

“ALL IS WELL”:
VICTORIAN MOURNING AESTHETICS
AND THE POETICS OF CONSOLATION

by
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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

December 2011

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: "All Is Well": Victorian Mourning Aesthetics and the Poetics of Consolation

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Degree awarded December 2011.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Department of English

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In this study, I examine the various techniques used by poets to provide consolation. With Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, I explore the relationship between formal and thematic consolation, i.e., the ways in which the use of formal elements of the poem, particularly rhyme scheme, is an attempt by the poet to attain and offer consolation. Early in his laureateship after the Duke of Wellington’s funeral, Tennyson wrote “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,” but this poem failed to meet his reading audience’s needs, as did the first major work published after Tennyson was named Poet Laureate: *Maud*. I argue that form and theme are as inextricably linked in *Maud* as they are in *In Memoriam*, and in many ways, *Maud* revises the type of mourning exhibited in *In Memoriam*. Later, I examine in greater detail the hallmarks of Victorian mourning. Although most Victorians did not mourn for as long or as excessively as Queen Victoria, the form her mourning took certainly is worth discussion. I argue that we can read Tennyson’s “Dedication” to *Idylls of the King* and his “To the Mourners” as Victorian funeral sermons, each of which offers explicit (and at times, contradictory) advice to the Queen on how to mourn. Finally, I discuss the reactions to Tennyson’s death in the popular press. Analyzing biographical accounts, letters, and memorial poems, I argue that

Tennyson and his family were invested in the idea of “the good death”; Tennyson needed to die as he had lived – as the great Laureate.

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PUBLICATIONS:

Holloway, Tamara. "Louisa Stuart Costello." *Studies in Romanticism at the University of Nebraska*. Corvey Collection. 2002. Web.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In the years since Tennyson's death, there has been a multitude of studies attempting to calculate his significance for England and for poetry. Critically rejected by the Modernists and those who followed, Tennyson was virtually ignored through much of the early Twentieth century; it is only relatively recently that a renaissance of Tennyson scholarship has emerged, focusing on Tennyson's poetry and its role in Victorian culture.

Christopher Ricks's and Robert Bernard Martin's excellent biographies of Tennyson have provided useful background and cultural context, as does Valerie Pitt's *Tennyson Laureate*. What these texts do not treat in detail, however, is how Tennyson used his position as Laureate to address the nation's greatest fears and anxieties, and how he transformed himself from the bereft author of *In Memoriam* to the practical, even detached sage in "To the Mourners." As well, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to Tennyson's death and the role his own poetry played in response.

Though there has been much written about Tennyson's poetry, the relationship between literary form and culture has not received much critical attention. Although recent critics have acknowledged that form and culture are inextricably linked in Victorian literature, there has been no in-depth study of how literary form and the Victorian culture of mourning are linked. The aim of this way of reading is to realize the

complexities of poetic writing not by separating formalist analysis from historical analysis, but by joining formal understanding with contextual knowledge. This critical method will lead to a fuller understanding of the literature of the Victorian era, and will provide a more responsible method of literary criticism; perhaps providing the connection between form and culture that will enhance our understanding of both. It is my hope that this dissertation will provide new ways of thinking about the relationships between form and consolation, between literature and mourning, and between literature and culture of the Victorian era.

Tennyson and the Laureateship

This dissertation begins with *In Memoriam*, the poem that “earned” Tennyson the Laureateship. Throughout the dissertation, I examine the responses to Tennyson’s poetry, his role as Poet Laureate, and his relationship with Queen Victoria. Queen Victoria was arguably the most popular media subject in Victorian periodicals, and they covered Tennyson’s poetic career in depth, often focusing on his relationship with the Queen. John Plunkett describes Victoria as the “first media monarch,” noting that some of the first photographs ever registered for copyright were portraits of the monarchy: “Out of the first 2,000 photographs registered, up to 11 September 1863, 317 contained one or more members of the British royal family, a proportion of just over 15 per cent” (159). However, as Kathryn Ledbetter points out, the first two portraits registered for copyright (in 1862) were of Tennyson, evidence that public fascination with both Tennyson and the monarchy “fueled commercial competition for images that would help sell printed

product,” whether it be books, periodicals, or individual prints (144). In addition, the poems that Tennyson created for the Queen in his official role as Poet Laureate were frequently published in periodicals. In this context both poet and monarch become icons of Victorian commodity culture.

The traditional role of Poet Laureate was to celebrate national events; in *Tennyson Laureate*, Valerie Pitt explains:

The good Laureate is a ritualist. His poetry is part of the ceremony of public life; in a sense he can help to create it by imposing on domestic occasions, like the marriage of royalty, a certain dignity and solemnity. His business is to generalise and formalise in such a way that the particular occasion is stripped of individual eccentricities and set in the perspective of a common order. (194)

Tennyson was keenly aware of his duty as Laureate to speak not just *to* the people, but *for* them as well. And, it would appear that Tennyson took his role as poet of the nation more seriously than did William Wordsworth and Robert Southey, the two Poets Laureate who preceded Tennyson.

Before Southey’s tenure as Laureate, some viewed the position as an “overtasking, demoralizing weight on one’s art”¹ (Ledbetter 145). Southey refused to

¹ Ledbetter quotes a letter from the Duke of Buccleuch to Sir Walter Scott that advises him not to take the position of Laureate in 1813:

write certain odes for certain occasions, and withheld publication of his poems in certain periodicals, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the traditional source for printing official odes since 1731 (145). Southey also refused to live at court or participate in many court functions, which allowed him to have more control over his time and poetic output. When Wordsworth was Poet Laureate (from 1843-1850), the expectations for annual odes were removed and the office became “not so much an office as an honour, not so much an obligation as a decoration” (qtd. in Ledbetter 145). Indeed, Wordsworth did not write any official laureate poems during his seven years as Laureate.

When Wordsworth died in 1850, Prince Albert offered the laureateship to Tennyson, as he had been much impressed by *In Memoriam*. Critics almost universally acknowledge that Tennyson saw his position as Laureate as both an honor and a great responsibility, and he was particularly well-suited for the position. Pitt describes the laureateship as being,

like his marriage, an element in his new psychological stability – a link which bound him to the world of affairs. [...] As the Laureate, the Bard, the Licensed Prophet, he could be, and often was, as eccentric as he liked without severing himself from the body of society. (148)

I shall frankly say that I should be mortified to see you hold a situation, which by the general concurrence of the world, is stamped ridiculous. There is no good reason why this should be so; but so it is.... Any future poem of yours would not come forward with the same probability of a successful reception. The poet laureate would stick to you and your productions like a piece of *court-plaster*.... Only think of being chaunted and recitivated [sic] by a parcel of hoarse and squeaking choristers on a birthday, for the edification of the bishops, pages, maids of honour, and gentlemen-pensioners! Oh, horrible, thrice horrible! (qtd. in Letbetter 145)

Throughout his career as Poet Laureate, Tennyson published ten official laureate poems in periodicals (Ledbetter 147), but even in his non-laureate poetry, it is clear that Tennyson is conscious of the fact that he is addressing a wide audience.

This dissertation takes as its focus the public reception of the poetry written just before, and during (and about) Tennyson's reign as Poet Laureate, both his official and unofficial laureate verse.

Victorian Mourning

The Victorians are well-known for their obsession with mourning. Painters and sculptors of the era depicted scenes of gravesites, of mourners, and of the moment of death itself. Not just a personal psychological experience, in the nineteenth century, mourning was a genuine cultural phenomenon. Much of the attention paid to mourning rites must be attributed to the mortality rates of mid-nineteenth century England; in London, in 1830, the average age at death was estimated at forty-four for gentry, at twenty-five for tradesmen and their families, and at twenty-two for laborers and their families. For children under ten years of age, the mortality rates rose from 1 in 75 in 1821 to 1 in 48 in 1839 (Morley 7).

Pat Jalland's book *Death in the Victorian Family* is an invaluable resource for understanding the cultural constructs of mourning in the Victorian era. Drawing from diaries, newspaper accounts, and etiquette books, Jalland examines the experiences of dying and death, grief and mourning among middle- and upper-class Victorians.

Evidence suggests that Victorian mourning rituals provided opportunities for the bereaved to express their grief in a manner that made the experience less painful. Modern psychologists argue that mourning rituals meet the psychological needs of the bereaved by structuring loss within a coherent system of values, while also rallying the support of the community to comfort the bereaved. While Victorian mourning practices have been condemned by historians as overly extravagant, Jalland argues that the Victorians were in many ways drawing on customs that go back for centuries (194).

In middle-class mourning rituals, typically the mourning process began with a funeral week: a week between the death and burial for the family to prepare. During this time, the body would be laid out, usually in a parlor or a bedroom, so that it could be viewed by family and friends, who would use the opportunity to make their final farewells. Jalland notes that the Victorians preferred to view the body immediately after death, “before the features stiffened, and while the relaxed facial muscles presented a more serene appearance” (213).

Funeral services varied according to religious belief, but the burial-service of the Church of England was the most commonly used during the Victorian age (216). Women did not typically attend upper- and middle-class funerals during the early and mid-Victorian periods, because of the assumption that they “could not control” their emotions (221). By the 1870s women were more frequent attendants at funerals, though the practice was still relatively rare.

Victorian mourning behavior included wearing mourning clothes, having lavish funerals, curtailing social behavior, and erecting ornate monuments on graves. The

typical Victorian middle class funeral has been described as elaborate and expensive, involving hearses, velvets, pairs of horses, mutes, silk velvets, feathers, and lead coffins. Mourning clothes were understood to be a family's outward display of their inner feelings. The rules for who wore what and for how long were complicated, and were outlined in conduct books² that gave copious instructions about appropriate mourning etiquette. Death infiltrated many objects in the nineteenth century, quite apart from clothing. Throughout the period, certain images were used again and again to represent the frailty and the brevity of human life. Draped urns, broken columns, weeping willows, and extinguished torches can be spotted in articles as diverse as tombstones, portraits, children's books, and embroidered samplers. Bereavement touched virtually every aspect of Victorian life.

To seek comfort in their grief, Victorian mourners turned to a variety of sources, most notably poetry and sermons. Victorian funeral sermons typically followed a pattern: a scriptural exposition (Wolffe 59), often thematically linked to the deceased; mourning for the dead and explicit references to the decedent (59), which produced "intense sorrow of domestic misfortune" (17); praising the dead and their virtues (59); celebrating death (65) in order to dwell "on the glories of the resurrected life and reunion beyond the grave" (210-11); and, finally, a lesson of hope for the listening congregation (59).

John Keble's *The Christian Year*, first published in 1827, was another source of comfort for the bereaved. The volume begins with a "Morning" and "Evening" hymn,

² These include, among others, Priscilla Maurice's *Sacred Poems for Mourners* (1846) and *Prayers for the Sick and Dying* (1853), Keith Norman MacDonald's *On Death and How to Divest of its Terrors* (1875), Mrs. John Sherwood's *Manners and Social Usages* (1884), Richard Davey's *A History of Mourning* (1889), Mrs. Fanny Douglas's *The Gentlewoman's Book of Dress* (1890), and Lady Colin Campbell's *Etiquette of Good Society* (1893) (Jalland 382-431).

corresponding to the Anglican Morning and Evening Prayer services, followed by a poem for every week in the Church year. These are followed by poems for the various saints' days, Holy Communion, Holy Baptism, and Burial of the Dead. When Keble published *The Christian Year*, he added to it an "Advertisement," in which he explains his reason for including poems to mark the occasional services such as baptism and burial:

Something has been added at the end concerning the several Occasional Services: which constitute, from their personal and domestic nature, the most perfect instance of that *soothing* tendency in the Prayer Book, which it is the chief purpose of these pages to exhibit. (ii)

In his *Lectures on Poetry*, Keble explained his own theory of poetry: "Let us therefore deem the glorious art of Poetry a kind of medicine divinely bestowed upon man: which gives healing relief to secret mental emotion, yet without detriment to modest reserve" (22). *The Christian Year* was enormously popular: the total number of copies sold in the first ten years was 26,500, and approximately one million copies were sold in the 19th Century.

As Esther Schor argues, mourning as a cultural, rather than a psychological, phenomenon, has become opaque to us. There are a variety of sociological explanations of this, such as the medicalization of death, the rise of the mortuary profession, the decline in mortuary arts such as photography, and the attenuation of funeral rites and mourning rituals (3). While a religious account of mourning interprets mourning as a discourse between the living and the dead, a cultural account interprets mourning as a discourse among the living. It is this that I wish to account for in this dissertation: how

are the states of grief and mourning poetically represented, and how does Tennyson's poetry attempt to heal the loss?

Literature of the Victorian era reflected and influenced the Victorian culture of mourning. John Rosenberg states that "Victorian elegy wears both a public and a private face, the one expressive of the loss of a sustaining culture, the other of personal loss" (9). Tennyson voices both the public and private aspects of Victorian elegy. My dissertation focuses on four prominent deaths in an attempt to examine the tension between public and personal loss in Victorian poetry: Arthur Henry Hallam (1833), the Duke of Wellington (1852), Prince Albert (1861), and Tennyson himself (1892).

In the first chapter of this study, "What hope is here for modern rhyme': The Poetics of Consolation in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*," I examine the relationship between formal and thematic consolation in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson did not put his name to the poem, nor did he allow it to be affixed during his lifetime. Critics have suggested that this indicates that Tennyson intended this poem not to be read as an expression of his own grief (although the poem is intensely personal), but as an anonymous tribute to his dead friend (whose initials were given, keeping him slightly less anonymous than the poet)³, and as a document addressing the public culture of mourning. This chapter addresses the ways in which the use of formal elements of the poem, particularly rhyme scheme, is an attempt by the poet to attain and offer consolation. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is a sustained exploration of grief through poetry. Throughout the long poem, the poet reiterates the comfort he finds in forms, both bodily and poetic. Faced with the absence of

³ Although *In Memoriam* was published anonymously, many knew that Tennyson was the author.

his dead friend, the poet seeks to place a boundary around his grief, to give a form to the emptiness. An exploration of Tennyson's poetics in *In Memoriam*, including the appropriateness of his *abba* stanza form as a tool for examining his struggle to both celebrate and overcome grief, can elucidate the aesthetic aim of the poetics of the elegy as a whole. Tennyson's unique stanza form and rhyme structure provide a form of resurrection, an uneasy consolation the poet attempts to give, but ultimately resists offering, throughout the poem.

The second chapter, "'The noise of the mourning of a mighty nation': Burying the Duke of Wellington / Tennyson's Early Laureate Poetry," analyzes Tennyson's poetry in the early years of the laureateship. Beginning with the Duke of Wellington's funeral, this chapter examines Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" as a failure to meet his reading audience's needs; the public was expecting a heartfelt elegy because they were so familiar with *In Memoriam*, and they criticized the Wellington Ode as being merely an official poem, not one composed with any genuine feeling. Further, I argue that the spectacle surrounding the Duke's death and funeral exposes a deeper cultural anxiety: how to properly mourn a figure who, even at the time, stood for England itself. In the second half of the chapter, I look at the first major work published after Tennyson was named Poet Laureate: *Maud*. I argue that form and theme are as inextricably linked in *Maud* as they are in *In Memoriam*, and in many ways, *Maud* revises the type of mourning exhibited in *In Memoriam*. *Maud* is a type of anti-Wellington Ode; its central figure is un-heroic, yet Tennyson uses much of the same language in *Maud* as he does in "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington." By examining these two early laureate

poems together, I argue, we can get a more accurate sense of how Tennyson saw himself in the role of Poet Laureate.

In “‘England mourns with her widowed Queen’: Queen Victoria and the Victorian Culture of Mourning,” my third chapter, I examine in greater detail the hallmarks of Victorian mourning. Although most Victorians did not mourn for as long or as excessively as Queen Victoria mourned Prince Albert, the form her mourning took, as the nation’s most visible mourner, certainly is worth discussion. In this chapter, I argue that we can read Tennyson’s “Dedication” to *Idylls of the King* and his “To the Mourners” as Victorian funeral sermons, each of which offers explicit (and at times, contradictory) advice to the Queen on how to mourn.

The final chapter, “‘The singer of undying songs is dead’: The Death of Tennyson and the End of Victorian Mourning,” looks at the reactions to Tennyson’s death in the popular press. Analyzing biographical accounts, letters, and memorial poems, this chapter argues that Tennyson and his family were invested in the idea of “the good death”; Tennyson needed to die as he had lived – as the great Laureate. The chapter ends by asserting that Tennyson had so shaped the language of Victorian mourning, that it would take a generation for poets to begin to account for grief in other ways.

CHAPTER II

“WHAT HOPE IS HERE FOR MODERN RHYME”:

THE POETICS OF CONSOLATION IN TENNYSON’S *IN MEMORIAM*

Introduction

In 1833 Arthur Henry Hallam died suddenly of a fever in Vienna. This single death, while seemingly inconsequential, would significantly impact the way the Victorians grieved for their dead. Hallam’s great friend, the young poet Alfred Tennyson, chronicled his grief and despair in the massive and sprawling poem *In Memoriam*, which was written over the span of the seventeen years following Hallam’s death. Consisting of one hundred thirty-one lyrics, plus a prologue and an epilogue, the poem wrestles with questions of mortality and faith, striving to offer comfort even as it resists comfortable interpretations.

Quoted more in Victorian England than any text except perhaps the Bible (Martin 443), *In Memoriam* gave its readers a structure through which to express loss. The poem shaped the landscape of mourning in the Victorian age. In his biography of Tennyson, Robert Bernard Martin writes that contemporary reviews of *In Memoriam* “were almost unanimously favourable, many of them full of unqualified praise” (341), and he describes the poem as “a triumph, both critical and popular, of a kind that is almost without parallel” (341). Readers from all classes knew the poem; its popularity was nearly universal. Joanna Richardson asserts that *In Memoriam* “became essential to those who mourned in a doubting generation” (60). It was even rumored that Queen Victoria slept

with a copy of *In Memoriam* beneath her pillow, turning to it for comfort after the death of the Prince Consort.

In Memoriam is at once intensely personal, chronicling Tennyson's great loss, and public, capable of expressing each reader's struggle to overcome loss. Tennyson himself noted that "It is a very impersonal poem as well as personal" (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 339). In a letter to James Knowles, Tennyson explains the doubleness of *In Memoriam*: "It is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine. In the poem altogether private grief swells out into thought of, and hope for, the whole world" (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 339).

No less than Queen Victoria, Tennyson is a central figure to understanding the Victorian culture of mourning, and his poetry must be read for form as well as for its cultural implications. This chapter will address the ways in which the poem's various formal elements are an attempt by the poet to attain and offer consolation as *In Memoriam* explores the complicated, circulating nature of grief.

Contexts

Alfred Tennyson first met Arthur Hallam in 1829, at Cambridge; they formed a friendship that was "swift and deep" (Ricks 29). The relationship was also relatively brief; Hallam died just four years after meeting Tennyson. However, the friendship affected Tennyson deeply. Martin argues that it would be "hard to exaggerate" the impact Hallam's friendship made on Tennyson: "their friendship was to be the most emotionally intense period he ever knew, four years probably equal in psychic importance to the other

seventy-nine of his life” (73). His relationship with Hallam is generally understood to have shaped Tennyson’s career as a poet; Ricks writes that Hallam “proved himself the most urgently and enduringly perceptive admirer of Tennyson’s poetry” (29).

Tennyson chronicled the immediate affinity he felt towards Hallam in the 1832 sonnet “To—.”⁴ The poem is built upon a simile that compares moments of intense contemplation with the sense Tennyson felt when he first met Hallam that the two men were alike enough to be reflections of each other. The sonnet describes the intimacy Tennyson enjoyed with his friend:

As when with downcast eyes we muse and brood,
And ebb into a former life, or seem
To lapse far back in some confused dream
To states of mystical similitude;
If one but speaks or hems or stirs his chair,
Ever the wonder waxeth more and more,
So that we say, “All this hath been before,
All this hath been, I know not when or where.’
So, friend, when first I looked upon your face,
Our thought gave answer each to each, so true –
Opposed mirrors each reflecting each –
That though I knew not in what time or place,
Methought that I had often met with you,

⁴ Although the title of the poem leaves its subject ambiguous, Christopher Ricks asserts that “To—” was addressed to Arthur Hallam (*Tennyson* 499).

And either lived in either's heart and speech.

This sonnet proposes that Tennyson and Hallam had always known each other, that their meeting in 1829 was simply a reconnection of souls who had been united in a distant past. This sonnet anticipates many of the themes Tennyson explores in *In Memoriam*: love and loss, friendship and time, relationship and individual identity. This sonnet also anticipates “Ulysses,” in which Tennyson writes, “I am a part of all that I have met” (line 18)⁵. Jane Wright remarks upon Tennyson’s memorializing impulses, present even before he has suffered the loss: “Before Hallam’s death, Tennyson has already begun to memorialize the startlingly close union between them and to situate their friendship in relation to a past moment which is even now both lost and recreated through verse” (Wright 78). Even as a young man, Tennyson obsessed over the passage of time; this sonnet seems to be an attempt to preserve the exact moment when Tennyson recognized a mutual sympathy with Hallam. Tennyson would not stop memorializing the closeness he shared with Hallam. The series of emotional states this sonnet describes – confusion, vacillation, and union – also surface and circle in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson’s great tribute to Hallam.

The news of Hallam’s death shocked and dismayed his circle of friends.

Tennyson was notified in a letter from Hallam’s uncle, which began “Your friend Sir [...] is no more – it has pleased God, to remove him from this his first scene of Existence, to

⁵ “Ulysses,” published in 1842, was composed soon after Tennyson heard of Hallam’s death; it attempts to find solace and understanding through classical figures. Tennyson made two comments about the poem; first: “The poem was written soon after Arthur Hallam’s death, and it gives the feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in *In Memoriam*” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 138). Second, in comparing “Ulysses” to *In Memoriam*, “There is more about myself in “Ulysses,” which was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, and that still life must be fought out to the end” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 138).

that better World, for which he was Created” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 331). Hallam had been engaged to Tennyson’s sister Emily, and his death, as Charles Tennyson argues, was therefore doubly painful: “A lifelong prospect, founded on his own friendship and Emily’s hoped-for union with his friend, was blotted out instantly and for ever” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 332). Hallam’s friends determined to publish his works, and his father wrote to ask Tennyson to contribute to Hallam’s *Remains*:

It will be necessary to prefix a short Memoir. I must rely on his contemporaries and most intimate friends to furnish me with part of my materials; and I should wish to have any thing that may be thought most worthy of being mentioned, communicated to me by letter. Perhaps you would do something. I should desire to have the character of his mind, his favourite studies and pursuits, his habits and views, delineated. (qtd. in Ricks 333)

Tennyson responded by saying that he had failed to complete Henry Hallam’s request; he indicated that his project would be of greater scope than a simple memoir:

I attempted to draw up a memoir of his life and character, but I failed to do him justice. I failed even to please myself. I could scarcely have pleased you. I hope to be able at a future period to concentrate whatever powers I may possess on the construction of some tribute to those high speculative endowments and comprehensive sympathies which I ever loved to contemplate; but at present, though somewhat ashamed at my own weakness, I find the object yet is too near me to permit of any very

accurate delineation. You, with your clear insight into human nature, may perhaps not wonder that in the dearest service I could have been employed in, I should be found most deficient. (qtd. in Ricks 333)

It is interesting to note in this passage that Tennyson protested that “the object” was “yet too near” him to allow him to properly memorialize Hallam. Throughout *In Memoriam*, which Tennyson began shortly after this, the poet expresses his overwhelming desire to bring the dead closer, to reach out to the object of his grief. The closeness that plagued Tennyson in the months after Hallam’s death becomes the thing for which he longs most as time passes.

The Structure of *In Memoriam*

Tennyson began composing *In Memoriam* in October 1833, the month he heard of Hallam’s death (Ricks 201). By 1841, Tennyson reported that “the number of the memorial poems had rapidly increased” (qtd. in Ricks 201), and by 1845 Tennyson’s friends were pressuring him to publish the elegies. By January 1849, he had promised Aubrey de Vere “to *print* at least his exquisite Elegies, and let his friends have a few copies” (qtd. in Ricks 201). This private edition was printed in March 1850, and it was published anonymously at the end of May 1850 (201). The 133 separate lyrics of the poem range in length from 12 lines to 144 lines.

It is difficult to date the composition of individual lyrics, but manuscript evidence indicates that the earliest sections were written between 1833 and 1834: XXX, IX, XVII-XIX, XXXI-XXXII, LXXXV, and XXVIII (Ricks *Tennyson* 336). We know that lyric LI

was probably composed in 1841, and the Epilogue in 1842 (336-7). Ricks asserts that the last lyrics written were VII-VIII, XCVI-XCVII, and CXIX-CXXI, which may have been written as late as 1850 (337).

The difficulty in neatly summarizing the poem is something that many critics have commented upon. In particular, Robert Bernard Martin describes the challenge of comprehending the poem as being three-fold: first, *In Memoriam* was written intermittently over a period of seventeen years, with no initial attempts to impose order on the lyrics that eventually made up the poem. Second, it was begun with no thought of publication. Finally, in spite of the dedication and the title, “the poem is about Alfred Tennyson and his reactions to Arthur Hallam’s death, not about Hallam himself” (341). In addition to discussing the impact of Hallam’s death on himself, Tennyson also covers questions of theology and immortality, geology and evolution, poetry and remembrance, and the future of England, among other topics. In the years since the publication of *In Memoriam*, different scholars have claimed each one of these topics as dominant in the poem. Martin asserts that the precedents for the poem are equally varied, and suggests that Tennyson drew upon Theocritus, Horace, Catullus, Ovid, Moschus, Milton, Shelley, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Keats, Lucretius, Goethe, Lyell, Chambers, Paley, Dante, and others: “There are pastoral poems, propemptika, Pre-Raphaelite vignettes, epicedia, epithalamia, and Christian hymns all thrown together” (342). Tennyson himself described the poem as conforming to an overarching organizing principle: “[it] begins with a funeral and ends with a marriage – begins in death and ends in promise of a new life – a sort of Divine Comedy, cheerful at the close” (qtd. in Bruns 248). Charles Armstrong

argues that *In Memoriam* is “a poem fragmented by memory: its disjointedness stems from the very diversity of its embodied memories” (250). Yet as I will argue, in spite of the sometimes rambling nature of the poem’s themes, the formal strategy is consistent, in spite of a number of different formal expressions.

One of the early titles for the poem, which Tennyson ultimately rejected, was *Fragments of an Elegy*. Shortly after it was published, Tennyson explained the composition of the poem:

The sections were written at many different places, and as the phases of our intercourse came to my memory and suggested them. I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many. (qtd. in Ricks 202)

This quotation suggests a random series, organized only by the order in which the remembrances occurred (a suggestion that a title like *Fragments of an Elegy* would seem to reinforce). However, it is clear that Tennyson did have an overarching organizing scheme, even though what that scheme is remains a matter of scholarly disagreement. As Christopher Ricks argues, even Tennyson himself “did not make large claims for *In Memoriam* as a unity” (202). We can understand the poem’s structure in a variety of ways, and they need not necessary conflict. The elusiveness of the poem’s form may be a function of its resistance of terminating, or even mitigating, the mourner’s grief.

Addressing the organization of the poem, Tennyson wrote, “After the death of A.H.H., the divisions of the poem are made by First Xmas Eve, Second Xmas, Third Xmas Eve” (qtd. in Ricks *Tennyson* 338). In response to this remark, Bradley and

Johnson argue for the presence of four divisions in the poem: (1) I-XXVII: Despair, (2) XXVIII-LXXVII: Doubt, (3) LXXVIII-CII: Hope, and (4) CIII-CXXXI: Faith (Landow). While this description can be seen to be generally accurate, it oversimplifies the complex and nuanced poem. The poet experiences all of these emotional states – despair, doubt, hope, and faith – throughout the poem. *In Memoriam* expresses the poet’s complicated feelings of loss, and to divide the poem into four such neat phases ignores the circulating, vacillating nature of his grief.

More informally, Tennyson explained that there were nine natural groups or divisions in the poem: I-VIII, IX-XX, XXI-XXVII, XXVIII-XLIX, L-LVIII, LIX-LXXI, LXXII-XCVIII, XCIX-CIII, and CIV-CXXXI (Ricks 202). In Tennyson scholarship, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the nine groups Tennyson mentioned. The groups do present a kind of plot, related to but different from the one Bradley described. By looking at these “natural” divisions, we can get a sense of the poem’s overarching structure, one that attempts to define a pattern of grief even as it reflects on the mourning process itself. Lyric by lyric and section by section, Tennyson chronicles the small steps he takes in the mourning process.

The first eight lyrics describe the poet’s intense, immediate grief. He wants to heed the warning of his will, “Thou shalt not be the fool of loss” (IV line 16), and is determined to find solace in the composition of poetry:

I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal

And half conceal the Soul within.

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,

A use in measured language lies;

The sad mechanic exercise,

Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,

Like coarsest clothes against the cold:

But that large grief which these enfold

Is given in outline and no more.

This lyric contains many of the themes of the larger poem: Tennyson posits himself as Hallam's widow and questions the adequacy of poetry in the struggle to overcome grief. These lines pose the problem of giving order to a poem about grieving. The first stanza questions the project itself: is it possible to accurately portray grief in words? The second stanza attempts to answer the question; in poetry – “measured language” – it is possible to lull oneself into numbness. However, the poet is critical of the “dull narcotics” of the “sad mechanic exercise” that numb pain; poetry, he implies, should do more than just lull the reader out of thought. The final stanza of this lyric invokes typical Victorian mourning imagery; the poet compares words to “weeds”: a reference to the black widow's weeds of mourning. The final lines of the stanza assert that even though the act of writing poetry may comfort the poet, words are incapable of truly representing grief:

the grief is only “given in outline.” In these lines, the poet distinguishes grief from mourning; the “weeds” – the clothing of mourning – are an external representation of the mourner’s inner, private sorrow – a sorrow that cannot ever be fully and accurately explained in words. The words/weeds image suggests the distinction and relation of grief and mourning. Poetry succeeds and fails insofar as this limited, formal gesture only “enfolds” something else, which is a theme that winds through the entire poem.

In Lyric VI, the poet addresses those who attempt to console with empty platitudes:

One writes, that ‘Other friends remain,’
That ‘Loss is common to the race’—
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore

To evening, but some heart did break. (lines 1-8)

This lyric explores collective loss versus personal loss. These lines place the poet in a company of mourners – past, present, and future. As the lyric continues, the poet imagines a mother’s loss, a father’s grief, and finally ends with the image of a girl kept in “perpetual maidenhood” (line 43) by the death of her fiancé, once again alluding to himself as Hallam’s widow.

The second division, lyrics IX-XX, continues to explore the meaning of poetry. This section describes the journey of the ship carrying Hallam's body back to England, and ends with his burial. The poet describes himself as vacillating between "calm despair" (XI line 16) and "wild unrest" (XV line 15), and he explains the kind of writing he is capable of in Lyric XIX:

The Danube to the Severn gave
The darkened heart that beat no more;
They laid him by the pleasant shore,
And in the hearing of the wave.

There twice a day the Severn fills;
The salt sea-water passes by,
And hushes half the babbling Wye,
And makes a silence of the hills.

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,
And hushed my deepest grief of all,
When filled with tears that cannot fall,
I brim with sorrow drowning song.

This tide flows down, the wave again
Is vocal in its wooded walls;

My deeper anguish also falls,

And I can speak a little then.

In these lines, the poet relates his grief to the rise and fall of the rivers associated with his friend's body as it travels home. He states that he can only write when his "deeper anguish" subsides, again suggesting that poetry cannot accurately represent the true depth of grief. Interestingly, Tennyson writes of Hallam's burial and gravesite even though he did not attend the funeral, and only visited the gravesite years after Hallam's death (Martin 187). 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" (128). Charles Armstrong asserts that *In Memoriam* functions as Tennyson's "own personal gravestone" for Hallam: "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" (254).

This lyric also attempts to account for the process of change, both literal as the body travels through these natural settings, and figurative as the poet charts and processes his grief. The grief is tidal; it ebbs and flows, just as the poet "brims" with tears and then feels those tears recede. This lyric reflects the larger structure of the poem; the poem circles and vacillates, just as the tides do. This indicates that there is not a straight path through grief; the mourner/poet must struggle to overcome the pull of the tide.

In the third division of *In Memoriam*, lyrics XXI-XXVII, the poet resolves to put his grief to greater use. He has declared his remorse, and Tennyson proclaims that he will

use his grief as inspiration: “I take the grasses of the grave, / And make them pipes on which to blow” (XXI lines 3-4). He imagines being criticized for his poem before reminiscing on the Cambridge days, realizing that he was happy not because there was no “daily burden for the back” (XXIV line 4), but because love made it light. In writing the poem, the poet longs to prove that “No lapse of moons can canker Love” (XXVI line 3); that, as he says in the final lyric of this section, “’Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all” (XXVII lines 15-16).

The fourth division begins with the first Christmas, and attempts to offer hope for life after death, a belief the poet accepts despite some moments of doubt. Tennyson evokes the figure of Lazarus, imploring God to “touch the east, and light / The light that shone when Hope was born” (XXX 31-32). Lyrics XXXVIII-XLIX express the poet’s doubt that immortality exists. Early in the poem, in Lyric II, Tennyson describes his sorrow in terms of the yew:

Old yew, which graspest at the stones
That name the under-lying dead,
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.

The seasons bring the flower again,
And bring the firstling to the flock;
And in the dusk of thee, the clock
Beats out the little lives of men.

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,
Who changest not in any gale,
Nor branding summer suns avail
To touch thy thousand years of gloom:

And gazing on thee, sullen tree,
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,
I seem to fail from out my blood
And grow incorporate into thee.

The poet represents his grief, which he imagines will remain unchanged, as being reflected in the unchanging nature of the tree. However, in spring, in Lyric XXXIX, he sees that the yew, like his sorrow, is not unchanging:

Old warder of these buried bones,
And answering now my random stroke
With fruitful cloud and living smoke,
Dark yew, that graspest at the stones

And dippest toward the dreamless head,
To thee too comes the golden hour
When flower is feeling after flower;
But Sorrow—fixt upon the dead,

And darkening the dark graves of men,—
What whisper'd from her lying lips?
Thy gloom is kindled at the tips,
And passes into gloom again.

Although Sorrow points out that the yew flowers too fleetingly to be of any lasting comfort, the poet recognizes that if the yew is not so unchanging as it had first seemed, perhaps the same is true for his grief. Sorrow is a liar, and although the lyric ends with the yew retreating into gloom, the poet seems to take hope in its momentary flowering. Such patterns of reversal abound in the formal structure of the poem; here, they are introduced as an inescapable feature of grief.

Although XXXIX is slightly hopeful, the poet still doubts that the afterlife will bring comfort; he is troubled by the thought that in the afterlife, his relationship with Hallam will be changed. He expresses the “spectral doubt which makes me cold, / That I shall be thy mate no more” (XLI lines 19-20), and he longs to be able to touch Hallam again:

Thy spirit ere our fatal loss
Did ever rise from high to higher;
As mounts the heavenward altar-fire,
As flies the lighter thro' the gross.

But thou art turn'd to something strange,

And I have lost the links that bound
Thy changes; here upon the ground,
No more partaker of thy change.

Deep folly! yet that this could be—
That I could wing my will with might
To leap the grades of life and light,
And flash at once, my friend, to thee! (lines 1-12)

Tennyson will achieve his desire to reunite spiritually with Hallam, but not until Lyric XCV.

In the fifth division, the poet's emotional progress begins to slowly improve. Despite, as Svaglic states, a plea for guidance to the Spirit of true love, "cruel doubts, prompted by the geological evidence of nature's indifference to both individual and species, seem on the verge of conquering the poet's faltering trust" in God's love (816-17). However, the poet is granted a respite from his deepest mourning; when he is about to leave Hallam's burial place, saying "'Adieu, adieu' for evermore" (LVII line 16), he receives a reply from "The high Muse" in Lyric LVIII:

The high Muse answered: 'Wherefore grieve
Thy brethren with a fruitless tear?
Abide a little longer here,
And thou shalt take a nobler leave.' (lines 9-12)

These lines confirm the poet's grief as being noble, raising him from simple mourner to artist. Tennyson still resists putting boundaries around his grief in this section, but he can recognize more and less noble forms of expression for it, now and in the future.

The sixth section of the poem begins with Tennyson embracing sorrow, inviting it to live with him as "No casual mistress, but a wife, / My bosom-friend and half of life" (LIX lines 2-3). In this section, the poet also takes refuge in past memories, finding escape from the present in dreams: "Sleep, kinsman thou to death and trance / And madness, thou hast forged at last / A night-long Present of the Past" (LXXI lines 1-3).

The seventh section is framed by the first and second anniversaries of Hallam's death, and rejects the poet's previous notion that it is acceptable to lose himself in the past. In the first few lyrics in this section, Tennyson explains that he is writing, not for immortality, but to nobly mourn his friend. In Lyric LXXVII, the poet questions the function of his poetic tribute:

What hope is here for modern rhyme
To him, who turns a musing eye
On songs, and deeds, and lives, that lie
Foreshortened in the tract of time?

These mortal lullabies of pain
May bind a book, may line a box
May serve to curl a maiden's locks;
Or when a thousand moons shall wane

A man upon a stall may find,
And, passing, turn the page that tells
A grief, then changed to something else,
Sung by a long-forgotten mind.

But what of that? My darkened ways
Shall ring with music all the same;
To breathe my loss is more than fame,
To utter love more sweet than praise.

The first stanza places the project in a cosmic setting, questioning if the poem can have any impact in the grand over-arching scheme. The “him” in the second line seems to refer to Hallam, and the poet wonders if Hallam will take notice. The second stanza imagines what other uses the poem may be put to, implying that the poet understands that his work will mean different things to each reader. The third stanza imagines a future in which the poet is no longer known – he is a “long-forgotten mind.” This stanza also shows that sorrow may be temporary; the grief has changed to “something else.” The final stanza resolves the problem of the poet being forgotten; he is writing not for fame or recognition: “To breathe my loss is more than fame, / To utter love more sweet than praise.” The second Christmas also appears in this section, which ends with Tennyson professing interest in the future with renewed faith.

This resolution carries over into the eighth part of the poem, which mark the second anniversary of Hallam's death and the Tennysons' departure from their Somersby home. Svalgic characterizes this section as "not merely a literal farewell to the scenes of the poet's youth but more importantly a symbolic farewell to the life in the past which he had been living" (820). Part of this farewell involves revisiting the image of the ship; Tennyson writes in CIII that he "dreamed a vision of the dead" (line 2), which he first sees as "a statue veiled" (12) in a hall, but later meets on "a great ship" (40). On the ship, the poet meets not a statue, but a living presence: "The man we loved was there on deck, / But thrice as large as man he bent / To greet us" (41-43). The final section of the poem reconfirms formal Christianity and looks toward the future, ending with the wedding of Tennyson's sister Cecilia.

By reading *In Memoriam* as being comprised of the nine divisions Tennyson noted, we can see a pattern emerge, one that leads the poet from the almost-mute shock of loss into something resembling hope. The narrative is not straightforward; instead, Tennyson attempts to most accurately portray the vacillating nature of grief. As the overarching thematic structure describes this journey, so do formal structures within the poem.

Rhyme and Consolation

In Memoriam is a sustained exploration of grief through poetry. Hartley S. Spatt describes one of the contradictions in the poem:

A work like *In Memoriam* is unusual. It is a poem about death and about the course of grief among those whom death leaves behind, but the conventional appurtenances of death are not to be found in Tennyson's elegy (48).

Instead of adhering to what his readers would have expected in an elegy, Tennyson gave them "a poem whose occasion may be death, but whose real purpose is the creation and interfoliation of a verbal tapestry which allows the poet to suppress, and then surpass, death" (48). Although much attention has been paid to the ways in which Tennyson attempts to circumvent the finality of death through themes of rebirth and resurrection in the poem, he also manages to negate the finality of loss through the poem's formal structures.

Formally, *In Memoriam* is unique. *In Memoriam*'s 133 lyrics vary in length, though each is divided into four-line stanzas of iambic tetrameter, rhyming *abba*.⁶ The effect of this form is to provide successive, mutually independent philosophical observations; each lyric is complete and coherent, and each builds upon the last. Yet individual stanzas exhibit a powerful and repeated tension related to the rhyme scheme. Many critics have remarked upon the *In Memoriam* stanza's "envelope" structure; the outer rhymes bracket the inner rhymes, lending special emphasis to the rhymes in the first and fourth lines of each stanza.

⁶ The *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes that "Although Tennyson believed he had invented the stanza, it may be found in 17th-c. poetry, notably Ben Jonson [...] and Lord Herbert of Chesterbury" (581).

Throughout the long poem, the poet reiterates the comfort he finds in forms, both bodily and poetic. Faced with the absence of his dead friend, the poet seeks to give a form to the emptiness of his grief. In “Form and Contentment,” Ellen Rooney discusses the vital importance of studying formal aspects of literature; she asks, “What is the nature of the anxiety of form that we can read across even the sharpest critical divisions?” The answer, she tells us, is the fear of having no form: “the real terror is the terror of formlessness” (24). An exploration of Tennyson’s poetics in *In Memoriam*, including the appropriateness of his *abba* stanza form as a tool for expressing his struggle to both celebrate and overcome grief, can elucidate the poetics of the project as a whole.

In Memoriam is deeply concerned with the struggle to overcome grief, even as it celebrates the act and effects of mourning. As several critics have discussed, one of the characteristic themes of the poem is the way it appears to attempt to resolve internal conflicts, while ultimately preserving and privileging such struggles: “The vacillation between opposite aspects of a theme or between opposing states of mind (such as hope and despair) that turn out not to oppose but to define each other is a critical *modus operandi* in *In Memoriam*” (Gates 507).

Critics have commented in passing on the effect of the *abba* stanza form, which Christopher Ricks argues “can ‘circle moaning in the air,’⁷ returning to its setting out, and with fertile circularity staving off its deepest terror and arrival at desolation and indifference” (228). In Ricks’ analysis, the *abba* form uses the outer rhymes to set out rather than to arrive; the travel completed within the stanza allows the poet to explore

⁷ Lyric XII line 15.

grief without resolving it, and as Gates asserts, “to continue missing Hallam rather than to cease loving him” (508)⁸. Even the physical format of the poem on the page represents a circling and returning: the second and third lines are indented several spaces in from the first and fourth lines, giving the impression that they are literally being enfolded.

As the poet attempts to offer consolation through the thematic elements of the poem, he also does so through the formal elements of individual stanzas. Gates describes the effect of Tennyson’s *abba* stanza:

The fourth line does gesture back to the first, but it does not enact a complete return, for it can only do so after the reader has passed through the two middle lines of whose couplet form gives so much strength to their rhyme. Thus, the outer rhyme of a- -a is distanced; the second “a” recollects only dimly the first “a,” which by then has become a faint echo and seems, in spite of the rhyme, to have been something different than the “a” we are now reading. [...] The second “a” returns, but it also leads beyond because it is different from the middle couplets and only faintly recollects its partner. The movement, then, is one of vacillation (a to bb, and back to a), of gesturing backward (a ← a), and of leading beyond (bb → a). (Gates 508)

The end rhymes of the stanzas do not quite meet; the first “a” leads the reader to anticipate the second, but the middle couplet interrupts the resolution and postpones the

⁸ This pattern has been remarked upon by critics since the publication of the poem; Charles Kingsley wrote in 1850 that, “The mournful minor rhyme of each first and fourth line always leads the ear to expect something beyond” (qtd. in Gates 508).

rhyme. The second “a” points to, but differs from, the first: “The outer lines, therefore, gesture toward enfolding the inner lines, but at the same time, the inner lines break through, or refuse this enfolding gesture” (Gates 509).

We can see this effect throughout *In Memoriam*. In Lyric LXXXIV, the poet questions the changes that Death has made upon his friend:

As sometimes in a dead man’s face,
To those that watch it more and more,
A likeness, hardly seen before,
Comes out—to some one of his race:

So, dearest, now thy brows are cold,
I see thee what thou art, and know
Thy likeness to the wise below,
Thy kindred with the great of old.

But there is more than I can see,
And what I see I leave unsaid,
Nor speak it, knowing Death has made
His darkness beautiful with thee.

The third stanza contains a slant rhyme: “unsaid” to “made.” “See” in the first line rhymes perfectly with “thee” in the fourth, but the middle two lines postpone the resolution that perfect rhyme offers. This stanza provides a thematic resolution – the poet

asserts that Death is made beautiful because of his dead friend, and it also provides formal resolution – despite the “interrupting core” of the middle lines (which are made even more disruptive with their slant rhyme), the lyric ends with “thee.” This reflects the content of the lyric; the poet begins by imagining his dead friend’s face, and though he fears that death will have made his friend unknowable, the lyric ends with the realization that his friend is still recognizable as “thee.”

The effect of the individual stanza can also be applied to an entire lyric, as demonstrated in Lyric CXXVII. The peaceful phrase “All is well” begins and ends the lyric, but is interrupted by the tumult of the inner stanzas:

And all is well, though faith and form
Be sundered in the night of fear;
Well roars the storm to those that hear
A deeper voice across the storm,

Proclaiming social truth shall spread,
And justice, even though thrice again
The red fool-fury of the Seine
Should pile her barricades with dead.

But ill for him that wears a crown,
And for him, the lazar, in his rags:
They tremble, the sustaining crags;

The spires of ice are toppled down,

And molten up, and roar in flood;

The fortress crashes from on high,

The brute earth lightens to the sky,

And the great Aeon sinks in blood,

And compassed by the fires of Hell;

While thou, dear spirit, happy star,

O'erlook'st the tumult from afar,

And smilest, knowing all is well.

Despite the violence depicted in many of these lines, the peace that seems to return at the end of the lyric attempts to be convincing, and therefore comforting, because of the imagery as the lyric progresses. The first instance of “all is well” is qualified; all is well even though tumult follows this tentative statement. “A deeper voice” in line four suggests that something, perhaps God, is watching over this process, ensuring that all is well, but “sundered” and “roars” in lines two and three suggest that even this ambiguously omnipotent figure cannot contain the instability. The lyric moves to the middle couplet of stanza five, “While thou, dear spirit, happy star / O'erlook'st the tumult from afar.” The violence which disrupts stanzas one through four progresses from what Gates terms an “interrupting core of violence” (510) to becoming an all-encompassing

force, which is in turn calmed by the “dear spirit, happy star” in stanza five before resolving in the conclusion that “all is well” in the last line of the lyric.

This “interrupting core of violence” points to the necessity of this particular form. It is through Tennyson’s enfolding gestures that the violence is tamed, or at the least contained. Paul de Man insists that the “true aesthetic dimension of the text” is found only when form and formlessness occupy the same text. It is the threat of formlessness within the highly formal structure of the poem that makes it so powerful, and it is the coexistence of the sundering tumult and the phrase “all is well” that makes the lyric so moving. The stability of Tennyson’s rhyme scheme allows thematic instability to exist within the poem.

Tennyson ends Lyric CXXVII with a formal and thematic consolation. The last “all is well” is both a return to the first and an attempt to move beyond it. The first “All is well” is followed by “though,” which introduces the violence of the following stanzas. The last “all is well” follows the “smiling” of the “happy star” and the overlooking “from afar.” This chiasmic structure is an extended version of the *abba* stanza form in which the final rhyme gestures toward its precursor even as it only faintly recalls it. The final “all is well” in this lyric barely recalls the first “All is well, though.” The final “all is well” has seemingly conquered the threatening darkness and tumult of the middle lines, and its context is much wider: the observation that all is well comes not from the poet on earth, but from his friend in Heaven. The conclusion of this lyric has not completely returned to its original form, but has indeed moved beyond it.

Although most of the lyrics of *In Memoriam* do not contain such strong repetitions as CXXVII, the process of acknowledging grief and moving beyond it recurs throughout the poem. The interruptions and movements to interrupt also appear in Lyric XLIII, which begins with sleep and ends with a form of awakening:

If Sleep and Death be truly one,
And every spirit's folded bloom
Through all its intervital gloom
In some long trance should slumber on;

Unconscious of the sliding hour,
Bare of the body, might it last,
And silent traces of the past
Be all the colour of the flower:

So then were nothing lost to man;
So that still garden of the souls
In many a figured leaf unrolls
The total world since life began;

And love will last as pure and whole
As when he loved me here in Time,
And at the spiritual prime

Rewaken with the dawning soul.

Thematically, the lyric accomplishes what the individual stanzas do: the first line posits a problem, that of sleep equaling death, and the concluding line offers a resolution: an awakening that is not from sleep, but from death. The last line is not a repetition of the first line, but instead is a thematic revision that hearkens back to the first line.

This same doubling and peculiar echoing can be seen on the level of individual stanzas in this lyric as well, particularly the first stanza. The first stanza of this lyric contains a slant rhyme: “one” to “on.” The problem of sleep equaling death is reflected in the form: the idea is difficult and possibly unsolvable, and the form echoes the content of the lines. Like the subject of the first stanza, and indeed the entire lyric, the rhyme scheme leaves the reader unsettled, with expectations that are not quite met. The middle rhymes of this stanza and those that follow are perfect rhymes; these middle couplets postpone the conclusion of the individual stanzas even as they gesture to the ability to move past the moment upon which the lyric reflects.

The lyric ends with a reference to the soul, and the hope that beyond sleep and even death, the deceased will be reawakened with a “dawning soul”; as Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes, death “cannot be the end of the story as long as [the poet] maintains his faith in the resurrection of the individual body, and where human ends are imagined as being extended, even the resolutions of terminal rhyme will be instinct with fresh life” (179). The lyric ends with a perfect rhyme, and as Douglas-Fairhurst and other critics suggest, the rhyme pattern fulfills the reader’s expectations of the lyric form. It therefore posits a resolution, which if not entirely healing, is at the least aesthetically comforting.

The final rhymes work because they are rhymes about resurrection which also present rhyme *as* resurrection:

Tennyson's rhymes [...] continually articulate what he does not always dare speak out loud, namely the continuity of his body and voice between this life and the afterlife: a body and voice which continue to exist just like his rhyming quatrains, single in all their self-divisions. (180)

Poetic form and corporeal form are thus combined to offer the reader the possibility of continuity.

While many of the *In Memoriam* lyrics employ this envelope structure, several lyrics challenge this structure with enjambments across stanzas.⁹ The experience of reading the poem as a whole is lulling; the rhyme scheme at times seems to fade, but the stanzas with enjambed lines call attention to this and force the reader's attention back to the rhyme scheme. In three instances throughout the poem, adjoining lyrics feature enjambments across stanzas: XV and XVI; XCV and XCVI; and CXIV and CXV. Although the rhyme scheme in these adjoining lyrics challenges the typical *In Memoriam* stanza form, the lyrics surrounding these employ the envelope structure. In the lyrics surrounding the adjacent enjambed lyrics, the repetition of rhyme is perfect.

Beginning with Lyric IX, the speaker imagines the ship carrying Hallam's remains as it crosses the ocean. Lyrics IX-XVII are understood to be among the first that Tennyson composed, and they deal with of Hallam's dead body. The sequence begins

⁹ Such enjambments occur in Lyrics X, XV, XVI, XXXIX, LXXVII, LXXXII, LXXXVII, XCII, XCV, XCVI, XCVIII, CV, CVII, CXIV, CXV, and CXVIII.

with Lyric IX, in which Tennyson addresses the “Fair ship” (line 1) containing “My Arthur, whom I shall not see / Till all my widowed race be run” (lines 17-18).

Fair ship, that from the Italian shore
 Sailest the placid ocean-plains
 With my lost Arthur’s loved remains,
Spread thy full wings, and waft him o’er.

So draw him home to those that mourn
 In vain; a favourable speed
 Ruffle thy mirrored mast, and lead
Through prosperous floods his holy urn.

All night no ruder air perplex
 Thy sliding keel, till Phosphor, bright
 As our pure love, through early light
Shall glimmer on the dewy decks.

Sphere all your lights around, above;
 Sleep, gentle heavens, before the prow;
 Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,
My friend, the brother of my love;

My Arthur, whom I shall not see
Till all my widowed race be run;
Dear as the mother to the son,
More than my brothers are to me.

The sequence ends with Lyric XVII, in which the ship “comest, much wept for” (line 1). The final stanza of Lyric XVII repeats the image of the poet as Hallam’s widow:

So kind an office hath been done,
Such precious relics brought by thee;
The dust of him I shall not see
Till all my widowed race be run. (lines 17-20)

The image of Tennyson as widow has moved from the middle lines of Lyric IV to the outer lines of XVII, leaving it the dominant image of these lyrics. In IV, the poet refers to the corpse by name (“My Arthur”); however, in the time it has taken the ship to cross the ocean, the body has transformed itself into nameless dust.

Lyrics XV and XVI both contain enjambments across stanzas, and both describe violence that threatens to lead to disintegration. Lyric XV contains two examples:

To-night the winds begin to rise
And roar from yonder dropping day;
The last red leaf is whilr’d away,
The rooks are blown about the skies;

The forest crack’d, the waters curl’d,

The cattle huddled on the lea;
And wildly dash'd on tower and tree
The sunbeam strikes along the world:

And but for fancies, which aver
That all thy¹⁰ motions gently pass
Athwart a plane of molten glass,
I scarce could brook the strain and stir

That makes the barren branches loud;
And but for fear it is not so,
The wild unrest that lives in woe
Would dote and pore on yonder cloud

That rises upward always higher,
And onward drags a laboring breast,
And topples round the dreary west,
A looming bastion fringed with fire.

The language of this lyric provides thematic instability to match the formal instability of the enjambed lines. The wildness of nature Tennyson describes functions as a metaphor for his own doubt, and the danger implied in a landscape normally safe is mirrored in the

¹⁰ The ship carrying Hallam's body back to England.

confusion to which he confesses. The winds roar, leaves and birds are whirled and blown about the skies, and the forest itself is “crack’d” by the violence of the storm. Even the sunbeam, typically a symbol of hope, is changed; it “strikes along the world” (line 8). There is a shift in the third stanza; Tennyson states that it is only “fancies” that confirm that the violence he describes is temporary: “all thy motions gently pass / Athwart a plane of molten glass” (lines 10-11). It is only this that allows him to withstand the tumult he observes. The lyric ends with a scene of destruction; the “laboring breast” (line 18) is dragged upward by a cloud, a fiery bastion that looms oppressively.

The enjambments surround the fourth stanza, the defining phrase of which is “wild unrest” (line 15). The enjambments have the effect of eliding the end rhymes of lines 12 and 16, thus bringing attention to the perfect rhyme of “so” to “woe” in the inner lines of the stanza. Without the characteristic envelope structure, the “wild unrest” spills into the surrounding stanzas, and the lyric ends with images of chaos.

The “wild unrest” in XV is carried into the subsequent lyric:

What words are these have fallen from me?

Can calm despair and wild unrest

Be tenants of a single breast,

Or Sorrow such a changeling be? (lines 1-4)

Lyric XVI poses a series of questions that collapse the speaker’s self; he feels the overwhelming turmoil stunning from him “my power to think / And all my knowledge of myself” (lines 15-16). The lyric ends with the speaker calling himself a “delirious man,” “Whose fancy fuses old and new, / And flashes into false and true, / And mingles all

without a plan” (lines 17-20). However, in Lyric XVII, the poet is comforted as a breeze blows the ship into safe harbor. The stanzas in this lyric are not enjambed; the chaos of XV and XVI is resolved, and the poet is able to calmly bless the ship, saying “Come quick, thou bringest all I love” (line 8).

Just as the repetition of “all is well” in lyric CXXVII provides comfort to the reader, so do other repetitions throughout *In Memoriam*. In lyrics VII and CXIX, the poet/speaker finds himself in front of Hallam’s house, and in the later lyric he seems to find a resolution that had been missing in the first. In VII, the poet is filled by the emptiness of the house in front of which he stands:

Dark house, by which once more I stand¹¹
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,

¹¹ Ricks quotes Tennyson as noting that the house was “67 Wimpole Street,” Hallam’s house (354).

And ghastly through the drizzling rain

On the bald street breaks the blank day.

The poet knows the house well; he is there “once more.” However, instead of grasping his friend’s hand, he is bereft, creeping like a “guilty thing” through the “bald streets.”

The picture Tennyson paints here is indeed ghastly, and we must wait more than one hundred more lyrics before the poet resolves this scene.

In CXIX, the poet/speaker once again stands in front of his dead friend’s house, but he does not find the experience as bleak:

Doors, where my heart was used to beat

So quickly, not as one that weeps

I come once more; the city sleeps;

I smell the meadow in the street;

I hear a chirp of birds; I see

Betwixt the black fronts long-withdrawn

A light-blue lane of early dawn,

And think of early days and thee,

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 hand¹².

In these lines, the poet is consoled by the memory of his dead friend. He no longer comes “as one that weeps,” and he is able to take comfort in the smell of the meadow and the chirp of birds, which ties this section of *In Memoriam* to more traditional pastoral elegies. The poet revisits the place of earlier trauma, but time and distance have transformed that place into something positive.

In addition to thematic repetitions, *In Memoriam* also provides temporal repetition, particularly centered on significant holidays. The recurring focus on Christmas provides a progression from grief to consolation. The first Christmas scene is described in Lyrics XXVIII, XXIX, and XXX, and it is a conflicted experience for the speaker; the bells that once brought him pure joy now bring him “sorrow touched with joy” (XXVIII line 19). And though the family tries to celebrate the holiday, they are constantly reminded of Hallam’s absence:

At our old pastimes in the hall
We gamboled, making vain pretense
Of gladness, with an awful sense
Of one mute Shadow watching all. (XXX lines 5-8)

In this description, Hallam’s memory is an awful Shadow, lurking near those who are celebrating without him. The guilt and grief that plagued the poet in the first Christmas

¹² VII and CXIX can be compared to “The Deserted House” (1830), which uses the house as a metaphor for a corpse, and which uses a form similar to the *In Memoriam* stanza:

Close the door, the shutters close,
Or thro’ the windows we shall see
The nakedness and vacancy
Of the dark deserted house. (lines 9-12)

scene has lessened in the second Christmas scene, described in Lyric LXXVII. Instead of sensing a “mute Shadow watching all,” the poet describes the “quiet sense of something lost” (line 8). The poet also describes a lack of tears (lines 14-16), but concludes that “with long use tears are dry” (line 20), implying that although grief still exists, it is not as immediate.

In the final Christmas scene, described in Lyrics CIV, CV, and CVI, the poet again sees hope in nature and hears solace in the sound of bells. Lyric CVI literally echoes with the ringing of the Christmas bells, which the poet describes as “Ring[ing] out the grief that saps the mind, / For those that here we see no more” (lines 9-10). As well, the poet finds hope in the possibility of a future reappearance of Christ: “Ring out of darkness of the land, / Ring in the Christ that is to be” (lines 31-32). With God still awaited, Tennyson offers ringing bells. With the movement from desolation in the first Christmas scene to quiet acceptance in the second Christmas scene to consolation in the third Christmas scene, the poet is providing the reader with a comforting structure, moving as the individual lyrics do through repetition to provide solace.

If we examine the poetics of the work as a whole, we see that the entire poem is indeed moving, not necessarily past grief, but through the mourning process and toward consolation, although it is never absolutely reached. While the analysis of the *abba* stanza form points to Tennyson’s attempts at resolution, both thematically and formally, within individual stanzas and lyrics, this analysis can be applied to the poem as a whole. The first stanza in the Prologue of *In Memoriam* has end rhymes of “Love” and “prove” in the

first and fourth lines¹³. The final stanza of the Epilogue has end rhymes of “loves” and “moves” in the first and fourth lines¹⁴. In each case, the end “a” rhymes are slant rhymes. In effect, we can read the entire poem as being bracketed by the rhyme of “Love” to “moves.” Thus, the entire poem is involved in the acts of gesturing backward and of leading beyond. The outer lines strive to enclose the lines in between, but those inner lines refuse the enfolding gesture. This refusal is represented on the level of the poem as a whole, as it is on the level of individual lyrics and stanzas, by the refusal of the final word, “moves,” to perfectly echo the final word of the first stanza, “Love.”

Tennyson’s consolation, then, seems not to be in actually moving beyond grief, but in the experience of the circular process of grieving itself. The poet we see at the end of the poem is not the same we saw at the beginning, and though there are familiar echoes of the early self in the later, the process of mourning has transformed the poet. In *In Memoriam*, perhaps the most widely celebrated poem on death in the modern era, Tennyson is working toward countering or enfolding the threat of chaos. Tennyson is not able to physically resurrect his dead friend, but the process of reading and writing enacts a strange form of resurrection, aesthetic instead of physical. Instead of showing that grief is the end, something to be dealt with and disposed of as soon as possible, Tennyson

¹³ Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove. (lines 1-4)

¹⁴ That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And with one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves. (lines 141-144)

shows that grief is something to be celebrated through his use of the *abba* stanza form, which struggles to enfold, but always meets with formal and thematic poetic tension.

Conclusion: Grief and Mourning

T.S. Eliot wrote of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* that "its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience" (200-201). Throughout the poem, the tension is between Tennyson's need for an end to his grief and his desire to continue mourning Hallam. As W. David Shaw asserts, that tension must always be there:

When we try to remove one of the contradictory elements – the consolation from the inconsolability; the remembering from the forgetting; the certainty from the uncertainty – we are in danger of making death noncontradictory or devoid of strangeness, which is the one thing it never really is. (6)

Throughout the poem, Tennyson questions the motives, purpose, and even existence of God, and he seems to question the healing power of poetry itself, even as he affirms it. Although Tennyson achieves thematic closure, formally the poem will never give him that closure – through its rhyme scheme, it always challenges the moment of resolution, reflecting the cyclical nature of grief itself.

Although in current times we seem mostly to have collapsed the divide between grieving and mourning, in Victorian times these were distinct things. Grief was understood to be the internal sorrow of the bereaved, while mourning referred to the outward expression of that sorrow, which could take the form of the black clothing,

wreaths, and other funereal artifacts with which the Victorian mourners surrounded themselves. Evidence suggests that Victorian mourning rituals “provided opportunities for the bereaved to express their sorrow in a manner that made the grieving experience easier to endure and to complete” (Jalland 193). Part of the function of mourning as the Victorians did it was to make the loss easier to bear by sharing it; their mourning rituals attempted to structure the terrifying aspect of death within a coherent system of values, while also rallying the support of the community (193).

With *In Memoriam*, Tennyson both contributed to, and helped to create, a Victorian culture of mourning. By giving form to chaotic grief, by showing that sorrow can be overcome in small ways, and by blending the personal and collective, Tennyson attempts to contain his own grief, but he also gives his readers a way to put language to their own sorrows. He also recognizes the patterns and rhythms of grief, what we sometimes call the stages of grief, an ebb and flow that his poem both struggles to express and organizes into a stable if tensely dynamic structure. *In Memoriam* became a foundational text; it was read and re-read, quoted in sermons and séances, and it was reported that, next to the Bible, it was the book Queen Victoria found most comforting in her widowhood.

Tennyson had already established his poetic career prior to 1850, but the publication of *In Memoriam* coincided with a vacancy in the role of national Poet Laureate. Queen Victoria offered Tennyson the Laureateship in November of 1850. Tennyson later told his friend James Knowles,

The night before I was asked to take the Laureateship, which was offered to me through Prince Albert's liking for my *In Memoriam*, I dreamed that he came to me and kissed me on the cheek. I said, in my dream, "Very kind, but very German." In the morning the letter about the Laureateship was brought to me and laid upon my bed. I thought about it through the day, but could not make up my mind whether to take it or refuse it, and at the last I wrote two letters, one accepting and one declining, and threw them on the table, and settled to decide which I would send after my dinner and bottle of port. (qtd. in Ricks 219-220)

Tennyson was appointed on November 19th.

In Memoriam earned Tennyson the Laureateship because it proved him to be the Victorians' "most articulate voice" (Pitt 148); he had written his deepest moods and anxieties, which seemed to echo theirs. It is perhaps ironic that such a private expression of loss earned him the most public role a poet could attain, but Tennyson was so beloved as the author of *In Memoriam* that it must have seemed only fitting that he would take the role. In addition to being meaningful to his readers, Tennyson's appointment as Laureate also meant a great deal to him: "To be the ceremonial voice of the State, the servant of its Servant, was to have status in the community, and what is more, a status, not merely as a person, but as a poet: there was no need to deny the inner voice or the solitary vision" (148). As Laureate, Tennyson would be obliged to speak for the Crown, but he would also be freer to be, as Pitt writes, "as eccentric as he liked" (148), and that creative

eccentricity would be honored. While *In Memoriam* cast a shadow over all the poems it preceded, it also allowed its author to become the voice of an entire culture.

CHAPTER III

“THE NOISE OF THE MOURNING OF A MIGHTY NATION”:

BURYING THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON /
TENNYSON’S EARLY LAUREATE POETRY

Introduction

As *In Memoriam* instructed the people of England how to experience and process grief, Tennyson’s early Laureate poetry also sought to fulfill the needs of its readers. Just as *In Memoriam* seemed to speak individually to each person who read it, so did the Duke of Wellington’s death touch the nation. The great Duke’s funeral in 1852 demonstrates an extreme version of Victorian public mourning. While *In Memoriam* provided consolation, both formal and thematic, the Duke’s funeral proved to be an occasion that raised great anxiety, even as, perhaps unexpectedly, it sought to entertain. As the newly-appointed Poet Laureate, Tennyson was expected to mark the occasion in verse, so he too was caught up in the elaborate spectacle. An examination of how Tennyson fashioned himself as Laureate during this time can show how he viewed the Laureateship, and how his readers viewed his role as poet of the nation as well.

In 1852, London witnessed a spectacle to rival the Great Exhibition.¹⁵ It was a funeral, one that particularly illuminates the aesthetics of mourning during the Victorian period. The funeral of the Duke of Wellington has been seen as one of the greatest public displays of the Victorian period; indeed, many felt it to be one of the most significant

¹⁵ The Great Exhibition was held in London from May-October 1851. Designed to display “the Industry of All Nations”, the Great Exhibition showcased England’s holdings throughout the world and emphasized the nation’s place at the top of industrialized nations (McClintock 57).

events in the history of Britain. Wellington's funeral was organized and overseen by Prince Albert, who organized the Great Exhibition; therefore, as Cornelia Pearsall asserts, "It may have seemed even at the time that Wellington's funeral [...] constituted an extension of the Great Exhibition, only now with his own corpse at the center of the international spectacle" (370). Like the Great Exhibition, although less predictably, Wellington's funeral showcased British arts, craftsmanship, and technology. The funeral procession, comprised of more than ten thousand marchers, engulfed central London, witnessed by an audience of more than one and a half million people (365). Anna Jane Barton describes the funeral as "a pageant of modern Englishness" (1). From the military parade that accompanied the coffin, to the gas lights that were used to light the specially-remodeled St. Paul's and the mechanical pulley that was used to hoist the coffin from the funeral car, to the multitude of people that flocked into London on the railways to witness the procession, every detail of the funeral demonstrated the strength and industry of the nation of which the Duke had been a figurehead (1).

Assembling these extensive materials necessarily took a great deal of time; in fact, almost two months passed between the Duke's death and his burial. But while the public marveled over the elaborate preparations for the interment, they expressed anxiety over the inevitable dissolution of the man himself. The Duke died on September 14th, 1852, but he was not buried until November 18th. The Duke had left the disposal of his body to the Queen, but she involved the people, waiting until Parliament reconvened so that the massive funeral ceremonies that were already agreed upon could be approved by a vote (Pearsall 379). The popular press expressed dismay over the delay and pondered

its political motives and implications. However, there was a much more urgent reason for public concern: the Duke's body was literally decomposing, even as his memorial was being arranged.

Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, a victory that raised him to the level of national hero. Upon his return to England, he served as Prime Minister, and became one of Queen Victoria's most trusted political advisors. Wellington was one of the great "heroes of the age," but unlike others, such as Nelson, he continued to serve his country in peacetime, elevating himself to "the greatest single argument for Victorian hero worship" (Houghton 309). In mourning for Wellington, Barton asserts, the people of England had the opportunity to enact, and redefine, their national and cultural identity. Wellington's death provided an occasion for Victorian England to describe itself. During the two months that followed Wellington's death and culminated with his funeral, a need to create and display lavish public art and pages of print was countered by a general sense of unease about the pomp and circumstance that were required to properly memorialize the great Duke.

The most significant work of literature produced to memorialize Wellington is Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington." Tennyson's "Ode" is the first poem to appear under his own name since the publication of *In Memoriam*, and it expresses many of the anxieties surrounding Wellington's body even as it celebrates the life of the nation's great hero. The delay in holding the funeral became one subject of Tennyson's Ode, but it also provided valuable time in which to compose the lengthy poem. The "Ode" is extraordinary in that it articulates the concerns of the population in

general, being preoccupied to a great extent with funeral arrangements, linking from the outset the details of the body's disposal to possibilities for national self-definition. Barton argues that Wellington's death gave not just the nation, but its recently appointed laureate an opportunity to establish a new identity (4). Journalists remarked upon the connection between national hero and national poet; a reviewer for the *Times* wrote, "It is fitting that the requiem for England's greatest warrior should be hymned by England's laureate" (11/20/1852).

While Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" may be the memorial poem with which we are most familiar, it was one of many literary works created in response to the Duke's death. Many of these poems are anonymous; most appear in the papers alongside illustrations of Wellington's portrait, his home, funeral arrangements, and so on. Many of these poets engaged in hyperbole in their attempts to adequately describe the occasion; indeed, much of the writing surrounding Wellington's death and funeral, when trying to reflect upon what the loss of Wellington will mean to the nation, resorts to claims about the man that seem outrageous. However, I argue that such hyperbole is not ridiculous; the inability of these writers to describe Wellington as an ordinary man reflects the anxiety that he was just that, and just like all other men, he too was decomposing after his death, even as these poems were being composed.

Given the effusiveness of the popular press and poets known and unknown alike, it is not surprising that Wellington's funeral has been criticized by historians as the epitome of what Peter Sinnema terms "outlandish ritual" (xx), citing twentieth-century sources that label it "the high point of Victorian funeral extravagance," or as a "fine

example of the Victorian exhibition of funerary display taken to extremes of redundancy” (xxi). However, in recent years, the Duke of Wellington’s funeral has received renewed critical attention, with historical and literary critics recognizing that it had significant cultural aftereffects.¹⁶

With this chapter I aim to extend the work of these recent critics, examining the ways in which Victorians enacted mourning, and the ways in which the literature of mourning contributes to Wellington’s funeral, as well as to those that follow. In the case of Wellington’s funeral, I argue, we can only begin to understand the cultural significance of the loss by examining the literature, particularly the newspaper articles and poems, that this momentous death gave birth to. While, as I will discuss later in this chapter, contemporary reviewers labeled Tennyson’s “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” an aesthetic and emotional failure, I argue that the poem, as well as the others written on the occasion of Wellington’s death, allow us insight into Victorian hero worship and the anxieties that define this particular funeral and Victorian mourning aesthetics in general. The great Duke’s body is at the center of this spectacle, and it is this body around which nearly all of the public’s anxieties revolve. As quickly as the Wellington literature tried to sanitize the corpse, it was clear that most never could forget one fact: even heroes rot.

¹⁶ In his recent book, Peter Sinnema discusses what it means to be English in the “wake of Wellington,” arguing, as does Anna Jane Barton, that English national identity was inextricably linked with the mourning rituals for the great national hero. Iain Pears discusses representations of Napoleon and Wellington, offering insights into Wellington admiration and patriotism at mid-century. And in an article that attempts to explain the Victorians’ “extravagant desire for proximity to [Wellington’s] remains” (371), Cornelia Pearsall poses a question that we all must ask when studying this event: “What *can* these remnants [...] all of the products spawned in the wake of one man’s death [...] tell us about Victorian culture?” (389)

The Death of the Duke of Wellington

Wellington died on September 14th, 1852 after a series of what were labeled “epileptic fits”; the *Times* reported that although the Duke was quite elderly, his death was unexpected: “No indications whatever had prepared the public mind for so sudden an event, and the melancholy occurrence was entirely unexpected by those persons who were immediately attached to the Duke’s person” (*The Times* 9/15/1852). From the time of Wellington’s death, and continuing for the next several days, the newspapers continued to add details of the Duke’s death to their reporting. Early reports in the *Times* emphasize the grace and dignity with which Wellington died, at the same time they seek to reassure their readers that everything was done to save the Duke:

[On the arrival of Dr. McArthur and Messrs. William and John Hulk, surgeons] an emetic was prescribed, but unfortunately without any favourable result. Even then, however, it was not anticipated that danger was immanent, and hopes were entertained that the attack would speedily pass away. Unhappily these favourable expectations were doomed to disappointment; attack rapidly succeeded attack, and his Grace finally expired from exhaustion at a quarter-past 3 p.m. Up to the moment of his death the Duke appeared to preserve consciousness, though unable to speak. (9/15/1852)

This emphasis on the Duke’s mental faculties demonstrates that for the *Times*, it was important that its readers understand that the Duke maintained his dignity even in the last

moments of his life. The *Times* further adds, “It will be gratifying to the public to learn that his Grace’s last moments were calm, and that he passed from life without suffering or pain” (9/15/1852).

While the *Times* takes great care to stress that Wellington died peacefully and with his customary dignity, the *Illustrated London News* offers a conflicting report of the Duke’s final moments. Like the account in the *Times*, this account includes a description of the measures that were taken to save the Duke after his first convulsion:

[I]t was necessary to send for Dr. Macarthur, of Walmer, his regular medical attendant. Mr. Hulke and his son (who also belongs to the medical profession) speedily returned, when an emetic was administered to the noble patient, but unfortunately without any good result. The Duke’s condition gradually became more dangerous; he was seized by a second convulsive fit of greater violence than the first; and the alarm of his son and daughter-in-law, Lord and Lady Charles Wellesley, painfully increased. At this critical emergency a messenger was despatched to the telegraph office at the Deal railway station, for the purpose of immediately summoning Dr. Hume from London to his Grace’s assistance. (9/18/1852)

The mention of Wellington’s family in this passage makes the description much more pathetic as we are invited to imagine the distress of Lord and Lady Charles Wellesley. This highly sensational mode of reporting continues in the description of Wellington’s final moments:

The noble Duke's state became gradually more perilous; and he suffered a third attack, still more severe than the preceding ones. When the members of his family and his medical attendants spoke to him, he appeared to be conscious that they were addressing him, and attempted to articulate a reply. His answers, however, were not distinct enough to be intelligible; and, indeed, not a syllable that he uttered from the moment when he ordered his apothecary to be sent for, could be understood. About three o'clock he had a fourth and final attack, of redoubled intensity, which rendered him perfectly insensible, and ultimately carried him off at the hour above stated. (9/18/1852)

While this report does state that Wellington appeared to be conscious even after his third attack, it also highlights the fact that he was not able to communicate intelligibly. The phrase "perfectly insensible" contradicts the reports in the *Times* that the Duke retained consciousness until his death, and challenges the reassurance that he died "without suffering or pain." What are we to make of these apparent contradictions? While it may be that the *Illustrated London News* simply has a more sensational style of reporting, it seems more likely that the *Times* was omitting these pathetic details so that Wellington could retain his heroic status even in death.

In the days following Wellington's death, the papers shifted from describing the man's death to celebrating his life, particularly those actions and attributes which characterized him as a national hero. An article in the *Times* describes Wellington's ascetic habits in admiring detail:

The Spartan simplicity of his habits was maintained to the last, and the only relaxation which he permitted himself was an occasional extra hour's rest at Walmer. In his 84th year he was still the same abstemious, active, self-denying man he had ever been, rising early, never latterly tasting wine or spirits, taking regular exercise on foot and on horseback, sleeping on a hard uncurtained couch, and rejecting even the luxury of a downy pillow.

(9/18/1852)

The matter of Wellington's pillow is significant. It becomes a symbol of the man; we can assume that such a hero would not find a comfortable pillow acceptable, nor would others deem it appropriate. Later in the article, a more detailed anecdote regarding Wellington's choice of pillow is related:

A story is told of a Highland chief who, finding his son reclining his head on a ball of snow, rebuked the effeminate indulgence by kicking it from under him. The Duke used a pillow, but it was an exceedingly hard one, stuffed with horsehair, and lined with washleather, and he carried it about with him wherever he went. (9/18/1852)

The fact that this anecdote begins with a reference to a "Highland chief" equates Wellington's heroism with that of a great Highland warrior, alluding to the virtues of primitive hardiness, manly stoicism, and military strength. The ball of snow is labeled an "effeminate indulgence," which we can assume would also describe the downy pillow the Duke rejected. The *Times* also reports that Wellington showed no taste for extravagant food: "[The Duke] showed no preference for a good dinner over a bad one. This troubled

the *chef de cuisine*, but he admits that his master was a very great man notwithstanding” (9/18/1852). While these reports may be comical to a contemporary audience, they illustrate the characteristics that Victorians valued in a national hero.

In addition to describing the personal habits that made Wellington so admirable, the papers also spent a great deal of time reflecting upon his achievements on behalf of the nation. The *Times* attempts to describe what the loss of Wellington means to the nation, though it admits the difficulty in doing so:

We believe we should best describe the national feeling at this remarkable period by saying that no one can yet fully realize the loss which the country has sustained. The Duke of Wellington, for generation after generation, had lived among us so long, and had so adapted his presence and capacities to the changing exigencies of taste, that it requires some effort to look back on more than the last stage of such an eventful life. (9/17/1852)

The article continues:

In addition to such reflections as these, which of themselves would suffice for a time to bewilder our ideas, it must be remembered that the event which we have now to solemnize is virtually without a precedent. Neither this nor any other country has ever, in modern times, lost such a son (9/17/1852).

This passage surely must be read as hyperbolic; it is impossible to imagine that of all of the deaths of heroes and rulers that England (and even the world) had survived until this

point, Wellington's would be the most significant. However, this sentiment is echoed in the memorial poetry. The author of "The Duke's Chamber in Walmer Castle," published in the *Illustrated London News* just three days after Wellington's death, describes the Duke as England's "mightiest Chief," and commands the nation, "Weep, England!" (ll. 12-13) In a similar vein, Tennyson describes Wellington as "the last great Englishman" in "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" (l. 18). Several critics have commented on the significance of that label. Yet it is important to realize that Tennyson was not the only writer given to such hyperbole. Writers of prose and poetry alike engaged in such descriptions, with the newspapers daily indulging in similar extravagance.

Like the *Times*, the *Illustrated London News* also reflected on what Wellington meant to the nation; it labels Wellington's death as a "national calamity": "The Duke of Wellington is dead. The great soldier, the wise statesman, the able administrator, the profound thinker, is no more. We cannot but call the event, which has deprived the country of the living presence of so illustrious a man, a national calamity" (9/18/1852). The paper then goes on to imagine the effect of Wellington's death on other nations: "Nor will the influence of the event or the sympathy of the multitude be confined to his own country. Throughout Europe, Asia, and America, the news will fall amid the universal condolence of grateful nations" (9/18/1852). The paper predicts universal mourning, strongly linking Wellington with English national identity. The *Illustrated London News* and the *Times* both maintain that Wellington's funeral must be appropriate, not only to memorialize the man himself, but also to demonstrate that England knows

how to properly honor a national hero. The *Illustrated London News* describes what is at stake:

England owes this great funeral, not so much to Wellington, whose fame it cannot enhance, as to itself. The British people would feel dissatisfied and ashamed of themselves if they did not, upon an occasion so touching as this, exert themselves to the utmost to express to all the world how highly they revered, and how deeply they deplore, the man they have lost (9/25/1852).

This funeral would express English national pride and identity to the world even as it paid tribute to the great Duke.

It is clear from another article in the *Illustrated London News* that English national pride is indeed at stake. It asserts that the English people are capable of producing such an appropriate spectacle, regardless of previous criticisms:

The English are said to be people who do not understand shows and celebrations, or the proper mode of conducting them. It is alleged that they flock to and applaud the rudest attempts of the kind; and that, unlike the French and other nations of the Continent, they have no real taste for ceremonial. There is, doubtless, some truth in the charge. We are a practical people; and the few great ceremonials, whether local or national, still remaining among us, hold their place as relics of the past, not to be lightly interfered with, rather than as celebrations in accordance with, or approved by, the spirit of our age. But in this case, we hope, and venture

to predict, that no reproach of want of taste will rest upon the people, or upon the officials who shall be charged with the necessary details of the ceremony. (9/25/1852)

From just after the time of the Duke's death, the press expressed concern over the funeral. The preoccupation began with anxiety over whether the funeral would be public or private. In the days immediately following Wellington's death, the *Times* and *The Illustrated London News* both voice this concern. In the first announcement of the Duke's death in the *Illustrated London News*, a funeral is called for to give the public the "mournful satisfaction" of public grief:

Amid the universal regret which his death has occasioned, the people of England may, and will, have the mournful satisfaction that the man whom they so honour in his death—and to whom, if permitted by the recorded wishes or directions of the illustrious dead, they will give a public funeral, such as was never before seen or imagined in any other country—was as much honoured and beloved in his life as it was possible for a man to be. (ILN 9/18/1852)

A week after the Duke's death, *The London Times* reported that there would indeed be a public funeral, although many details were still unknown:

There is to be a public funeral, it is announced, and, it is further reported, on a very grand scale. The arrangements, however, are not yet definitively settled, and among those arrangements still left in darkness are the place, whether Westminster or St. Paul's—the attendance, whether it will profess

to include the two Houses of Parliament—the regiments to assist, and of course the time, besides every other detail. (9/21/1852)

As time passed, the concern over whether or not a funeral would be held transformed into concerns over the danger of public funerals. In the *Times*, a letter from a person who calls himself “A Fog Hater” deplores the idea of having a public funeral in the fall, because, as he wrote, “I apprehend that the sacrifice or safety of some valuable lives may depend upon it” (9/23/1852). This person cites the inclement weather as a source of danger. Others express fears of large crowds in general. As it turned out, these fears were justified. At the Lying-in-State at Chelsea Hospital, a violent spectacle occurred. Among the estimated 235,000 visitors, the push to enter the chapel was so strong that many people were injured, and two women were killed, crushed to death amid what the *Times* described as “scenes of confusion and struggles for bare life, frightful shrieks and exclamations of agony” (Pearsall 374).

As the days became weeks and then months, concerns over the state of the body began to arise. Wellington’s corpse was transported through the country in the months following his death, and the papers noted every move. Pearsall states that the *Illustrated London News* provided the most extensive chronicle; its special issues featuring information regarding Wellington’s mortuary arrangements sold more than two million copies (365). The delay in holding the funeral gave rise to other editorials in the popular press that bemoaned the postponement, and speculated about its political motives and repercussions. However, Pearsall argues that all knew the more pressing reason for public concern: that the Duke’s body certainly was undergoing its own “unseemly

transformations” (366). The delay in burying the Duke is even more striking in light of a widespread mid-century concern with proper and timely internments. Beginning in the 1830s, as Pearsall states, writings by G. A. Walker, Edwin Chadwick, and others strenuously argued to stop the practically indiscriminate burial of bodies in the overcrowded churchyards of London’s densely populated neighborhoods, a practice that was seen to encourage the spread of the massive cholera epidemics that since 1831 had periodically decimated the population (366). These public health tracts not only traced in detail the processes of decomposition, but also presented case after case of living people who immediately died after even slight contact with what the authors called the “effluvia” emitted by corpses. This notion of an invisible and inescapable noxious influence emanating from decomposing corpses provoked a public horror regarding the proximity of the dead, which a Parliamentary Report in 1842 and legislative acts such as the 1850 Metropolitan Interments Act and the 1852 Burial Act attempted to address (367).

While Wellington’s body would not have to endure interment in a pauper’s grave, the increased fear of any proximity to decaying flesh contributed to a larger distrust of the dead, which was reinforced by the popular press. In a review of G. A. Walker’s *Interment and Disinterment*, published in 1843, the *Illustrated London News* declared that London was becoming a “festering necropolis of the dead,” proclaiming that there was no “more cruel and disgusting enormity than is to be found in the custom which exists under our own eyes, by which the corrupted remains of the dead are brought into contiguity, and almost into contact, with the quick who breathe and move in the crowded streets of the

metropolis.” The article rails against the “exposure of corpses, and those mouldering remains of mortality which decency requires to be concealed with an impenetrable veil, and on which the mind refuses to dwell” (2/18/1843). Pearsall argues that public opinion on this subject remained steadfast, and even continued to grow over time. However, Wellington’s corpse was above the ground for an extended period of time, exposed to millions of people, and then placed in a vault in the center of the city. This contradiction is puzzling; however, as the accounts in the press describe Wellington as more than a man, perhaps he was not expected to decompose as his fellow men were.

The Duke’s body was carefully encased in elaborate coffins. While it was customary to place dead bodies in three coffins, the middle one of lead, Wellington’s body was enclosed in four, one of lead twice the usual thickness. The surrounding coffins were of pine, English oak, and mahogany, and were described and illustrated in exacting detail in the press (Pearsall 372). Such detailed reports were the focus of the press during the two months the body lay at Walmer Castle, the Duke’s home. In the final days of its stay there, the house was opened, and the public was allowed to view the sealed remains there before their removal to London for the funeral. The body was then transported by train to London, a journey that was described in detail by the press.

The first stage of the Duke’s interment ceremonies was the lying-in-state, which took place at Chelsea Hospital (Pearsall 373). The coffin was placed upon a decorative bier with medals hanging around it. The reporter for the *Illustrated London News* complained that the coffin was placed too high to provide a complete view. The reporter directly links the coffin to its inhabitant, remarking, “the coffin is large, massive, and

noble, as the man to whom it is the mortal monument.” He further reports his frustration that the viewing was, by necessity of the large crowds, so hasty: “if there is disappointment here in anything, it is that we must pass away with so brief, so bare a glimpse of that coffin” (11/20/1852).

In addition to pragmatic concerns over the state of the body and A Fog Hater’s concern for the funeral spectators, the papers were preoccupied with the question of *how* the funeral would be conducted. The *Illustrated London News* wrote:

What Englishmen resolve to do, they always do well; and it has been determined by the public, and in the mind of every individual composing it, that this event shall be solemnized as becomes the mightiest nation in the world, mourning for the loss of her mightiest citizen. We may be confident that nothing mean, tawdry, theatrical, inappropriate, or pagan, will be permitted in the obsequies of Wellington; but that the remains of the hero shall be deposited in the most holy ground within the realm, in the presence of the highest officers of the State and of the Legislature; of the survivors of his deeds and of his fame; and of Britain; that the *cortege* shall be, like the hero, devoid of unmeaning and frivolous accessories, and that it shall be simple, grand, and magnificent in its completeness and in its details. (*ILN* 9/25/1852)

This passage reassures its readers that nothing “mean, tawdry, theatrical, inappropriate, or pagan” would be allowed to taint the ceremonies, and expresses confidence that, like Wellington, the funeral will be “devoid of unmeaning and frivolous accessories.” As we

will see, however, the press's hopes for the funeral were not exactly realized by the event itself.

“The Hero sleeps well”: Wellington's Funeral

In the days following Wellington's death, the papers speculated about who would take charge of the funeral arrangements. Upon the arrival of Wellington's son, *The London Times* expressed relief that someone was there to begin making plans for the interment: “His presence removes the chief cause for delay in the arrangements for the funeral, but, as already announced, they will not be definitively settled until Her Majesty's will has been declared by her constitutional advisors” (9/18/1852). A few days later the *Times* reported the discovery of Wellington's will, which had been drawn up in 1818. The *Times* further remarks that although the Duke had drawn up many wills in his later years, he never had them executed, reporting that the Duke appeared “to have always avoided the subject of his own death, and the arrangements connected with it” (9/21/1852). Finally, according to Wellington's wishes, his body, and the arrangements for its disposal, was left to the crown.

When the press speculated what form Wellington's funeral would take, most agreed that it should be modeled on Nelson's, conducted in 1806 at St. Paul's Cathedral. The *Times* stated, “The only clue given us is a general reference to the funeral of Nelson, and we have seen it expressly, and almost authoritatively, stated that the precedent of that occasion is to be observed,” adding that Nelson's funeral was “the only precedent at all to the point” (9/21/1852). Indeed, the decisions about every stage of Wellington's funeral

were made in reference to Nelson's funeral. The linkage is not surprising since, as Houghton asserts, "in English eyes Nelson and Wellington were *the* heroes of the age" (309). As preparations for Wellington's funeral were made, however, an issue of concern for the public and the press was the placement of their remains in relation to each other. Pearsall reports that Nelson's tomb had been positioned in the center of the area of the crypt directly beneath the dome of St. Paul's. Questions were raised concerning whether it should be moved, so that both men could share the symbolically central location (383). The final solution placed both men in positions of significance.

While the funeral attempted to exhibit an appropriate amount of dignity and grandeur, highlighting the strength and innovation of the British Empire, there were still elements of what was considered "mean" and "tawdry":

The fact that the extensive preparations were barely finished on time and the modern technologies employed were not entirely successful – the funeral car was too heavy and brown down under its own weight, the pulleys used to winch the bier did not work smoothly and the light from the gas lamps was drowned out by the sunlight streaming through the windows of the cathedral – lent the occasion a clumsiness that only served to emphasize its modernity. (Barton 1)

The Spectator terms the funeral finery "too much":

That it was an impressive pageant—that it did express a great national idea—that it spoke eloquently the national sentiment in regard to the national man, we all admit; and yet there is a feeling, that the spontaneity,

the completeness, the genuineness of the manifestation are abated by the sight of the machinery. (*The Spectator* 11/20/1852)

Similarly, the reviewer for *The Examiner* found the ceremony to be a distraction from the serious business of remembrance: “Reverent thoughts of the dead were in all minds; but necessarily overlaid by thoughts obtruded by the pageantry, they were drawn away from the coffin and passed to the ‘funeral car drawn by twelve horses, decorated with trophies and heraldic achievements’” (11/20/1852). Finally, a particularly critical letter to the editor of *The Spectator*, entitled “Funereal and Memorial Aesthetics,” describes the “whole proceedings” as “vulgar, overcharged and unnatural” and views the Duke’s funeral as representing much of what was wrong with Victorian England:

Though Englishmen possess sensibility they suppress it. [...] They are so very practical that they take more interest in the sign than in the signified. By velvet at twelve shillings a yard, and gilding laid on without stint, they express the measure of difference between a hero and a common man. (11/20/1852)

Each writer suggests that the measure of a hero so great as Wellington cannot be found in spectacle; it is a thing that transcends pomp and ostentatious display, what Barton calls the “material language of greatness” (4).

Although there were many criticisms of the funeral, the *Illustrated London News* claimed that overall it was a satisfactory tribute; in the first article published after the funeral, the ceremony is described as embodying an appropriate solemnity and grandeur:

The grave has closed over the mortal remains of the greatest man of our age, and one of the purest-minded men recorded in history. Wellington and Nelson sleep side by side under the dome of St. Paul's, and the national mausoleum of our isles has received the most illustrious of its dead. With a pomp and circumstance, a fervour of popular respect, a solemnity and a grandeur never before seen in our time, and, in all probability, never to be surpassed in the obsequies of any other hero hereafter to be born to become the benefactor of this country, the sacred relics of Arthur Duke of Wellington have been deposited in the place long since set apart for them by the unanimous decision of his countrymen.

(11/20/1852)

The article continues to celebrate the event itself, including the crowds and the “funeral trappings” that had so upset other reviewers:

All that ingenuity could suggest in the funeral trappings, all that imagination and fancy could devise to surround the ceremonial with the accessories that most forcibly impress the minds of a multitude, all the grace that Royalty could lend, all the aid that the State could afford in every one of its great departments, all the imposing circumstances derivable from the assemblage of great masses of men arrayed with military splendour and in military mourning, together with the less dramatic but even more affecting grief expressed by the sober trappings of respectful and sympathetic crowds, all the dignity that could be conferred

by the presence of the civil and legislative power of a great and ancient kingdom; and, lastly, all the sanctity and awe inspired by the grandest of religious services performed in the grandest Protestant temple in the world, were combined to render the scene, inside and outside of St. Paul's Cathedral on Thursday last, the most memorable in our annals.

(11/20/1852)

The article goes on to proclaim that even nature cooperated with the spectacle, declaring that the presence of rain, a "weeping sky," signified that the "very elements" were in sympathy with the "feelings of living men at the loss of one so mighty":

Nor in the popular estimation were these, so great and imposing as they were, the only circumstances that invested the funeral of the great Duke with extraordinary interest. To the mind of the people, and to the superstition of thousands who would be loth to confess, although they would find it impossible to deny, the hold of such feelings upon their imagination, "the signs and the portents of nature" were added to the commemorative deeds of men, to render the last scene in the history of the hero more awe-inspiring than it might otherwise have been. (11/20/1852)

This article implies that the death of the Duke was not just a national, nor even a global loss, but rather one with cosmic significance: even the heavens wept for Wellington.

The article ends by reassuring its readers that the Duke will remain a symbol of English power and justice:

The Hero sleeps well. Time shall but increase his glory. May we never miss in a future day the guiding hand and the clear judgment of him who gave nearly forty years' peace to Europe, who was the benefactor of every kingdom in it; who gave France constitutional liberty—since lost, but sure to be regained; and who raised his own country to a height of power, influence, and true glory she had never before reached. No Caesar ever approached such deeds as these; and all Greek and Roman fame are but small and mean compared with the pure fame of the Great Duke of Wellington! (11/20/1852)

In addition to providing details regarding the funeral itself, the funeral supplement to the *Illustrated London News* also provides a summary of their previous coverage regarding the travels the Duke's body underwent, diagrams of the Duke's coffin inside St. Paul's, military and personal biographies, numerous engravings of sites relevant to the Duke's life and death, and a detailed description of the funeral procession, including a list cataloguing the order of procession.

The funeral also resulted in an outpouring of commemorative goods. For many subjects who did not attend a memorial service or witness the procession, the purchase of souvenirs such as postcards, engravings, and commemorative pottery was, as Belinda Beaton notes, an act of “genuine respect for the duke and his long life of service to the nation” (100). Peter Sinnema implies that the sale of such souvenirs was less noble; he cites an excerpt from the *Age*, a London weekly, which describes the windows of the shops in central London two weeks after Wellington's death:

Every shop window from Hammersmith to Bow [was] filled with scores on scores of pictures of the late Duke—pictures of him at every age, in every dress, in every attitude, and in every circumstance ... a universal and bewildering array ... fling[ing] itself, as it were, in the faces of doubting purchasers. (49)

For a brief moment, Sinnema asserts, central London had been turned into a display case for the advertisement and sale of Wellingtonia. The Victorian public was fascinated by the Duke's funeral, as demonstrated by their urgent need to not only attend, but also to bring away souvenirs. Apparently, the fascination has endured.¹⁷

Laudatory Tributes: Wellington Literature

Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" was one of many poems written in response to the Duke's death, and it is important to read it within the context of the larger response. Judging by reviews in newspapers, Tennyson's contribution to the national mourning was eagerly anticipated. Ten thousand copies were printed for sale on the day of the funeral, and it was reproduced more or less in its entirety in *The Times* the day before the funeral (Barton 2). Although the poem was Tennyson's first as Poet Laureate, it was not an official laureate poem. That is, the queen did not request Tennyson to compose it; he wrote it, as he mentioned in a letter, because "it was expected of me to write" (Ricks 489). Still many reviewers criticized Tennyson's "Ode" for being overly affected and impersonal, echoing much of the criticism of the

¹⁷ Interestingly, it is still possible to find memorabilia from the Duke's funeral on Ebay; teapots, coins, engravings, and sermons have all come up for sale recently.

funeral itself. Even though newspapers and journals made it part of the “Wellington Literature” that filled their pages, what they saw as the poem’s failure to stand apart from the mass of print became a subject of criticism (Barton 3). The *Illustrated London News* baldly states, “We are not satisfied with this laureate ode,” and continues its criticism, characterizing the poem as “dry, hard, cold, formal—a forced product, in short, pleasing neither to the producer nor to the consumer,” and stating that it seems to be more the work of the “most humble of minstrels” rather than of the Poet Laureate (11/27/1852). At the same time, the poem’s failings were often put down to its being a piece of formal laureate verse, required by public events rather than inspired by personal loss. The “Ode” was inevitably compared to *In Memoriam*. A reviewer for *The Court Journal* makes a direct comparison between the poems:

Alfred Tennyson, who, when really touched by grief, sobbed forth his soul in the touching *In Memoriam*—Alfred Tennyson, as we suppose feeling himself bound, as the public’s pensioner, to pay his laudatory tribute to the memory of the public’s idol, has written an ode which [...] is far inferior to anything that has yet fallen from his pen. (11/20/1852)

It is important to note the implied irony here, but the criticism is clear. *In Memoriam* represents the aesthetic from which Tennyson departed when he wrote his “Ode,” but it also helped to form the public sensibility that Tennyson offended with his tribute to the Duke of Wellington.

Other reviewers who found the “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” disappointing expressed an admiration of Tennyson’s larger body of work, and often

excused the new poem on the grounds that Tennyson had not had enough time to reflect adequately on the national sense of bereavement. A review in *The Leader* concludes by saying, “Tennyson is said to compose with great slowness and as this ode must have been written hastily, it may have that extenuation” (11/20/1852). The *Illustrated London News* ends a scathing review by stating that with enough time, the poem may be revised to reflect the greatness of the man:

The reader who can be pleased with these small sprinklings of “poetic dew” on the barren stems and branches of a wintry scene, mocking the blossoms and leaves of a more favourable season, will find many such in unexpected places, as his eye wanders over the lines of various length that compose this present lyric. Many of these have the true Tennysonian glitter; but they are cold, and merely ornamental, not the fruit of the warm vital sap within. The subject must, it is clear, await Mr. Tennyson’s better mood; must become, perhaps, idealized by distance of time, and then we doubt not we shall have a fine poem from his pen, the produce of a leisure consecrated to the high argument, not hurried by the pressure of circumstances, but a free offering from the soul of the poet. (11/27/1852)

In fact, Tennyson did revise the “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.” A revised edition was published the following year and more changes were made before its inclusion in *Maud and Other Poems* in 1855 (Barton 8). Christopher Ricks observes that some of the revisions make the poem more feeling and less formal, and adds that these changes were made in part as a response to negative reviews. But, as Barton asserts, no

amount of revision could have transformed the “Ode” into a poem that could meet the expectations *In Memoriam* had created.

Tennyson wrote the “Ode” in just under two months, while he spent seventeen years composing *In Memoriam*. The latter uses a distinctive form, with a unique meter and rhyme scheme, while the “Ode” follows traditional elegiac form. Tennyson left his own name off of *In Memoriam*, leaving only Hallam’s initials (A.H.H.) to identify the poem, whereas the “Ode” appeared under his own name. Both poems express concern over what happens to the body of the deceased after death. This issue, at the center of press coverage, suggests another way to understand the difference in the two memorial poems.

In Memoriam apostrophizes the object Hallam’s body will encounter after death. In Lyric IX and X, the poet addresses the “fair ship” carrying Hallam’s remains, pleading that the ship speed its “dark freight” back to England so that the body can rest “beneath the clover sod.” The phrase “dark freight” shows the poet’s unease over the state of the body; where other lyrics mourn the loss of Hallam in more ethereal terms, the “dark freight” has a disturbing substance. In Lyric II, Tennyson imagines the dissolution of the body into the landscape:

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
That name the under-lying dead,
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapt about the bones. (lines 1-4)

In contrast to the body in *In Memoriam*, which begins in transit and ends in the earth, the body in the “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” has not yet been buried. The poem begins with the command to “Bury the Great Duke,” which is repeated two lines later. Tennyson, like many in the press, is concerned with the amount of time that has passed between the Duke’s death and his funeral. In fact, the poem is primarily occupied with describing the funeral arrangements, linking the Duke’s funeral to the national identity from the first lines. Tennyson imagines the outcry over the Duke’s death as “the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation” (line 4), marrying grief to a display of national strength.

Tennyson seems preoccupied with the proximity of the Duke’s corpse; adding in another injunction, “Let the sound of those he wrought for, / And the feet of those he fought for, / Echo round his bones for evermore” (lines 10-12). While Tennyson sanitizes the corpse by reducing it to bones, Pearsall asserts that these were not exempt from the stain of putrefaction. However, we are assured that the Duke’s flesh and bones were carefully contained. Later in the poem, Tennyson describes the Duke’s funeral as he imagines it:

Hush, the Dead March wails in the people’s ears:

The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears:

The black earth yawns: the mortal disappears;

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;

He is gone who seem’d so great.— (lines 267-71)

Tennyson further sanitizes that rotting corpse by grinding it to ashes and dust and burying it in the black earth.

At various points in the nine sections of the “Ode,” Tennyson attempts to account for the impact the loss of such a great man will have on the nation. The first three sections of the poem are most concerned with burying the Duke, while the fourth lauds his praises. The fifth section imagines Wellington buried, and the remaining sections look to the future, with predictions that the nation will carry Wellington’s spirit on. Later in the “Ode,” Tennyson announces that its purpose is to honor the name of the nation’s hero:

A people’s voice, when they rejoice
At civic realm and pomp and game,
Attest their great commander’s claim
With honour, honour, honour to him,
Eternal honour to his name. (lines 146-150)

Barton asserts that Tennyson fails, even in stating his aims:

[H]e refuses to acknowledge the depths that separate his ode from what it represents. It does not keep a respectful and modest silence, nor does it verbalize silence with the anxiety-ridden language of *In Memoriam*. It is reduced instead to a rhetoric that it is at once empty and insistent, a rhetoric of repetitions. (10)

Tennyson sees Wellington’s death as the end of an era. As the “last great Englishman” Wellington takes with him a time that has been lost, but he also leaves

behind a legacy that must be sustained. The first lines in the fourth section of the poem reinforce this theme: “Mourn, for to us he seems the last, / Remembering all his greatness in the Past” (lines 19-20). The remainder of the section draws on journalistic sketches of Wellington’s character: he was “moderate, resolute” (line 25), “greatest yet with least pretense” (line 29), “Rich in saving common sense / And, as the greatest only are, / In his simplicity sublime” (lines 32-34). With this elaborate tribute to simplicity, Tennyson leaves the past and looks ahead to the modern present that remains.

Wellington’s voice, now silenced by death, is used by Tennyson as a symbol of the national character. The Duke’s language was the deep, wordless language of cannon fire:

Let the bell be tolled:
And a deeper knell in the heart be knolled;
And the sound of the sorrowing anthem rolled
Through the dome of the golden cross;
And the volleying cannon thunder his loss;
He knew their voices of old.
For many a time in many a clime
His captain’s-ear has heard them boom
Bellowing victory, bellowing doom:
When he with those deep voices wrought,
Guarding realms and kings from shame;
With those voices our dead captain taught

The tyrant, and asserts his claim

In that dread sound to that great name. (lines 58-71)

However powerful, the Duke's voice will be heard no more: "O friends, our chief-state oracle is mute" (line 23), "His voice is silent in your council-hall / For ever" (lines 174-175). Tennyson, as Laureate, must now use his voice to honor Wellington's name. As the "Ode" draws to a close, Tennyson offers consolation to the mourners, and he calls upon them to be at peace.

From the critical response to this poem, it is easy to read it as a failure. While the tone of self-doubt that permeates the poem may be attributed to it being Tennyson's first published poem after he was granted the Laureateship, it is interesting to consider the poem as an attempt at something new: Tennyson wrestles with the materiality of mourning in an increasingly modern nation. Anna Jane Barton asserts that the reason we still tend to read the "Ode" as a failure is that the anxieties prevalent in the poem are ones we still have not resolved, even a century after its publication:

A poetic that so perfectly reflects the age in which it is written is distasteful even now and the embarrassment with which Tennyson's ode resonates is our own. Not yet reconciled to an aesthetic made up of the material surfaces of modern culture and still enamored with illusions of depth, we are more likely to regard "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" as an historical document than a poem: an artifact that confers honour on the name of its subject rather than a work of art that honours the name of the poet. (13)

Tennyson's ode was only one of a multitude of poems written on the occasion of the Duke's death. In addition to the poem by Nicholas Mitchell discussed earlier, poems by authors both major and minor abounded. The majority of these were published in the popular press. The *Illustrated London News* reports that Wellington was "a most diligent and indefatigable reader of the newspapers" (9/25/1852); it is therefore fitting that in addition to publishing details regarding the Duke's death and funeral, the papers would also publish these literary "laudatory tributes" as well. Not all of this literary effluvia was well received, as an article in the *Spectator* asserts:

It needs all the genuine respect for the memory of the Duke of Wellington to prevent the mass of writing, about the past, present and even future, which floods the journals, in respect to his career, his departure and his funeral, from degenerating into a nuisance; and there can be no doubt that it has already had an inevitable tendency in that direction. (*Spectator* 9/18/1852)

In the earliest poem published in the *Illustrated London News* after the Duke's death, the author imagines the Duke's body lying in his home. The poem is titled "The Duke's Chamber in Walmer Castle," and its author is not named.

Tread lightly! the spot shall be hallowed in story;
Speak not his name but with blessings or sighs.
He sleeps in his lone simple turret in glory:
So great as he was, and so low as he lies.

High were his aims and untarnished his honour;
 Danger he scorned in the pathways of right.
England shall miss, when the cloud is upon her,
 The spirit that led her through darkness to light.

Tread lightly! To this lonely shore of the ocean
 The eyes of the world are directed with grief;
And the voice of the people, with heartfelt emotion,
 Makes wail for the loss of their mightiest Chief.

Weep, England!—weep for the Spirit departed!
 Write his pure name on his worthiest page;
The stoic, the hero, high-souled, and true-hearted,
 Who moulded to justice the mind of his age.

This poem is laden with Christian imagery; it posits the Duke as the savior of England, leading the nation “through darkness to light.” Other poems were no less effusive in their representations of what Wellington meant to the nation.

In a poem titled “The Last Dream of Wellington,” published in the November 20th funeral supplement of the *ILN*, the author, identified only as G. S., focuses on Wellington’s death after tracing his military career:

Dying! leaving all his glory;
 Dying! going from the world;

All his battle-armor rusty,
All his battle-flags unfurled.

Dying! eyes that mocked the eagle's
Glazing in eternal night
This the eye that saw advantage
In the very wreck of flight?

This the thunder-bolt of battle,
Gasping for a little breath;
And the voice that roused all Europe
Muttering in the dream of death?

In a dream of death, repeating
This long life in one swift gleam,
From the follies of his boyhood
To the instant of the dream.

[...]

And he sees his shadow vanish;
Then he knows that all is o'er;
Never shall he lead to battle—
Never be the victor, more.

And the present, and the future,
 And the past, are all as one;
And a mighty life is over,
 And a glorious race is run. (ll. 1-16, 49-56)

This enfolding of the present, past, and future around the figure of Wellington in the final stanza is exactly what the *Spectator* deplores.

Following these examples, Nicholas Mitchell was particularly elaborate in his poem “The Burial of Wellington: An Elegiac and Tributary Poem”:

A Nation, like one man, seems here,
A Nation comes to drop a tear,
A Nation sighs above the bier—
O Death! Is this thy prey? ...
 Words fail to paint the scene whose glory
Excites the land, shall live in story;
It awes the mind, and dazzles sense,
Gloom striving with magnificence.
Wealth, art, and power combine to throw
A halo ‘round our cloud of woe;
 A world seems met—all-glorious sight—
To honour this great funeral rite. (ll. 43-46, 69-76)

This poem imagines the nation sighing as one over the Duke's death. Interestingly, the first lines of the poem enfold the English people into one figure: a man, grieving over the loss of another. While Mitchell does not refer explicitly to *In Memoriam* in this poem, the figures it creates are similar. Like the other poems published before Wellington's funeral, "The Burial of Wellington" hastens to the inevitable conclusion: the funeral. Although the poem does not mention Wellington's body, it is implied; we assume that the bier is not empty, and the funeral would not be possible without Wellington's mortal remains.

The impulse in all of these poems is to celebrate the heroic events of the great Duke's life while glossing over the condition of his body in death. To what can we attribute this impulse to simultaneously embrace and reject the figure of Wellington? While the press detailed the movements of Wellington's corpse, other literature surrounding the event conspicuously ignored it. If, as Houghton asserts, the Victorian era was the historical period defined by hero worship, the insistence of the literature surrounding Wellington's death and funeral that their hero would not disappear from the hearts or minds of the nation demonstrates that, for the Victorians, heroes *couldn't* rot.

The "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," though critically unpopular, is what the Poet Laureate typically could be expected to provide: it lauds the national hero and attempts to address the impact of the loss of such a hero. What Tennyson did next, however, confounded expectations: how do we read *Maud* as a Laureate poem?

“O that ‘twere possible”: *Maud*

When Tennyson composed *In Memoriam*, he could not have anticipated that it would earn him the Laureateship. It is only after that he was granted the Laureateship, only in the years after 1850, that Tennyson could be sure that he was writing for a national audience, with, as Pelatson writes, “the nudging sanction of the laureateship to speak for as well as to them” (198). Although Tennyson took his position as Laureate seriously, it is difficult to gauge to what extent that position influenced the composition of individual poems. The “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” is clearly self-conscious (though unofficial) piece of laureate verse, and it anticipates other more official military-themed patriotic poems such as “Britons, Guard Your Own,” “Hands All Round,” and “The Penny-Wise,” all published in 1852, and “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” published in 1854. However, Tennyson’s view of himself as Laureate is complicated by the publication of *Maud*, his first great poem after *In Memoriam* and the Laureateship. As much as the Wellington ode and his other overtly nationalistic poems do, *Maud* defines Tennyson as the national poet.

In the 1850s, Tennyson was more secure; he was fortified by marriage, financial security, and the Laureateship. He was able to undertake what Christopher Ricks describes as “a more audacious exorcism” (233), the long poem *Maud*. Valerie Pitt characterizes the nature of Tennyson’s Laureate voice:

That Tennyson the Laureate can justly be regarded as the voice of the Victorian public does not mean that his Laureate poems are full of Victorian platitudes, but that they are startlingly impersonal. In them

Tennyson is not, really, so much concerned with moral sentiment, as with the formal expression of public emotion. (14)

Responding to early 20th-century criticism that Tennyson's poetic abilities declined after he became Laureate, Pitt emphasizes the great shift that the Laureateship forced Tennyson to make in his poetic voice, asserting that the question not be, "Why did his poetic power flag and fail after he became Laureate?" but instead, "How did the poet of a purely private emotion become the poet of a public order?" (15). Timothy Pelatson sees the Laureateship as confirmation of Tennyson's ability to speak to and for his countrymen:

More than any poet laureate before or after, Tennyson in 1850 had earned his appointment by speaking at once to and for the deepest anxieties of his culture, and there was thus a tantalizing fitness to the fact that the position should have fallen vacant just as he was proving his claim to it by gathering together his exemplary narrative of doubtful affirmation. (197)

Tennyson began composing *Maud* immediately after Hallam's death; the first written section of the poem, "O that 'twere possible," was begun in 1833 or 1834, and published in 1837 (Ricks 511). Apparently, Tennyson was reluctant to publish that early "germ"; R. W. Rader states that "Tennyson finished and published his poem [...] against his will, cobbling up an ending for it under pressure" (qtd. in Ricks 551). Twenty years later, still apparently unsatisfied by the poem's ending, Tennyson took up the poem again. Around the original lyric, Tennyson arranged a sequence of other lyrical and semi-narrative poems. As with *In Memoriam*, Tennyson worked "backwards and outwards"

(Pelatson 199), composing *Maud* as a long poem made up of shorter poems. The sections in *Maud* vary in length and meter, cataloguing the changing moods of the poem's single narrator, lending discontinuity to the reading.

Tennyson made several changes to the poem's organization in the ten years after it was first published. When it was first published in 1855, its more than 1200 lines were divided into twenty-six consecutively numbered sections, seven of which were composed of a single stanza, while the other nineteen had anywhere between two and nineteen stanzas, each separately numbered. Tennyson added two sections in 1856, bringing the poem to 1324 lines. In 1859, he divided it into two unequal parts, the first with twenty-two sections and the second with six sections. Finally in 1865, Tennyson subdivided Part II, making its last fifty-nine line section into Part III (199).

Maud is spoken in the voice of a disturbed young man who roams windswept hills, haunted by his father's suicide and his mother's early death. He blames his father's old friend, the lord of the Hall, for his ruin. The young man was betrothed to Maud, the lord's daughter, when they were children, but she and her family left the area after the suicide. Upon Maud's return to the Hall, the speaker attempts to win her back. The speaker kills Maud's brother in a duel, Maud herself dies, and the poem ends with the speaker leaving to fight in the Crimean War. The contrast of public versus private permeates the poem; the inner feelings of the characters are reflected in (and influenced by) the very public war.

Reading *Maud* is a disorienting experience, both thematically and formally. We are exposed to the speaker's fractured, feverish consciousness, and the organization of the

poem contributes to this. It is possible to read Tennyson's revisions to the organization of the poem as an attempt to make *Maud* more accessible; however, the divisions between parts, sections, and stanzas seem to confound order. The organization of the poem cries out for order, echoing the desperate pleas of its speaker. Even the meter, rhyme, and stanzas refuse to offer comfort because they are so varied throughout the poem. The rhythm, which could offer some formal stability to the reader, changes constantly. While the formal elements of *In Memoriam* provide comfort, *Maud* does exactly the opposite. Tennyson does not offer consolation with *Maud*, a strong contrast to the work he does in *In Memoriam* and "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington."

Despite the great amount of time between "O that 'twere possible" and the publication of the completed *Maud*, most of the finished poem was written and arranged during a relatively short period in 1854 and 1855 (Ricks 511). As Laureate, Tennyson would have understood that *Maud* would have a significantly larger audience than the majority of his previously published work. Perhaps because his appointment as Laureate was for his lifetime, and because he had already published a number of ostentatiously patriotic official poems, Tennyson felt secure to experiment with form and theme in *Maud*, creating a voice of "ranting and deliberate eccentricity" (Pelatson 200).

Tennyson described *Maud* as "a dramatic poem" (235); in 1856, Robert Mann termed it a monodrama. Alexander Macmillan repeated the term three years later, and in 1875 Tennyson changed the poem's title from *Maud or the Madness* to *Maud: A Monodrama* (235). Tennyson gave a direct account of the poem to his son:

This poem of *Maud or the Madness* is a little *Hamlet*, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness, an egoist with the makings of a cynic, raised to a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven into madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through the unselfishness born of a great passion. The peculiarity of this poem is that different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters. (qtd. in Ricks 235)

Tennyson was fully aware of the antagonistic responses the poem had evoked; by linking the poem to *Hamlet*, by describing it as a drama played out by one man, he is perhaps attempting to mitigate that negative reaction.

In *Maud*, Tennyson offers something distinctly different from his earlier work. Although *Maud* was not met with critical praise, it remained Tennyson's favorite poem: "You must always stand up for *Maud* when you hear my pet bantling abused. Perhaps that is why I am sensitive about her. You know mothers always make the most of a child that is abused" (qtd. in Ricks 234). Jane Welsh Carlyle observed that Tennyson was particularly sensitive to criticisms of the poem, taking them as "imputations on his honour" (qtd. in Ricks 234). Dante Gabriel Rossetti seems to have taken some amusement from Tennyson's defense of the poem; he reported that one of Tennyson's

“neverended stories” concerned an anonymous letter received after the publication of *Maud*: “Sir, I used to worship you, but now I hate you. I loathe and detest you. You beast! So you’ve taken to imitating Longfellow. Yours in aversion, –” (qtd. in Ricks 234-5).

Several critics have read *Maud* as a political poem¹⁸. While it certainly is influenced by the events of the Crimean War, overall the poem has more in common with *In Memoriam* than it does with Tennyson’s overtly political poetry. Both feature a central speaker attempting to reconcile himself to loss. James Kincaid categorizes these attempts as a “movement from isolation to social acceptance,” arguing that behind each poem lies the “pattern of death and resurrection”; Francis O’Gorman suggests that *Maud* is a reworking of the type of loss and mourning found in *In Memoriam*. *In Memoriam* is keenly interested in the question of survival – how do we keep the dead with us in life? While throughout *In Memoriam* Tennyson assures his readers (and himself) that the dead are still reachable, just “behind the veil” (LVI line 28). *Maud* undercuts these assurances by articulating the same concerns in the voice of a madman.

In Lyric XCV of *In Memoriam*, Tennyson is able to break through the veil, achieving what Isobel Armstrong terms “a visionary, longed-for union with the dead” (268). *Maud* focuses on the consequences of having the dead metaphorically return; O’Gorman argues that *Maud* is a poem that expresses the poet’s desire to be more firmly grounded in reality, as well as “a rebuke for an earlier inclination to yield to the chimerae

¹⁸ In *Tennyson Laureate*, Valerie Pitt describes *Maud* as Tennyson’s “central political poem,” arguing that the speaker’s “neurosis” is linked to (even caused by) “corruption in society” (197).

produced by grief, and an effort to break from *In Memoriam*'s public yearning for [...] [an] improbable reunion" (293-4).

Although *Maud* was unexpected and unpopular, the crisis it attempts to address allows it to be read as another Laureate poem. As with *In Memoriam* and the Wellington ode, *Maud* begins in death:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,
The red-ribbed ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,
And Echo there, whatever is asked her, answers "Death."

For there in the ghastly pit long since a body was found,
His who had given me life—O father! O God! was it well?—
Mangled, and flattened, and crushed, and dented into the ground:
There yet lies the rock that fell with him when he fell. (I. lines 1-8)

The speaker's language is violent, his voice disturbed. Each line rushes into the next. The speaker sees death everywhere, even hearing the word repeated in echo. The speaker uses four synonymic verbs – mangled, flattened, crushed, and dented¹⁹ – to describe his father's body, as though he himself is driving the body into the ground. This violent death, then, is the crisis which the poem must settle; like *In Memoriam* and "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," the poet/speaker must come to terms with the corpse and all it represents.

¹⁹ "To impress or drive in with force" (*O.E.D.*)

The speaker immediately presents himself as an unreliable narrator, seeing his own obsessions in everything he encounters. *Maud* is filled with the speaker's preoccupation with death; at night by the sea he hears "the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar" (I. line 98) and "the scream of a maddened beach dragged down by the wave" (I. line 99). From beginning to end, the poem questions the accuracy of the speaker's perceptions of the external world.

Later in the poem, the speaker experiences a crisis of consciousness and attempts to rejoin the living world. As he attempts to unbury himself, to make contact with others (namely Maud), the speaker states, "I have climbed nearer out of lonely hell" (I. line 678). *Maud* provides the narrative of the speaker's struggle, a struggle that Pelatson implies Tennyson shares to some extent:

It is not just the struggle of a socially and psychologically isolated individual to achieve intimacy with others, but the struggle of an ungrounded consciousness to be sure of its perceptions of the world and the struggle of a fundamentally lyric poet to make the voiced reflections of an isolated and idiosyncratic sensibility the vehicle of a large and public imaginative undertaking. (208)

Maud shares sensibilities with Tennyson's early poetry, namely "The Kraken," "Mariana," "The Lady of Shalott," and "Ulysses," all of which feature an isolated central figure who discovers that participating in the world can be as terrifyingly dangerous as abandoning it. However, *Maud* explores this theme on an unprecedented scale and to an exponentially larger audience.

In Memoriam begins with death and ends with a marriage; *Maud* begins with suicide and ends with war. Always at the center of *Maud* is the speaker's confusion of death with life, and life with death, often focusing on Maud herself. The poet describes Maud as dead before her actual death; she is "Dead perfection, no more" (I. II. line 83). "No more" means that she is merely perfect, but it also serves as a synonym for "dead." Maud's perfection is cold; she is "Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek" and her face itself is lifeless: "passionless, pale, cold" (I. III. line 91). When the speaker describes her alone in church, the imagery is funerary: "An angel watching an urn observes her," and it "Wept over her, carved in stone" (I. VIII. line 304).

Elsewhere in the poem, Maud is described as a phantom before she has died. In Part I, as the speaker is thinking of Maud's garden, he describes a surprise nighttime visit:

I thought as I stood, if a hand, as white
As ocean-foam in the moon, were laid
On the hasp of the window, and my Delight
Had a sudden desire, like a glorious ghost, to glide,
Like a beam of the seventh Heaven, down to my side,
There were but a step to be made. (I. XIV. lines 505-510)

These lines recall Lyric XCV of *In Memoriam*, another garden scene at night, in which the poet/speaker declares,

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch'd me from the past,

And all at once it seem'd at last

The living soul was flash'd on mine. (lines 33-36)

In both poems, touch is welcome; the speaker/poet in *In Memoriam* hears “Aeonian music” (line 41) as he is touched; he “senses the harmony in an otherwise unintelligible universe” (Hill 170). In *Maud*, the touch is imaginary (as perhaps it is in *In Memoriam* as well), but it places Maud in between the world of the living and the dead.

After Maud has died, she again seems to visit the speaker:

Tell him now: she is standing here at my head;
Not beautiful now, not even kind;
He may take her now; for she never speaks her mind,
But is ever the one thing silent here.
She is not *of* us, as I divine;
She comes from another stiller world of the dead,
Stiller, not fairer than mine. (II. V. lines 303-309)

Maud’s ghost has lost her beauty and her kindness, and as these lines imply, even her humanity. The speaker places Maud in the “stiller world of the dead”; elsewhere in the poem he has begged admission to that stiller world, but line 309 shows that the promise that the world of the dead would be fairer than the world of the living is empty. Although the speaker is able to commune with the dead in this scene, it offers him no comfort. The speaker’s vision of Maud as a corpse or phantom while she was alive doesn’t come true when she’s a ghost, underscoring the point that the living can not anticipate the transformations worked by death, a recurring theme throughout *In Memoriam*.

The speaker's imagined graveyard scene contains another example of the dead's willingness to communicate with the living. The speaker imagines himself as "Dead, long dead, / Long dead!":

And my heart is a handful of dust,
And the wheels go over my head,
And my bones are shaken with pain,
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,
Only a yard beneath the street,
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,
The hoofs of the horses beat,
Beat into my scalp and my brain,
With never an end to the stream of passing feet,
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,
Clamor and rumble, and ringing and clatter;
And here beneath it is all as bad,
For I thought the dead had peace, but it is not so.
To have no peace in the grave, is that not sad?
But up and down and to and fro,
Ever about me the dead men go;
And then to hear a dead man chatter
Is enough to drive one mad. (II. V. lines 241-258)

As he imagines himself buried under a busy street, he hears a dead man speak, and the speaker realizes that death offers no peace. This description is very similar to another burial Tennyson described, that of the Duke of Wellington:

Where shall we lay the man whom we deplore?

Here, in streaming London's central roar.

Let the sound of those he wrought for,

And the feet of those he fought for,

Echo round his bones for evermore. (lines 8-12)

In the Wellington ode, the roar of the busy crowds is a tribute to a great hero; in *Maud*, the speaker, undead and unheroic, finds the noise above him and below him “all as bad.”

In many ways, *Maud* rewrites the type of grief we see in *In Memoriam*. Although it is far too complex a poem to be read as didactic, it does seem to serve as a warning to those who would be tempted to luxuriate in grief. The mourning *In Memoriam* describes should not be replicated by the mentally unstable; as O’Gorman asserts,

In the archest comment on *In Memoriam*'s most luminous hopes, this strangely orderly cascade from a disorderly brain, confirms, in the bathos of its feeble sorrow, that fantasies of communication from the grave take their origin in the most distressing confusion. (307)

The speaker's grief is unbalanced, and the communication he receives from beyond the grave is not comforting. Isobel Armstrong argues that the primary relationship between *Maud* and *In Memoriam* is that the former suggests that “the mourning process” of the latter “has been arrested at its earliest stages and turned morbid” (269). In actuality, the

relationship between the two poems is more complex. *Maud* is extremely conscious of *In Memoriam*, and it frequently looks back to the elegy with, as O’Gorman phrases it, “antiphonal, ironizing, and parodic purposes” (310). In *Maud*, Tennyson presents a portrait of a mourner who is entirely, self-indulgently, unhinged by grief. Tennyson thwarts his readers’ expectations by writing a poem that revises his most famous work in such a disturbing way.

Maud can be read as a poem that Tennyson uses to test his role as Laureate. Timothy Pelatson argues that *Maud* collapses boundaries “between Tennyson and his speaker and between that speaker and a community of readers who has just accepted his creator as the licensed spokesman of their deepest fears and hopes” (218). It is no wonder then that readers were made profoundly uncomfortable by *Maud*. In the years following, Tennyson would be compelled to use his position as Laureate to speak to a much narrower audience, and he would do so with considerably more success.

CHAPTER IV

“ENGLAND MOURNS WITH HER WIDOWED QUEEN”:

QUEEN VICTORIA AND THE VICTORIAN CULTURE OF MOURNING

Introduction

If the accounts of the Duke of Wellington’s funeral in 1852 exhibited the spectacular aspects of mourning in the Victorian era, the accounts of Prince Albert’s death and funeral in 1861 provide a striking contrast. While Wellington’s last moments were chronicled repeatedly and in great detail in the popular press, Prince Albert’s death is treated almost distantly, with few of the details that the accounts of Wellington’s death celebrated. While Wellington’s funeral was delayed for weeks with endless speculations in the press, Albert’s funeral took place less than a week after his death. While accounts in the newspapers at the time of Wellington’s death focused on what the loss of the great hero would mean for the nation, the reports at the time of Albert’s death, for a large part, centered on what the loss would mean to the Queen.

Queen Victoria became the figure of mourning for England, both through the focus of the reports in the press and by her prolonged, indeed lifelong, engagement with the act of mourning. However, as Pat Jalland asserts in *Death in the Victorian Family*, Queen Victoria was “certainly neither the archetypal Victorian mourner nor the model widow” (321). This characterization of Victoria as straining, even breaking, accepted mourning practices points to the tremendous conflict she experienced upon the death of the Prince Consort. As head of state, she could not indulge in her grief in the same way her subjects would be expected to. The anxiety over the state of Victoria’s heart and her

mind, first expressed in funeral sermons shortly after Albert's death, only increased in the literature surrounding the event as time passed; Tennyson's "Dedication" to the 1862 edition of *Idylls of the King* and his "The Death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale: to the Mourners," published in 1892, offer different, even conflicting, advice to the Queen on how she should express and cope with her grief. While the earlier poem focuses on the Queen's loss and only offers vague hopes for consolation, the later poem appeals to a more practical wisdom based on Tennyson's friendship with Victoria, and advises her to move quickly through her mourning. Together, the two poems represent the conflicting attitudes of Victorian mourning: that which celebrates the extravagant acts of mourning, and that which views death and grief as a natural part of human life. In this chapter I will argue that while the poetry of the age certainly reflected and shaped Victorian mourning practices, Tennyson's poems of the time, as well as his letters to Victoria, demonstrate that mourning expectations for common people, especially including poets, did not apply to the Queen: Victoria could not mourn as her subjects did, and Tennyson saw it as his role to remind her of that fact.

"[T]he almost imperceptible motion of the bier": The Death of the Prince Consort

When Prince Albert died in 1861, the newspapers portrayed the event as almost entirely unexpected. While the papers had been issuing bulletins regarding Albert's health during the week prior to his death, his death itself came as a shock. The account given by the *Illustrated London News* on December 21st conveys the suddenness of Albert's decline:

It was in the middle of a career such as we have faintly endeavoured to sketch that the Prince, who had hitherto enjoyed such good health, was attacked by an illness which, in its earlier stages, caused no alarm; but which, if report be true, he himself viewed from the first with apprehension, and something more. The earliest public intimation of the illness of His Royal Highness was given in the Court Circular of Sunday, the 8th instant, when it was stated that “the Prince Consort had been confined to his apartments with a feverish cold and pain in the limbs,” and the usual entertainments of the Court were laid aside for the time. This notification attracted comparatively little attention, and it was not until the formal bulletin of Wednesday, the 11th instant, was published that notice was taken in the journals of the day of the circumstances of the Prince’s illness. The subsequent bulletins excited anxiety, but not positive apprehension; and it is not too much to say that the fact of the decease of his Royal Highness on Saturday night caused as much surprise as it did sorrow and distress. These feelings were, however, universal, deep, and sincere. (621)

This report expresses the shock of Albert’s death; no public notice had been given about the Prince Consort’s decline until a few days before his death. The statement that “little attention” was paid to the bulletins about Albert’s health demonstrates that most assumed that he was suffering from a relatively minor illness, certainly not one that was life-threatening. While the death of the Duke of Wellington was reported with sadness, those

newspaper accounts also hint at the inevitability of death coming to a man of such advanced years. In the report above, the emphasis is placed on the surprise of the event, along with the “sorrow and distress” it evoked. That these feelings were “universal, deep, and sincere” pays tribute to the affection the public (or at least those writing for the *Illustrated London News*) held for Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.

Albert’s death evoked a prolonged and intense public reaction. John Wolffe relates one example of the grief the common people had to Albert’s death:

Adam Sedgwick, the geologist and Albert’s secretary in his capacity as Chancellor of Cambridge University, was struck by a letter he had received from his niece, wife of the clergyman at Fylingdales on the North Yorkshire Moors. The sad news arrived just as she had assembled her weekly Sunday class of farmers’ daughters. “We could not read,” she wrote, “but we all knelt down to pray for the Queen and wept bitterly.” She noted that in many parts of the moors the “poor people” were all wearing marks of mourning, and that even in remote places churches and school buildings had been “put in regular mourning” at the expense of the inhabitants. (194-95)

Wolffe also reports the observation of Richard Monckton Miles, who wrote, “It is the realest public sorrow I have ever seen – quite different from anything else” (195).

Wolffe compares the public response to Prince Albert’s death to their response to Wellington’s death, describing it as “appreciably different”:

The Duke's decease was a big event, but still one tacitly accepted as inevitable in the course of nature, and hence hardly a matter for profound concern or grief. Albert's death on the other hand was doubly untimely, both in the light of his relative youth, and also because it removed a major public figure whose work was felt to be still very much incomplete. (197)

Given the proximity of Albert's death to Wellington's, occurring just nine years apart, it is perhaps inevitable that there would be comparisons drawn between the two. Since Albert arranged and oversaw the funeral arrangements for the Duke, these comparisons become even easier to make.

While the papers leapt to make comparisons between the loss of Wellington and the Prince Consort, the funeral arrangements for the two great men could not have been more dissimilar. While Wellington's funeral was delayed for several months while his body was carted around the country and made a spectacle of, the funeral for Prince Albert seems almost quiet by comparison. Arrangements were made quickly, and the public was left out of much of the event. The *Illustrated London News* gave the following report on December 18th, a few days before the funeral:

In accordance with the wishes of the deceased Prince, much if not all the ceremonial of Royal obsequies will be pretermitted, and the funeral will be of the character of that of a private gentleman of wealth and distinction. There will be a carriage procession – comprising a hearse and an adequate number of mourning-coaches – unaccompanied by private carriages, from the castle at Windsor to St. George's Chapel; the Prince of Wales acting as

chief mourner, supported by the Duke of Cambridge and the Crown Prince of Prussia. (621)

The fact that the funeral would be in keeping in tone with that of a “private gentleman of wealth and distinction” emphasizes the family’s wishes for a modest, unspectacular ceremony, and also Albert’s ambiguous rank.

The newspaper also reported on some of the funeral accoutrements, focusing, as they did with the Duke of Wellington, on the coffin:

In compliance with custom, the body will be interred in four coffins, the inner one or shell being of polished mahogany, cased outside with lead, then an outer, plain, but very massive coffin of mahogany; over all comes the state coffin or case, of crimson velvet and with massive silver gilt ornaments. On the leaden coffin is to be a silver plate, engraved with the style and titles of the deceased Prince. The outer mahogany coffin will simply bear a plate with his name and the date of his birth and death. On the state coffin will be the customary silver-gilt plate bearing an inscription similar to that on the leaden coffin. (621)

While the description of Wellington’s elaborate coffins focused on the diversity and security of the arrangement (as I discuss in the second chapter), this passage focuses on the stateliness of the arrangement: the mahogany, velvet, and silver all emphasizing Prince Albert’s combination of illustrious status and modest nature.

Albert himself apparently had requested a private funeral with little pomp. And, for the most part, it would appear as though his wish was respected. The funeral carriages

proceeded directly from the family's private apartments at Windsor to the chapel through the Norman Gate, thwarting the expectations of the local public, who had hoped to catch a glimpse of the processional (202). However, though some of the public had been disappointed by the private nature of the funeral, John Wolffe states that they were satisfied by the extensive coverage the funeral received in the newspapers:

For the great majority of the British population [...], the question of whether or not a few thousand local people could see the procession was irrelevant to their own perception of the funeral, which inevitably had to be mediated by newspapers and magazines. The Lord Chamberlain's Office was content to give facilities to reporters and illustrators, and hence accounts and images of the funeral became widely available during the ensuing days. (203)

The funeral was held on December 23rd, 1861. It was conducted "away from the public eye and with a minimum of pageantry" (Wolffe 200). Queen Victoria was not involved with the funeral arrangements; they were left to Viscount Sydney, the Lord Chamberlain, who patterned some of the arrangements after the funeral for the Duchess of Kent, the Queen's mother, who had died shortly before (201).

Newspaper accounts share a sympathetic and reverential tone, particularly when describing the Royal family. The reporter from the *Illustrated London News*, in an article from the December 28th edition, after describing the processional, remarked upon the solemnity of the service:

On arriving at the western door the procession wheeled round and advanced up the centre of the nave towards the choir. This was, perhaps, the most impressive part of the ceremonial for a spectator. The solemnity of the musical service, and the almost imperceptible motion of the bier as it approached the Royal vault, were particularly imposing. (673)

Though the account uses the word “spectator” in this passage, the gaudy spectacle that characterized the Duke of Wellington’s funeral is entirely absent from all reports of the Prince Consort’s funeral; instead, the focus is placed upon the solemnity of the event. The closest this account comes to drama is in its description of Albert’s sons:

The Prince of Wales, supported by the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and his young brother Prince Arthur, followed immediately after Garter. The Prince appeared deeply affected, though his Royal Highness did not give way to any violent outburst of grief during the ceremony. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Prince Arthur exhibited much emotion, and the countenances of all present showed that each felt himself to have lost a friend. (673)

Such passages, which still contain emotional weight, must have had a great impact on contemporary readers. Wolfe describes the likely effect:

Such descriptions and images are likely to have deepened sympathy for the Queen and her family, highlighted the association between sincerity and relative simplicity in funeral observance, and reinforced the intangible

but powerful links between patriotism, royalty, and religious responses to death. (204)

Newspapers were particularly emotional when imagining the Queen's grief. In its first report of Albert's death, on December 21st, the *Illustrated London News* refers to the death as "the heaviest national calamity which has befallen this country for many years" (615). The report makes it clear that the nation in its entirety is suffering with the Queen, blending patriotism and mourning in the sympathy it declares: "Our gracious Queen! The hearts of her people bleed with hers. They share her agony of grief. They are overwhelmed with the same sense of desolation" (615). The language of this passage casts the pain of grief into physical terms; hearts are bleeding, and the sensation of grief is agonizing and overwhelming. What this passage can not include is a reference to Victoria's mental state. While the newspapers could sympathize by offering fairly conventional platitudes, they could not truly understand what it meant to grieve as the Queen.

While the public may have been able to sympathize with Queen Victoria, she was not able to mourn as they did. As Queen, Victoria was not permitted to attend the funeral of any of her subjects. Because Albert was lower than she in rank, even though he was her husband, he also was technically her subject. During the time of the funeral, Victoria had secluded herself at Osborne, which was, according to Weintraub, "as far away from the funeral as was practical" (306). In any case, it seems likely that Victoria would have been too distraught to comport herself with any reserve at the funeral. Weintraub reports the Queen speaking the following words to her daughter Vicky after Albert's death:

Oh, my poor child. Why may the earth not swallow *us* up? ...How am I alive after witnessing what I have done? Oh! I who prayed daily that we might die together and I never survive Him! I who felt, when in those blessed Arms clasped and held tight in the sacred Hours of the night, when the world seemed only to be ourselves, that nothing could part us. I felt so v[er]y secure. (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 302).

These extreme sentiments are simultaneously conventional and theatrical.

Although Victoria is a famous mourner, she drew upon various cultural models, including Tennyson's poetry. She expressed an affinity with Mariana, a heroine from one of Tennyson's early poems. Weintraub reports that on their first meeting, on April 14th 1862, Queen Victoria introduced herself to Tennyson with the words, "I am like your Mariana now" (311). "Mariana," published in 1830, describes the desolate life of a widow who perpetually waits for her husband to return, and perpetually concludes, "He cometh not." At the end of each overwrought stanza is the refrain, "I am weary, weary, / I would that I were dead."

Shortly after Albert's death, Victoria began an *album consolatum*, a type of mourner's scrapbook. It included passages from poems, sermons, prayers, and "other expressions relevant to the mourner's mood" (Weintraub *Victoria* 308). It never has been published; it resides at the British Library, which describes the album as "containing extracts from verses, sermons and letters collected by Queen Victoria for consolation after the death of Prince Albert; 1862-1886." The extracts, written in both German and English, were "entered partly by the Queen herself, but mostly by members of her

household and other members of the royal family.” Weintraub reports that the Queen’s 182-page *album consolatum* was filled by June 27, 1862. The table of contents for the Queen’s book included poems by Tennyson, Coleridge, Goethe, Heine, and Longfellow (309). The British Library adds that the album also contained passages from Newman, Charley Kingsley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Schiller. There were extracts from letters, passages from sermons, and the “Commemoration of the Faithful Departed” from the *Book of Common Prayer* (Weintraub 309). Elisabeth Darby and Nicola Smith report that the Queen’s *album consolatum* also included letters of condolence and excerpts from tracts concerning life after death (4).

In addition to those authors whose names are now well known, the Queen also included passages from lesser-known poets. One of these, anonymous and titled simply “A Dirge,” was sung at a meeting of Victoria’s working-class subjects at Surrey Chapel on December 16th, 1861. It was reprinted in the *Christian Spectator* in January of 1862, where it is credited as being reprinted from *The Star*. The poem begins with the call to mourn: “Toll, great bells of St. Paul! / Toll through the midnight air!” (lines 1-2) before picturing the people of the nation “on their knees in prayer” (4). The author describes the Queen as the “dear lady” (5) who has been left alone “[u]pon her glittering throne” (6) before describing how the loss of Prince Albert will affect her:

More utterly left

More hopelessly alone

Than the poor peasant’s wife

Because from her is riven

The only human life

That to her state was given

To help, controul and guide. (lines 7-13)

In fact, Victoria did compare herself to a peasant's wife; she strongly sympathized with the grief her female subjects felt upon the loss of their husbands. In January of 1862 the Queen became involved in the response to the Hartley coillery catastrophe, in which miners had been entombed (Weintraub *Victoria* 312). She wrote a statement after all hope was gone for the trapped miners expressing her grief for the lost men, saying that "her tenderest sympathy is with the poor widows and mothers, and that her own misery makes her feel all the more for them" (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 312). When the Queen visited Balmoral for the first time after Albert's death, she called on a cottager she knew whose own husband had recently died; the woman recalled "And we both cried: she cried and I cried. I controlled myself as soon as I could, and asked her pardon for crying" (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 313). While the cottager seemed to understand that though she shared the experience of widowhood with her Queen, they were not equals in any other way, the Queen saw in her a kindred spirit: "But, oh!" said the Queen, "I am so thankful to cry with someone who knows exactly how I feel" (313). Although Victoria was able to condole with some of her subjects briefly, she was essentially isolated from them; a recurring theme in her later writings, both letters and journals, was how deep her isolation in her widowhood was.

"A Dirge" continues with the theme of the Queen's loneliness, though it also includes reassurances that the Queen's people will continue to love her: "Millions will

love her still; / Ay, fondlier than before!” (lines 17-18). The poem ends with the command to “weep and pray for her” (21) and the hope that the Queen will find solace in her faith and in the company of her children. The poem twice repeats the words “upon her glittering throne”; although Victoria’s subjects, including the author of this poem, could sympathize with her, this poem still emphasizes that she is the Queen; while her throne may be lonely, she is still expected to rule.

The last entry in the Queen’s *album consolatum* was a Charley Kingsley verse beginning, “Shrink not from grief...” (Weintraub *Victoria* 309). Indeed, the Queen did not shrink from her grief, but instead embraced it. While Victoria underlined many significant passages from these snippets, Weintraub reports that the most underlined passages were those from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, which was her favorite work of his (309). The British Library concurs: “[T]he underlinings from [...] *In Memoriam* bear out the Queen’s testimony that it gave her the greatest consolation in after her loss.” Victoria altered lines from *In Memoriam* to make them more applicable to her particular situation; for example, she changed “widower” to “widow” and “his” to “hers” in the lines “Tears of a Widower” (Darby and Smith 4). She recorded in her diary for January 5th 1862 that she was “much soothed and pleased with Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*,” and that “only those who have suffered as I do, can understand these beautiful poems” (qtd. in Darby and Smith 4).

“Break not”: Tennyson’s “Dedication”

On hearing of Prince Albert's death, Tennyson immediately drafted a letter of condolence to Princess Alice:

[W]hen I was some three or four years older than yourself I suffered what seemed to me to shatter all my life so that I desired to die rather than to live. And the record of my grief I put into a book; and I continually receive letters from those who suffer telling me how great a solace this book has been to them. Possibly if by and by Your R.H. would consider this record it might give you some comfort. I do not know. (qtd. in Blair 246)

The tone of this letter is polite; Tennyson speculates that his book “possibly” might bring comfort to the royal family, though he does not know. The personal touch of Tennyson giving advice to Princess Alice based upon his own experience reads as well-meaning, but almost too familiar. However, the diffidence expressed in this letter is offset by the fact that it is not necessary for Tennyson to name the title of his poem, nor does he need to detail the type of grief he endured. In 1861, *In Memoriam* was so well-known that it required no specific mention; it is enough for Tennyson to mention putting his grief into “a book.” Pat Jalland states that by the 1860s, *In Memoriam* was replacing Keble's *The Christian Year* as the consolatory literature of choice (282). Kirstie Blair argues that the position of *In Memoriam* “in the Victorian literary canon was almost unique,” allowing such sympathy that the hearts of all its readers “will beat as one” (246). In his assessment of *In Memoriam* Edward Tannish writes,

To thousands, this is a sort of sacred book, and it dwells in their hearts in a place quite by itself. Deeper than all praise or fame, is the glory of having stirred the hearts and quickened the spirits of thousands of men to whom not many of the words spoken in their ears at present stand for much. This our poet has done in this his greatest poem. (qtd. in Blair 246)

This evaluation lauds the poem for its ability to touch the individual, for whom the types of consolation offered “at present” do not “stand for much,” and for its ability to touch all of its readers equally, giving solace to “thousands.” Blair argues that *In Memoriam* provided its readers with very real comfort:

More than any other Victorian poem, Tennyson's masterpiece served as a key example of the affective model of poetry: poetry as a means to induce peace and tranquility by calming body and mind, and to provide “healing relief” from dangerous emotion, a “safety-valve to the heart.” (247)

While *In Memoriam* had been creating sympathy among its readers since 1850, Tennyson again attempted to provide comfort through his poetry to a much more select audience.

Although there were numerous physical monuments erected in Albert's memory, beginning in 1862 and continuing for many years, notable literary monuments were penned. Perhaps the most famous poem dedicated to the Prince Consort was Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In 1862, Tennyson published a new edition of the *Idylls*, this time adding a dedication to Prince Albert. This addition was well-received by the public and the royal family both. The “Echoes of the Week” section in the *ILN* provides a detailed and appreciative review that begins with a contemplation of the responsibility a poet who

professes to speak for the nation:

It is a proud thing, and the lot of few men, to know that the attention of the World hangs upon our faintest speech; that every word we publish will be eagerly and admiringly canvassed wherever the English language is spoken; and that our minutest utterances will find sympathetic echoes in the heart of a whole nation. Such universal audit was given to glorious old John Dryden in his latter days; with such is favoured his successor, the actual wearer of the Laureate's bays, Alfred Tennyson (141).

The author goes on to lament the infrequency of Tennyson's publishing new work, before providing an assessment of the newest edition of the *Idylls*:

It becomes a national misfortune for a man so credited, and whose lightest effusions are so dwelt upon, to write one mean or halting line; and a knowledge of the tremendous audience who listen for his voice may well be pleaded by a poet in excuse for the reticence which so often, and for so long a period, keeps mute the chords of his lyre.

Alfred Tennyson has just spoken, and spoken nobly and beautifully as ever. His theme is a sad—the saddest of ones; but the tender yet majestic poetic feeling with which it is treated raises it miles beyond the ordinary level of Royal dirges and birthday odes. All men must feel that the dedication of the new edition of “*Idylls of the King*” to the memory of the Prince Consort is no cut-and-dried monody, no mere elegy *de commande*. In every line it breathes infinite affection, sympathy,

commiseration—in every line it is replete with wise and thoughtful eloquence (141).

This enthusiastic review provides a stark contrast with the paper's reception of Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington." While the "Ode" was criticized for being little more than an "elegy *de commande*," required of Tennyson but written with little genuine feeling, with the "Dedication," Tennyson's tribute now arises from real emotion; it is no typical "Royal dirge" or "birthday ode."

The affection, sympathy, commiseration, wisdom, and eloquence for which the "Dedication" is praised likely was much inspired by Tennyson's relationship with Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort²⁰. Christopher Ricks writes that Prince Albert had asked Tennyson to inscribe a copy of the *Idylls* in 1860. It seems especially fitting, then, that Tennyson would dedicate to the Prince Consort the 1862 version, which was finished by about Christmas 1861 (Ricks 675), just weeks after Albert's death. Hope Dyson reports that Tennyson was made aware less than a week after Albert's death that the family desired him to write something about the Prince. On December 24th, 1861, Tennyson and his family traveled to Osborne, where the Queen and her family remained for some time after Albert's death, to record their sympathy in the visitors' book (62). It was just after this that Tennyson began work on the "Dedication," which he completed about two weeks later (62). He wrote a letter to Princess Alice shortly thereafter, which entails his hopes for the way his lines would be received by the family, particularly Queen Victoria:

²⁰ After the publication of *In Memoriam* in 1850, Prince Albert, who greatly admired the poem, strongly recommended that Tennyson fill the laureateship Wordsworth had vacated. Because of this gesture, Tennyson certainly felt some sense of obligation to the Prince Consort (Newton 65).

Madam,

Having heard some time ago from Sir C. B. Phipps that your Royal Highness had expressed a strong desire that I should in some way 'idealise' our lamented Prince, and being at that time very unwell, I was unwilling to attempt the subject because I feared that I might scarce be able to do it justice, nor did I well see how I should idealise a life which was in itself an ideal.

At last it seemed to me that I could do no better than to dedicate to his memory a book which he himself had told me was valued by him. I am the more emboldened to send these lines to your Royal Highness, because having asked the opinion of a Lady who knew and truly loved and honoured him,²¹ she gave me to understand by her reply that they were true and worthy of him: whether they be so or not, I hardly know, but if they do not appear so to your Royal Highness, forgive me as your Father would have forgiven me.

Though these lines conclude with an address to our beloved Queen I feel that I cannot do better than leave the occasion of presenting them to the discretion of your Royal Highness.

Believe me, as altogether sympathising with your sorrow,

Your Royal Highness's faithful
and obedient servant

²¹ The Duchess of Sutherland, who had been the Queen's Mistress of the Robes until April 1861, to whom Tennyson first sent the completed "Dedication" for approval (Dyson 62).

A. Tennyson (qtd. in Dyson 62-3)

This letter demonstrates the burden Tennyson felt himself under: his concerns over how to properly “idealise” the Prince Consort is both touching and telling. Could he have been afraid of receiving the same type of criticism his “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” provoked? That would explain his emphasis on the fact that he shared the lines with “a Lady who knew and truly loved and honoured him” before sending them to Albert’s daughter. Most poignant in this letter is Tennyson’s plea that if Princess Alice found the “Dedication” lacking, she would remember her father’s love of Tennyson’s poetry and excuse the poet on his behalf. Fortunately, Tennyson’s fears, whether genuine or merely expressed by convention, proved to be unfounded.

A short while after Tennyson sent the new edition to the Queen and her family, Emily Tennyson recorded in her diary “a day to be remembered by us – a letter of thanks to A from Princess Alice telling us that his lines have soothed our Queen, thank God!” (qtd. in Dyson 65). The letter from Princess Alice, dated January 15th, 1862, highlights the healing effects of the “Dedication”:

If words could express thanks and real appreciation of lines so beautiful, so truly worthy of the great pure spirit which inspired the Author, Princess Alice would attempt to do it; – but these failing, she begs Mr Alfred Tennyson to believe how much she admires them, and that this just tribute to the memory of her beloved Father touched her deeply. Mr Alfred Tennyson could not have chosen a more beautiful or true testimonial to the memory of him who was so really good and *noble*, than the ‘Idylls of the

King' which he so valued and admired. Princess Alice has transmitted the lines to the Queen, who desired her to tell Mr Tennyson, with her warmest thanks, how much moved she was in reading them, and that they had soothed her aching, bleeding heart. She knows also how *He* would have admired them²². (qtd. in Dyson 65)

This letter unequivocally states the royal family's appreciation of Tennyson's poetic tribute. The fact that Princess Alice shared the "Dedication" with the Queen demonstrates her approval, particularly since Tennyson implored Princess Alice to keep the lines from her mother unless she truly found them worthy. The description of the "Dedication" soothing the Queen's "aching, bleeding heart" must have touched him deeply.

Daniel W. Newton proposes that we read the "Dedication" as a funeral sermon, one which "unif[ies] the religious and political with an attitude of mourning" (24). Antony Harrison argues that we view Tennyson in these lines as "adopt[ing] the metapolitical stance of the sage prophet, presenting its author as the Merlin of Victorian England" (49). I will consider Tennyson's "Dedication" to the *Idylls of the King* as a funeral sermon in verse, so it is useful to consider the model of Victorian funeral sermons John Wolffe describes in *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*. These funeral sermons rose to great popularity during the early to middle decades of the nineteenth century. These sermons frequently were preached not at the funerals themselves, but at separate special services or on a Sunday close to the death

²² This letter from Princess Alice represents the first sent to Tennyson from the Queen's household; in the months and years to come, Victoria herself would write many letters to him, and their correspondence would continue until his death some thirty years later.

or funeral (58). The intention of the clergymen at these services, Wolffe states, “was to link tribute to the deceased to the drawing of spiritual lessons for the living” (58). While for the most part the subjects of these sermons were common people, occasionally the death of a well-known person offered the opportunity to reach wider audiences: “The deaths of prominent people gave [...] a particular stimulus to widespread preaching of this kind” (58).

Funeral sermons for prominent people in the 19th century were patterned upon those preached after the death of Princess Charlotte, becoming more global in their address and more strident in their exhortations: “such events were worthy of especial note both because they touched the whole kingdom, and because the very elevated station of the deceased in life pointed up the ultimate vanity of all human aspiration when laid low by death” (58). Funeral sermons for prominent people in the 19th century reached unprecedented high numbers: Princess Charlotte’s death (1817) occasioned eighty-one sermons, there were seventy-five for George III (1820), sixty-five on the Duke of Wellington (1852), and seventy on the Prince Consort (1861). These deaths had such an impact on the populace, Wolffe argues, because they touched something deep in the national psyche:

The four individuals who gave rise to the most numerous published sermons suggest the two main contexts in which death stirred the deepest response. These were either untimely and tragic deaths like those of Charlotte and Albert, or conversely the ending of lives such as those of

George III and the Duke of Wellington that had seemed to define a whole era. (59)

These funeral sermons sought to speak to those who were in shock from the death of a national celebrity, to those who were seeking to make sense of themselves and the nation in the absence of the figures who had seemed to represent it. The death of Prince Albert must have encompassed both of these responses for contemporary mourners.

A passage of scripture typically introduced a funeral sermon; the Reverend Edward White Benson discusses its function in an 1870 sermon:

It has become almost a custom that when words are to be spoken to a congregation about a great man, or a good [man] taken from our midst by death, the preacher should preface the substance of his discourse by analyzing an example or chapter from Holy Writ. [...] While this scriptural invocation lifts the lost to a sheerer region, it seems at the same time to make more vivid the scriptural record. (qtd. in Newton 6)

Following the scriptural exposition, the sermonizer turns to mourning the dead. The Reverend John Nash Griffin began a sermon at Albert's death by noting the universal mourning of his passing: "The sad tidings were speedily born by the electric wire to the most distant portions of the Kingdom, and as they flew upon the wings of the lightning, sudden distress sat upon all faces, and many eyes wept tears of sorrow" (qtd. in Newton 7). The Reverend Benson also emphasizes the widespread sorrow over Albert's untimely passing: "What we have lost none can tell. He whom so many households mourn, was to

us a musing father. [...] And no one need to be ashamed to sorrow indeed” (qtd. in Newton 7).

After deliberately and explicitly mourning the dead, the deceased’s virtues were praised. This panegyric element treats “the qualities in the life of the deceased that were considered worthy of admiration and emulation” (Wolffe 60) as the basis for moral and spiritual lessons for the congregation (58-9). Griffin and Benson praised Albert’s virtues to encourage others to follow his example by remembering “the kingly presence, that manly countenance, with its thoughtfulness, its firmness; the frank, bright eye which lighted up every face it fell upon; [and] the kindness of that ringing laugh which has sounded so often in our cloisters” (qtd. in Newton 8).

After praising the dead, the clergyman would give the mourners hope, celebrating “new avenues for activity and personal growth” for the deceased (Wolffe 63). Hence, after extolling Albert’s virtuous life, the Reverend Charles Kingsley wondered aloud about Albert’s potential for greatness, asking, “To what unknown heights has he not risen?” (qtd. in Newton 8). The act of celebrating death may feel slightly inappropriate when contrasted with the sorrow of a funeral, but it was common practice in Victorian funeral sermons: “Celebration may seem a provocative word when used in relation to death, but it still encapsulates much of the sermon comment on the deaths” in Victorian society (65). Therefore, listening audiences, though grieving their loss, could welcome this celebratory element because it gives hope that the deceased’s positive virtues would continue on after death. It also provided a reminder of the afterlife, the “crown” of earthly achievement.

The final portion of Wolffe’s funeral sermon model is a “direct exhortation to the hearers to be mindful of their own mortality, spiritual state, and eternal prospects” (59). This lesson was designed to fill the mourners with hope for the future and encourage understanding of the present. This is the type of hope and instruction Tennyson attempts to provide for Queen Victoria. Pat Jalland contrasts Victoria’s mourning of the Prince Consort with the mourning undertaken by her subjects, who “usually achieved some sort of resolution, whether through Christian faith, the memory of a loved one, family support, professional work, re-engagement in family and community activity, or remarriage” (318). As part of his direct exhortation to the Queen, Tennyson encourages her to achieve something similar to this type of resolution.

Throughout the “Dedication,” Tennyson adheres to the funeral model Wolffe describes: he mourns Albert’s untimely passing by evoking the shadows of his death, praises his virtues, celebrates his future potential, and includes his hopes that the Queen will seek support from a multitude of people to find healing. However, while all of the funeral elements exist in the poem, Tennyson spends the most time on mourning Albert and praising his virtues, which, in turn, mitigates the celebration of death and the final hopeful lesson.

The “Dedication” to the 1862 edition of *Idylls of the King* begins with a justification for the dedication:

These to His Memory – since he held them dear,
Perchance as finding there unconsciously
Some image of himself – I dedicate,

I dedicate, I consecrate with tears –

These Idylls. (lines 1-5)

Tennyson is expressing shared sorrow. He weeps as the Queen weeps; he exposes his emotions to the Queen, insisting that Albert's death has affected him, describing "tears" she would recognize as a reader of *In Memoriam*.

Critics both modern and contemporary have drawn parallels between the figure of King Arthur and Prince Albert; Hallam Tennyson reported that lines six and seven, "And indeed He seems to me / Scarce other than my king's ideal knight," were changed in 1882 from "my king's own knight" to "my king's ideal knight," explaining, "The first reading ... was altered because Leslie Stephen and others called King Arthur a portrait of the Prince Consort" (qtd. in Ricks 676). Clinton Machann reports Swinburne mockingly referring to the "Morte d'Albert, or Idylls of the Prince Consort" (qtd. in Machann 199). Tennyson was not ignorant of these criticisms. In the first lines of the "Dedication," he also seems to be acknowledging the truth in the likeness, though he states that the comparison was unintentional on his part; Albert may have found himself in the poem "unconsciously." These lines also serve as notice to those readers, of whom Queen Victoria herself would have been most prominent, who might see Albert in Arthur as well. Newton asserts that the Queen would have accepted Tennyson's comparison of Albert to Arthur (19), making it an effective and believable move. This strategy of linking the deceased to an historical hero conforms to the first part of Wolfe's funeral sermon pattern; although Tennyson does not link the Prince Consort to a Biblical figure, his comparison of Albert to Arthur may have been even more significant for Victoria.

While the affinity between Albert and Arthur may have been “unconscious,” not unconscious in these lines is Tennyson's use of the word “I.” While in *In Memoriam* he insisted that the “I” was not *his* “I,”²³ it is impossible to ignore the poet's presence in the “Dedication.” Tennyson had been quite fond of the Prince Consort, and in the “Dedication” Tennyson speaks directly to the Queen as her Poet Laureate, representing the national grief as his own. In these first lines, Tennyson represents grief formally as well as thematically. The repetition of the words “I dedicate” serves to reinforce the poet’s earnestness. When Tennyson stammers “I dedicate” twice, it implies that “conscious” mourning, including the mourning of poetry, is not enough; tears are more valid, more religious, more appropriate. In these lines, simple, conventional language fails to express the depth of the poet's dedication; he must therefore repeat himself. These lines echo the rhythm of weeping, in which the throat tightens and the breath hitches unevenly, through which speaking becomes nearly impossible.

These lines also hearken back to Tennyson's 1833 poem “Break, break, break,”²⁴

²³ About the use of “I” in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson wrote, “‘I’ is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him” (qtd. in Ricks 338). “It is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine” (339), he added. “In the poem altogether private grief swells out into thought of, and hope for, the whole world” (339).

²⁴ Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,

with their repetitions and stated inability to accurately express grief in words. The phrase “consecrate with tears” carries with it echoes of the poet’s tears in his earlier poetry, certainly tears in *In Memoriam*, but also in the song “Tears, Idle Tears” from *The Princess*. In the context of *The Princess*, “Tears, Idle Tears” is sung by a maid with such passion that “the tear / She sang of, shook and fell” (IV lines 41-2). The Princess replies with scorn, advising the maid to remain stoic, likening the pull of such idle grief to a siren song (IV lines 46-8). Herbert Tucker argues that “Tears, Idle Tears” “expresses a universal dispossession, a common loss” (363). The same can certainly be said about the “Dedication.” However, the tears in the dedication to the *Idylls* are not idle; their purpose is to consecrate, and we are made to understand that these tears are right and proper. Even so, we are made to understand later in the “Dedication” that a poet's tears operate under different laws than do a queen's.

Tennyson first mentions Queen Victoria in line 12 of the “Dedication,” when he likens the loss of Albert to the loss of the sun:

Her – over all whose realms to their last isle,
Commingled with the gloom of imminent war,²⁵

And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

²⁵ Tennyson refers here to the American Civil War, 1861-1865. England’s government was involved in attempting to avert the war; Weintraub asserts that without Prince Albert’s intervention in defusing the “belligerent Palmerston-Russell ultimatum,” which called for England to declare war against America, “there might have been an Anglo-American war which could have drawn in France, and irrevocably divided both Canada and the United States” (*Uncrowned King* 423-24). Albert’s intervention in this matter represented the last political act of his life; he died a short time later.

The shadow of His loss drew like eclipse,
Darkening the world. [...] (12-15)

These lines enfold the entire world into Victoria's empire, making the darkness of the metaphoric eclipse truly worldwide. The earliest reports of the Prince Consort's death in the *Illustrated London News* employ a similar metaphor likening death to darkness:

Every family in the land is smitten with the awe and the sorrow which
Death excites when he breaks into the domestic circle and snatches from it
its chief pride and joy. For the moment there seems no consolation. It is all
dark and mysterious. Grief itself is dumb and tearless with excess of
astonishment. Even faith is stunned, and can only murmur forth in
faltering accents, "Thy will be done" (615).

This passage asks its readers to imagine a darkness so complete that even grief and faith are incapacitated. The personifications in this passage, of Death as a thief, of grief mute, and of faith nearly so, serve to anticipate and describe the feelings of a shocked and mournful public. The representation of a silent, shocked grief and a faith that can "only murmur" resonates again in the first lines of the "Dedication," in which the poet stammers out his lines.

On a cultural level, the dark and solemn mourning images of Albert's death in the "Dedication" reflect contemporary mourning customs. Black was the standard color for mourning apparel; in 1861, at the time Albert's death, "Oxford Street shops already existed for sable women's hats, sashed crepe 'weepers' for men's tall hats, black armbands, deep purple clothes, black plumes for horses, and funeral accoutrements of

every description” (Weintraub *Uncrowned King* 438). Victoria’s demands for her court were no different: she required everyone to wear mourning clothing at all social occasions for one year after Albert’s death. When this requirement was lifted, then only because morale was depressingly low, royal servants still had to wear a black crepe band on their arms until the end of the decade (440). Tennyson’s mourning of Albert in the “Dedication,” full of gloom, shadows, an eclipse, and darkness, connects to these Victorian funeral customs of parading death and remembering the dead, and anticipates and perhaps helps support the Queen’s mourning responses.

In line 15, Tennyson states the dark and gloomy truth: “We have lost him: he is gone.” The starkness of these words jolts the reader, cutting through the metaphors to remind us of the facts; Albert is indeed gone.²⁶ Tennyson’s mourning admission – that Albert is lost and gone – is perhaps a risky acknowledgment, though it certainly is true. If the Queen were to dwell on the fact, she never might be able to move beyond her grief. Even though such an explicit reference to the dead conforms to the model of the Victorian funeral sermon, when not balanced with celebration, it provides “less an inducement to recovery than an incentive to continue mourning well past the accepted bounds” (Blair 251). Newton argues that Tennyson’s assertion is not necessarily negative: “Tennyson did not attempt to extinguish any remaining hope for Victoria, but took great pains to explicitly clarify the reality of her situation and tell her that Albert had, in fact, died” (22).²⁷ While the words of this line themselves may seem hopeless or

²⁶ Once again, the language of this passage seems to echo language from the *Illustrated London News*; which reported on Saturday, December 28th, 1861, “All is over” (655).

unpoetically frank, the colon at the end of the line itself seems to offer hope: we expect more words to follow the colon; the statement that had seemed so stark may not in fact be the end. Hartley S. Spatt argues that after he wrote *In Memoriam*, Tennyson found ways to “dematerialize” death through affirmations that great heroes cannot die: “In the years following Hallam’s death, Tennyson achieves a unique power to subsume death within poetic visions of life that render it, not powerless perhaps, but irrelevant” (54). When Tennyson equates Prince Albert’s death with an eclipse and states “he is gone,” he is representing death as little worse than a removal from the world of human perception, and part of a frightening but natural cycle.

After Tennyson mourns Albert in the first several lines of the “Dedication,” he lauds Albert’s virtuous and productive life, a common move in Victorian sermons. In praising Albert, Tennyson compares him to the

ideal knight,
Who revered his conscience as his king;
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it;
Who loved one only and who clave to her – (7-11)

Tennyson’s praise here is copied almost word for word from “Guinevere” from the

²⁷ While this statement may be starkly abrupt, the Queen needed to hear that Albert was truly gone because she did not seem to have accepted his absence; Victoria “abandoned herself to the past and to her memories of him with a passionate intensity” (Hibbert 285). In visiting the Queen in March of 1862, her daughter Vicky reported, “She cries a lot; then there is always the empty room, the empty bed, she always sleeps with Papa’s coat over her and his dear red dressing-gown beside her and some of his clothes in the bed!” (qtd. in Pakula 161).

Idylls.²⁸ In this section of the “Dedication,” Tennyson consciously connects Albert to Arthur. This rhetorical move portrays Albert as the embodiment of chivalric ideals and connects him to the legendary King Arthur, the most revered monarch in England. This connection was not lost on the Queen or the royal family; following the publication of the “Dedication,” Vicky wrote to Tennyson on February 23, 1862, “I cannot separate the idea of King Arthur from the image of him whom I most revered on earth” (H. Tennyson 2:481).

The next lines mark a shift, moving from mourning to celebration. Indeed, the lines that follow turn from the darkness and celebrate the fact that now, after his death, the world can appreciate Albert in a new way:

We know him now: all narrow jealousies
Are silent; and we see him as he moved,
How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise,
With what sublime repression of himself,
And in what limits, and how tenderly;
Not swaying to this faction or to that;
Not making his high place the lawless perch
Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage-ground
For pleasure; but through all this tract of years

²⁸ In “Guinevere,” Arthur highlights the ideals of the Round Table and believes his knights should
Reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it. (lines 465-69)

Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,
Before a thousand peering littlenesses,
In that fierce light which beats upon a throne,
And blackens every blot: for where is he,
Who dares foreshadow for an only son
A lovelier life, a more unstained, than his? (16-30)

These lines emphasize a certain demystification of Albert's character even as they add to the hyperbolic descriptions of it that the newspaper reports also provide, and which allowed the Queen to feel justified in her expansive and perpetual monument-creating in the years following her husband's death. The statement "We know him now" implies that only *now*, after his death, can the world truly understand who Albert was.

When Albert was alive, many in the British public distrusted him because of his foreign birth, even accusing him of being a Prussian spy (Weintraub *Victoria* 232). An item in the *Daily News*, dated January 11th, 1854, doubted that the Prince could ever "feel and act" like a true Englishman, accusing him of "breath[ing] from childhood the air of Courts tainted by the imaginative servility of Goethe" (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 232). Weintraub reports that Charles Greville, the Victorian diarist, recorded his belief that the attacks against Prince Albert were led by the *Daily News* and the *Morning Advertiser* (232). The accusations against the Prince Consort continued to come in articles and in letters to the editors of the papers; they were "full of the bitterest abuse and all sort of lies" (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 232). Greville stated that the charges against Albert included the accusation that he

has been in the habit of meddling improperly in public affairs, and has used his influence to promote objects of his own and the interests of his family at the expense of the interests of this country; that he is German and not English in his sentiments and principles; that he corresponds with foreign princes and with British Ministers abroad without the knowledge of the Government, and that he thwarts the foreign policy of the Ministers when it does not coincide with his own ideas and purposes. (qtd. in Weintraub *Victoria* 232)

These rumors were persistent enough for some of the public to believe reports that Albert was a Russian agent and would be imprisoned for treason in the Tower (233). Although the rumors of Albert holding anti-English sympathies were unfounded and roundly rejected by his supporters in the government, they continued to plague him throughout his political career, and it was only after his death that the papers, and with them the public, exonerated him. In his dismissal of the charges against Albert as “narrow jealousies” and his assertion in these lines from the “Dedication” that Albert’s life was “unstained,” Tennyson is allying himself with those loyal to the Queen and her family. While this is to be expected from the Poet Laureate, the sentiment in these lines rings true; we know from his letters that Tennyson respected and admired the Prince Consort, and while much of this “Dedication” lacks the passion and pain that characterizes *In Memoriam*, the respect, sorrow, and admiration these lines profess appears to be heartfelt nonetheless.

The figure of death in these lines from the middle of the “Dedication” has shifted from being something that darkens comprehension to something that provides

illumination. These lines also pay tribute to the Queen, reminding her (and England's reading public) that the Prince Consort did not overreach, remaining always mindful of his place, even though Victoria had lobbied Parliament for years to bestow the official title of Prince Consort upon Albert.²⁹

Following these lines, Tennyson addresses the future of Albert's progeny, calling upon them to follow their father's example of philanthropy on behalf of the nation:

Or how should England dreaming of *his* sons
Hope more for these than some inheritance
Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine,
Thou noble Father of her Kings to be,
Laborious for her people and her poor –
Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day –
Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace –
Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam
Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art,
Dear to thy land ours, a Prince indeed,
Beyond all titles, and a household name,
Hereafter, through all times, Albert the Good. (lines 31-43)

This section reiterates Albert's kingly virtues and encourages the Queen and the English

²⁹ In 1858, frustrated by repeated attempts have the title of Prince Consort granted by Parliament, Queen Victoria issued letters patent making Albert "something more than a Coburg prince" (Weintraub 264). In fact, Albert had long been king in all but name, assuming the duties of ceremonial sovereign abroad when the Queen was forced to withdraw from public view during her pregnancies. Parliament's refusal to recognize Albert as Prince Consort continued to anger Victoria long after his death.

people alike to emulate them. The greatest gift Albert's death could bestow, Tennyson asserts, would be the inheritance of his virtues. These lines also serve as a reminder that although Albert was never named king, his sons would be, and they also claim Albert as England's own, even though he was German by birth. When Tennyson lauds Albert as "Beyond all titles," he is setting Albert above the need for government-bestowed titles, instead focusing on what Albert meant to the people of England; when Tennyson refers to him as a "household name," he is praising Albert as something higher than a royal figure: a good man in his own right. However, knowing as he must have known that Victoria was sensitive about Albert's lowly title of Prince Consort, Tennyson bestows his own title upon Albert. When Tennyson labels the Prince Consort "Albert the Good," he is bestowing upon him a kingly title, one that can only be given after Albert's death. Stanley Weintraub reports that the Queen was deeply touched by this tribute: "The Queen replied through Princess Alice, 'who desired to tell Mr. Tennyson, with her warmest thanks, how much she was moved by his lines'" (310), calling the poem a tribute to "'my own Ideal knight,' who would be 'hereafter, thro' all times, Albert the Good'" (310).

When Tennyson encourages Victoria and her people to have a heart like Albert's, he seems particularly to be imploring the Queen to hold her heart together. This is significant because some mid-century Victorian beliefs held "that excessive emotional stimulation could cause heart disease – that one could, in effect, die of a broken heart" (Russett 955-56). On December 7, one week before Albert died, the Queen recorded her grief over her husband's failing health: "I went to my room & cried dreadfully and felt Oh! as if my heart must break – oh! such agony as exceed all my grief this year. Oh God!

help and protect him... I seem to live in a dreadful dream” (qtd. in Hibbert 278). Later in the Dedication, after lines lauding the Prince Consort’s greatness and the dedication to art and science the Great Exhibition³⁰ demonstrated, Tennyson seems to offer a warning to Queen Victoria that her grief over Albert’s death not be too excessive:

Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;
Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure,
Remembering all the beauty of that star
Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made
One light together, but has past and leaves
The Crown a lonely splendour. (lines 44-49)

The repetition of the phrase “break not” signals the poet’s anxiety over the state of Victoria’s heart; in these lines, Tennyson is reminding the Queen that as head of state, she does not have the luxury of allowing her heart to break.

Numerous sermons on the occasion of Albert’s death align the Queen’s grief, and therefore her heart, with that of the nation. In his 1862 sermon *The Nation Admonished: A Sermon on the Death of the Prince Consort*, Edward Henry Carr states, “[T]he very heart of this nation, great, proud, and manly as it is, is bowed down to the ground, agitated by the emotions of astonishment, sympathy and awe” (14). In another sermon, *A Nation’s Sorrow and a Nation’s Sympathy*, John Richardson claims, “The throb of humanity makes us feel that we are all one, one, in our tribute of respect towards the

³⁰ The Great Exhibition, which was held in 1851 in London, showcased industrial achievements and cultural and artistic attractions from England and its colonies, as well as other countries around the world. It was organized by Prince Albert and other members of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. Approximately six million people attended during the five months it ran; Queen Victoria and her family visited three times.

departed – one, in our yearning, aching sympathy with the bereaved” (13). Although the sense of shared grief creates what Kirstie Blair terms a “community of mourners” (249), their sympathy with Victoria could be potentially dangerous: “As sympathy transfers feeling, the implication is that agonies of grief felt in the Queen’s heart could be communicated to the hearts of her subjects, spreading illness” (249). It is therefore necessary that Victoria set an example for the nation in moderating her grief; Edward Miller’s sermon *England’s Irreparable Loss: A Sermon on the Death of the Prince Consort* addresses the Queen’s emotional state: “She is struggling bravely now, for the people who love her [...] but the conflict is not over yet, and each day we count the hours she has slept, and balance the spirit’s strength against the weakness of a mortal from, and PRAY” (22). In the “Dedication,” Tennyson is reminding his Queen that, unlike the young poet of *In Memoriam* who wills that his heart should break in Lyric IV,³¹ Victoria is not “at liberty to will her heart’s own destruction” (Blair 249). The contrast implicit in

³¹ To Sleep I give my powers away;
 My will is bondsman to the dark;
 I sit within a helmless bark,
 And with my heart I muse and say:

O heart, how fares it with thee now,
 That thou should’st fail from thy desire,
 Who scarcely darest to inquire,
 ‘What is it makes me beat so low?’

Something it is which thou hast lost,
 Some pleasure from thine early years.
 Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears,
 That grief hath shaken into frost!

Such clouds of nameless trouble cross
 All night below the darkened eyes;
 With morning wakes the will, and cries,
 ‘Thou shalt not be the fool of loss.’

these lines is between the kind of grief allowed a poet but not a queen, as if she must (like Albert the Reader) remain "unconscious" of a resemblance that is all too plain. These lines suggest that mourning is not divided just by rank or gender but also in terms of mind and body: poets can be conscious of what others must suppress.

The "Dedication" ends with a benediction for Queen Victoria:

May all love,
His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow Thee,
The love of all Thy sons encompass Thee,
The love of all Thy daughters cherish Thee,
The love of all Thy people comfort Thee,
Till God's love set Thee at his side again! (lines 50-55)

These lines do not urge Victoria to make active attempts at healing; instead, she must wait to be overshadowed, encompassed, cherished, and comforted by various loves.

Tennyson's "Dedication" to the *Idylls* contains all the funeral elements Wolfe describes, but leans most heavily on mourning and praising the Prince Consort. As an introduction to the *Idylls*, Albert's "Dedication" really does seem to be a *Morte d'Albert* as Swinburne suggests. The poem revolves around Albert's death in order to provide an appropriately funereal atmosphere in which to mourn Albert. While the "Dedication" does idealize Albert and mourn his loss, the celebration of death and exhortations of hope are restricted in the poem. As the Queen responded by prolonged mourning and suffered additional tragedies in the royal family, we can chart how Tennyson alters his advice on

mourning to the Queen, seeming to understand again that she could not mourn as her subjects did.

“More the Queen *can not do*”: Victoria’s Mourning

No one would argue that Queen Victoria mourned as others did, though the form her mourning took was often criticized as being immoderate, inappropriate, and unhealthy. However, in the first several months of her bereavement, “Few looked on such demonstrations as morbid sentiment” (Weintraub *Victoria* 308). While it is worthwhile to examine Victoria’s mourning as reflective of the mourning customs of her age, the shape her mourning took is by no means representative. Weintraub asserts that Victoria “contributed nothing new to the vocabulary or symbolism of mourning” (307), adding that there was already a thriving funerary trade in Victorian England:

Oxford street shops already existed that were devoted solely to a trade in black ostrich feathers for women’s hats, and sashed crepe “weepers” for men’s tall hats, black armbands, deep purple clothes, black plumes for horses, and funeral accoutrements of every description. (307-08)

While Victoria indulged in the kind of mourning these objects represented, it was not seen as excessive; as Weintraub states, “One indulged in what grief one could afford” (308). Although the Queen indulged in some of the acceptable mourning practices of the Victorian age, what set her apart from her fellow mourners was the duration of her mourning. Pat Jalland discusses Victoria’s mourning in the chapter titled “Chronic and Abnormal Grief,” asserting that while chronic grief was “most uncommon” during the

Victorian age, the majority of bereaved Victorians working through their grief in approximately two years after their bereavement, the Queen mourned Albert from the time of his death for the next two decades (318-20).

Much has been written about Victorian social customs regulating mourning. Esther Schor argues that in the Victorian era, mourning rituals, and the necessary accoutrements, provided an indication of respectability and social propriety; these included “[...] crepe gowns, black silk bonnets, and jet ornaments; the miniatures; the mourning tea sets for entertaining; the commemorative ceramics, medals, and memorials” (231). In addition to the physical objects that indicated mourning, time was also a consideration in the mourning ritual: “Technically, ‘deep’ mourning refers to a code of behavior and dress to be observed during the initial, most stringent, period of mourning; within a few months, the rules relaxed as the family (and often its servants) donned the more moderate costumes of ‘half-mourning’” (231-2). While Victoria certainly observed these traditions, many of her contemporaries argued that her mourning went beyond mere respectability into excess.

By the time Prince Albert died in 1861, Victoria had already lost both her parents; her father died when she was an infant, and her mother died just months before Albert. Several authors have credited the early loss of Victoria’s father for instigating her search for a father figure throughout her youth and early adulthood; Jalland asserts that Victoria was able to find such a figure in Lord Melbourne, her first Prime Minister, and later in her husband: “Her love for Albert was overwhelming, involving powerful dependency, even in matters of state” (319). Victoria’s relationship with her mother was deeply

troubled, and thus Victoria's reaction to the loss of her mother was extreme: "Her response to her mother's death in March 1861, aggravated by guilt and remorse, led to a nervous breakdown. She nursed her sorrow in isolation, her 'unremitting grief' arousing rumours that her mind was unbalanced" (319). Victoria had barely begun to recover from the shock her mother's death caused when Albert died later that same year.

Victoria's mourning for Albert included what Jalland describes as his "mummification"; she left his rooms and belongings undisturbed, even having his clothes and bathing implements laid out each day, "as if he might return from the dead at any time" (319). Indeed, Victoria's language indicated that she was waiting to be reunited with her dead husband; she told the Belgian King, "I live on with him, for him; in fact I am only outwardly separated from him, and only for a time" (qtd. in Jalland 319). In a letter to Lord Canning, the Queen described her isolation in grief:

To lose one's partner in life is [...] like losing half of one's body and soul, torn forcibly away. [...] But to the Queen—to a poor helpless woman—it is not that only—it is the stay, support and comfort which is lost! To the Queen it is like *death* in life! [...] and she feels alone in the wide world, with many helpless children [...] to look to her—and the whole nation to look to her—now when she can barely struggle with her wretched existence! Her misery—her utter despair—she *cannot* describe! Her only support [...] is in the firm conviction and certainty of his nearness, his undying love, and of their eternal reunion! (qtd. in Jalland 320)

Victoria insists that her experience is unique; she begins with the universal statement equating losing “one’s partner in life” to having “one’s body and soul” sundered before indicating that her grief is different: “But to the Queen [...] it is not that only.” The Queen, we are made to understand, is under such pressures and expectations that she cannot mourn in the usual way.

While the Queen asserted her exclusion from standard Victorian mourning practices as fact, most of the nation was not as understanding. By 1863, sporadic criticisms of Victoria’s isolation had become common in the newspapers. Responding to such criticism, Victoria submitted an anonymous letter to the *Times* in her own defense, which the *Times* dutifully published. Weintraub states that the Queen’s letter was prompted by “the clamor that she show herself more, and involve herself more in state affairs” (328). The letter was addressed to “the Editor of *The Times*,” and though it was unsigned, the handwriting was recognized as belonging to Victoria (329). The letter begins by addressing the rumors that the Queen would soon break her solitude:

An erroneous idea seems generally to prevail, and has latterly found frequent expression in the newspapers, that the Queen is about to resume the place in society which she occupied before her great affliction; that is, that she is about again to hold levees and drawing-rooms in person, and to appear as before at court balls, concerts, etc. This idea cannot be too explicitly contradicted.

After contradicting the idea that she would be rejoining society, Victoria reassures her subjects that in important matters concerning national interest, she would do her duty in spite of her grief.

The Queen heartily appreciates the desire of her subjects to see her, and whatever she can do to gratify them in this loyal and affectionate wish she will do. Whenever any real object is to be attained by her appearing on public occasions, any national interest to be promoted, or any thing to be encouraged which is for the good of her people, her Majesty will not shrink, as she has not shrunk, from any personal sacrifice or exertion, however painful.

Next, Victoria discusses what effect the loss of Albert has had on her ability to perform the more ceremonial duties that were required of her:

But there are other and higher duties than those of a mere representation which are now thrown upon the Queen, alone and unassisted—duties which she can not neglect without injury to the public service, which weigh unceasingly upon her, overwhelming her with work and anxiety.

Victoria continues to address her duties in the letter, going into detail about what effect these have had on her health:

The Queen has laboured conscientiously to discharge these duties till her health and her strength, already shaken by the utter and ever-abiding desolation which has taken the place of her former happiness, have been seriously impaired.

To call upon her to undergo, in addition, the fatigue of those mere State ceremonies, which can be equally well performed by other members of her family, is to ask her to run the risk of entirely disabling herself for the discharge of those other duties which can not be neglected without serious injury to the public interests.

After remarking upon the unfairness of her subjects in asking her to perform ceremonial duties, the Queen reassures them that she will continue to do her best:

The Queen will, however, do what she can—in a manner least trying to her health, strength, and spirits—to meet the loyal wishes of her subjects; to afford that support and countenance to society, and to give that encouragement to trade which is desired of her.

Victoria ends her letter with a plea for understanding: “More the Queen *can not* do; and more the kindness and good feeling of her people will surely not exact from her.”

At least one of her subjects found Victoria’s letter particularly moving. In 1872, Dinah Maria Mulock Craik published *The Unkind Word, and Other Stories*, in which she discusses public criticism of Victoria’s extended mourning. Craik introduces Victoria’s letter to *The Times* as “one of those bits of human nature which spring up here and there in the arid deserts of courtly formalities and State history, touching—and they ought to touch—the whole heart of a nation” (84). Craik labels Victoria’s words in the letter “strange and touching” before sharing the emotions the letter raised:

Here is the highest, loneliest woman in the land, appealing, with a sad gentleness, to the sympathy of her people. Pleading, without State reserve,

and with a pathetic simplicity that feels no shame to confess either love or grief, her “former happiness,” her “ever-abiding desolation.” Nevertheless, she “will do what she can.” Surely there is not a man in the nation, a real man, father, husband, or brother, who would not respond loyally to such an appeal? (85)

Craik questions whether the Queen would have received such criticism if she had been “any other woman” (85) before describing what made Victoria unlike any other widow in the nation: “[S]he, in her splendid isolation, has no next friend” (85). Next, Craik criticizes those who found fault with Victoria’s behavior and questioned its authenticity, insisting that there is great nobility in the Queen’s letter:

But [the critics] forget one thing—that the life of a nation is not its ceremonial but its moral life, to which such a letter as this, out-spoken, honest, and free, from the Sovereign to the people, contributes more than the holding of a hundred drawing-rooms. And why? Because it is a true thing, a real thing. Because it sets forth, the more strongly because unconsciously, the fact that womanhood is higher than queendom. Even though never a queen did the like before, it is well done in this our Queen—loved and honoured as such for twenty-seven years—to have the courage to stand forward, quite by herself, and in her own identity, without intervention of ministers, or councillors, or parliament, and say to the country, “I am only a woman, I have lost my husband, my one love of all my life; my heart is broken, but I will try to do my duty. Ask of me no

shows or shams, and I will try to fulfill all that is real and necessary. ‘The Queen will do what she can.’” (86)

Craik further argues that the Queen’s letter highlights two emotions that were being “too much ignored” by those who found fault with the Queen’s behavior in the years following Albert’s death: “the reality of love, [and] the reality of grief” (86).

Next, Craik attempts to offer an explanation of why some of the Queen’s subjects were impatient with her prolonged and excessive grief:

There is something in our strong, reserved Saxon nature which recoils exceedingly from much outward demonstration of grief—indeed of every kind of emotion. We do not beat our breasts or tear our hair. We follow out best beloved to the grave in composed silence. We neither hang *immortelles* on their tombs, nor wreath their memorial busts with flowers. Not that we condemn these things, only they are not our way. After any great affliction we rarely speak much about it, but as soon as possible go back to our ordinary habits, and let the smooth surface of daily existence close over the cruel wound. We bury our dead in our hearts; there they soon arise and live, and live forever. And we believe it is best so. (86)

The Queen would make her subjects “more tender over her” (86), Craik argues, if she would try as much as possible to remember this. Englishmen would esteem her all the more for making her sorrow a silent sorrow. And English women, so many of whom are also widows, or childless, or solitary and forlorn, would like to see her suppress, in every suitable way,

all outward tokens of suffering. We suffer too, and are obliged to bear it; we can not mourn externally, at least not for long; some of us, after the very briefest season of that death-like passiveness which nature itself allows to a great sorrow, have to rise up again and resume our daily burden, fulfilling unremittingly, and at any personal sacrifice, all the duties of our station, be it low or high. (86-7)

Although Craik sympathizes with the Queen in her sorrow, she makes it clear in this passage that her sympathy only extends so far. While the Queen is in many ways alone, she also shares the commonality of death and loss with her subjects, and to forget that is to become self-indulgent. Craik offers a plea to the Queen: “[...] we would appeal to our Queen, as honestly as she appeals to us, that she do her best to overcome her grief [...]” (87). Craik continues with her plea, imagining the voices of the nation crying together: “We would cry to her as with one voice—the echo of her own—‘Be strong!’” (87). Despite the call to rally from her subjects, Victoria continued to grieve in a way Craik implies was un-English.

Victoria was in her early 40s at the time of Albert’s death, but she continued to grieve for the next twenty years, “instead of the two or three years which her subjects would have understood and which the rules of etiquette endorsed” (Jalland 320). The Queen placed herself under extreme seclusion in the years following Albert’s death, shutting herself away from her family and household and seeing her ministers as little as possible (320). Rumors circulated during this time that Victoria had been driven insane by grief, and she only gradually reemerged to public life and the business of running the

country in the 1870s (320). However, Jalland argues that even then Victoria was still grieving: “[E]very move out of seclusion seemed to Victoria a betrayal of her idealized husband, and she felt guilty that her grief was becoming less powerful” (320).

We should not view Queen Victoria as the archetypal Victorian mourner, but rather as one example of powerful chronic grief, into which state she was placed by the circumstances of her life and station. The Queen did allow her heart to break, unable or unwilling to obey Tennyson’s admonition. Jalland asserts that the Victorian customs of mourning neither contributed to Victoria’s extreme example, nor were they particularly affected by it:

She was certainly neither the archetypal Victorian mourner nor the model widow. Nor can we blame the elaborate mourning rituals for her condition—that is to confuse grief with mourning, and the experience of sorrow with its outward expression. The explanation probably lies in the predetermining influences, such as her lonely childhood, her dependence on Albert, her extreme reaction to her mother’s death, and the sudden, premature death of her husband. (321)

One of the most visible representations of Victoria’s prolonged mourning was her perpetual monument-making for her husband. The Queen wrote to Princess Alice on December 18th, just four days after the death of Prince Albert, asking for her guidance in designing memorials for her late husband:

I do hope you will come in two or three weeks; it will be such a blessing then. I shall need your taste to help me in carrying out works to His

memory which I shall want His aid to render all worthy of Him! You know his taste. You have inherited it. (qtd. in Darby and Smith 6)

This letter indicates one of the greatest struggles Victoria faced after Albert's death: she relied on him so much during his life that even after his death, she continued to desire his advice on everything, even in how to properly memorialize him. Princess Alice did provide the Queen with assistance in creating memorials for Albert: "The Crown Princess advised her mother on the design of the Royal Mausoleum, the Albert Memorial Chapel, and on the statues and busts which played such a prominent role in Queen Victoria's commemoration of her husband" (6).

During his life, Prince Albert often expressed his wish that Victoria would not create public memorials in his name. However, in the aftermath of his death, Victoria perpetually memorialized her husband, starting almost immediately:

Ignoring the Prince Consort's request that should he die before her, she would not "raise even a single marble image" to his name, the Queen proceeded immediately after his death to commission two full-size statues, a group, and several busts and statuettes of her beloved husband for her residences, and as gifts for members of her family and faithful servants. In addition, photographs and several of the memorial paintings which Queen Victoria commissioned show her alone, or with her children, grouped around posthumous busts of the Prince Consort. (6)

Early in 1862, the Queen approved William Theed's design for a statue of Prince Albert wearing Highland dress. The statue was unveiled at Balmoral at a ceremony

attended by the Queen, members of the royal family, and members of the household in October 1863 (11). The inscription on the pedestal was a phrase taken from a letter to the Queen from Norman Maclead, written two weeks after Albert's death: "His life sprang from a deep inner sympathy with God's Will, and therefore with all that is true, and beautiful, and right" (qtd. in Darby and Smith 12). Victoria was so touched by the letter that she immediately transcribed it into her *album consolatum* and ensured that it would be preserved permanently in marble.

While Victoria memorialized Albert in statues and paintings for her family, she also wished to create public memorials for the nation to appreciate. Early in 1862, *The Illustrated London News* made first mention of these: "Application has been made to the Lords Lieutenant of counties and to the chief magistrates of all cities and boroughs to join the metropolis in raising one national memorial to the lamented Prince" (85). The *ILN* reported that Manchester proposed to erect "a statue in the first instance," though money was an issue: "considerable difference of opinion exists as to the disposal of any surplus funds" (85). A committee in Birmingham resolved that "a statue will be the most appropriate, but that, in the event of a sufficient fund for that work not being obtained, it shall be an obelisk with bas-reliefs and an inscription" (qtd. in *ILN* 85). While these reports all express the nation's wish to erect a suitable memorial for the Prince Consort, there is a clear preoccupation with what such a memorial would cost. The *ILN* included details about one man's plea to build a monument at any cost:

The Rev. William Allen, Wesleyan minister of Ramsgate, has addressed a letter to Sunday scholars on the subject of the projected National

Memorial to the Prince. After dwelling in simple terms on the affecting circumstances of the Queen's bereavement, he quotes the speech made at the recent Mansion House meeting by the Bishop of London, in which his Lordship expressed his conviction that all classes of the population would readily co-operate in the erection of the memorial. Mr. Allen concludes by inviting the children in Sundal schools to unite in the work by a contribution of one penny each. (85)

Even this early mention of memorials seems quite extensive, though it does not begin to hint at how often Albert would be memorialized in coming years and decades. For the Queen, this perpetual memorializing was intended to ensure that the Prince Consort would not be forgotten, that the nation would continue to mourn him just as she did.

Although it had been suggested to the Queen that Albert be memorialized with a museum or a university in his name, Victoria desired a monument in the true sense of the word. A sculpture commemorating Albert's contributions to the nation was decided upon, and the Queen remained active in its design and execution. The National Memorial to His Royal Highness the Prince Consort, or the Albert Memorial, as it is come to be called, was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott. The central figure of the memorial is a bronze statue of Prince Albert, in which the Prince Consort is "wearing the robes of the Garter and holding a catalogue of the Great Exhibition" (Darby and Smith 52). At the base of the statue are eight sculptural groups representing Agriculture, Manufactures, Commerce, Engineering, Europe, Asia, Africa, and America (52). The frieze around the podium of the memorial portrays figures representing poets, musicians, painters, architects, and

sculptors (52). In glass mosaic is the monument's inscription: "Queen Victoria and Her People • To the Memory of Albert Prince Consort • As a Tribute of Their Gratitude • For a Life Devoted to the Public Good" (qtd. in Darby and Smith 56).

Although the Albert Memorial received favorable press on the whole, there were doubts about how accurately the monument achieved its goal of commemorating the Prince Consort. Darby and Smith report that *The Athenaeum* argued that the monument commemorated the Great Exhibition instead of Prince Albert as an individual (56). While *The Athenaeum* expressed doubt, *The Times* expressed outrage:

We are struck with the extraordinary omission which has been made in introducing nowhere so much as a single word of inscription, or emblem of sculpture or ornament, which might declare to posterity the real *raison d'être* of the splendid shrine! Why was it that when Prince Albert died the nation felt it had suffered a loss heavy and irreparable? Why is it that national sympathy and national money have raised this Memorial? (qtd. in Darby and Smith 56-57)

The writer of this piece declared that it was not because Albert had supported art and science but because "all felt that so princely an example of purity of life could ill be spared by a wealthy and luxurious age and society" (qtd. in Darby and Smith 57). The language in this passage describes the monument as being raised by "national sympathy" as well as money; while Victoria may have needed to perpetually memorialize Albert to meet her own grieving needs, clearly this monument was also intended to meet the needs of a grieving nation.

In the years following the Prince Consort's death, Queen Victoria was beset by many other significant deaths. These include the loss of several members of her family, as well as "dear friends and ladies and gentlemen of her Household" (Hibbert 487). General Grey and Sir James Clark³² died in 1870. Lady Augusta Stanley died in 1876, five years before her husband.³³ In 1876, to what Victoria described as her "profoundest grief" (qtd. in Hibbert 487), Sir Thomas Biddulph³⁴ contracted a fatal illness in Scotland. Gerald Wellesley, Dean of Windsor, and Dean Stanley both died in 1882. "Dear kind" Sir Henry Ponsonby³⁵ was incapacitated by a paralytic stroke in 1895 and never recovered. Sir William Jenner³⁶ died in 1898. As for the Queen's family, her grandson, Prince Albert Victor, the Duke of Clarence and Avondale, died in 1892. Both Prince Alexander of Battenberg and the Prince Consort's brother, Ernest, Duke of Coburg, died in 1893. Augusta, the old Duchess of Cambridge, died in 1889; the Queen recorded the event by noting, "The last one gone, who had a right to call me Victoria!" (qtd. in Hibbert 487). Finally, one of her favorite grandsons, Christian Victor, Prince of Schleswig-Holstein, died in 1900 (Hibbert 487). In addition to these human deaths, Victoria was also much grieved by the deaths of her non-human family members.

³² Sir Charles Grey, an army officer and member of the House of Commons, served as Private Secretary to Prince Albert, and later to the Queen. Sir James Clark was the Queen's private physician.

³³ Lady Augusta Stanley (nee Bruce) was the Queen's lady-in-waiting after the death of the Duchess of Kent; Lord Arthur Penrhyn Stanley was the Dean of Westminster.

³⁴ Colonel Sir Thomas Biddulph was Master of the Household, in charge of the "below stairs" operations for the Queen's residence.

³⁵ Ponsonby served as Private Secretary to Queen Victoria.

³⁶ Sir William was physician to the Queen beginning in 1861; he attended both the Prince Consort and the Prince of Wales in their attacks of typhoid fever.

Dr. Reid, the Queen's surgeon, remarked upon how strong was Victoria's reaction to the death of Noble, her favorite Scottish sheepdog; "She was much upset," wrote Dr. Reid, "and cried a great deal. She said [...] she believes dogs have souls and a future life: and she could not bear to see [Noble's] body, though she would have liked to kiss his head" (qtd. in Hibbert 496). Victoria sent Reid a note instructing him in the manner in which Noble should be buried, patterning the details after the way in which "the Prince's beloved old dog" had been buried nearly half a century before:

I wish the grave to be bricked. The dear dog to be wrapped up in the box lined with lead and *charcoal*, placed in it. [...] I feel as if I could not bring myself to go and choose the spot. Dr. Profeit [the factor at Balmoral] would perhaps suggest it. I will then tell Mr. Profeit to write to Boehm to get a repetition of his statue of the dear Dog in bronze to be placed over the grave. (qtd. in Hibbert 496)

The Queen's attention to the details of this canine funeral is representative of the excessive care she paid to all funerals, including those of her immediate family, and later, her own.

"Mourn in Hope!": Tennyson's Final Funeral Sermon

Late in her life, the Queen lost yet another member of her family. In October of 1890, Victoria requested an impromptu dance in which she danced with Eddy, the Duke of Clarence and Avondale, a favorite grandson. Stanley Weintraub provides a vivid description of the party:

One visualizes the silent agony of the pleasure-loving Eddy mired in chill Balmoral, dancing – ever so slowly – with his tiny, stout, lame, black-swaddled grandmother. For a moment, Victoria was back in 1840 [with Albert]. (*Victoria* 516)

Victoria recorded the event with enthusiasm:

After dinner, the other ladies and gentlemen joined us in the Drawing-room, and we pushed the furniture back and had a nice little impromptu dance, Curtis's band being so *entrainant*. We had a quadrille, in which I danced with Prince Eddy!!” (qtd. in *Victoria* 516)

The double exclamation points that end this passage signal the Queen's excitement over this entertainment, but they also suggest the rarity of this event; it is difficult to imagine Victoria doing much dancing, particularly in the decade before her death. However, it would not be the Queen who died first, but her grandson.

While attending the funeral of the Queen's nephew, Prince Victor of Hohenlohe, Eddy developed a cold. Two weeks later, he died from pneumonia (527). Although Victoria had lost other close family members in the time since Prince Albert's death, most notably her daughter Princess Alice in 1878 and her son Prince Leopold in 1884, neither of these deaths impacted her as poignantly as Eddy's passing on January 14th, 1892 (Newton 36). His death aroused great sympathy throughout the nation; he was second in line to become the King, he was still relatively young, and he had just become engaged. In fact, a short time before his death, Victoria took Eddy and his fiancée to Albert's mausoleum for a posthumous blessing from the Prince Consort (Weintraub

Victoria 526). Newton points out the significance of the date of Eddy's death; the 14th was a day Victoria "eerily dreaded" (37) because Albert had died on the 14th in 1861, and Eddy's father had almost died on the 14th in 1871: "The obvious comparison to Albert awakened Victoria's keen grieving emotions and challenged her coping capacity" (37).

Still Poet Laureate, Tennyson was shocked by the Duke's death and set out to write a "poem of consolation for the bereaved family" (qtd. in Dyson 137). He was not well when he heard the news, and his health deteriorated rapidly under "the effort and stress of feeling" of composing the lines (139). Despite the burden it placed upon his health, Tennyson finished the poem in two days. The rapidity with which he wrote it indicates how anxious he was to aid the royal family in their grief. As with the "Dedication," this was not a formal piece of laureate verse, but instead a genuine attempt to speak to the family and ease the burden of their grief.

His poem, "The Death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale: To the Mourners," is directed to Queen Victoria; Princess May, Eddy's fiancée; and his parents, the Prince and Princess of Wales. The January 28 edition of the *London Times* carries an editorial from the Queen which also singles out these mourners:

The overwhelming misfortune of my dearly loved Grandson having been thus suddenly cut off in the flower of his age, full of promise for the future, amiable and gentle, and endearing himself to all, renders it hard for his sorely stricken Parents, his dear young Bride, and his fond Grandmother to bow in submission to the inscrutable decrees of Providence. (qtd. in Newton 37)

As his last laureate poem, Tennyson's "The Death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale: To the Mourners" has received surprisingly little critical attention, though the way in which it addresses and advises the Queen and her family bears comparison with the dedication to the *Idylls of the King*.

In contrast to the "Dedication," the focus of "The Death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale" is not much on mourning and praise; instead, Tennyson uses these elements to encourage mourners to recover more swiftly from their grief. Building upon John Wolffe's Victorian funeral sermon model, we can read this poem as a continuation of Tennyson's funeral sermon to the Queen. As Wolffe's model indicates, Tennyson begins by mourning the Duke and praising his virtues, though this section is limited in comparison to the mourning and praise Tennyson offers for Albert in the "Dedication." Consequently, the poem focuses on the later stages in the Victorian funeral sermon model; it provides a detailed celebration of Eddy's death and an expanded exhortation to the mourners that address how they should move on from their grief, insisting that they take hope in the comfort of being reunited in the afterlife.

The poem begins with Tennyson addressing the sorrow Eddy's death evoked, just where we would expect a funeral sermon to begin: "The bridal garland falls upon the bier, / The shadow of a crown, that o'er him hung, / Has vanish'd in the shadow cast by Death" (1-3). The "shadow" correlates with Victorian mourning customs of wearing black to indicate grief, and it recalls the "eclipse" that Prince Albert's death cast over the nation. However, it is significant that it is not the death of Eddy himself that casts the shadow; here, the emphasis is not so much on the person, but on the station he could have

achieved. This very brief mourning and explicit reference begins the poem, but as the poem progresses, mourning is more contained and replaced with an emphasis on optimism and recovery.

Tennyson next praises Eddy's virtues: "So princely, tender, truthful, reverent, pure" (4). This line of praise provides a stark contrast for the dozens of lines Tennyson afforded Prince Albert in the "Dedication." Unlike Albert, Eddy had not led a life free from stain; scandalous accusations had been made against him. Weintraub reports that Eddy "drank heavily and chain-smoked," that "he was treated for gonorrhea and possibly for syphilis," and that "an actress claimed that her baby was his" (*Victoria* 520). In addition, Eddy's "manly enthusiasms" led him to visit brothels, including the notorious "homosexual brothel in Cleveland Street" (520).

In spite of Eddy's alleged weak morals and limited supply of praiseworthy attributes, Tennyson wisely still lauds him. Although Tennyson could have chosen to expose Eddy's imperfections for the sake of realistically portraying his subject, he overlooks the Duke's failings. Queen Victoria described Eddy in her editorial to *The Times* as "full of promise," amiable, gentle, and well-loved; Tennyson is reflecting his understanding of his mourning audience when he celebrates Eddy's virtues. While the praise for Eddy may "apply more to Prince Albert or Queen Victoria than to their grandson" (Inboden 219), Newton argues that we should not view the avoidance of the distasteful aspects of Eddy's past as pandering (40). Tennyson's decorum represents a reverence for the dead that allows him to further the goals of his poem: to fully align his praise with Victoria's thoughts, which would allow him to more efficiently assist her and

the other mourners in dealing with their grief. Wolffe notes that Tennyson's strategy would have been commonplace among clergymen: "In the last quarter of the century [...], preachers tended carefully to avoid controversial ground" (60), and Jalland asserts that "most of the Victorian tributes to the life and character of the dead were highly selective eulogies" (311). When Tennyson curtails the mourning and praise sections of the poem, it allows him to spend more time encouraging his audience to take action to deal with their grief.

Beginning in the fifth line of the poem, Tennyson encourages his readers to mourn: "Mourn! That a world-wide Empire mourns with you, / That all the Thrones are clouded by your loss, / Were slender solace" (5-7). The stridency of the command, highlighted with an exclamation point, signals the poet's reassurance that mourning is the appropriate response. When he describes the worldwide mourning that Eddy's death will provoke, he is addressing the fact that the loss of the second-in-succession would have caused worldwide concern, particularly throughout the empire; he also suggests that the world would be watching to see how the Queen and her family would handle this loss. By the 1890s, Victoria had been mourning Albert for thirty years, and surely her subjects around the world would have been interested in seeing how her mourning for Eddy would compare.

While his early admonition to "Mourn!" indicates that mourning has its place, the type of mourning on which the readers should embark is clarified by the poem's conclusion. There is

no discordance in the roll

And march of that Eternal Harmony

Whereto the worlds beat time, tho' faintly heard

Until the great Hereafter. Mourn in hope! (13-17)

These lines celebrate death; it is divine, a heavenly procession in which the march of life and death plays out in "Eternal Harmony." And while the living can only faintly hear the perfect beat and roll, they will gain complete understanding in the "great Hereafter."

Tennyson's suggestion that those grieving the loss "mourn in hope" asserts that death is not something to be feared, but instead is a beautiful and divine transition.

In his celebration of death, balancing mourning with hope, Tennyson clears away the shadows he initially uses to mourn Eddy. As the eclipse that shadows the world after Prince Albert's death in the "Dedication" is burned away by the light that compassion and understanding bring, so is the "shadow cast by Death" in this poem. Tennyson gives his readers the hope that Death is not entirely negative: "The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life, / His shadow darkens earth: his truer name / Is "Onward" (11-13). Even death serves life; death faces the "Sun of Life," and while it casts a shadow, the fact that Tennyson names him "Onward" indicates that death is as inevitable as the sun's rising, and as little to be feared. Tennyson's increased use of light and his more complete celebration of Eddy's death align that death with light and life in the future. When Tennyson associates Eddy with light, he links him with the kings and queens of the *Idylls*. William Gracie discusses how the virtuous archetypal rulers in the *Idylls* are filled with light: "Arthur is described as the 'Sun in Heaven,' and once more Guinevere casts a shadow" (45). When Tennyson emphasizes the way in which the light of the sun

overcomes the darkness of death, he is affirming the belief that healing can follow a sudden and grievous loss.

Tennyson's celebratory tone in this poem is unique; other poets cast the death of Eddy in a bleaker light. In "Eheu," published in the *Illustrated London News*, Graham R. Tomson, the pen name of Rosamund Armytage Tomson Marriott Watson (Newton 42), focused solely on the sorrow and darkness of the Duke's passing: "death hath passed by and chilled with icy wing / The bridal blossoms pale and withering: / Dead! With such a life to live" (4-6). Like Tennyson, Tomson describes the chilled shadows of the icy day, but her poem does not move beyond the darkness to resolve the grief with the sort of hope Tennyson provides. Tomson ends the poem on a dismal note: "Power, Glory, Love, the beckoning future vowed: / Alas! Within the shadow of the shroud / Our silent tears fall fast beside his grave" (12-14). Tomson's expression of grief, and her naming of the Duke's possibilities for future power, glory, and love, which he now will never achieve, is disheartening. She mourns his future "life to live" (6) by exclaiming "alas" (13), and isolates the image of Eddy's fiancée weeping beside his grave with her "bridal blossoms pale and withering" (5). Thomas Newman also focuses on the figure of the Duke's fiancée and her shattered hopes:

Thy lover's gone

Maiden fair Prince alone

Heir to Britannia's throne

Now thy bridal hopes have flown. (qtd. in Newton 43)

Like Tennyson, Tomson and Newman grieve Eddy's passing. However, they do not offer the hope of life overcoming death.

In "The Duke of Clarence and Avondale," Tennyson celebrates the renewal of life that comes with death:

Yet be comforted;

For if this earth be ruled by Perfect Love,

Then after his brief range of blameless days,

The toll of funeral in an Angel ear

Sounds happier than the merriest marriage-bell. (lines 7-11)

The comparison of funeral chimes to a marriage bell is startling; however, Tennyson is accentuating the divine significance of death: earth is "ruled by Perfect Love." These lines also assert that despite some of Eddy's more unsavory personal characteristics, after his death his life is recast as "blameless." Tennyson's focus on traditional religious figures, the ruler of "Perfect Love" and the "Angel," indicates his belief that Eddy will ascend to a heavenly afterlife. It is through this assertion that Tennyson can claim that this death is more cause for joy than a wedding would be.

Such a positive, ringing image seems extreme in a celebration of death. Queen Victoria wrote to Tennyson of the terrible contrast of "a wedding with bright hopes turned into a funeral in the very chapel where the former was to have taken place" (Dyson 138). However, Tennyson seems not to expect his readers to understand the death immediately; instead, he is insisting upon the reality of the situation. This is why the funeral bell only sounds happier "in an Angel ear"; we assume that only angels would

fully understand the order, roll, and march of the divine. Apparently Queen Victoria was able to take comfort in this poem; she wrote that she was “very deeply touched by the beautiful lines Lord Tennyson has so kindly written” (138). The Queen was intimately familiar with *In Memoriam*, in which a greater hope emerges with death: “The dead / Are breathers of an ampler day / For ever nobler ends” (CXVIII: 5-6). The belief that death brings greater opportunities resonates within “Crossing the Bar” as well; Tennyson requests in that poem, “And may there be no sadness of farewell, / When I embark” (lines 11-12); for “I hope to see my Pilot face to face / When I have crost the bar” (15-16). Tennyson’s juxtaposition of the funeral and marriage bells exemplifies the Victorian performance and celebration of death, ultimately providing comfort in the hope of reunion in the afterlife.

Above all, Tennyson encourages the mourners to view love as an active force in the universe. He wanted to royal family to “be comforted” in knowing that “this earth [is] ruled by Perfect Love” (8). Tennyson had used this theme of universal love to comfort the Queen in the past; in a letter dated January 30, 1892, he expressed his condolences for her loss:

Madam, I venture to write but I do not know how to express the profound sympathy of myself and my family with the great sorrow which has befallen Your Majesty and your children. I know that Your Majesty has a perfect trust in the Love and Wisdom which order the circumstances of our life and in this alone there is comfort (Dyson 137).

Tennyson crafted “The Duke of Clarence and Avondale: To the Mourners” to appeal to Victoria’s belief that God’s love rules the earth and comforts the sorrowing soul.

Tennyson’s ability to address Victoria’s grief by specifically including her religious beliefs is illustrated by a conversation they had in 1883, which moved the Queen to tears, as did the poem he wrote for Eddy in 1892. Victoria recorded in her journal how

Tennyson’s sincerity touched her: she wrote that Tennyson

Talked of the many friends he had lost, and what it would be if he did not feel and know that there was another World where there would be no partings; and then he spoke with horror of the unbelievers and philosophers, who would make you believe there was no other world, no Immortality – who tried to explain *all* away in a miserable manner. We agreed that were such a thing possible, God, who is Love, would be far more cruel than any human being. [...] When I took leave of him I thanked him for his kindness and said I needed it, for I had gone through so much – and he said you are so alone on that “terrible height, it is Terrible. I’ve only a year or two to live but I’ll be happy to do anything for you I can. Send for me whenever you like.” I thanked him warmly. (102-03)

Tennyson and Victoria’s shared understanding of the nature of divine love strengthened their relationship. Following their discussion he wrote her, “During our conversation I felt the touch of that true friendship & sympathy which binds human beings together, whether they be Kings or cobblers” (104). This friendship and sympathy

further empowered Tennyson to provide comfort to the Queen. For her part, Victoria reciprocated this concern after Tennyson's son Lionel died in 1886: "I say from the depth of a heart which has suffered cruelly – and lost almost all it cared for and loved best – I feel for you" (126).

Because of their strengthened relationship, Tennyson was able to encourage the Queen to more swiftly move through her grief by seeking divine love. While in the "Dedication," the benediction at the end of the poem placed Victoria in a more passive role, in which she merely awaited the various loves of her sons, daughters, people, and God, in "The Duke of Clarence and Avondale: To the Mourners," Tennyson encourages the Queen to "be comforted" by the "Perfect Love" and ends with the exhortation to "Mourn in hope!". Tennyson also focuses on divine wisdom. In his January 30 letter to Victoria he referred to the "Love and Wisdom which order the circumstances of our life" (Dyson 137); seeking to console her and allow her to remain hopeful, Tennyson includes the wisdom of moving on and accepting this death in order to gain solace.

The mourners took Tennyson's advice: the Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales were able to find solace quickly and limit their mourning (Newton 51). The Marquess of Lorne, the Queen's son-in-law, reported to Tennyson how successful he was in speaking to the Queen's mourning:

The Queen was very much touched and very much pleased with what you wrote and sent to her. [...] As soon as the touching lines came she spoke with tears in her eyes of their beauty, and I know that she felt much your

goodness in sending them, and that they were really a comfort to her.

(Dyson 138)

The Prince of Wales was similarly moved:

The beautiful Poem dedicated to the beloved son we have lost has deeply touched our hearts, but what has greatly enhanced its value in our eyes is that you have sent a copy of it to the Princess and myself written in your hand. You may be assured that we shall always greatly prize it and that the verses emanating from so distinguished a pen will ever remain a solace for us in our grief (139).

In his remonstrance to the Queen and her family that they embrace love and wisdom in their grief, he also reminds them of their responsibilities. Tennyson elevates Eddy's status to "princely" in the first lines of the poem. In his other laureate poems, Tennyson indicates that different burdens and duties come with noble birth; in his first laureate publication, "To the Queen," Tennyson thanks Victoria for her "Royal grace" (line 5) in granting him the laureateship and concludes by recounting her duties as "Mother, Wife, and Queen" (28). In the "Dedication," Tennyson advances the familial, royal, and social obligations when he admonishes Victoria to not allow her heart to break: "Break not, O woman's heart, but still endure; / Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure" (lines 43-44). The poem to Eddy reminds the mourners of these vital royal responsibilities they must fulfill and encourages them to overcome their grief in a timely and healthy manner.

This reminder asserts that Victoria cannot become lost in her grief and ignore her responsibility to her people. The public expected her to rule despite her personal suffering. Two weeks after Eddy's death she addressed this expectation in *The London Times*:

My bereavements during the last thirty years of my reign have indeed been heavy. Though the labors, anxieties, and responsibilities inseparable from my position have been great, yet it is my earnest prayer that God may continue to give me health and strength to work for the good and happiness of my dear Country and Empire while life lasts." (9E)

Tennyson's exhortation remains the same for the Duke's as for the Prince Consort's mourners: "Break not, for thou art Royal" (44). In this letter at least, Victoria appears to have taken that advice to heart when she states her commitment to continue ruling in spite of her grief.

Conclusion: The Death of Victoria

Victoria continued to rule England until the time of her death, though her last years saw her relying more and more on her family, particularly the Prince of Wales, as she grew weaker and weaker. The Queen died on January 22nd, 1901. She had carefully planned her own funeral as well as the actions to be taken immediately after her death; she gave "very minute directions" (qtd. in Hibbert 497) as to what she wanted done. The Queen desired a white funeral, and her wishes were carried out; she was even dressed in clothing reminiscent of bridal garb:

Banked with flowers, the silver crucifix from above her bed in her hands, and her lace wedding veil and white widow's cap covering her face and hair, the Queen's body, unseen now in the closed coffin, lay in state at Osborne House while funeral preparations went on at Windsor (Weintraub *Victoria* 638).

The Queen's body, encased in its coffin, passed through the doors of the Mausoleum at Frogmore, through which Albert's body had passed in 1862, and over which Victoria had ordered to be inscribed the words "*Vale desideratissime*. Farewell most beloved. Here at length I shall rest with thee, with thee in Christ I shall rise again" (Weintraub *Victoria* 640). Weintraub asserts that "[f]aith in a final reunion with her husband was almost the sum of her theology, from his death to her own" (*Victoria* 640).

From the time of Prince Albert's death until the time of her own death, Victoria mourned her late husband. Ever the grieving widow, the Queen both reflected and defied Victorian mourning. For much of the duration of her widowhood, Victoria relied on poetry to instruct her on the proper way to grieve, though she did not always follow the advice of Tennyson and the other poets she consulted. Upon her death, the nation mourned once again.

CHAPTER V

“THE SINGER OF UNDYING SONGS IS DEAD”:

THE DEATH OF TENNYSON AND THE END OF VICTORIAN MOURNING

Introduction

As Queen Victoria showed the nation how to mourn (albeit in an extreme manner), so Tennyson taught the nation how to grieve. With the publication of *In Memoriam* in 1850 and through his role as Poet Laureate for the next forty years, Tennyson gave the people of England the language through which to express their feelings of loss, both personal (as with *In Memoriam*) and collective (as with “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” and *Idylls of the King*). Throughout his career, Tennyson wrote often about death, and he portrayed his own death in verse numerous times. What he did not imagine, however, was the spectacular response the public would have to his death.

When Tennyson died, on October 6th, 1892, the papers were quick to cover the event. Filled with accounts of his final moments, descriptions of his funeral, laudatory poems and essays, and speculations about the future of the laureateship, the *Illustrated London News* indulged in the sensationalism such occasions commonly evoked. What is most notable about the print response to Tennyson’s death is how saturated with Tennyson’s own language these accounts are. Other than Queen Victoria herself, Tennyson was the Victorian era’s most famous mourner. He brought his personal loss into the national psyche; *In Memoriam* was the most popular book for decades, and the Queen herself kept a copy by her bed. Quoted in sermons, speeches, and at séances, *In*

Memoriam had a deep impact on the Victorians. The *Illustrated London News*'s response to Tennyson's death in the context of his earlier poetry suggests the difficulty involved in mourning one of the nation's greatest mourners. Tennyson showed the nation how to express their grief, and they applied the lessons they had learned to demonstrate their grief for him.

Upon receiving the news of Tennyson's death, the papers rushed extra supplements to print. Filled with biographical sketches, statements from acquaintances, illustrations showing various stages of Tennyson's life, and exacting descriptions of the deathbed and funeral, the papers attempted to present as full a portrait as they could to the reading public. The sections describing the Laureate's last moments are particularly vivid and detailed. In this chapter, I will analyze the various accounts of Tennyson's deathbed against the notion of the "good death," arguing that Tennyson's death was required to be more than merely pious, but sufficiently literary as well. An analysis of how Tennyson was memorialized can offer one last way to understand his place in and his impact upon the Victorian culture of mourning.

The Good Victorian Death

The Victorians placed great importance on deathbed scenes. Based in Evangelical tradition, they believed that a person's death said as much, or more, about his or her character as the life he or she lived. Pat Jalland provides an extensive history of the idea, stating that "[i]n late medieval and early modern England a vast body of devotional literature known as the *ars morendi*, the art of dying, taught people how to die well" (17).

The idea of the good death was powerful through the late Victorian period. The Victorian version of it included several features: the dying person should be pious, of upright character, and resigned to death (21). In addition,

Death ideally should take place at home, with the dying person making explicit farewells to each family member. There should be time, and physical and mental capacity, for the completion of temporal and spiritual business [. . .]. The dying person should be conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God's will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove his or her worthiness for salvation. Pain and suffering should be borne with fortitude, and even welcomed as a final test of fitness for heaven and willingness to pay for past sins. (26)

Victorian deathbed scenes tended to be relatively private, limited to a few members of the immediate family, with a nurse or servant, and sometimes a doctor (26). Great importance was placed upon the dying person's last words; the dying "were supposed to be supremely aware of their proximity to divine judgment and to the afterlife at the hour of their death, and therefore capable of uttering words of heavenly wisdom" (33). It was believed that because the person was so close to the afterlife, he/she would be able to pass on wisdom or knowledge of what lay "beyond the veil."

The good death is portrayed in fictional accounts as well as biographical accounts through the early and mid-Victorian periods. Although Pat Jalland asserts that the decreasing popularity of the Evangelical movement toward the end of the century meant that the concept of the good death began to go out of fashion as more people worried

about alleviating physical discomfort rather than more spiritual matters (51), we can still see examples of the good death in literature and in life through the turn of the century. Indeed, the distinction Jalland makes between body and spirit seems to miss one of the great truths of Victorian mourning: body and spirit were seen as intimately intertwined; one stood for the other, which explains the great care taken to honor and preserve the deceased person's body throughout the Victorian period, and the great attention paid to the progress of the body between death and grave.

The standard of the "good death" in the case of Tennyson goes beyond the ideal of a good moral death. Instead, he must die a good *literary* death. As the nation's great mourner, his death must live up to the aesthetic ideals set forth in his poetry. "Crossing the Bar," written towards the end of the Victorian era, portrays one version of the good death:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

Christopher Ricks reports that Tennyson composed the poem in 1889; his nurse had suggested that he write a hymn to celebrate his recovery from a serious illness (665). Tennyson requested that the poem be the final word in each edition of his poetry: “Mind you put my *Crossing the Bar* at the end of all editions of my poems” (qtd. in Ricks 665).

The poem begins with the end of day, which here serves as a metaphor for the end of a life. In the second line, the poet/speaker receives a call. As a marine term, the call is a summons to duty. Here the suggestion is that the call comes from God, which would be consistent with the Christian view of death. In “*Enoch Arden*,” published in 1864, the “call” signals the character’s immanent death; “While Enoch slumbered motionless and pale” (line 902):

There came so loud a calling of the sea,
That all the houses in the haven rang.
He woke, he rose, he spread his arms abroad

Crying with a loud voice “A sail! a sail

I am saved;” and so fell back and spoke no more. (lines 904-908)

Enoch is a tragic figure: a sailor who voyages afar to provide for his family, then loses his wife to another man. Yet he is not blameless; he abandons his wife and their sickly child, leaving them without support. The call in these lines fills Enoch with joy; he exclaims, perhaps in surprise, perhaps in relief, “I am saved.” In “Crossing the Bar,” the call seems similarly joyful. The poet speaker makes it clear that the call is clear, and it is only for him. The exclamation point at the end of the line signals enthusiasm, though he still addresses the sadness that will follow for those who remain behind.

The third and fourth lines continue the maritime metaphor; the bar is a marine term that refers to the sandbank across the harbor mouth (Ricks 665). The poet/speaker’s request that there be no “moaning” is consistent with the ideal good death; the physical and emotional pain of the passage into death should be withstood stoically by both the family and the dying person. That sentiment is echoed in the third stanza, in which the poet expresses his wish that “there be no sadness of farewell, / When I embark” (lines 11-12).

The second stanza presents death as both peaceful and irresistible. The drawing tide “seems asleep” (line 5), and it comes “from out the boundless deep” (line 6), which suggests that the forces of death and afterlife are beyond our comprehension. The final

line of the stanza mentions “home,” which is consistent with the Christian view of the afterlife; the departed soul returns “home” to God.³⁷

While the tone of this poem overall is calm and resigned, the final stanza expresses some anxiety. The speaker has been borne far by the flood, suggesting that perhaps he has strayed from the narrow path of Christianity, and yet he hopes that he will still see his Pilot, i.e. God. This expression of doubt reflects the deathbed confession expected at the Victorian good death; the assurance of salvation is not yet secure. However, the specificity of the poet/speaker’s hope – not just that he will see his Pilot, but that he will see him “face to face” indicates that the poet/speaker is perhaps more confident in his salvation than the first lines of this stanza would suggest. The phrase “face to face” suggests equality; the poet/speaker can meet God without shame or guilt; he can look God in the eye, so to speak. He is confident that he is pure and blameless, able to meet God on good terms, which is the ultimate goal of the Victorian good death.

We see another version of the good death in “Morte d’Arthur,” which while set in ancient times rather than the Victorian era, nevertheless demonstrates Victorian values. It was written in 1833-4 and published in 1842, and Tennyson later incorporated it in its entirety into *Idylls of the King* as “The Passing of Arthur.” “Morte d’Arthur” shares a watery setting with “Crossing the Bar” and “Enoch Arden,” and the doubt it expresses is reminiscent of *In Memoriam*. The poem begins with the dying King Arthur, who is placed in “a chapel nigh the field” (line 8) where “On one side lay the Ocean, and on one / Lay a great water, and the moon was full” (lines 11-12), bidding Sir Bedivere to throw

³⁷ In Audrey Tennyson’s deathbed diary, she described the moment of Tennyson’s death: “And our darling had entered his Eternal Home” (140).

Excalibur into the lake. Sir Bedivere, unwilling to part with the sword, fails to do so until he is commanded a third time. Finally, King Arthur too is cast into the lake, floating away on a barge, presumably to die.

Excalibur can be read as a metaphor for life. It is the source and symbol of King Arthur's power, mysteriously bestowed. King Arthur reminds Sir Bedivere of how he came to possess the sword:

In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword – and how I rowed across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king. (lines 29-33)

Sir Bedivere is reluctant to dispose of the sword, seemingly beguiled by its beauty. The second time he goes to the lake with the intention of throwing it in he stops after seeing “the wonder of the hilt” (line 85), and then cries,

“And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.

What good should follow this, if this were done?” (lines 88-92)

Although Bedivere fears to see such a treasure disappear from the world, eventually he follows King Arthur's wishes under threat of death. Rising from the king's side, Bedivere ran,

And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutched the sword,
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere. (lines 134-46)

In Christian belief, holding too tightly to the things of this world is a sin: believers are reassured that their true reward lies in Heaven. Sir Bedivere is not blamed for his doubt, however; King Arthur excuses him by saying, “a man may fail in duty twice, / And the third time may prosper” (lines 129-30). The number three is also significant in Christian theology, representing not only the Trinity, but also forgiveness: Peter denies Jesus three times and is met with understanding. In terms of the Victorian good death, Excalibur can be read as representing human life: what comes before and after is mysterious, but the life itself is precious while it is here, and anxiety about the afterlife may be conquered by faith.

Sir Bedivere is treated with kindness, but it is clear that Arthur's attitude toward death is what should be aspired to. He meets his death with courage, "Larger than human on the frozen hills" (line 183) and escorted by "Three Queens with crowns of gold" (line 198). As he floats away on the barge, he consoles the bereft Sir Bedivere by reminding him of the natural order: "'The old order changeth, yielding place to the new, / And God fulfils Himself in many ways'" (lines 240-41). Even in death there is hope. Arthur sails "To the island-valley of Avilion" (line 259), "Where I will heal me of my grievous wound" (line 264). Christopher Ricks states that "one of the paradoxes of this apparently equable elegiac poem is that one has to ask whether Arthur is *mort*" (130). Although the outcome of the poem is death, it is shrouded in mystery with the promise that it is not final.

Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away. (lines 269-72)

The verge is the dawn of death or of renewed life: "the black dot is not a full stop to bring the poem to an end; the sound-effect is of a fading echoic truncation, with 'away' as a thinning dying ripple from 'the wailing'" (Ricks 130). The uncertainty of the final image negates the finality of death.

Tennyson's Good Death

Three accounts of Tennyson's death – that written by his daughter-in-law, Audrey Tennyson; his son Hallam's account; and the scene described by the papers, show how details were edited in order to give Tennyson a good literary death. Among the rich legacy of biographical, fictional, and visual accounts of Victorian deathbed scenes, one of the most moving is Hallam Tennyson's account of Alfred Tennyson's final three days. It appears in the *Memoir* he wrote about his father.

On Monday morning at 8 o'clock he sent me for his Shakespeare. I took his Stevens' edition, *Lear*, *Cymbeline* and *Troilus and Cressida*, three plays which he loved dearly.

He tried two or three lines, and told Dr. Dabbs that he should never get well again. We asked him later whether he felt better; he answered, "The doctor says I am." At his request I read some Shakespeare to him; he was most patient, and in his courteous fashion always feared that he was troubling his nurses, expressed much anxiety for my mother's health.

Hallam continues:

His last food was taken at a quarter to four, and he tried to read, but could not. He exclaimed, "I have opened it." Whether this referred to the Shakespeare, opened by him at "Hang there like fruit, my soul / Till the tree die" [*Cymbeline*, V.v], which he always called among the tenderest lines in Shakespeare: or whether one of his last poems, of which he was fond, was running through his head I cannot tell.

He then spoke his last words, a farewell blessing, to my mother and myself.

For the next hours the full moon flooded the room and the great landscape outside with light; and we watched in solemn stillness. (*Memoir* II 425-29)

To compose his description of his father's deathbed, Hallam Tennyson used a deathbed diary kept by his wife, Audrey. She chronicled the details of her father-in-law's death practically hour-by-hour. Hallam did not print his wife's diary verbatim; he left out many of what Ann C. Colley terms the "difficult physical realities that in the end circumvent status" (231), e.g. that Tennyson had trouble swallowing and keeping his food down (Audrey Tennyson 130), that he spoke irrationally and indecipherably (131), that his chest rattled and that the milk he was given to drink ran out his nostrils (132), that he was given enemas, and that he was frequently querulous and experiencing pain (133). Instead, Hallam culled entries from the diary that would befit the Laureate; he reported his father's courteous concern for those around him, and his eagerness to read his Shakespeare. While these elements are certainly present in Audrey Tennyson's diary, it presents a more complex, more realistic account of Tennyson's final days.

Of Tennyson's last words, Audrey Tennyson offers the following description, dated Tuesday, 5 October at 2:30 p.m.:

He was much the same all the afternoon, occasionally saying a word or two and hearing every sound when he opened his eyes and gazed round, then closed his eyes again. But it was almost impossible to make out more than a word here and there of what he said, owing greatly I think to his

having no teeth in. He took his last nourishment at 3:45, some beef tea.

And a little before that he tried to lift up his Shakespeare, and Hallam told him to lay it down and not try to read, and we could make out “opened it.”

We guessed he said “I opened it.” (137-138)

The picture of Tennyson’s last words that Audrey paints is bleak; the Laureate is toothless, weak, and disoriented. While Hallam describes his father’s last words as an exclamation, here Audrey represents them as little more than a mutter. Hallam so wanted his father’s death to fit in with the Victorian ideal of the good death that he greatly exaggerated his father’s condition in the last days. However, Hallam did not act alone or without his father’s approval; Tennyson himself was concerned with dying the good death.

Audrey Tennyson mentions the moonlight several times in the passages leading up to Tennyson’s death. The night before he died, she wrote, “The moon which had been straight in front of him from the moment of rising, suddenly lit up the whole of his face and bed, and he looked grand and peaceful in a golden light” (138). Hallam also focused on the moonlight; he concludes his account by repeating Audrey’s poetic description of the full moon illuminating Tennyson’s room during his final hours. Although most of the details in the *Memoir* come directly from Audrey Tennyson’s diary, they also are rooted in the death-bed scenes that feature in contemporary biography and fiction. Hallam’s account of Tennyson’s last three days is influenced by the understanding that the deathbed scene is reflective of the life of the dying person; as Colley states, it “offers

sanctuary to the qualities that were or should have been most important to the life that has ceased” (231). Death refines and isolates the essence of the person who has died.

In his poetry, most strikingly in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson wrestles with spiritual matters. He questions the nature, the presence, and even, at times, the existence of God. In the deathbed scene Hallam Tennyson describes, his father’s last thoughts are not on spiritual, but on literary matters; in his final moments, Tennyson wants his Shakespeare. Even the choice of *Cymbeline* is meaningful. *Cymbeline*, first published in the Folio of 1623, is set in a pre-Christian, semi-legendary period of English history, and thus would have greatly appealed to Tennyson. Reportedly, it was Tennyson’s favorite (Smith 1565). Tennyson is said to have been particularly fond of “Fear no more the heat o’ th’ sun,” a dirge sung by Guiderius and Arviragus, sons of the king. The tone of the poem is one of confident reassurance; death is not to be greeted with fear, but looked upon as a respite from threats of danger. Tennyson was concerned with dying the good literary death. By requesting the works of one of the most lauded British authors, Tennyson is placing himself in that lineage. Even in his last days, Tennyson is mindful of his place in history. Tennyson, therefore, dies as a laureate is supposed to have lived (or so Hallam’s account asserts).

Tennyson’s illness was first reported by *The Times* on October 5th, when the paper sent a special correspondent to Haslemere, the town a few miles from the Tennysons’ home in Surrey (Matthews 255). H. B. Forman’s elegy “Midnight: 5-6 October, 1892” notes the irony implicit in the fact that modern advances, such as the telegraph and railway *The Times*’ correspondent use to transmit the news of Tennyson’s decline, assisted at the death of a man who represented a rapidly fading era. Forman’s elegy

announces that “A thousand wires have flashed the word / That he has passed beyond our time” (lines 2-3). The inclusion of the word “our” indicates the belief that Tennyson may have died, but that he will live on in another form. Matthews notes that the speed of information transmission allowed the public to feel intimately engaged with each step of Tennyson’s death: “Readers’ familiarity with the latest news was closer to real time than ever before, encouraging engagement with the progress of ongoing narratives” (255-256). As with the coverage of the Duke of Wellington’s death and the death of Prince Albert, the newspaper accounts attempted to balance the public demand for information with respect for the grieving family. Tennyson had always fiercely guarded his privacy, especially when it came to his impending death. When Queen Victoria sent a concerned telegram shortly before his death, Tennyson’s response was “O, that Press will get hold of me now!” (H. Tennyson 775).

The first significant release of information came from Tennyson’s friend and doctor, George Dabbs, who fixed the description of the moonlit deathbed to Aldworth’s gates on October 6th (Matthews 256). The idealized deathbed scene, which was included with a medical bulletin, read

Nothing could have been more striking than the scene during the last few hours. On the bed a figure of breathing marble, flooded and bathed in the light of the full moon streaming through the oriel window; his hand clasping the Shakespeare which he had asked for but recently, and which he had kept by him to the end; the moonlight, the majestic figure as he lay

there, “drawing thicker breath,” irresistibly brought to our minds his own
“Passing of Arthur.” (H. Tennyson 777).

Dabbs frames his statement in aesthetic rather than medical terms, knowing, as the family did, that the account would set the tone for the tributes that were sure to follow. The detail that Tennyson died with his Shakespeare was repeated in many poetic tributes; Swinburne’s “Threnody” describes Tennyson dying, “his proud head pillowed on Shakespeare’s breast” (line 7). Rawnsley’s “Tennyson. Obit, Aldworth, October 6th, 1892” pictures Tennyson joining Shakespeare as an equal: “His hand held Shakespeare’s book— / Shakespeare, so soon to greet him as a friend!” (lines 10-11). Dabbs notes that the sublime moonlit scene recalls a moment from *Idylls of the King*, “The Passing of Arthur,” where King Arthur dies nobly under “the long glories of the winter moon” (line 360) supported by Bedivere, who cries, “now I see the true old times are dead” (line 397).

Recent critics recognize the fictional quality of Hallam’s account:

The salient characteristics of a Victorian death are impossible to miss in this famous, final rite of passage, lovingly recorded yet artfully wrought too, in fitting tribute to one of the most representative of Victorian men.

The composed, elaborated quality is what most strikes us: the stately pace, the allusive and premeditated weave. (Joseph and Tucker 112)

In fact, Joseph and Tucker suggest that Tennyson was complicit in constructing the scene of his own death, by calling repeatedly for his Shakespeare when he knew he was dying, and if Tennyson felt compelled to die “the good death,” his friend Dabbs colluded. The other doctor present at Tennyson’s deathbed, Sir Andrew Clark, confirmed Dabbs’s

description of the deathbed as an “exquisite picture”: “I have never witnessed anything more glorious [...]. The soft beams of light fell upon the bed and played upon the features of the dying poet like a halo of Rembrandt” (qtd. in Matthews 257). Although Tennyson’s body was never on public display, its image circulated widely through written and pictorial descriptions of the idealized moonlight deathbed, a tableau that was informed by poetic deathbed scenes Tennyson himself had created. In essence, Tennyson created the scene of his own death.

It is apparent that the papers relied heavily on Hallam’s account. The *Illustrated London News* emphasizes the fact that Tennyson died at home in the presence of his family, and it focuses on the aesthetics of the deathbed, quoting Sir Andrew Clark as describing the event as “gloriously beautiful” (476). This description of Tennyson’s deathbed echoes the image the poet created of himself contemplating the death of Hallam in Lyric LXVII of *In Memoriam*, which begins with the line, “When on my bed the moonlight falls” (1). The description of the “soft beams of light” that create a halo around the dying laureate’s head harkens back to the “marble bright” (5), the “mystic glory” (9), and the “lucid veil” (14) that illuminate the dead Hallam in *In Memoriam*. The description of Tennyson’s final hours continues in the same poetic vein; the account in the *Illustrated London News* describes Tennyson’s “painless, dreamy state,” the “peaceful fields,” “silent hills,” and the sky so “deep and pure” which could be seen from the windows in the dying laureate’s room (476). “All nature seemed to be waiting, watching” wrote the *Pall Mall Gazette* (qtd. in *ILN* 476). All of these descriptions could have been taken from Lyric XCV of *In Memoriam*.

Even in his final moments, Tennyson lived up to his reputation as laureate. The *ILN* echoes Hallam's emphasis on Shakespeare:

The bed on which Lord Tennyson lay, now very near to the gate of death, and with his left hand still resting on his Shakespeare, was in deep darkness; the rest of the room lit up with the glory of the night, which poured in through the uncurtained windows. And thus, without pain, without a struggle, the great English poet passed away. (476)

The *ILN* assures its readers that Tennyson died the good death; he was with his family and he was without pain. The insistence that the room was "lit up with the glory of the night" serves as a metaphor for Tennyson's spiritual state; though Tennyson himself was in peaceful "deep darkness," the witnesses at his death were seeing something glorious.

Tennyson's death and funeral were anticipated by the loss of Robert Browning in 1889. Browning died in Venice, and was then transported back to England first by gondola, then by boat and train. The body's progress was carefully charted by the press, which also described the funeral at Westminster Abbey on 31 December 1889 (Matthews 254). The funeral was attended by a number of prominent late-Victorians; Hallam Tennyson, representing his ailing father, served as one of the pallbearers (254). In the newspaper coverage of Browning's death and funeral, Tennyson's name appears frequently, and always with a distinctly anxious tone; Matthews suggests that the focus on Tennyson during Browning's funeral indicates that Browning's funeral was a "dry run" for an "impending national tragedy" (254).

After his death, Tennyson lay in his coffin until October 10th. Its composition was carefully designed: “On his head was a wreath of laurel from Virgil’s tomb” (Martin 582), and “[o]n his chest lay a bunch of roses from Emily, and in one hand was a copy of *Cymbeline*” (582). These details – the laurel, the roses, and the Shakespeare – seem constructed to remind the world that Tennyson was laureate; just as he lived by his profession, so he died by it. Knowing that Tennyson’s final days would be analyzed, his family did everything they could to maintain Tennyson’s elevated status even after his death³⁸. Audrey Tennyson reports that it was Hallam who placed the Shakespeare within the coffin:

Enclosed in the coffin, Hallam had a tin box sealed in which he put one of my little green Shakespeares with *Cymbeline* in it, and on the fly-leaf he wrote: “Placed here by me Hallam Tennyson in memory of my Father’s devotion to Shakespeare, which showed itself up to the hour of his death by his having a copy of Shakespeare on his bed, so as to feel it when he was too weak to read it. One of his last acts was to open it half consciously and the corner of the page was turned down by my wife where he had opened it. On looking at the page afterwards I found that he had opened it at one of the 3 passages which he used to call the tenderest in Shakespeare: ‘Hang there like fruit my soul / ‘Till the tree dies.’ One of

³⁸ The Tennysons may have looked to the example of Charles Dickens, who was “as well aware that his life would eventually be told from his correspondence, as he was determined not to keep any letters written to him to satisfy the curious” (Storey). In fact, throughout the newspapers’ coverage of Tennyson’s death, Dickens’s death frequently arises:

since the death of Dickens no writer without whose works English literature would seem incomplete, no teacher to whom we are indebted for our thoughts, our phrases, and even our creed, has passed away. But now we have lost Tennyson. (Payn 474)

the last things that he said was 'I opened it.' Hallam Tennyson. Buried with him Wednesday October 12th 1892." (142)

The fact that Hallam Tennyson wrote such a detailed note, knowing that it would be buried with his father and read by others, shows how concerned he was with cementing Tennyson's status. Anticipating, perhaps, that some day his father's body would be exhumed, Hallam placed in the coffin evidence of Tennyson's literary soul. Again, Hallam emphasizes his father's last words, enforcing his version of Tennyson's death. Audrey remarks here that the copy of *Cymbeline* belonged to her, perhaps as a way of inserting herself into that legacy. What is striking here is how consistent is Hallam's account of his father's death, and how readily the papers repeated it.

Poets and newspapers also repeated the imagery from Dabbs's description of the Laureate's final moments. Dabbs's portrayal of the dying Tennyson as a "figure of breathing marble" was repeated and reworked numerous times. In "The Poet's Death-Chamber. October 6th, 1892," Hardwick Rawnsley, a chief mourner at the funeral, turns the phrase into a conceit about the emotional impact of Tennyson's poetry: "And so he grew to marble he who made / In hearts of stone the generous life-blood run" (lines 9-10). The description of Tennyson's body as made of marble anticipates his commemoration in stone in Westminster Abbey; at the same time it expresses a desire for Tennyson's body to remain intact and undecayed. As we have seen, preserving the body in its pristine state was a desire often stated; in an early biography titled *Tennyson: A Sainly Life*, Horton writes, "The body lay for five days, grand and majestic, perfect peace upon the unfurrowed brow" (299). The *Illustrated London News* describes the moment

the body was enclosed in the coffin: “The face wore a look of calm majesty, the hands were crossed upon the breast, flowers lay beside the body, laurel-leaves at the head and feet” (476). In the middle of the page describing Tennyson’s death and funeral, the *ILN* printed an illustration depicting “The Remains of Lord Tennyson in St. Faith’s Chapel, Westminster Abbey, the Night Before the Funeral.” The illustration shows a pall-covered coffin standing alone in a cavernous space. Laurel wreaths are draped along the base of the coffin, and from a window high above comes a beam of moonlight to illuminate the coffin. This scene clearly draws upon the account of Tennyson’s moonlit corpse as it lay in bed at Aldworth. It is significant to note that because of the privacy surrounding Tennyson’s death and funeral preparations, those wanting to depict the deathbed were forced to rely on the doctors’ descriptions and on their own imaginations, all the more reason so much fiction circulated. At his death, Tennyson becomes an object that stands for his poetry, and indeed for English literature, and so is treated with a remarkable degree of reverence, along with literary license.

After Tennyson’s death, his wife Emily sent instructions to the Dean of Westminster:

Decide as you think best. If it is thought better, let him have the flag of England on his coffin, and rest in the churchyard of the dear place where his happiest days have been passed. Only, let the flag represent the feeling of the beloved Queen, and the nation, and the empire he loved so dearly.
(qtd. in Martin 582)

As Martin states, there was no real question in Emily's mind as to where Tennyson should be buried, and the Dean chose the Abbey³⁹ (582). Tennyson was laid to rest alongside Robert Browning on October 12th, 1892 (476). The funeral itself was simple, in accordance with Tennyson's wishes (476). Because Tennyson disliked the traditional black funerary trappings, his body was carried on a shooting cart decorated with ivy, Virginia creeper, and fern, with the mourners walking after (Matthews 259). In contrast with most funeral processions destined for Westminster Abbey, *The Times* reported, "There were no hearses, no mourning carriages; there was no parade of grief" (6). Audrey Tennyson accompanied the body from Haslemere to Waterloo, where a crowd was waiting. Although the body was moved at night to minimize exposure, the Union flag was spread over the coffin, indicating to people on the street that a national hero was passing (Matthews 259). *The Times* reported that another "extremely dense" but "reverent" crowd was waiting at the Abbey, and once the coffin was within, "No member of the public was admitted inside" (6). Queen Victoria was not in attendance at the funeral, though she sent traditional marks of respect: "By the side of the grave were three wreaths from the royal family, plain to severity, simple laurel for the most part, with a few white flowers intertwined with the green leaves" (Martin 476). Two of the wreaths had inscriptions from the Queen, written "in her own hand"; the first read "A mark of sincere regard and admiration from Victoria R.I."; the other, "A tribute of affectionate regard and true admiration from his Sovereign" (qtd. in *ILN* 476).

³⁹ By the time of Tennyson's death in 1892, Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey was well-established, and as the laureate, it was only natural that Tennyson would be laid to rest there.

Among the floral and laurel tributes sent to the Abbey was a wreath of mignonette and fern made by Catherine Gladstone, the Prime Minister's wife (Matthews 259). The wreath was inscribed with the closing couplet of Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," written forty years before: "And in the vast cathedral leave him, / God accept him, Christ receive him" (lines 280-81). This wreath, a small detail in an elaborately symbolic ceremony, represents what Matthews terms a "complex interaction of private and public values" (259). The wreath was made by hand out of home-grown flowers, signifying the affection of close friends, while the Ode's closing couplet links Tennyson's grave in the Abbey with the Duke of Wellington's grave in St. Paul's, identifying Tennyson, like Wellington, as a national hero. Hallam Tennyson also remembered words from the Wellington Ode as his father was dying, an incident that he recorded in the *Memoir*: "as he was passing away, I spoke over him his own prayer, 'God accept him! Christ receive him! because I knew that he would have wished it'" (776-77). Hallam's prayer and the Gladstones' floral tribute indicate the extent to which Tennyson had influenced the Victorian language of mourning: Tennyson's poetry was seen as the most fitting way to mourn the death of the greatest Victorian poet. Hallam later recorded that at the funeral, "Many were seen reading 'In Memoriam' while waiting before the service" (778). As one account phrased it, "The great consolation at his burial was his own great consolation to all who are bereaved; the poem which might well be in the house of mourning for ever" (Horton 300).

Elegies for Tennyson

Tennyson was the only Victorian poet whose death prompted a “spontaneous outbreak of mass mourning” (Matthews 248) that could be compared to that for Prince Albert, Queen Victoria, the Duke of Wellington, Charles Dickens, or W. E. Gladstone. Tennyson was mourned as a national hero. The poems written to commemorate Tennyson’s death share several features: they invoke the poet’s name, usually in the title; they allude to his best-known works through epigraph, overt citation, allusion, or stylistic echoes; and they characterize Tennyson in turn as the poet of the national epic, a patriotic poet, or a lyricist. Traditional elegiac conventions are much used, including themes of weeping, singing, and direct address (Matthews 319). Matthews also notes that many of the memorial poems written for Tennyson also hint at the poems’ inferiority to Tennyson’s work, cementing the idea that with the loss of Tennyson, poetry has been lost as well.

The Illustrated London News ends its description of Tennyson’s funeral by placing him among other great English poets: “In the little nook where sleep Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden, and Browning were loosely grouped some of the famous men of England, some of them bearing famous names – Coleridge, Dickens, Wordsworth – more famous still” (476). A later article mentions Tennyson’s reverence for Byron (whose body would not be moved to Poets’ Corner for another eighty years):

Little did the young poet dream when on that great day of Byron’s death he went and carved “Byron is dead!” in the sandstone, feeling, as he said, that the world was at an end – little did he dream that some day to come

his own death would seem no less momentous to the English world.

Tennyson is dead! “Byron is dead!” could have meant no more for him than that means for us. (483)

The papers frequently express an anxiety about the future of the national literature; there was no clear line of literary succession after Tennyson, and no obvious candidate for the Laureateship. *Fin de siecle* anxiety heightened the fear that poetry was dying, and many wondered what would happen after the death of the “last and greatest poet” (Covey 61). Media responses to Tennyson’s “beautiful death” and spectacular funeral are saturated with anxiety and a sense of national identity. Newspaper obituaries exhibit a combination of extremity and tragedy, accounts which express genuine grief and exhibit an interest in sensationalism, often all at once. *The Saturday Review* is typical in describing Tennyson’s death as “more than a momentous national event”:

Seventy years have elapsed since the last English poet entitled to rank with Lord TENNYSON passed away [...]. To the great majority of Englishmen, therefore, the melancholy event [...] is an absolutely new experience [...]. They now know what it is to witness the extinction of one of those beacon-lights of humanity which often remain unkindled for generations (405-406).

This sense that Tennyson’s genius had been extinguished with his death was not shared by Queen Victoria; Hallan Tennyson quotes the telegram the Queen wrote to the family upon hearing of Tennyson’s death: “The Queen deeply laments and mourns her noble Poet Laureate, who will be so universally regretted, but he has left undying works

behind him which we shall ever treasure” (798). The Queen’s use of tense in this telegram is informative; her mourning is present, but she places Tennyson’s body of work in the future, stating that they will be treasured forever. Lewis Morris, one of the many poets hoping to assume the Laureateship after Tennyson’s death, also hails the immortality of Tennyson’s poetry in his elegy “October 6, 1892”:

Our race can never lose thee, whose fair page,
Rich with the harvest of a soul inspired,
So many a weakling life and heart has fired.
Thou art not wholly gone, but livest yet
Till thy great England’s sons their tongue forget! (lines 32-36)

Morris continues the elegiac tradition of directly addressing the dead. The figurative transformation of author into book by death (“thee, whose fair page”) is a common note in the dozens of elegies for Tennyson, as is the assertion that Tennyson is immortalized through his poetry.

W. S. Blunt’s poem “Alfred Tennyson” attempts to pay homage to Tennyson in an original poem:

Tears, idle tears! Ah, who shall beg us weep,
Now that thy lyre, O prophet, is unstrung?
What voice shall rouse the dull world from its sleep
And lead its requiem as when Grief was young,
And thou in thy rapt youth, Time’s bards among,
Captured our ears, and we looked up and heard

Spring's sweetest music on thy mourning tongue
And knew thee for Pain's paradisa bird.
We are alone without thee in our tears,
Alone in our mute chauntings. Vows are vain
To tell thee how we loved thee in those years
Nor dream to look upon thy like again.
We know not how to weep without thy aid,
Since all that tears would tell thyself hast said.

Several elegiac conventions are used in this poem: an apostrophe to the spirit of the dead poet, who is figured as a bardic teacher, a "prophet" with a lyre. The poem's use of the metaphor of weeping as the composition of elegy depends on an allusion to one of Tennyson's most popular and familiar poems, "The Princess." The reference affirms a representation of Tennyson as a chiefly lyrical poet, and in calling him "Pain's paradisa bird," Blunt is characterizing Tennyson as an elegiac poet: the author of *In Memoriam*.

In the weeks and months following Tennyson's death, there occurred other attempts to determine his impact upon the nation. In an article titled "The Laureateship," the *Illustrated London News* questions whether anyone can fill Tennyson's role as national poet: "The first question is not so much Who is to be the next Laureate? as, Shall the Laureateship be continued at all?" (491). While giving a brief history of the Laureateship, the author states, "It began in glory with Ben Jonson, and it ends in even greater glory with Tennyson" (476) before expounding upon what qualities Tennyson brought as Laureate:

Tennyson [...], by bringing to it the luster of his own fame, has so dignified it that some of that luster may fairly be said to have been reflected back upon himself. After his name the words “Poet Laureate” no longer seemed absurd. He had honoured them, and they seemed in turn to honour him. In fact, he was able to raise the Laureateship to that ideal dignity of which up to his time it had been but an absurd shadow. On his head the wreath meant our possession of a great national poet [...].

England at large read and loved his verses, acknowledged him as poet.

(476)

While this article discusses the failings of some of England’s other Poets Laureate, this description of the role Tennyson played is all positive: the author states that just as Tennyson was elevated by the position, so was the position improved by Tennyson. Indeed, the author finds it hard to imagine a national poetry without Tennyson: “With his death the national interest in poetry ceases, and the Laureateship sinks to its former dimensions. It is impossible to continue it as a national institution, because we have no national poet” (476). While the Laureateship did continue⁴⁰, the certainty that this author expresses that it could not possibly be sustained demonstrates the enormous impact Tennyson’s poetry had upon the nation’s readers, and the great loss his death represented.

In *The Poets Laureate*, Kenneth Hopkins describes the crisis caused by the lack of acceptable candidates to take Tennyson’s place. The three-year period between

⁴⁰ Although the *ILN* speculated that the post of Poet Laureate might be awarded to Edwin Arnold, Lewis Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Austin Dobson, William Watson, Coventry Patmore, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Buchanan, or George Meredith, Alfred Austin was named Poet Laureate in 1896 (after William Morris refused the post).

Tennyson's death and the appointment of Alfred Austin as Poet Laureate extended what Matthews terms "Tennyson's posthumous influence" (322) in a number of ways. Even after his death, Tennyson continued to occupy the laureateship symbolically; the press continued to refer to Tennyson as "the Poet Laureate," and several commentators recommended that the post be eliminated rather than risk the national poetry falling below his standard. In an article published in *The Idler* in 1895, Aaron Watson alludes to the difficulty of filling the office: "Tennyson carried [the laureateship] to heights so sacred that we must henceforth, be very careful how we dispose of his halo" (qtd. in Matthews 322). Matthews argues that many of the memorial poems published in the papers after Tennyson's death came from "would-be Laureates" (322) who were competing for public notice, hoping that the office might fall to one of them.

Forman's "Midnight: 5-6 October, 1892" is an elegy that incorporates a sustained address to the laurel leaves – a poetic discussion of the future of the Laureateship:

The laurel greener from the brow
Of him who uttered nothing base
MIDNIGHT! and feebly comes his breath
Whose breath was ever fraught with song.
The life that was so whole and strong
Treads hard upon the heels of death.
And all the Land he loved so well,
The Land to which his golden tongue
Gave forth such songs as no man sung,

Is listening for the passing bell.
An hour and half an hour are past:
Hush! can we hear his breathing yet?
Nay, Death and he have clasped and met
The mellow voice is mute at last.
And through our lands in every clime,
Where'er his English speech is heard,
A thousand wires have flashed the word
That he has passed beyond our time.
The wreath that Wordsworth left so green
He leaves all bright with magic flowers;
They fall on his dead head in showers,
And kiss the lips where song has been.
O Laurel, greener from the head
Of him who uttered nothing base,
Hang thou for ever in thy place
Above the great old poet's head!
For he whose soul, both young and old,
Was ever minted into verse,
Bequeaths his country nothing worse
Than mintage of the purest gold.
So be it thine, O Laurel Crown,

Fitly to mark the resting-place
Of him the last of all his race;
For who so bold to take thee down?

Forman begins the poem by placing Tennyson first among poets; the laurel is “greener from the brow.” In keeping with the accounts from Dabbs and the papers, the scene is set at midnight. Interestingly, Forman imagines Tennyson’s deathbed, but does not portray the dying moment itself. Instead, he imagines Tennyson’s breath coming “feebly” before noting the contributions Tennyson has made to the national literature. Forman places himself and the reader in the room with Tennyson, which gives the dying moments a sense of drama and immediacy. He instructs the reader to “Hush!” before asking if Tennyson’s breath can still be heard. “Nay,” we are told; the Laureate died while his praises were being sung. Forman then compares Tennyson to Wordsworth, implying that Tennyson was the superior poet; Wordsworth left the laurel “so green,” but Tennyson added “magic flowers.” Forman ends the poem with an apostrophe to the laurel wreath, admonishing it to hang “for ever” above Tennyson’s head, even turning it into a crown. The last line of the poem, “For who so bold to take thee down?,” repeats the concern over the future of the Laureateship. Forman is asking who can take Tennyson’s place, implying that it is impossible; he was “the last of all his race.”

In his 1926 book *The Romantic '90s*, Richard Le Gallienne describes Tennyson’s death as “perhaps the most impressive event” of his first years in London (qtd. in Matthews 316). Le Gallienne reflects on what the loss of Tennyson meant to England, and to poetry:

While he lived, we somehow felt more secure, secure for the position of poetry in a world which needed such a figure to maintain its august estate. This Tennyson did as few poets have ever done. He looked the great poet, and his life had been lived consistently as a great poet, and his place in the English world of the day was exalted, enthroned, with even a touch of sacredness, such as that which attached to a great cardinal. The image is worn enough, but his passing was like the fall of a great oak in a forest of lesser trees. As it crashed down, the landscape seems to grow suddenly empty, devoid of meaning, filled with the naked light of common day. (qtd. in Matthews 316)

This passage demonstrates Le Gallienne's understanding that in 1892, Tennyson's cultural symbolism was as important as the poetry itself; Le Gallienne emphasizes that Tennyson "looked the great poet" and lived as such. The anxiety about the fate of poetry without Tennyson to "maintain its august estate" was an anxiety that already existed; even before Tennyson's death, poets and biographers were beginning to lament the loss of a great national poetry. Samantha Matthews argues that Tennyson death "does not create but reveals a pre-existing crisis, a loss of faith in poetry as a morally elevated yet popular medium" (317).

After Tennyson died, numerous poets wrote tributes. The editors of the *ILN* published several of these poems, but they also make it clear that there were many others

they chose not to publish⁴¹. In the introduction to the first poem on a page titled “Living Poets and the Late Poet Laureate,” the editors praise the author for his command for literary restraint: “The death of Lord Tennyson has caused the somewhat too hasty production of a deluge of memorial verses, and, with what we think legitimate sensitiveness [sic], Mr. Andrew Lang sends us the following” (492):

Silence! “The best” (he said) “are silent now,”—
That younger bearer of the laurel bow,
Who with his Thysris, kindred souls divine,
Harps only for Sicilian Proserpine;
For Arnold died, and Browning died, and He—
The oldest, wisest, greatest of the three—
Dies, and what voice shall dirge for Him to-day?
For the Muse went with Him the darkling way,
And left us mute! Peace! who shall rhyme or rave,
The violet blooms not on the new-made grave,
And not in this first blankness of regret
Are eyes of men who mourn their Master wet.
New grief is dumb: Himself through many a year
Withheld the meed of His melodious tear,
When Hallam slept. But no! The moment flies,

⁴¹ Hardwicke Rawnsley produced no less than twenty-four memorial poems for Tennyson. Published in 1893, *Valete – Tennyson and Other Memorial Poems* contains titles such as “Death and Fame,” “I Have Opened the Book,” “The Laureate Dead,” and “Christmas Without the Laureate.”

And rapid rhymers, when the Poet dies,
Wail punctual, and prompt, and unafraid,
In copious instant ditties ready made.
Oh, Peace! Ye do but make our loss more deep,
Who wail above His unwaking sleep.

This poem implies that lesser poets only add to the grief over the loss of Tennyson, and that the hasty production of mourning poems indicates that the grief is disingenuous; “New grief is dumb.” Lang reminds his readers that Tennyson did not rush to write *In Memoriam*; “Himself through many a year / Withheld the meed of His melodious tear” and asks the question common to many of the poems and newspaper accounts: who can take Tennyson’s place? The poem’s complaint that Tennyson’s death “left us mute” seems to refer not to the production of occasional verse, which was copious, but instead to the true language of grief. Since Tennyson is dead, the means by which to mourn are dead as well.

Conclusion

Efforts to memorialize Tennyson began even before his death. The first biography, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Study of his Life and Work* by Arthur Waugh, was ready for the press when Tennyson died. It was followed in 1893 by J. Cuming Walters’s *Tennyson: Poet, Philosopher, Idealist*. Hallam Tennyson’s *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his son* was published in 1897; it was the most significant and influential biography of the time, combining unpublished manuscript poems and new biographical

details culled from letters, memoirs, diaries, and recorded conversations. The *Memoir* was heavily edited by Hallam Tennyson and his mother; Emily Tennyson was particularly insistent that the *Memoir* “would only enhance the reputation of her husband” (Mazzeno 35). Both mother and son crafted the memoir so that Tennyson would be remembered as one of England’s greatest poets, most patriotic citizens, and thoughtful philosophers.

In death, Tennyson came to stand not just for poetry, but for the nation as well. Wolffe notes that the “introduction of a prominent patriotic reference,” the Union flag that was draped over Tennyson’s coffin, was a public act meant to “affirm national consensus” (74). However, it is worth noting that the flag was draped over the coffin at Emily Tennyson’s request; she asked that the flag be understood to represent “the feeling of the beloved Queen, and the nation, and the empire he loved so dearly.” In *Recollections of a Westminster Antiquary*, Lawrence Tanner notes that the flag was retained by the Abbey authorities as a “particularly significant relic,” and publicly displayed in 1900, on one of Queen Victoria’s last visits to London:

She drove past the Abbey. On this occasion the Abbey Clergy and the Choir in their surplices took their places on a stand outside the West Door and sang the National Anthem as she passed. For the first time, too, within living memory a flag was flown on the North West Tower of the Abbey in honour of the occasion. It was the Union Jack which had covered the coffin of Lord Tennyson at his funeral in 1892. (qtd. in Matthews 266)

The insistence of Tennyson and his family that his final moments embody the Victorian ideal of the good death was clearly successful; in every public account, and repeated through poetic tributes, the insistence that Tennyson's noble life was reflected in his death pervades. The sense that something has been irretrievably lost is pervasive in everything written upon the occasion of Tennyson's death. While such hyperbolic statements are frequently seen in Victorian tributes, in this case it is true. The death of Tennyson meant the dying of a way of talking about loss. While the memorial poems written for Tennyson are steeped in his poetic language, the shadow cast by Tennyson was so great that it forced the next generation of poets to, in a sense, reinvent poetry even if this meant rejecting Tennyson as a poetic forbearer. Tennyson came to represent the Victorian era. In every Tennyson tribute, poetry and nation are linked inextricably; just as poetry would not be the same without Tennyson, neither would England.

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