

Editorial

Páraic Finnerty and Mark Frost (Guest Editors)

On 4 June 1869, a year after dining merrily with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Charles Eliot Norton in Paris, John Ruskin records the following in his diary:

VERONA. – As I was drawing in the square this morning in a lovely, quiet Italian light, there came up the poet Longfellow with his little daughter, a girl of twelve or thirteen, with springy-curved flaxen hair – curls or waves, that wouldn't come out in damp, I mean. They stayed talking beside me some time. I don't think it was a very vain thought that came over me, that if a photograph could have been taken of the beautiful square of Verona, in that soft light, with Longfellow and his daughter talking to me at my work, some people in England and America would have liked copies of it.¹

The specificity of this chance meeting between the great Victorian sage and the acclaimed American poet taps into many of the themes explored by the contributors to this special issue. In particular, the diary entry underlines the significance of encounters with or between celebrities in nineteenth-century Europe for the parties involved, but also for a larger audience, and implies that textual or visual commemorations of such meetings have a value that make them worthy of both international circulation and commodification. The proposed photograph would provide Ruskin's and Longfellow's admirers with a permanent record of a fleeting, unexpected encounter between these distinguished men, but also indicates Ruskin's consciousness that he, like Longfellow, was an internationally recognizable, much-discussed, mass-mediated figure, whose private life and activities garnered public interest and attention. Reversing the stereotype of the American tourist returning home with stories of seeing the sights of Europe and meeting its celebrities, Ruskin's account of meeting Longfellow in Verona underlines the fact that many of America's most famous figures came to Europe and were

treated as celebrities there. Accordingly, in this special issue scholars from Britain, America, and Australia examine European interactions between British and American celebrities, and between famous Americans and their British admirers, in order to address a deficiency in current scholarship on nineteenth-century celebrity that has been primarily nation-based in its approach.² In using celebrity encounters as a starting point, each of the articles builds in different ways on recent seminal work on celebrity, particularly Nicholas Dames' 2001 article 'Brushes with Fame: Thackeray and the Work of Celebrity' and Richard Salmon's 2013 monograph on celebrity and nineteenth-century authorship.³

In the first article in the issue, John Morton concentrates on Longfellow's encounters with Tennyson and his British admirers during the American poet's visits to Britain in 1868–69. Longfellow is seen as both a source of celebrity adulation – he was at the time America's most prominent and beloved poet, sought after by a legion of fans on both sides of the Atlantic, and someone who in his correspondence, travels, and poetry cultivated an amiable, often intimate relationship with admirers – and as a seeker of celebrity encounters, most notably with his chief British counterpart, Tennyson, whose fame eclipsed even Longfellow's. The second contributor, Páraic Finnerty, focuses on the manner in which Henry James repeatedly draws on the realities of such celebrity encounters in his representations of Americans in Europe in *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1877). In these early novels, James's Americans in Europe become or are figures of public recognition – lions, notables, and celebrities – and he explores their encounters with each other and with a range of Europeans. Drawing on the imagery of artistry, theatricality, and statuary, James's texts highlight connections between contemporary mass-mediated, commercialized celebrity and older forms of ritualistic and ceremonial aristocratic renown, and underline associations of publicity-based public fame with social mobility and self-determination, but also with social invasiveness and self-division.

Whereas Finnerty's article focuses on fictionalized celebrity encounters within novels that predate James's own fame, Jennifer McDonnell's article centres on the literary repercussions of James's first encounter, in early 1877, with Robert Browning, a poet James had long admired, who was known for the difficulty of his verse, and who was by then internationally acclaimed alongside Tennyson as the greatest British poet of the Victorian period. The encounter led to

James's initial formulation, subsequent fictionalization, and ongoing critical exploration of the idea that there are 'two Brownings': a private, esoteric, unknowable, genius poet and a worldly, sociable, and exoteric public figure. Drawing provocative parallels between Browning's and James's works, McDonnell suggests that the motif of authorial doubleness responds to and attempts to counteract the realities of a culture of publicity in which distinctions between private and public were being constantly eradicated, while also challenging the legitimacy of celebrity culture's promotion of the scrutiny and commodification of the author's life rather than a real engagement with the complexity of his or her works. While McDonnell's article focuses on the effects of an actual encounter between celebrities, Mark Frost's explores the consequences for a working-class intellectual, William Harrison Riley, of his attempts in the late 1870s to broker an epistolary relationship between two seemingly very different figures whose shared commitment to the working classes inspired his devotion and admiration: Ruskin and Walt Whitman. Drawing on their apparent affiliation, Riley asks Ruskin to use his cultural authority to raise Whitman's profile in Britain, seeing his part in such a literary coup as a way of forging a personal relationship with the American poet. Frost shows the personal and economic costs of Riley's endeavours that expose rather than unsettle (as Riley hoped they would) hierarchies within celebrity-fan and prophet-disciple relationships, and show both the dangers for admirers of entering or seeking to enter their idol's circle and the ways in which celebrity culture can reflect and reinforce deeper social divisions.

The 1884 inclusion of Longfellow as the only non-Briton in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner reflects the power and significance of Longfellow's reception in Britain and his actual and textual encounters with British admirers that Morton's article examines. This event provides the principal focus of David Haven Blake's article, and a means to explore the manner in which Longfellow's celebrity was represented and mediated on both sides of the Atlantic. Like Morton, Blake considers the way in which Longfellow's considerable nineteenth-century celebrity was ultimately short-lived, but also turns to the key issue of the monumentalization and commodification of celebrity. Blake skilfully demonstrates the ways in which the campaign to include Longfellow at Poets' Corner engaged with celebrity culture in various ways, not least in terms of the naked self-promotion of many of those involved,

but also in terms of the ways in which the campaign reflected ongoing conflicts and tensions between the idea of a national literature and notions of cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and investment in theories of Anglo-Saxon racial connections between Britain and America, on the other. Touching on similar cultural themes and ongoing debates, the final article in this collection, by Rod Rosenquist, explores Ford Madox Ford's charting in his memoir *Return to Yesterday* (1931) of changing literary relations and reputations in late nineteenth-century Britain that herald the emergence of a more transatlantic concept of English literature that would culminate in a Modernist emphasis on internationalism. The article examines Ford's hand-drawn map of the southern coast of England surrounding Romney Marsh in 1895 which functions as a 'star map' and a diagram of battle lines recording real or textual encounters, rivalries, and conflicts between stalwart British literary celebrities, such as Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, and Rudyard Kipling, and famous American expatriates such as Henry James, Stephen Crane, and W.H. Hudson, and their 'alien' allies Ford and Joseph Conrad. Like Morton's and McDonnell's articles, Rosenquist's underlines the relationship between celebrity culture and generational literary conflict and the inevitable cycles of celebrity and lionism – what Richard Salmon terms 'the fungible status of modern authors', in which 'each successive "lion" replac[es] the temporary renown of [a] predecessor'.⁴ Moreover, this final article, like the other articles in this special issue, underlines the importance of viewing the making and unmaking of nineteenth-century literary reputations, the complex relationships between celebrities and their admirers, and the nuances of authors' responses to and engagements with celebrity culture from a transatlantic perspective.

Notes

1. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds, *The Library Edition of John Ruskin's Works*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–12), 19. liv.

2. For exceptions to this general trend, see Brenda R. Weber, *Women and Literary Celebrity in the Nineteenth Century: The Transatlantic Production of Fame and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012) and the essays in Beth Lynne Lueck, Brigitte Bailey, and Lucinda L. Damon-Bach, eds, *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain* (Lebanon: University of New Hampshire, 2012).

3. Nicholas Dames, 'Brushes with Fame: Thackeray and the Work of Celebrity', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56, 1 (2001), 23–51; Richard Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
4. Salmon, *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession*, 27.