



**Tennyson's diversion from Victorian modes of masculinity through  
a personalisation of emotion, with a focus on *In Memoriam***

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## Contents

Introduction: <i>In Memoriam</i> , Personalised Emotion, and Victorian Masculinity.....	24
Chapter One: Two other male Victorian poets and their avoidance of subjective emotion, with comparison to <i>In Memoriam</i> .....	26
Chapter Two: Who is 'I' in <i>In Memoriam</i> ?.....	29
Chapter Three: Tennyson's Subjective Metaphor.....	32
Chapter Four: The Role of Form and Structure in Tennyson's Attempted Construction of Masculinity.....	34
Conclusion.....	36
Bibliography .....	37

### Introduction: *In Memoriam*, Personalised Emotion, and Victorian Masculinity

I hold it true, what'er befall;  
I feel it, when I sorrow most;  
'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.<sup>1</sup>

This well-known stanza from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* encapsulates Tennyson's attitudes towards emotion, especially in reference to grief as a response to loss: beginning with 'I', what is most important to the poet is his own experience, and that which he regards as 'true' can only be traced in what he 'feel[s]'. Indeed, Tennyson stands apart from his contemporaries due to a personalisation of emotion. Rather than generalising sentiments with distancing methods such as metaphor, Tennyson's emotions are always related to the subjective 'I'. Male poets of the Victorian era, two of whom I will mention in this dissertation, often celebrate feeling in terms of the physiological or the sensory; Tennyson, on the other hand, embraces internal, psychological emotion. The grief displayed overtly in *In Memoriam*, the elegy published in 1850 to commemorate Tennyson's deceased friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, is an outburst of private feelings, which lead us to read the poetry as an autobiographical commentary where the poet is one with the speaker, who continually attempts to contact a lost loved one.<sup>2</sup> While the poem is not an autobiographical document, the reader is certainly inclined to sense subjectivity more forcibly in light of Tennyson's disposition. However, the poem itself suggests personalised emotion without the autobiographical detail. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will treat the terms 'personalisation', 'subjectivity' and 'individualism' as synonymous, but recognise their difference to 'autobiographical'. Nonetheless, Lushington, who had close connections with the Tennyson family, held that 'No one... could have read many pages without becoming aware of their parentage', and whilst, as Buckley points out, modern critics tend to scrutinise literature as standing apart from the author, *In Memoriam* is undeniably a thoroughly private text, even when exposed to the public.<sup>3</sup>

Tennyson has often been described as lacking a clear gender identity, as the subject of *In Memoriam* is changeable, a 'widower', 'child', and 'mother', with the object of affection simultaneously 'maiden' and 'manhood'.<sup>4</sup> Both subject and object are androgynous, and Kramer draws attention to the fluidity between the 'phallus or the breast'.<sup>5</sup> Tennyson's undetermined masculinity has led to a wealth of studies in determining his possible homosexuality, indeed Nunokawa's work quotes Ricks in declaring that 'some Victorians... found *In Memoriam* troubling 'due to the hint of homosexual desire', the 'wish too strong for words to name'.<sup>6</sup> However, rather than reiterating studies which recognise this tendency for homoeroticism, this dissertation will focus on the nuanced approach to emotion (specifically towards the tendency of personalisation). Whether Tennyson displays homoerotic desire or otherwise towards Hallam, his work is distinct in the Victorian canon due to the way emotion is conveyed, and in this the direction of affection is irrelevant.

Victorian literary critics are useful in discerning Tennyson's originality in expressing his feelings, having peculiar attitudes towards emotion. Wary of poetry which could be deemed to be improper, expression was enjoyed when in forms deemed appropriate, such as metaphor.<sup>7</sup> Armstrong's seminal work is a particularly useful tool in understanding the Victorian outlook with regard to emotions within poetry, drawing from Mill's 1833 article 'What is Poetry?' which defines poetry's purpose as 'to act upon the emotions'.<sup>8</sup> Armstrong reminds the reader that only a certain level of emotion was trusted by the Victorian, indeed, mentioning Keble, she says that a poet's spontaneity should be controlled, for fear

<sup>1</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Erik Gray, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), XXVII.13-16, pp. 23-4.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome H. Buckley, *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin Lushington, 'Review of *In Memoriam*', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, N.S.XVII (1950), in *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830-1870*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), p. 223; Jerome H. Buckley, 'The Persistence of Tennyson', in *The Victorian Experience: The Poets*, ed. by Richard A. Levine (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982), p. 4-6.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Victorian Poetry/ Oedipal Politics: "In Memoriam" and Other Instances', *Victorian Poetry*, 29:4 (1991), 351-363 (p. 355); Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XIII.1, p. 14; VI.28, p. 10; IX.19, p.12; XL.3, p. 31; CIX.17, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Kramer, 'Victorian Poetry', p. 355.

<sup>6</sup> Nunokawa, Jeff, 'In Memoriam and the Extinction of the Homosexual', *ELH*, 58: 2 (1991), 427-438 (p. 427); Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XCIII.14, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Isobel Armstrong, 'The Role and Treatment of Emotion in Victorian Criticism of Poetry', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 10:1 (1977), 2-16 (p. 3, 9).

<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'What is Poetry?', *Monthly Repository*, 7:73 (1833), 60-70, (p. 60).

that it would tarnish 'modest reserve'.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Keble recommends the use of metaphor as a distancing method, in order to be 'indirect', anchoring emotion to something concrete in the external world to avoid subjectivity, and maintain 'order and control'.<sup>10</sup> Armstrong uses the phrase 'autonomy would be too threatening'; in this dissertation I will argue that Tennyson creates this very threat, placing the self as the subject matter of the poem.<sup>11</sup> Though the 1850 *Eclectic Review* considers that Tennyson successfully paints pictures by 'round[ing] off into the objective', I will demonstrate the opposite: that the legitimacy of *In Memoriam* lies in its personalisation of feeling.<sup>12</sup>

At the very centre of the nineteenth century, when *In Memoriam* was presented to Victorian Britain, ideas of 'manliness' and 'masculinity' were being redefined, and the still problematic terms were aligned with industry, as a result of rising industrialisation in the early half of the century.<sup>13</sup> Sussman discusses an 'entrepreneurial manhood', where a man's success was measured in terms of his competition in the public marketplace, naturally opposed to a female private sphere, where the imagination is a primarily feminine realm.<sup>14</sup> To be a poet, therefore, is a particularly ambiguous position, as to be isolated with one's own thoughts is considered a female activity. Indeed, Morgan reviews the paradox of Victorian thought where the poet is expected to be male, yet emotion is accepted as female.<sup>15</sup> If expressing one's emotion is a predominantly female sphere according to Victorians, Tennyson's subjective stance goes one step further. Thus, we can understand a confusion of gender boundaries when considering his outward display of autonomous thought.

This dissertation will demonstrate Tennyson's subjective approach to emotion: in comparison to other Victorian poets; in discussion of the self-involved 'I' speaker; with a view to Tennyson's use of metaphor and the way in which the structure of poetry contributes to personalisation. I will argue that Tennyson's poetry is unique in the Victorian era due to the subjective nature of his verse, which resulted in an audience who questioned his masculinity.

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<sup>9</sup> Armstrong, 'Treatment of Emotion', p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, 'Treatment of Emotion', p. 9; John Keble, *Keble's Lectures on Poetry 1832-1841*, Vol. 1, translated by Edward Kershaw Francis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Armstrong, 'Treatment of Emotion', p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Unknown author, 'Review of *In Memoriam*', *The Eclectic Review*, 28 (Sep 1850), 330-341, (p. 336).

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Sussman, 'Robert Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" and the Problematic of a Male Poetic', *Victorian Studies*, 35:2 (1992), 185-200, (pp. 185-6).

<sup>15</sup> Thais E. Morgan, 'The Poetry of Victorian Masculinities', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 204-5.

**Chapter One: Two other male Victorian poets and their avoidance of subjective emotion, with comparison to *In Memoriam***

To successfully demonstrate Tennyson's divergence from accepted modes of masculinity within Victorian poetry, I will demonstrate the way in which two of his contemporaries, Arnold and Swinburne, approach emotion. Arnold's sentiment is one of success and glory, while Swinburne depicts man as a predatory, sexual figure, whose feelings are predominantly sensory. There is a clear difference in the way each poet explores emotion, and it is useful to consider the difference between psychological and physiological feeling.<sup>16</sup> Tennyson's emotion is wholly innate, Swinburne indulges in the senses, while Arnold lies somewhere in between, noticing the feeling of 'pain' but the *feeling* of prideful glory.

Matthew Arnold's poetry reveals a preoccupation with the ephemeral nature of life, and a questioning of how a man can be so strong and yet mortal. To Arnold, living must be experienced in a glorified manner, and unless one has felt pain he has not fully existed. In 'Early Death and Fame', as its title suggests, 'immature' death is justified through the experience of suffering, 'Give him emotion, through pain!'<sup>17</sup> According to Arnold, pain is the only valuable feeling in life, indeed with the use of the word 'through', it is suggested that 'pain' is equal to emotion. For a man, for 'him', pain allows for honour, and hence we are given the idea that a man's objective in life is to be glorified, which he will attain through suffering. The choice of pronoun is revealing, expressing a generic male experience, 'let him feel: *I have lived!*'<sup>18</sup> The colon foregrounds the speech of all men, who believe they have succeeded in life by feeling such suffering.

Through placing an emphasis on youth, there is a sense that life is only truly experienced by a man when he is in his prime of strength. Arnold talks of the loss of 'glory of the form' in 'Growing Old', picturing a man as a warrior-like creature, made only to exhibit strength.<sup>19</sup> The only emotion in maturity is that of nostalgia, where men 'weep' to 'feel the fullness of the past', so with the 'decay' of 'strength' comes the loss of feeling, as if all emotion is attached to physical might.<sup>20</sup> The stagnation of the verse echoes the idea of aging as deteriorating, as we witness constant pausing through the varied length of lines and interrupting punctuation:

'Is it to feel each limb  
Grow stiffer, every function less exact'<sup>21</sup>

The pauses embody frailty but also reflect a sense of contemplation that the speaker feels as he is concerned about aging. As the poem comes to a close and the notion of '-the last stage of all-' is declared, the stagnation heightens as the phrase is parenthesised with hyphens, as is demonstrated in the phrase 'no emotion- none'.<sup>22</sup> Emotion can only be felt in youth, when man has strength and can be glorified, and the hyphens represent an absence of this mode of feeling.

The clear theme of a battleground is evident in Arnold's vision of the emotion of a warrior, which can be compared to Victorian ideals of masculinity in the arena of a marketplace; in both, the males compete for success and victory.<sup>23</sup> While Arnold is preoccupied with approaching death, *In Memoriam's* focus is on grieving, and the glory is not held by the speaker, rather elsewhere:

That the Victor Hours should scorn  
The long lost result of love, and boast,  
'Behold the man that loved and lost,  
But all he was is overworn'<sup>24</sup>

Not only does Tennyson's speaker lose his 'love', but the vocabulary of 'Victor' and 'lost' sets up an imagined battlefield. Whilst this theme is apparent in both Arnold and Tennyson's work, it is clear that the tragedies are on completely different scales. 'Growing Old' explores 'our strength', but *In Memoriam* reveals the loss of one 'man', and though the speech of the 'Hours' refers to him in third person, earlier

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Ablow, 'Introduction: Victorian Emotions', *Victorian Studies*, 50:3 (2008), 375-377 (p. 375).

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Early Death and Fame', in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold 1840-1867*, ed. by Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 407, line 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407, line 17.

<sup>19</sup> Arnold, 'Growing Old', in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold 1840-1867*, p. 408, line 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409, line 19; 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409, lines 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31; 30.

<sup>23</sup> Sussman, 'Robert Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi"', p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, l.13-16, p. 7.

in the poem the voice is the singular 'I'.<sup>25</sup> Isolated in painful loss, Tennyson's speaker is weaker than the collective 'our' of Arnold. Furthermore, the narrator is arguably feminised through being depicted as weak in loss of battle, and this notion is heightened through the singularity of character, experiencing emotion alone.

Meanwhile, Swinburne overwhelmingly discusses emotion in terms of physical, tangible feeling. 'Laus Veneris' illustrates an excessively carnal experience, where the male figure becomes predatory both sexually and in battle. The verbs chosen by Swinburne in 'Laus Veneris' reveal how a man operates, and we are presented with a male figure whose ultimate preoccupation is sex; Sussman writes of how sexual life is integral to masculinity, and Swinburne permeates this stereotype.<sup>26</sup> Passive verbs such as 'Kissed', 'Stained', and 'warmed' are used to show the lack of control of the female, the male being the active doer and causer of every effect.<sup>27</sup> The description that follows calls attention to visual sensation, in the presence of the 'purple speck' which makes her 'fairer', an animalistic marking of territory which gives him pleasure.<sup>28</sup> The language indicates that male feeling revolves around the senses; the verbs 'stung' and 'sucking' are sensual rather than emotive, as well as constant reference to 'limbs', 'lips', 'feet and hands'.<sup>29</sup>

Swinburne's choices of pronouns are revelatory in depicting a certain hierarchy and overpowering dominance of an egotistical masculine character. The repeated subject pronoun 'my' shows a possessive nature, adjacent to 'Venus', and 'soul's body', reaching a climax in the phrase 'my love in all her limbs and hair'.<sup>30</sup> Through repetition Swinburne creates a build up, almost as if reaching a point of sexual release, and the regularity of the poem's rhyme scheme echoes the continued pleasure the narrator feels. Bellarsi writes of poetical rhythm which can echo sexual progression, and this is clear to the reader of 'Laus Veneris'.<sup>31</sup> With the scheme of aaba, the only variation comes at every third line of each stanza, and a differing sentiment can be traced in the content. One notable example is the rhyming of 'lies', 'sighs' and 'eyes', describing the passion of the female, yet the third line finishes with 'unsatisfied'.<sup>32</sup> This jarring disparity points to a desire for return to his continued experience, indeed, the return to 'a'.

The narrator of 'Laus Veneris' talks of an abstract 'they' who have fallen for Venus, a generalised idea of man, all who have felt 'Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain'.<sup>33</sup> Both pain and pleasure are equally alluring to the male, and later we are told of 'days / Gone past... time of goodly fight'.<sup>34</sup> Battle offers as great an appeal as sexual sensation, and the lexical choices expose this. The sounds of Venus, 'laughing' and 'sighing' can be compared to the 'shriek[ing]' of his foe, and sex is overtly aligned with fighting.<sup>35</sup> The love described in wartime is a 'fair pure sword', which can be thought of in terms of phallic imagery: 'like a snake that takes short breath and dips'.<sup>36</sup> The sword is given a body, and indeed has the same effect, leaving a 'fleck'.<sup>37</sup> This marking of territory is almost identical to the sex-imposed 'speck', and we see the male not only as sadistic but predatory, describing the 'game', which could refer either to hunting or play.<sup>38</sup>

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* rarely speaks of sensuous feeling; indeed, one of the few references to the body is the recurring imagery of 'A hand that can be clasp'd no more'.<sup>39</sup> This is an illustration of both unity and separation, as a 'clasp[ing]' motion is a joining one, yet the entities must be separate in order to unite.<sup>40</sup> The physical bond is only significant for the speaker insofar as seeking contact with his

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, l.1, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Laus Veneris' in *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Swinburne, 'Laus Veneris', p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Franca Bellarsi, 'Sex and the Body in Michael McClure's Quest 'For the Mammal Self'', in *The Body and the Book: Writings on Poetry and Sexuality*, ed. by Glennis Byron and Andrew J. Sneddon (New York, NY: Brill, 2008), p. 179.

<sup>32</sup> Swinburne, 'Laus Veneris', p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 15-18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, VII.5, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Erik Gray, 'Introduction' in *In Memoriam: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Erik Gray, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), p. xvii.

lost friend, rather than any sensory value. Throughout *In Memoriam*, all verse is addressed to the object of affection, 'I sing to him that rests below', and the desire for contact springs from his 'love' that 'thou bringest'.<sup>41</sup>

With comparison to Arnold and Swinburne, it is evident that Tennyson's male subject varies in his experience of emotion; while Arnold glorifies all men, Swinburne illustrates a lustful predator, compared to Tennyson's individual, loving griever.

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<sup>41</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XXI.1, p. 19; XVII.8, p. 17.

## Chapter Two: Who is 'I' in *In Memoriam*?

Buckley writes of 'the peculiar intensity with which Tennyson transfers attention from the object to the subject'.<sup>42</sup> Though an elegy addressed to a lost friend, the lexical choices place the speaker at the centre. The speaker's voice is unclear, oscillating between female and male personas, but what remains constant is a strong sense of subjectivity. The spatial markers of VII place the speaker on a 'bald street', outside a 'Dark house', 'Here'.<sup>43</sup> The subject seeks the 'hand' of his desired listener, but can only address the 'house', 'Dark' due to the absence of the imagined object.<sup>44</sup> This vacancy mirrors the solitude of the speaker in the entire poem: although he is continually 'waiting for a hand', the only true presence is the narrator with the feelings in his 'heart'.<sup>45</sup> 'All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy', says Mill, and *In Memoriam* is certainly a monologue rather than a conversation with the desired object.<sup>46</sup> The first line of the first stanza sets this up: 'I held it truth', and from the very beginning it is clear that 'I' is the central focus.

The 'I' voice, whilst constant in its self-absorption, fluctuates in character, creating an androgynous figure with both male and female attributes, perhaps to be identifiable to a wide audience. Tennyson writes that "'I' is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him."<sup>47</sup> Thus, the narrator's voice attempts to speak for humanity and the ambiguous nature of the persona is justified. Sussman recognises the mourner's unorthodox masculinity due to an androgynous portrayal of his late friend, yet misses the androgyny of the mourner himself.<sup>48</sup> The speaker often refers to himself as a 'widower', who mourns as 'Her place is empty', and an image is created of a husband mourning his wife.<sup>49</sup> Later, 'the widow'd hour' is recalled, and the speaker fondly reminisces 'when first she wears her orange-flower', as a 'maiden'.<sup>50</sup> Both 'widower' and 'widow', it is difficult to discern the sex of the griever, and this problem heightens with every change, becoming a 'son', and a 'brother', with the object 'mother'.<sup>51</sup> Kramer notices a setting up of familial relationships to construct the image of an ideal Victorian society, where 'Tennyson takes... the best traits of Victorian manhood', and adorns the object with masculinity, to honour Hallam.<sup>52</sup> The object is named a 'gentleman', praised for his public prowess and pursuit of power, 'A potent voice of Parliament'.<sup>53</sup> Stronger than the surrounding mass, the object leads in knowledge, 'power and grace', compared to the weaker subject, who only listens with his 'willing ear'.<sup>54</sup>

With the object portrayed as dominating a patriarchal hierarchy, we can wonder whether the 'I' speaker is defined by his relationship to the object. In the marital relationships outlined, the speaker is both a betrothed 'child' waiting for her 'future Lord', and a 'happy lover' who 'learns her gone'.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the ambivalence is so frequent that one can only be sure that they are 'Two partners of a married life'.<sup>56</sup> This statement, with the term 'partners', places the subject and object on equal ground, and this is reiterated throughout: 'thou and I are one in kind', 'with equal feet we faired', 'The lading of a single pain'.<sup>57</sup> If the speaker and object are to represent Tennyson and Hallam, one must remember their difference in class and status, indeed, Martin exclaims wonder in the fact that their friendship began in the first place.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps, with a masculine tendency for competition, Tennyson tries to compensate for his societal inferiority through placing the poetic figures on par, even going as far as intensifying the focus on the subject. The pronoun in 'my lost Arthur' reveals a possessive quality, whilst 'draw him home' demonstrates a certain passivity of the object.<sup>59</sup> The syntax of certain phrases also exposes

<sup>42</sup> Buckley, *The Growth of a Poet*, p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, VII.1-12, pp. 10-11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, VII.1-4; p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, VII.3-4, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Mill, 'What is Poetry?', p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> Baron Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (London: Macmillan, 1898), p. 305.

<sup>48</sup> Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XIII.1-4, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, XL.3-4, p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, IX.19-20, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Kramer, 'Victorian Poetry', p. 355-6.

<sup>53</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, CXI.22, p. 84; CXIII.11, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, LXXXVII.30-33, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, VI.28-38, p. 10; VIII.1-4, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, XCVII.5, p. 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, LXXIX.5, p. 54; XXV.2-11, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, IX.3-5, p. 12.



much: 'And I shall know him when we meet'.<sup>60</sup> The scene described is a reunion in heaven, where once more they would be on equal ground, yet only speaker is granted the active verb 'I shall know him', personalising the action. To truly be on equal terms, the speaker would have to wholly join the deceased, and Puckett detects a quasi-suicidal tone: 'The life that almost dies in me'.<sup>61</sup> We can infer the death of a prior life, and a dependence on the departed for any quality of living, justifying intense grief. However, this disturbing transfer of the state of death from the departed to the living 'me' subverts the intention of the elegy, as the speaker memorialises himself.

The poem is self-conscious in its reference to poetry itself, and in these instances we see a clear figure of a poet, who expresses his concerns about how society will receive him:

'This fellow would make weakness weak,  
And melt the waxen hearts of men.'<sup>62</sup>

The speaker recognises that his poetry may express an unreasonable or an unorthodox degree of sentimentality, by imagining the impossible, 'make weakness weak'. Surely this statement reveals that Tennyson is aware of a reception which might mark him as feminine, with the word 'weak' perhaps indicating the inferior sex. The 1851 *Times* remarks, 'Very sweet and plaintive these verses are, but who would not give them a feminine application?' and Maxwell notices the 'expressive femininity' which led reviewers to respond this way.<sup>63</sup> Tennyson must recognise his own mawkishness, and this stanza acts almost as an apology, that he diverges from what 'men' would expect. Here, he is either noticing a distinction from a male standard of expression, or uses the term in a general sense, referring to humanity. Shannon reports that 'The poem awakened chords of universal human sympathy'; his choice of the word 'sympathy' tells us that while people may have responded with pity to *In Memoriam*, the emotion remains very much individuated.<sup>64</sup> Johnson recognises the anxiety with which the speaker expresses an awareness of an audience, and we can notice a narrator who admits his separation from society in isolating himself, through the writing of poetry.<sup>65</sup>

A time to sicken and to swoon,  
When Science reaches forth her arms<sup>66</sup>

The poet notices his absence from the public sphere, where 'Science' is a topical matter, and Johnson notices the 'unpoetic temper of the time', where there was greater concern for industry and innovation than poetry.<sup>67</sup> Morgan, meanwhile, comments on the increase of female writers and one can notice the distinction between this career and the discussion of science.<sup>68</sup> Tennyson, therefore, 'care[s] not... To raise a cry' in the populous, and uses the poetry as an outlet for his own private emotion.<sup>69</sup> What becomes clear is that whilst the speaker, 'I', is a poet, his concern lies in his own grief rather than the experience of humanity, and though the *Eclectic* comments on the 'relevance with universal humanity', the speaker's interest is introspective.<sup>70</sup> More apt is Eliot's description of *In Memoriam*, 'the concentrated diary of a man confessing himself'; no wonder the 'I' is at the heart of the poetry.<sup>71</sup>

I leave thy praises unexpress'd  
In verse that brings myself relief,  
And by the measure of my grief  
I leave thy greatness to be guessed<sup>72</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, XLVII.8, p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Harry Puckett, 'Subjective Imagination in "In Memoriam"', *Victorian Poetry*, 12:2 (1974), 97-124 (p. 99).

<sup>62</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XXI.7-8, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> Manley Hopkins, 'The Poetry of Sorrow', *The Times*, Issue 20971 (London, 28 Nov 1851), p. 8; Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> Edgar Finley Shannon, Jr., 'The Pinnacle of Success: *In Memoriam*', in *In Memoriam: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. by Erik Gray, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>65</sup> E. D. H. Johnson, "'In Memoriam": The Way of the Poet', *Victorian Studies*, 2:2 (1958), 139-148 (p. 141).

<sup>66</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XXI.17-18, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> H. Johnson, 'The Way of the Poet', p. 143.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, 'The Poetry of Victorian Masculinities', p. 203.

<sup>69</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LXXV.9-10, p. 52.

<sup>70</sup> 'Review of *In Memoriam*', *The Eclectic Review*, p. 331.

<sup>71</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 243.

<sup>72</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LXXV.1-4, pp. 51-2.

The diary-like form is apparent here; the speaker both acknowledges and justifies his central positioning. If his writing were not subjective, the 'greatness' of the object would not be so blatant, so serves to memorialise him amply. 'I', therefore, may be androgynous, conflicted and self-conscious, but his centrality is necessary rather than egotistical.

### Chapter Three: Tennyson's Subjective Metaphor

Whilst *In Memoriam* is thoroughly subjective, this is not to say that the poet avoids the use of the metaphor. Tennyson's metaphor, though, is not used as a distancing tool; on the contrary, his imagery heightens the sense of personalisation.<sup>73</sup> It is worth reiterating the intense distrust Victorians had towards expression of emotion; Armstrong notes that 'at no other time has there been such intense concern with the *subjects* of poetry'.<sup>74</sup> Patmore gives one reason for this suspicion in 1858, 'The poet is... more of a seer of what God has already created'; thus, metaphor was a safe medium to explore emotion.<sup>75</sup> Tennyson manages to be both metaphorical and individual, and Fox comments on the way he depicts 'the external world with a predominant emotion'.<sup>76</sup> With the 'I' of the poem frequently becoming the voice of a poet, one can trace the most subjective, self-conscious metaphors amongst these sections.

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.<sup>77</sup>

Rather than creating objective neutrality, the metaphor heightens the sense of grief, as the speaker voices the distress he feels at the inadequacy of his words, 'outline and no more'. The 'coarsest clothes' only provide some protection from reality, and the sense is given by 'wrap' that he is not only sheltering himself but hiding from the external world. This metaphor exposes the extent of introspection the griever is manifesting, through using terms which can be understood as confining: 'weeds' which 'wrap', 'enfold' and 'outline'. Referencing external actualities, Tennyson satisfies Victorian taste for metaphor, by externalising and actualising emotion. Nonetheless, simultaneous to the comparative metaphor is the clear meaning in the language: 'grief...Is given in outline and no more'. Ironically, Tennyson uses metaphor to express aversion to it, exclaiming that it does not suffice to display his grieving, thereby undermining the metaphor itself. Tennyson has, therefore, outwardly declared a preference of plain subjectivity, as the use of metaphor only conceals the 'large grief'.

Pathetic fallacy is another figurative device Tennyson uses to individualise emotion; rather than 'stabilis[ing], fix[ing] and anchor[ing] emotions in the palpable and concrete', the narrator seems to be the nucleus of his surrounding environment.<sup>78</sup>

Calm is the morn without a sound  
Calm as to suit a calmer grief  
And in my heart, if calm at all,  
If any calm, a calm despair<sup>79</sup>

The repeated 'Calm', which describes the 'morn', 'wold', 'plain', 'air' and 'seas', echoes the endured feeling of the speaker and his 'calm despair'.<sup>80</sup> The words 'to suit' place 'my heart' at the core, providing the sentiment for the entire setting. Ruskin, who first coined 'pathetic fallacy' in 1856, writes of the emotions of the subject which are projected to 'fanc[y] life' on externalities, 'a fallacy caused by an excited state' of the speaker.<sup>81</sup> Arguably then, any use of pathetic fallacy shows an acute subjectivity, and Ruskin describes the 'reason unhinged by grief' as a result of the figurative method.<sup>82</sup> With a nineteenth-century view to emotion, such lack of reason and an overwhelming of subjective passion is a feminine quality, and Tennyson's pathetic fallacy therefore impairs his masculinity.<sup>83</sup> Later, the poem's

<sup>73</sup> Armstrong, 'Treatment of Emotion', p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Isobel Armstrong, ed., *Victorian Scrutinies: Reviews of Poetry 1830-1870* (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Coventry Patmore, 'Poetry- The Spasmodics', *The North British Review*, 28:55 (1858), 231-250 (p. 231).

<sup>76</sup> Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies*, p. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, V.9-12, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Armstrong, 'Treatment of Emotion', p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XI.1-16, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, XI.1-17, p. 13.

<sup>81</sup> John Ruskin, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', in *English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century)*, ed. by Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp 381-3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p. 382.

<sup>83</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, Review of *Speaking from the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion* by Stephanie A. Shields, *Journal of Social History*, 38:1 (2004), 232-234 (p. 233).

voice asks 'Can calm despair and wild unrest / Be tenants of a single breast [?]; clearly the speaker is aware of his projection of emotion, acknowledging that they come from his personal 'breast'.<sup>84</sup>

These contradictory notions of 'calm' and 'wild' lead to a sense of turmoil in the speaker, as he calls himself a 'delirious man'.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, metaphor is used by Tennyson to manifest a 'crisis of identity' which has resulted from loss.<sup>86</sup> Buckley deems the questioning, 'what am I?', to stem from a reluctance to mature and accept a societal role.<sup>87</sup> This may justify Tennyson's repeated allegorical reference to 'An infant crying in the night', comforted only by 'his father', and the reader interprets the symbol of vulnerability, and reliability on a loved one.<sup>88</sup> The 'crisis of identity' metaphor can be explored further in Tennyson's picture of 'a helmless bark', illustrating the lack of direction and extreme solitude one would feel if lost at sea, which can be compared to the feeling of grief.<sup>89</sup> No wonder then, that Tennyson dwells on the infant, who tries to discover himself, 'learn[ing] the use of 'I' and 'me'', and perhaps his insistence on affirming 'I' is a reassurance that he exists at all.<sup>90</sup> Dale comments on Tennyson's use of the term 'infant', noting that it derives from the Latin *infans*, which means 'without language'.<sup>91</sup> Hence, the metaphor can be extended further, as the cries can be interpreted as the speaker's craving to be heard, and anxiety that his individual feelings won't be understood. While metaphor draws from externalities, Tennyson achieves subjectivity in the image of his weak speaker: alone, lost and introspective.

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<sup>84</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XVI.2-3, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, XVI.17, p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Buckley, 'The Persistence of Tennyson', p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LIV.17, p. 40; Buckley, 'The Persistence of Tennyson', p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LIV.18, p. 40; CXXIV.20, p. 92.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, IV.3, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Gray, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Allan Dale, "'Gracious Lies": The Meaning of Metaphor in "In Memoriam"', *Victorian Poetry*, 18:2 (1980), 147-167 (p. 153).

#### Chapter Four: The Role of Form and Structure in Tennyson's Attempted Construction of Masculinity

The structure of the poem aids individuated emotion at length, although can also be seen as Tennyson's attempt at affirming his masculinity. According to Carlyle, true manhood is measured by the ability to abstain from expressing inner chaos, exhibiting all times a sense of control.<sup>92</sup> Simultaneously, Ruskin argues that 'the man who perceives rightly, [is so] because he does not feel'.<sup>93</sup> Tennyson's poetry has been described as following certain 'logic of feeling', yet this seems oxymoronic when recalling Ruskin's dismissal of 'the influence of emotion', where feeling is irrational.<sup>94</sup> Boyd recognises a pressing concern of *In Memoriam*, the difficulty of discerning truth between science and religion, which can be compared to a difference between logic and emotion.<sup>95</sup> He describes the emotional journey in the elegy, where the speaker's emotions progress; indeed, eventually a certain clarity is achieved, and the epilogue expresses a firm belief in 'one God', echoing Dante's *Divina Commedia*, which ends in bliss.<sup>96</sup> The yearly Christmas poems demonstrate a step by step progression of emotion, where syntactic repetition and a modified adverb move the speaker towards a resolution.

And sadly fell our Christmas-eve<sup>97</sup>  
 And calmly fell our Christmas-eve<sup>98</sup>  
 And strangely falls our Christmas-eve<sup>99</sup>

This logical and progressive structure shows the working out of emotion which is less chaotic than it first appears, and in the last 'strange' Christmas, the hopeful statement 'No more shall wayward grief abuse', there is a complete rejection of overshadowing emotion.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, the speaker's feelings are still paramount, and the foregrounding of each year with the adverbial 'sadly', 'calmly', and 'strangely', presents an event dominated by his mood. Though his poetry shows logic, Tennyson is certainly 'subdued by the feelings under which [he] write[s]', and by Victorian standards, 'perceives wrongly, because he feels'.<sup>101</sup> Bradley talks of a 'definite structure', contrasting to Buckley, who names it 'formless', which gives the poet a comprehensive opportunity to explore his feelings.<sup>102</sup> This is not necessarily a redeeming feature for the Victorian critic; in 1853 Arnold decides that poetry cannot be enjoyed if it manifests a 'continuous state of mental distress'.<sup>103</sup>

A structured logic in each stanza undermines any implication of chaos, as the poem is unified by the so-called '*In Memoriam* stanza' with a constant tetrameter and abba scheme.<sup>104</sup> Tennyson demonstrates the masculine qualities of order and discipline through the constancy of scheme; nonetheless, by deferring from the normative pentameter, he is rejecting the 'metrical code' which is so firmly established in the English 'patriarchal poetic tradition'.<sup>105</sup> Gray deems that Tennyson's unusual short line allows natural spontaneity and unifies the stanza as each phrase is incomplete by itself.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, in many instances, broken structure and enjambment echoes the speaker's confused emotive state; 'vain pretence / Of gladness' represents his struggle overtly.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the statement, 'words...half reveal / And half conceal', illustrate the division between the two abstract states, where the

<sup>92</sup> Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, p. 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Ruskin, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', p. 385.

<sup>94</sup> John D. Boyd, "In Memoriam" and the "Logic of Feeling", *Victorian Poetry*, 10:2 (1972), 95-110 (p. 95); Ruskin, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', p. 380.

<sup>95</sup> Boyd, 'Logic of Feeling', p. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Buckley, *The Growth of a Poet*, p. 119; Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Epilogue, line 142, p. 101; Tennyson, *A Memoir by his Son*, p. 304.

<sup>97</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XXX.4, p. 25.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, LXXVIII.4, p. 53.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, CV.4, p. 79.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, CV.9, p. 79.

<sup>101</sup> Ruskin, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', pp. 385-7.

<sup>102</sup> A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 20; Buckley, *The Growth of a Poet*, p. 112.

<sup>103</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Choice of Subjects in Poetry', in *English Critical Essays (Nineteenth Century)* ed. by Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 358.

<sup>104</sup> Gray, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>105</sup> Madeleine Hurd, 'Class, Masculinity, Manners, and Mores: 'Public Space and Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Social Science History*, 24:1 (2000), 75-110 (p. 82); A. R. C. Finch, 'Dickinson and Patriarchal Meter: A Theory of Metrical Codes', *PMLA*, 102:2 (1987), p. 166-8.

<sup>106</sup> Gray, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>107</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XXX.6-7, p. 25.

lines are incomplete just as 'words' are inadequate to express his emotion.<sup>108</sup> The disjointed lines also visually portray the distance between the mourner and the departed:

He put our lives so far apart  
We cannot hear each other speak.<sup>109</sup>

This spatial logic is referred to by Welch, who points out the way the speaker concentrates on the certainties of time, space and distance to comfort him.<sup>110</sup> His loss is legitimised by the reminder that the departed did once exist, having been 'beside the reverend walls', whilst time is an inevitability that will bring him closer to his lost friend: 'O days and hours, your work is this / To hold me from my proper place'.<sup>111</sup> Using space-time concepts to underpin emotion, Tennyson becomes a 'man of society', drawing from topical debates of scientific discovery, a rising matter of discussion in the nineteenth-century public sphere.<sup>112</sup> The Victorian public sphere is, of course, the place for the competent, educated male, compared to the illogical female, and Tennyson achieves masculinity.<sup>113</sup> However, each concern of the speaker is individuated, 'hold me' and 'my proper place', giving an impression of introspection, and the subjective pronouns draw the powers of space and time around him.

This individualistic outlook is mirrored by the abba rhyme scheme, where the outer couplets, 'a', show a return to an original statement, suggesting a lack of movement and, therefore, closed-mindedness, as a result of extended introspection. Indeed, Ricks calls the Tennyson's rhyme a 'circle moaning in the air', where the speaker does not wish to progress in fear of arriving at a place of 'desolation'.<sup>114</sup> The desire for stasis, therefore, is motivated by a wish to continue loving a lost friend, for fear of moving on.<sup>115</sup> One is reminded of the first stanza of *In Memoriam*, the foundation of the entire elegy, 'Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd', and the wish to indulge in 'Grief' is unmistakable.<sup>116</sup> Shannon speaks of the monotony of the consistent rhyme, whilst Gates names it an 'obsessive constant'.<sup>117</sup> She argues that the rhyme scheme is not cyclical; rather, the fourth line is only an echo of the first, as the speaker remains himself but slowly evolves.<sup>118</sup> Certainly the abba scheme validates a return, and this can be understood as solid resolve of the narrator, who moves towards his resolution. The positive closure of the epilogue shows firm belief that 'the man, that with me trod' is a 'friend of mine who lives with God'.<sup>119</sup> The many verses were necessary to reach this conclusion, but the strong rhyme scheme affirms it. The last stanza, however, varies slightly:

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.<sup>120</sup>

One may notice the half-rhyming of 'loves' and 'moves'. Ricks calls the continuity of rhyme scheme throughout a unifying feature of the many stanzas, yet here there is a digression.<sup>121</sup> Finally expressing contentment, the speaker and the poet are inclined to look to the future, and the sense of resolve has led to this change.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, V.3-4, p. 9; Gray, 'Introduction', p. xv.

<sup>109</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LXXXII.15-16, p. 56.

<sup>110</sup> Dennis M. Welch, 'Distance and Progress in "In Memoriam"', *Victorian Poetry*, 18:2 (1980), 169-177 (p. 170).

<sup>111</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LXXXVII.1, p. 62; CXVII.1-2, p. 88.

<sup>112</sup> Basil Willey, *More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), pp. 53-4.

<sup>113</sup> Hurd, 'Class, Masculinity, Manners', p. 76; 91.

<sup>114</sup> Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 228.

<sup>115</sup> Sarah Gates, 'Poetics, Metaphysics, Genre: The Stanza Form of "In Memoriam"', *Victorian Poetry*, 37:4 (1999), 507-520 (p. 508).

<sup>116</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, I.9, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Shannon, 'The Pinnacle of Success', p. 117; Gates, 'Poetics, Metaphysics, Genre', p. 508.

<sup>118</sup> Gates, 'Poetics, Metaphysics, Genre', p. 508-9.

<sup>119</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Epilogue, lines 137-140, p. 101.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, Epilogue, lines 141-144, p. 101.

<sup>121</sup> Ricks, *Tennyson*, p. 121.

### Conclusion

That loss is common would not make  
My own less bitter, rather more<sup>122</sup>

This couplet justifies Tennyson's personalisation of emotion: it is necessary to describe one's 'own' grief rather than the suffering of the 'common', in order to depict the sentiment accurately. Tennyson certainly diverges from masculine modes of masculinity when expressing emotion, and the reader can sense the cutting, overpowering grief which cannot be felt in the poetry of Arnold and Swinburne. In his personalisation of passionate sentiment, Tennyson may be construed as feminine; however, through depicting the speaker in various figures, a distancing effect is achieved with a lack of stable narrator, satisfying the Victorian demand for metaphor. Therefore, though Tennyson's excessively emotive speaker tinges reason, often he displays masculine tendencies. Perhaps the androgynous value and variety of character is a wish to create more than one voice, to minimise the sense of isolation. Though attempting contact with a lost Hallam, the speaker's voice is ultimately alone, and the lack of reply intensifies and extends his grief. In breaking the mould of Victorian literature, Tennyson transgresses expectations, and the speaker becomes many characters whilst remaining one, subjective 'I'.

Whether masculine or otherwise, Tennyson's extensive elegy, *In Memoriam*, does justice to his dear friend, Hallam. Whilst it is arguable that the personalisation of emotion deters the attention from the object, it is necessary to sufficiently illustrate the weight of pain that stems from the loss. I conclude with a statement which celebrates Tennyson's subjectivity, to counter most Victorians:

"The reader must already have discovered that this poem is characterised by thorough 'subjectivity'. We pause to say a few words with reference to the outcry which has been raised, from time to time, against this order of poetry. Self-conscious or 'subjective' art, is only bad when it is not self-conscious and subjective enough."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, VI.5-6, p. 9.

<sup>123</sup> Coventry Patmore, 'In Memoriam', *The North British Review*, 13:26 (1850), p. 551.

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