

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head" *In Memoriam* and the Complexity of Memory

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Lord Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A. H. H.* is, one feels safe to say, a poem of memory. For rarely has the memory of a friend been given such an illustrious, elevated poetical treatment. Yet the question remains: how is the poem "of" or "in" memory? And is the poem really *about* its propounded subject, Arthur Hallam, at all? Although the initial premise of *In Memoriam* seems simple enough, a closer reading of how recollection works in the text reveals considerable complexity in its dealings with memory.

To a large extent, Tennyson himself neglected such questions. Although a poet prodigiously interested in memory, he seems resistant to pursue its ravel beyond a certain point. Melancholy recollections hold many of his speakers in a spell – a spell which it often seems the poems themselves are unable to sufficiently contextualise or dispel. Although overly irreverent, perhaps Auden's mocking evaluation of his Victorian predecessor can be of help here. Tennyson, he famously wrote, "had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; he was also undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else that he did" (Auden 1946: x). Although stupidity surely does not come into it – that epithet being more revealing of Auden's characteristically supercilious wit than of his extremely knowledgeable subject – there is some point to this estimate. Making extensive use of the various intertexts (both biographical and poetical) of *In Memoriam*, this paper will try to hone in on how the anti-intellectual view of Tennyson and his poem – propounded not only by Auden, but also many other scholars – is simultaneously belied and confirmed by the poet's dealings with the activity of memory. Tennyson may not be the most explicitly philosophical of poets, but he is rarely *simple*, and it is the problem of recollection itself that can most decisively help us to revise our common memories of the bard.

It might be granted that there is a resistance to thought, of sorts, in Tennyson's obsession with all things gone by. Of course this is implicit

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

already in 1831 when Arthur Hallam, writing to Tennyson, says he is "not without knowledge and experience of your passion for the past" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: I, 81). Now a passion is something more than a mere interest, but also something rather different to a reflection. Tennyson's poetry seems to frequently be beset by memories, implicitly recalling the Latin root of the word passion: *patior*, meaning "to suffer." His protagonists suffer their memories, having no other choice than to be inundated by the compelling evidence of the past. Part of the reason for this passivity lies in the fact that memory is here understood to be the very element of thought and action, rather than a limited faculty one can make use of at will. At one point Tennyson writes of how the dead will have access to the "eternal landscape of the past" (xlvi, 8)¹: all their past experiences will be laid out before them, presumably as well-organised and accessible as all the varied features of nature's scenery in a picturesque painting by Claude or Poussin. Even if the temporal experience of the living is different, for them too the past does not simply pass away. Tennyson is close to Antonio Negri's claim that the past is "eternal," since it is "indeed the power of accumulated life, of an irreversible and indestructible temporality" (Negri 2003: 165). The poet's general unwillingness to *forget* Hallam, even if he is removed from him by the inevitable distancing of mourning, is a form of non-transcendental evidence of the indestructibility of the past.

Nevertheless, even if the past does not vanish, it is not easy to grasp. Whatever may be said of the dead, the living cannot easily obtain an overview over times past. The speaker of *In Memoriam* may want his reminiscences of the dead to haunt the "memory like a cloudless air" (xciv, 11), but this is easier said than done. In section lxx of the poem, for instance, the speaker struggles at length with the "shadowy thoroughfares of thought" (lxx, 8) before finally managing to conjure up the features of Hallam's face. And even the pivotal experience of section xcv, where the reading of the friend's letters facilitates a mystical sense of communion, soon loses its immediacy: before long, we discover the speaker lamenting how hard it is "for intellect to reach / Through memory that which I became" (xcv, 48). Yet this does not mean that one is doomed to be a

¹ All quotations from *In Memoriam* will be supplied with references to the relevant section and line numbers of the poem. For all references to Tennyson's poetry, I have used the following edition of Tennyson's poems: *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, edited by Christopher Ricks. Harlow: Longman, 1969.

creature of the present. The past is continuously there, surrounding the present like a luminous halo, or like – to use Tennyson's own favourite image, rather than one of Woolf's – the sound of the sea. In one of the discarded fragments of the poem he uses another image: in the lines beginning "Are these the far-famed Victor Hours" he evokes as a piece of counter-evidence to the meaninglessness of the present what he calls "this wide whisper round my head" (line 11). At least part of this wide whisper is the mutterings of past: as in modern hermeneutics, the past of Tennyson's poetry is always impinging upon the present, always providing the *milieu* from which every act or reflection takes its bearings.

The differing titles

If the pervasiveness and ineluctability of the past is one of its more arresting features, one should not underestimate its complex richness, either. If *In Memoriam* deals with memory, it does so in an elusive and often seemingly self-contradictory way. The story of the poem's title makes this evident. As is well known, the published title was not the obvious choice it might seem to some of its readers in retrospect. During the poem's long, seventeen-year gestation, the author tried out various different titles, but not *In Memoriam* before the very end. "Elegies" was one of the alternatives used for the work in process, and according to the testimony of Aubrey de Vere, Tennyson also "once thought of entitling [the poem] 'Fragments of an Elegy'" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: I, 293). In the title "Fragments of an Elegy," two of the main themes of twentieth century criticism of the poem are faced head-on: the poem's close relation with the elegiac genre, and its somewhat piecemeal, certainly less than systematic, structure. Although the final version of *In Memoriam* indicates that its disjointed appearance is necessary – Sorrow dares not "trust a larger lay, / But rather loosens from the lip / Short swallow-flights of song" (xlvi, 13-15) – there has been much debate about exactly how independent the prologue, epilogue and 131 sections are of one other (see for instance Bishop 1970).

Another title used by the poet on more than one occasion was "The Way of the Soul."² The final title which the poem is known by today was in the final draft still merely the dedication, and was only later promoted

² *Memoirs*, I, note 2 on p. 393.

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

to its more elevated, final status. In the field of tension opened up by these three titles, we can glimpse three rather different ways of reading the poem. "Fragments of an Elegy" is rather defensive, both calling upon a venerable past and forestalling any criticism on the basis of the structural incoherence. The Latinate quality of the final choice still resonates with the classical past of Roman precursors such as Catullus, Ovid, and Propertius,³ yet removes any complete identification of genre and also shifts the emphasis away from the question of structural cohesion and over to the deceased "subject" of the poem. The structural strand reappears in "The Way of the Soul," where the "way" in question is surely that of the process of mourning. The poem itself arguably borrows structural unity from the ideal teleology of the soul, in an inversion of its famous pronouncement on how art itself grants the model of ordered progression: "I see in part / That all, as in some piece of art, / Is toil coöperant to an end" (cxxviii, 22-24).

Yet letting the rather abstract term "Soul" stand at the head of the poem radically shifts the attention away from Hallam, and nudges us far closer to Wordsworth's description of *The Prelude* as a poem on "the growth of my own mind" (Wordsworth 1979: 533), as well as Keats' description of earthly life as a "vale of Soul-making" (Keats 1958: 102). Tennyson often claimed that the speaker of the poem was a general subject, representing all of mankind rather than himself, and here it would seem that the development of that subject *per se* – rather than the individual Arthur Hallam – is the exclusive theme of the poem. "What know we greater than the soul" it is asked in the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (line 265), and here the greatness of this theme is in danger of overshadowing the promising but all-too-brief life of Tennyson's friend.

Of course, neither "The Way of the Soul" nor "Fragments of an Elegy" ever did make the printed page: both were banished to the critical paraphernalia of footnotes and biographies, rather than the finished version of the poem. Yet this does not mean that they do not make their weight felt, if only obliquely, within the text. Tennyson's poem is one that frequently asserts that it has hidden, unsaid depths, and any reading that is willing to take such pronouncements at face value must do more than resort to paraphrase or summaries of its surface themes. *In Memoriam* is a subtle web of textual and contextual memories, twisting in and out of sight

³ On the relationship between *In Memoriam* and Roman elegy, see Shatto and Shaw 1982: 26-32.

a variegated assembly of linked references and allusions. In what follows, the three strands suggested by the differing titles – strands which can be summarised as conflicts involving structure vs. fragmentation, generality vs. personality, and memory vs. forgetting – will give us our lead for the untangling of this web.

Day-dreaming, reading, dedicating

David Bromwich has noted how the "larger possibilities of invention" which concerned Kipling "emerge only if one reflects on more than a poem or a story at a time" (Bromwich 1989: 195). The same is arguably also true with regard to Tennyson. Productive intertextual dialogues can be made between *In Memoriam* and other texts of the poet, most obviously ones which were written at the same time as its first drafts (and which exist side by side with it in an early notebook) such as "Morte d'Arthur" and "Love thou thy Land, with Love Far-Brought."⁴ But the kind of genealogical myopia that sometimes takes over the bibliographical study of sources and influences should not deter one from looking further afield. A text is not, after all, a simple memory of one event or one occasion, but partakes in a veritable force field of recollective allusions – and this is true *in extremis* when the text in question has such a long and convoluted gestation as *In Memoriam*.

One of the less obvious, but perhaps most fruitful of intertexts for this poem is "The Day-Dream," published in 1842. *In Memoriam*'s openness to differing interpretations, as well as Tennyson's ultimate deference to the wishes of his wife on the question of the title, resonates with the express comments on the practice of interpretation proffered in this unusually self-conscious text. A rather whimsical rendering of the legend of the Sleeping Beauty, "The Day-Dream" both offers, retracts, and problematises various possible interpretations of itself. As in the poem on Hallam, the latter is a somewhat disjointed, almost fragmentary affair. Early on, the speaker admonishes his listener, Lady Flora, to not "look what too-earnest eye – / The rhymes are dazzled from their place, / And ordered words asunder fly" ("Prologue," lines 18-20). Of "The Day-Dream"'s nine subsections, the last three – "Moral," "L'Envoi," and

⁴ See the notebook in the property of Trinity College, Cambridge, the Trinity MS 0.15.17. I am grateful to Trinity College for allowing me to inspect both this text and the Trinity MS 0.15.13.

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

"Epilogue" – all address the vexed question of the poem's message. The first of these disclaims fixing the poem within any one semantic pigeonhole: "'twere to cramp its use, if I should hook it to some useful end" ("Moral," 15-16). The poem goes on to register some outward pressure in this matter, however, as the speaker notes Lady Flora's unwillingness to make do with a poem devoid of a moral: "You shake your head. A random string / Your finer female sense offends" ("L'Envoi," 1-2). After this, a determinate meaning is both propounded and retracted. In "L'Envoi," the speaker rather half-heartedly locates a meaning in the beauty of Lady Flora and in hopes for a transformation "to some brighter world" ("L'Envoi," 40). In the epilogue, though, the poem returns to indeterminacy, and again identifies the mere possibility of meaning as resting upon its listener:

So, Lady Flora, take my lay,
And, if you find a meaning there,
O whisper to your glass, and say,
'What wonder, if he thinks me fair?' ("Epilogue," 1-4)

The indeterminacy of the beautiful, a mainstay of post-Kantian aesthetics, here seems to undermine the very possibility of extracting a significant meaning from the work of art. Even if the reader, embodied in Lady Flora, may feel impelled to act like a phenomenological subject *à la* Wolfgang Iser (cf. Iser 1978) – one which is compelled to make a unified reading of the poem – "A Day-Dream" will not let him or her do so without being aware of the arbitrariness such a procedure.

Although *In Memoriam* is a considerably less light-hearted affair than "A Day-Dream," it is inhabited by a similarly fragmented quarry of meaning. These poems also share a directedness towards the reader, who has to make the final word on interpretive questions. Tennyson's wife, Emily, famously had some influence on the choice of *In Memoriam* as the title of the poem, acting almost like a discrete Lady Flora behind the scenes (cf. Thwaite 1996: 191). In section lxxv, this bestowal of interpretive responsibility is anticipated by the manner in which the speaker places himself in the hands of Hallam: "Sweet soul do with me as thou wilt" (lxxv, 1). The kind of mutual influencing described by the poem with regard to the relations with Hallam, also figures the give and take of the creative

process, where both writer and reader contribute to the making of the artistic experience.

The opening up of *In Memoriam* to the force of the reader is partially evident in the final title of the poem. By making the title identical to the dedication of the poem, the textual corpus is folded towards its own outside. Tennyson skews the normal communicative situation, transforming it into a more unconventional and unpredictable operation. While a dedication can name the ideal addressee of a poem, or some important cause or catalyst in its production, a title does so less frequently. By invoking Hallam in the title of the poem, theme, cause and addressee are all equated. While this partially entails a sublimating homogenisation, where the complexity of the work is reined in by one, unified focus, it also simultaneously warps *In Memoriam* from within. For the name Arthur Hallam does not refer to a simple presence or plenitude of being – it is also, of course, a sign evoking death and ephemerality. "Hallam" marks a place of passing away. The relevance of this sign of absence to the intended audience of the poem is made evident in section lxxvii, where the speaker laments the finitude of verse:

What hope is here for modern rhyme
To him, who turns a musing eye
On songs, and deeds, and lives, that lie
Foreshorten'd in the tract of time? (lxxvii, 1-4)

Tennyson's endeavour is "darken'd" (lxxvii, 13) with the feeling that one day his poem will be without any readership. Hence the traditional humanistic afterlife, so important to Shakespeare's sonnets (a strong influence on *In Memoriam*), where survival is bestowed through literary fame, seems foreclosed. Although the poem is open to a reader, the place of that reader is at least partially absent. Certainly if Hallam is not only the theme and cause of the poem, but also its ideal reader, then this is a poem which really only can be read by the dead. Yet there is consolation to be found, even given such dispiriting circumstances: "To breathe my loss is more than fame, / To utter love more sweet than praise" (lxxvii, 15-16). Without any real reader, Tennyson can least aim to please himself. In time, though, he will also come to please others, for behind the scenes gradually repeated acts of memory are propelling the speaker out of his melancholy haven of solitude.

Textual dismemberment

In a recent reading of *In Memoriam*, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has detected a narrative of development through retrospection, whereby the self-remembering of the poem can be interpreted benignly as a process of maturation "creating the sound of a mind raising its past, and itself on that past" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2002: 252). Certainly such a reading would tie in nicely with *In Memoriam*'s own organic paradigm, where the speaker's resurfacing from his grief is a natural process which reaps "what fruit may be / Of sorrow under human skies" (cviii, 13-14). Yet a somewhat different, perhaps less credulous, interpretation is also available, if one takes into account the sacrifices and deprivations inherent in all progression.

In the nine fragments excluded from the poem, all written according to the same verse form as the rest of *In Memoriam*, one can trace something of this ambivalence. These fragments are the dross of Tennyson's work of mourning, utterances of an abstract negativity which could not be completely assimilated by the published version. In them, the body of *In Memoriam* is stretched to a breaking point, to a prosthetic site where it is hard to separate an *oeuvre*'s amputations and abortions – the "indigestions of the brain"⁵ – from its vital, living limbs. They might even be said to represent the corpse of the poem: for a poem about death and mourning, *In Memoriam* is strikingly silent about the materiality of the corpse. It is as if the traditional taboo against touching the corpse is here transformed into a verbal interdiction: the poet shall not dwell upon the singular impersonality and haunting liminality of the corpse; he shall not even deign to mention it. Angela Leighton has made us aware of how ambiguous and virtual the poem's repeated references to the hand of Hallam are (cf. Leighton 2001), yet the fact remains that those references remain obfuscations before the cadavre and the way in which "the corpse appears in the strangeness of its solitude as that which has disdainfully withdrawn from us" (Blanchot 1982: 257). The poem has replaced the strange leadenness of dead limbs with virtualised familiarity.

The following discarded fragment can bring this process of denial into clearer focus:

⁵ Excluded fragment no. viii ("He was too good and kind and sweet"), line 8.

Let Death and Memory keep the face
Of three and twenty summers, fair.
I see it and no grief is there,
Nor time can wrong the youthful grace.

I see it and I scarce repine.
I hear the voice that held me fast.
The voice is pleasant in the past,
It speaks to me of me and mine.

The face is bright, the lips are bland,
He smiles upon me eye to eye,
And in my thoughts with scarce a sigh
I take the pressure of his hand.

Here the look "eye to eye" in the final stanza may lead one to think of Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura, which strongly privileges a community of glances, a form of ocular sociality. But for Tennyson it is the following reference to "the pressure of his hand" that bears the brunt of the verse's emotional investment, giving tactility a characteristic pride of place. As Christopher Ricks' notes point out, this fragment was plundered for two different sections of the final version of *In Memoriam*. Lines 7-8 were transformed into the following: "And that dear voice, I once have known, / Still speak to me of me and mine" (cxvi, 11-12). The final four lines crop up elsewhere, as "And bless thee, for thy lips are bland, / And bright the friendship of thine eye; / And in my thoughts with scarce a sigh / I take the pressure of thine hand" (cxix, 9-12). The references to the bright face, the smile, as well as the intensity of the mirroring "eye to eye" are thus gone. More generally, the published fragments fail to recover the way in which this fragment travels across the length and breadth of Hallam's body, creating a veritable catalogue of sensuous immediacy. Yet it *is* a fragmentary catalogue; more a fetishistic roll call of bodily impressions than an evocation of a unified totality. Severing the links of this body, the writing of *In Memoriam* can be said to register a veritable recoil from the incompleteness of the disorganised body. Arguably, it is precisely the very disjointedness of this fragment that causes it to splinter the organic unity

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

of the work of art where "all [...] / Is toil cōoperant to an end" (cxxxviii, 23-24). Where some parts are splintered or discarded, the sense that all contributes to the whole is at best an inexplicable faith, at worst misguided and misguiding illusion.

The question of *In Memoriam's* structure, or the lack thereof, has a far from negligible bearing on the question of memory's role in the poem. For in many ways this is a poem fragmented by memory: its disjointedness stems from the very diversity of its embodied memories. This is a feature which it shares with Tennyson's preceding long poem, *The Princess*, published in 1847. *The Princess* is a poem notoriously diverse, spanning many different moods and registers. Not only does it consist of different narrations, thus constituting – as its subtitle also insists – a medley. In addition, there is the heterogeneity of the framing narrative, set in the gardens of Sir Walter Vivian, and the interspersed songs. The songs were a late addition, and were meant to solder the poem into a more unified whole. Arguably, they have had quite the opposite effect, as later anthologies are often wont to feature songs such as "Tears, idle tears" and "Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height" completely severed from the surrounding poem: these verses thus seem to function as detachable units, originally welded to a larger whole but now primarily remembered as independent lyrical utterances.

Their status is additionally complicated by the fact that they are themselves carriers of memories. "The splendour falls on castle walls," or (as it also is known) the bugle song, is famously linked with Tennyson's sightseeing experience of Killarney, a fact that was so well known that it considerably boosted the tourist industry at this Irish lake. The landscape painted in "Come down, O maid," for its part, was said by Hallam Tennyson to be "written in Switzerland (chiefly at Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald), and descriptive of the waste Alpine heights and gorges, and of the sweet, valleys below" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: I, 252). A more complex process of remembering is linked with "Tears, idle tears," which Tennyson admitted writing close to Tintern Abbey – a place which not only resonates of Wordsworth's own act of poetical remembering, but also of Hallam, who was buried in nearby Clevedon.

In all such cases, the songs function not only as elements of a larger whole, but also as both memorable in their own right *and* significantly linked to one or more personal memories heterogeneous to the plot of *The Princess*. Not only is "Tears, idle tears" a poem in its own right, but due to its allusion to Hallam it also forges a subterranean mnemonic link between

the larger bodies of *The Princess* and *In Memoriam*. In *The Princess*, Tennyson elegantly compares living poetry, the kind of verse which survives in the memory of its audience, with "jewels five-words-long / That on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time / Sparkle forever" (*The Princess*, ii, 355-357). Exemplifying what it pronounces, this fragment implicitly figures memory as a something of a dis severing force, or even as something of an elusive jewellery thief: memory does not reconfigure a whole – it does not construct a palace – but rather a small, detachable gem. It wheels and deals with the surface ornaments of the edifice, neglecting both the heart and the deep-seated skeleton of the matter as it sees fit.

It would, however, be overstating matters to claim that memory's "jewels five-words-long" completely disfigure the poetical work. However available or memorable biographical anecdote may be, it does not necessarily constitute the pure essence of any literary work. Tennyson's own vexed relationship to biography exemplifies this truism. Hallam's memoirs of his father are replete with irritated jibes aimed at those who would reduce poetry to a mere imitation of given facts. "Why," Tennyson is cited as asking at one point, "do they give a poet no credit for imagination? The power of poetical creation seems to be utterly ignored now. This modern realism is hateful, and destroys all poetry. No man with an imagination can be tied down for his ideal" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: II, 423).

At the same time, Hallam's memoirs are the richest source of all for those who want to give links between poetry and biography some form of credence. The imagination's credit is not without limits, it evidently does have its debts to the real. Thus we are told that a simile about a hearth, in the "Balin and Balan" section of *Idylls of the King*, "was suggested by what he often saw from his own study at Aldworth" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: II, 319). Numerous similar references are given to the passing sights and sounds Tennyson experienced at different locations, and particularly on the beaches of the Isle of Wight. Hallam's biographical project is itself an attempt to control and direct the biographical seepage of the poems, neglecting for instance worrying details about Tennyson's childhood and family, circumscribing the life narrative within the boundaries of what he understands to be his father's relevant legacy. While *In Memoriam* covertly suggests that Hallam might have been the critical complement to Tennyson's poetical genius, a kind of Coleridge to his Wordsworth, the whole project of the *Memoirs* is an act that not so much sets the house of Tennyson's poetry in order, as it tidies up and fences in its surrounding biographical landscape.

This is surely not exclusively a case of damage limitation, though. The inclusion, by Tennyson's son, of a number of personal anecdotes and data opens up a rich contextual field for the poems. Tennyson's poems can from then on be said to *allude* to biographical fact, heavy from their pregnant load of memories, just as much as they resonate with echoes of literary forebears such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Milton.

The space of mourning

The use of Arthur Hallam in *In Memoriam* is too explicit to function as mere allusion, but nevertheless the references to his identity have a peculiar logic of their own. We have already touched upon the way in which the contrast between the titles *In Memoriam A. H. H.* and *The Way of the Soul* shows different interpretive possibilities which coexist at the heart of the poem. Thus when the poem hardly mentions Hallam's name, and in the end subsumes him as both part of a spiritual universe and as a quasi-Christ figure, these are gestures which resonate with the erased title: soul is, as it were, getting the upper hand. This particular forgetting of Hallam is thematised, and thus remembered, within the text itself. The speaker remembers that he is forgetting his friend, which of course is something quite other than letting him slip his mind completely.

The paradox of a kind of forgetful memory relates to the entirety of *In Memoriam*. This is not to say that the poem involves a light-hearted dealing with its weighty subject. Quite to the contrary, it does not neglect the "sense of duty" Tennyson believed to be inherent in literature, a duty "not only to the living and the unborn, but also, in a very marked degree, to the dead" (Tennyson, Hallam T. 1897: II, 203). Yet this duty involves one in a complex double bind: the best way to remember Hallam, one might say, is to forget him. Indeed the speaker does try to imagine how Hallam would react to grief, and finds a precedent – and some solace – in his belief that he would not overdo it. A temperate form of forgetting thus shows that one's mourning is not self-indulgent, that one is getting to grips with the matters at hand. As Princess Ida says, after having "Tears, Idle Tears" sung to her, there are times one must let "the past be the past" and "let old by-gones be," since all hinges on the fulfilment of Millennial harmony: "all things serve their time / Toward that great year of equal might and rights."⁶ Seizing not only the moment but also the past entails

⁶ *The Princess*, section IV, lines 58, 51, and 55-56.

an act of organisation, of structuring experience, and even here Tennyson has Hallam as his own exemplar: he admires his old friend for how he "large elements in order brought" (cxii, 13). This is the kind of control that Tennyson must find within himself in the writing of *In Memoriam*, for how else can he avoid becoming

that delirious man
Whose fancy fuses old and new,
And flashes into false and true,
And mingles all without a plan? (xvi, 17-20)

Thus when Tennyson tries to organise his long, elegiac poem into more than stray fragments, he is allowing his own "imitative will" (cx, 20) be spurred by his old friend. There is, however, the danger the resulting edifice will hardly bear any legible inscription in memory of Hallam. If one wanders further down the well-travelled highways of biography, there is also the obvious fact that the poem seems in some respects to be a monument which *replaces* that of Hallam's own gravestone.

As is well known, Tennyson neither attended his friend's funeral nor managed to respond to Hallam's father's request for a biographical contribution to the publishing of his son's literary remains.⁷ The eighteen years passed in between Hallam's death and the publishing of *In Memoriam* makes the poem twice as belated as Spenser's mourning of Sidney in "Astrophel," another famously delayed act of poetical mourning. In light of his extreme hesitation with publishing it, one might see the text as constituting a kind of substitute fetish, or relic, creating a sense of presence of one particular past person. As Edward S. Casey has pointed out, it is a common activity to "commemorate [...] by *remembering through* specific commemorative vehicles such as rituals or texts – or any other available *commemorabilia*" (Casey 2000: 218). Certainly *In Memoriam* contains within itself several references to various objects functioning as such vehicles. Timothy Peltason has justly remarked upon how the memory of Hallam does not "do its work unaided in the poem," but is triggered by relevant objects such as "landscapes, houses, and significant

⁷ Michael Thorn speculates that "Tennyson refused to attend the funeral because he wanted to preserve his private reaction to Hallam's death, already knowing perhaps that it would bear creative fruit" (Thorn 1992: 128).

places, [as well as] his letters" (Peltason 1985: 15). Yet one should not forget the poem itself: Tennyson's manuscripts are material objects, comparable, say, to the drawing of Hallam by one of the Sellwood sisters which he always kept by his side. By holding on to them for so long, he was not merely evincing shyness, or how a combination of critical denigration and oversensitivity contributed to a withdrawal from the literary scene, but also holding on to and prolonging the ritualised presence of Hallam.

In a way, the poem can be read as functioning like Tennyson's own personal gravestone to his friend. For not only is *In Memoriam* intricately bound with the process of mourning, but it is also – at least in part – a spatial object, and one which Tennyson kept returning to in an extended process of working through his grief. But perhaps even a gravestone is a too modest image of the text's affective power: perhaps another aspect of the famously intense and thorough Victorian practices of mourning offers a better comparison. For the regimentation of space in Tennyson's sprawling poem makes its phenomenology of mourning more similar, in some ways, to that of an entire graveyard than just a single gravestone. The way in which the Victorians tried to give grief its pride of place in their elaborate graveyards (of which Highgate and Kensal Green are perhaps two of the most illustrious examples), yet still displace death's more unhealthy side-effects from the centres of their cities (by opting for more marginal and rural sites), loosely parallels the way in which Tennyson's poem both confronts and sublimates the speaker's sorrow. A more rigorous similarity can be gleaned from the fact that the initial drafts of *In Memoriam* reveal that the text was initially meant to be written in sections of a regular length. It is as if the poet was planning to map his grief in tidy, symmetrical plots of ground.

Thus the Trinity Notebook, containing some of the earliest drafts of the poem, starts off with what would become section 30 in the published version, which is then followed by numbers 9, 17, 18, and 31. All of the latter contain precisely *five stanzas* of the poem's characteristic quatrains, and numbers 17 and 18 are headed "II" and "III" respectively. Hence there is evidence that the earliest formal conception of the poem seems to have been of a section of short poems of the same length. This conception was quickly shattered by the subsequent poem, which is a version of section 85, which despite seeming to build on the same scheme, soon grows to become far longer than the preceding poems. Yet even this section may have been of five stanzas originally, with the remainder added

on later; a thesis which is supported by the fact that the subsequent section (number 28) is again five stanzas long.

If the poem was originally understood as a tidy, almost mathematical burying of the poet's friend, its geometry soon became more similar to that of an old, time-worn cemetery – the kind which the more rationally structured Victorian graveyards were meant to leave behind – overflowing with keepsakes of the dead and with the odd administrative building dotted around its landscape. The growth of *In Memoriam* is a mirror image of the kind of congestion that overtook the cemeteries of the day, as even the new and spacious private-enterprise cemeteries began to be filled up. James Stevens Curl claims that by the 1870s,

it had become apparent to many observers that the new hygienic cemeteries were bound to create difficulties as they, too, filled with bodies. There were growing murmurs about pollution of rivers, and the masses of human remains packed into London clay caused great concern. [...] Furthermore, the early [and characteristically Victorian] idea of cemeteries as landscaped parks with mausolea and monuments tastefully placed within them had failed as they had more and more memorials crammed into a limited space (Curl 2000: 176-177).

Similarly, Tennyson may have started out wanting to swiftly order his experience of death in a spatial schematics, but he soon found himself obeying death's own drawn-out and labyrinthine logic. While he once was Hallam's "partner in the flowery walk / Of letters" (lxxxiv, 22-23), the process of writing *In Memoriam* involved him in meandering peregrinations on obscure paths, amid tangled growths, outlined by the virtual body of his deceased friend.

Traces of Hallam

Tennyson's poem can be read as an act of compensation, the formation of a sprawling graveyard-like space of language where the poet could confront and explicate his own grief without letting go of his past. Yet it also tends towards being an act of substitution, replacing both Hallam and Somersby with an alternative, virtual site: this is illustrated by the fact that for many the name Arthur Hallam barely conjures up more than the words of Tennyson's poem. If we are tempted to act out the ritual of mourning

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

traced by *In Memoriam*, the speaker of the poem subtly desists from making the object of that mourning a specific, living human being:

I leave thy praises unexpress'd

In verse that brings myself relief,
And by the measure of my grief
I leave thy greatness to be guess'd;

What practice howsoe'er expert

In fitting aptest words to things,
Or voice the richest-toned that sings,
Hath power to give thee as thou wert?

I care not in these fading days

To raise a cry that lasts not long,
And round thee with the breeze of song
To stir a little dust of praise. (lxxv, 1-12)

This poem goes on to add that "here shall silence guard thy fame" (line 17), but unfortunately silence is a poor and innocuous guardian. These lines also risk implying that the speaker's own emotional "relief" is more important than even trying to express the "greatness" of the deceased. As Tennyson repeatedly alludes to Shakespeare's sonnets in *In Memoriam*, he well knows that occasionally a well-formulated "cry" does last long indeed, so long as to either fully or partially blot out the identity of the A. H. H.'s or W. H.'s of the world.

Perhaps this is the reason why silence is not left the sole guardian of Hallam's fame. In a remarkable *volte-face*, the speaker actually does get down to supplying something more than a mere shadow of Hallam's virtues (from section cix to cxiii). The young man's wisdom (as opposed to mere knowledge) is lauded, his conversational brilliance and intellectual promise are noted, other virtues are sketched out, and particular attention is given to his ability to correct and inspire others by his example. Even here, though, the personal touch seems strangely to be missing. Allusion is made to Hallam's particular fortes only to issue in a general (and rather

crusty) defence for the old values of the gentleman (in cxi), and a prophecy of apocalyptic change in the political realm (in cxiii). All such observations are relatively commonplace, though; they seem to be saying too much, and thereby far too little, about the singular life of the deceased. It is as if the "novel power [that] / Sprang up for ever at a touch" (cxii, 10-11) was *too* novel for words to fully measure up to it. Unlike Hopkins' belief in inscape and the way in which humanity and nature "Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells" ("As kingfishers draw fire," lines 7-8), Tennyson's poem seems to be more sceptical about any profound expression of interiority. The section detailing Hallam's potential to inspire self-improvement in his contemporaries significantly ends with his influence on the speaker:

While I, thy nearest, sat apart,
And felt thy triumph was as mine;
 And loved them more, that they were thine,
The graceful tact, the Christian art;

Nor mine the sweetness or the skill,
 But mine the love that will not tire,
 And born of love, the vague desire
That spurs an imitative will. (cx, 13-20)

Here again one may detect a tendency towards appropriation. With some qualification – even if he "felt thy triumph was as mine," he stills returns to what virtues "were thine" in the next line – Tennyson is assimilating Hallam's power, making it into his own even as he obliquely lets the reader get into its force field. Tennyson's early sonnet "As when with downcast eyes we muse and brood" addressed a similar process. It argued that the extreme closeness of friendship, where the thoughts of the friends became like "Opposed mirrors each reflecting each" (line 11); creates a similar kind of identity to that which is created between the present and the past in experiences of *déjà vu*. *In Memoriam* frequently seems to tend toward a similar conclusion, as it elides both the past and its other (i.e., Hallam) into the present and future of the living poet.

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

This process of elision can be read as a sublimated version of a hidden *agon* in the text. Although *In Memoriam* surely is not an insincere poem, it does perhaps have an air of exaggerated ingenuousness in this respect. Despite the fact that Tennyson does write in an autobiographical, introspective vein of sensibility inherited from forerunners such as St. Augustine and Rousseau, he does not to do so with anything approaching their level of frankness and explicitness. *In Memoriam* is closer to the smokescreen of Wordsworth's "Julia and Vaudracour," a fictional story covering for the poet's own ill-starred relationship with Annette Vallon in book ix of *The Prelude*, than to their confessions. If there is some underlying wish to appropriate Hallam's energies at work in *In Memoriam*, it does not surface fully. Yet Tennyson is more a poet of sublimation than of downright repression, and if one looks elsewhere the underlying tensions of friendship are in evidence. This is particularly true of *The Princess*, published only two and a half years before *In Memoriam*. Whereas Blanche's resentment and jealousy sours her friendship with Princess Ida, there is no comparable intersubjective tension at the heart of Tennyson's poem: only death can come between the speaker and his beloved friend.

Section cii is an important one, in this respect, as it brings out a ripple of tension on the text's otherwise rather placid surface: it certainly shows that the speaker is aware that mourning Hallam is not his sole concern. Here the poet's reminiscences of his native Lincolnshire landscape, soon to be left behind as the family are forced to leave Somersby, takes on a valedictory tone. But why is he loath to leave this landscape behind? As for Wordsworth, a tension between memory as primarily interested in personal memories of nature, on the one hand, and interpersonal acts of remembrance, on the other, becomes evident: thus "Two spirits of a diverse love / Contend for loving masterdom" (cii, 7-8). For a moment, the struggle between memories of his own "boyhood" (cii, 9) and those of his "lost friend" (cii, 15) threaten to have a disastrous outcome:

These two have striven half the day,
And each prefers his separate claim,
Poor rivals in a losing game,
That will not yield each other way (cii, 17-20).

The "losing game" is one in which the mind that does not manage to compensate and re-invest its own losses, but rather has to face a pure deficit of affects. Such a catastrophe is avoided, however, as the two spirits "mix in one another's arms / To one pure image of regret" (cii, 23-24). As one of the two spirits is a representative of the speaker himself (i.e. his younger self), it would seem hard to envisage such an assimilation as being weighted otherwise than towards the mind of the poet.

The same form of assimilative presentation is also arguably at work when Tennyson alludes to his friend's own literary work. Several recent critics have pointed out how *In Memoriam* contains verbal echoes of Hallam's own poems and criticism.⁸ Such instances embody extremely complex affective and literary transactions, where the involved economy of give and take is hard to calculate. No doubt part of the intention is to attain a reciprocal exchange which "turns [Arthur's] burthen into gain" even as his "credit thus shall set me free" (lxxx, 12,13): homage is being given to the dead man, even as his words assist the living poet to make his statement. Both are being recompensed, both are finding "in loss a gain to match" (I, 6). If one is to believe the poem's own rhetoric, its subtle allusions to Hallam's own words really are meant to be understood by Tennyson's friend now or in the future. It is as if the speaker were envisaging something like the reunion of Florian and his sister Psyche, after a long separation, in *The Princess*: "betwixt them blossomed up / From out a common vein of memory / Sweet household talk, and phrases of the hearth, / And far allusion" (ii, 292-5). *In Memoriam* is a text replete with the kind of "far allusion" which none of Tennyson's contemporaries, bar a miraculously returning Hallam, could fully understand.

This poetical process of mutual enrichment changes its appearance somewhat, however, if one takes into account how often *In Memoriam* simply rephrases themes and interests from Tennyson's earlier poetry, dating long before Hallam's death. The struggle between religious faith and doubt is for instance to be found in "Two Voices" and "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind." Tennyson's "old affection of the tomb" (lxxxv, 77) was similarly older than his friendship with Hallam, and can be traced in several early poems. The same is true of

⁸ According to Garrett Jones, T. H. Motter was the first to detect the allusions to Hallam's writings, in 1943 (Jones 2001: 153). Recent examples of readings pursuing these allusions in detail include Christopher Ricks' *Allusion to the Poets*, and Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's *Victorian Afterlives*.

"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

many other aspects, too numerous to mention here. Even the disillusionment with Christmas celebrations, marked in section cv where it is asked "who would keep an ancient form / Through which the spirit breathes no more:" (19-20), is anticipated. For prior to this, in "The Epic," there is the lamentation: "all the old honour had from Christmas gone / Or gone or dwindled down to some odd games / In some old nooks like this" (lines 7-9). Then there is also the fact, long overlooked, that "Ulysses" – rather than responding to Hallam's death, and being one of a kind with *In Memoriam* – actually pre-dated the composition of the latter poem (see Christopher Ricks' note in Tennyson, Lord Alfred 1969: 82).

Such echoes must be understood as a form of auto-allusion, where the poet recirculates and rephrases the concerns of his past. Tennyson may seem to be remembering Hallam, but he is just as much concerned with remembering his own verse. There is an obvious autobiographical parallel: as Tennyson subsumes Hallam to his own creative powers in the poem, he would later – by calling his son Hallam – even give birth to a kind of replacement figure for his dead friend. Although one should doubtless not overemphasise the emotional investment evident in this naming process, there certainly is an interesting way in which Hallam Tennyson's memoirs of his father are the recommencement of the (hastily interrupted) form of critical consecration represented by Arthur Hallam's early criticism.

To argue that Tennyson is almost more concerned with remembering himself than recalling Hallam is to improvise upon a recurrent theme in the criticism of *In Memoriam*: Tennyson's narcissism. Peter M. Sacks has written deprecatingly about how Tennyson and his peers were belaboured with "the retarding Victorian obsession with personal survival" (Sacks 1985: 217). For Timothy Peltason, that obsession lies at the heart of the poem dedicated to Arthur Hallam, although the poet's single-minded concern with his own mortality is obscured by the fact that it is "mediated by community, translated into the fear of lost companionship or, later, of the death of the species" (Peltason 1985: 76). Peltason admits that he "cannot be certain, of course, that the fear of his own death was the original language of Tennyson's life-long insistence on personal immortality" (*ibid.*), but he does stick to such a thesis.

The idea that there should be an "original language" for a belief or emotion is attractive, but surely beguiling. Certainly Peltason's thesis connects with the avoidance of the corpse that I have previously traced in Tennyson's poem, but this view is perhaps not quite attuned to how complexly both language and memory function in Tennyson's writings.

For *In Memoriam* is ultimately not in memory of any specific thing or person, but rather a testimony to the dislocating powers of memory itself. The passing of time, mediated through acts of memory, is always already eroding presumed "original" languages. As in the case of the reception of Wordsworth's poetry, there is a tendency to all too easily simplify and unify what in reality is a very complex and multifarious movement. If *In Memoriam* has a grammar underlying its acts of remembering, it is a highly complex one, signifying much more than "I, Alfred Tennyson, remember Arthur Hallam in order to sustain my faith in immortality and not to confront death." The subject of the poem's acts of remembering is not only the empirical identity of the poem, but also blurs into a more generalised subject. The object of *In Memoriam*'s memories is, as we have seen, even more complex: frequently memory itself is what is at stake. Auden's "stupidity" is not so much an apt description of Tennyson, as of the critic who does not see what strange shapes Tennyson's "passion" of the past drags this poem into, what odd and forbidding paths his devotion to his friend leads him to. To remember *In Memoriam*, one might say, is surely also to never forget how hard it is to remember anything at all.

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"This Wide Whisper Round My Head"

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