation arose that he would have a cameo in the film adaptation of his 2009 novel, *Inherent Vice*. In the promotional tour leading up to the film’s release, director Paul Thomas Anderson and star Josh Brolin alluded to the possibility of an appearance by Pynchon. But since the last photograph of the author had been taken in 1955, audiences could only pore over still frames and take their best guess (Daly).

Loren Glass, however, takes DeLillo and *Mao II* as evidence that “the rise of postmodernity...has witnessed a greatly diminished interest in the personal lives and styles of literary figures.” “DeLillo may be a minor celebrity,” he writes, “but readers and critics alike are generally uninterested in his private experience....A biography of him is unlikely to be written, and if one is, it is unlikely to be popular” (198). What characterizes the literary celebrity of the twentieth century, for Glass, is not so much the author’s visibility in popular culture, but the audience’s interest in his/her private life—and, as he claims, the “bohemia that nourished the literary personalities of the early and mid-twentieth century no longer exist,” or if they do, they do so only through the author’s afterlife in biography and pop culture. Given this, Glass

concludes by arguing that “literary celebrity as a historically specific articulation of the dialectical tension between modern consciousness and public subjectivity persists only as a residual model of authorship. It no longer commands the cultural authority it did in the modern era; and it never will again” (200).

In many ways, both Glass’ and Moran’s arguments ring true: the trajectory of Victorian to modernist to contemporary literary celebrity may be arcing downward rather than upward, yet images of literary celebrities seem more ubiquitous than ever before. The feature that I have argued defined Victorian literary celebrity—the mass (re)production and circulation of printed images of the author—has become standard practice in today’s publishing industry, diluting the novelty that accompanied seeing the author in the days of Dickens, Tennyson, and Wilde: authors’ photos appear on book jackets and covers, on promotional posters and in magazines, on authors’ personal websites, Amazon, and Wikipedia. Digital and printed images of the author have become so commonplace they seem almost invisible. Perhaps the question is not one of quantity, then, but of location: how has the position of the author’s image changed with respect to the text? As Gerard Curtis points out, the “dramatic rise in the use of frontispiece portraits” in the Victorian era signaled a kind of reading practice that privileged the “connection between fiction, a non-fictive voice, and the real world.” Many readers believed that the “non-fictive face” of the author “offered insights into the fictive world” of the text. Curtis goes on to note that “the tradition of the frontispiece itself lasted well into the 1920s, when the author’s face was moved to the dust jacket of the book, subordinate to blurbs, or effaced altogether.” “This shift from the frontispiece,” he argues, “points to a conceptual change in the separation of narrative voice from authorial presence” (134-5). In Curtis’ observation, the changing position of the author’s image in the 1920s is a physical manifestation of the turn away from biographical

criticism, anticipating something like Barthes' "death of the author" in the latter twentieth century. Now, it seems the author's image can circulate in literary and popular culture without ever coming into contact with the text itself.

Ultimately, the printed image of the author does not play the same important role it once did in the construction and negotiation of literary celebrity. Rather, to borrow Glass' phrasing, Victorian literary celebrity might be seen as its own "historically specific articulation" of the cultural "tensions" of the time—tensions over the author's place in emerging conceptions of "culture," both highbrow and popular; over the function of the printed image in negotiating the growing distance between individual and public; over the rewards, limitations, and dangers of "too much" intimacy in the public sphere. Seen in this way, the pertinent question to ask is not so much how we see traces of Victorian literary celerity in contemporary culture, but what contemporary manifestations of literary celebrity—whether on YouTube or *The Simpsons*—can tell us about the cultural tensions of the current moment.

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