

# IN MEMORIAM

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON



EDITED BY ERIK GRAY

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION  
SECOND EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

---

Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
IN MEMORIAM



AUTHORITATIVE TEXT  
CRITICISM

Second Edition

*Edited by*

ERIK GRAY  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

---

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

---

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The Nortons soon expanded their program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By mid-century, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

---

Copyright © 2004, 1973 by  
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved.  
Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Fairfield Medium  
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.  
Composition by Binghamton Valley Composition, Inc.  
Manufacturing by the Maple-Vail Book Group.  
Book design by Antonina Krass.  
Production manager: Ben Reynolds.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, Baron, 1809–1892.

In memoriam : authoritative text : criticism / Alfred, Lord Tennyson; edited  
by Erik Gray.—2nd ed.

p. cm.—(Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

**ISBN 0-393-97926-1**

1. Hallam, Arthur Henry, 1811–1833—Poetry. 2. Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, Baron, 1809–1892. In memoriam. 3. Hallam, Arthur Henry, 1811–1833—In literature. 4. Elegiac poetry, English—History and criticism. 5. Friendship in literature. I. Gray, Erik Irving, 1972– II. Title. III. Series.

PR5562.A2G73 2003  
821'.8—dc21

2003051298

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110  
[www.wwnorton.com](http://www.wwnorton.com)

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House,  
75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

4 5 6 7 8 9 0

---

## Preface

---

For thirty years Robert H. Ross's Norton Critical Edition of *In Memoriam* has furnished a reliable and helpful text of Tennyson's poem. In preparing this new edition I have frequently referred to Professor Ross's annotations, and on occasion I have reproduced his notes exactly or with only small alterations. The text of the poem has been reset to allow for a clearer and more readable layout, and I have taken this opportunity to correct a few misprints. Five of the critical essays included in the first edition reappear here; they have been supplemented by a selection of criticism from the past three decades, including examples of formal, contextual, reader-response, queer, and genre criticism. Given the availability of continually updated bibliographical databases, I have not tried to assemble a comprehensive bibliography but instead have supplied a more selective annotated bibliography; criticism of the poem is extensive, and I hope this will serve as a useful guide to those doing further research. Also new to this edition is the introduction, which aims to provide readers with necessary background information and a critical overview of the poem's most distinctive formal and thematic peculiarities.

In the notes I have frequently quoted the annotations Tennyson himself provided for the Eversley edition (see Bibliography); these are marked [T.]. I am greatly indebted to the two chief modern editions of the poem, that by Christopher Ricks and that by Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw, both of which are described in the bibliography. Like Ross, I follow the Eversley text, retaining Tennyson's distinctive abbreviations (*thro'*, *tho'*, endings in *-d*), but also retaining, unlike Ross, the Roman numerals that Tennyson used in all printed editions to number his sections. I have followed Ricks in reverting to one earlier reading, a comma rather than a period at the end of LXXII, 16.

I am grateful to Harvard University for its financial support in the preparation of this volume and to the libraries that allowed me to consult the major manuscripts of the poem: Houghton Library, Harvard University; the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge; and the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln. I would like to thank Ger-

hard Joseph and Herbert Tucker for their helpful suggestions, and I am especially grateful to Christopher Ricks for his guidance and advice: I remember with great pleasure the day we worked through some of Tennyson's "wordy snares" together.

---

# Introduction

---

## Tennyson, Hallam, and the Poem

In October of 1833, Alfred Tennyson (he would not become “Lord” Tennyson for another fifty years) was living at the rectory in Somersby, Lincolnshire, where he had grown up. His father had died two years before, while Tennyson was studying at Cambridge; Alfred, although he was not the eldest son, had left the university without completing his degree in order to take on the duties of the male head of the household for his mother and his numerous younger siblings. Life with Tennyson’s father had been extremely difficult for the entire family, and it did not get much easier when he died. The Reverend George Tennyson had been the rector at Somersby; after his death his family, which was always in want of money, was faced with the probability that they would have to leave the rectory that had always been their home—as eventually they were compelled to do in 1837, an event commemorated in sections C–CV of *In Memoriam*.

One bright spot in Tennyson’s life at this time, and in that of his whole family, was Arthur Henry Hallam. Tennyson had met Hallam in the spring of 1829 at Cambridge, where they were both students at Trinity College, and they immediately formed the deepest and most profound friendship of Tennyson’s life. Tennyson’s childhood had been dark and unquiet, and he had not liked Cambridge at first, but with his newfound friend he flourished. Hallam was a sensitive and brilliant young man, later remembered not just by Tennyson but by many of his friends (including the future prime minister William Ewart Gladstone) as the member of their circle most clearly destined for greatness. Together he and Tennyson became members of “The Apostles,” an undergraduate society for intellectual discussion and debate. Hallam fervently admired Tennyson’s poetry and encouraged him to publish it. The result was a volume of poems in 1830, which Hallam very ably (and very favorably) reviewed in an article the following year, and then another, larger volume of poems in 1832, which Hallam was instrumental in getting published.

Meanwhile, Tennyson brought Hallam to Somersby, where he became an immediate favorite, particularly with Tennyson's younger sister Emily, with whom he fell in love. The two were soon engaged to be married—a move that angered Hallam's father, who forbade Hallam and Emily to see each other until Hallam turned twenty-one. But their love survived the separation, and when Hallam did come of age in February 1832, the engagement was renewed; Hallam finished his degree at Cambridge and moved to London to study law, hoping to begin a career that would allow him to marry soon. In the meantime his friendship with Tennyson continued as close as ever. When Hallam left for a long tour of the Continent with his father in late summer of 1833, Tennyson went down to London to share his final days in England and to see him off.

Such was the situation when in early October 1833, Tennyson received the following letter:

My dear Sir,

At the desire of a most afflicted family, I write to you because they are unequal from the abyss of grief into which they have fallen to do it themselves. Your friend, sir, and my much-loved nephew, Arthur Hallam, is no more. It has pleased God to remove him from this, his first scene of existence, to that better world for which he was created. He died at Vienna, on his return from Buda, by apoplexy, and I believe his remains come by sea from Trieste. \* \* \* May that Being in whose hands are all the destinies of man, and who has promised to comfort all that mourn, pour the balm of consolation on all the families, who are bowed down by this unexpected dispensation!

Tennyson was faced with the duty of breaking the news to his sister Emily, and then of learning to cope with it himself.

Tennyson's reaction was to begin writing poetry that, directly or indirectly, confronted the grief that seemed to have cut his life in two. Within a week of receiving the news of Hallam's death, he composed one of his greatest short poems, "Ulysses," and over the following weeks he began work on other major poems, including "Tithonus" and "Morte d'Arthur." All of these dealt obliquely with his loss. But at the same time Tennyson drafted a more explicitly personal lyric, "Fair ship, that from the Italian shore," addressed to the boat that was bearing Hallam's body back to England for burial in Somerset, near the family estate. (The ship finally arrived and the funeral took place in early January; Tennyson could not bring himself to attend.) This lyric later became section ix of *In Memoriam*.

So began the drawn-out and piecemeal process of composition that was not to conclude until the elegy was published at last in May 1850, nearly seventeen years after it was begun. Indeed, for many years after Hallam's death Tennyson published very little at all, until

1842, when he came out with a two-volume edition of old and new poems—including “Ulysses” and “Morte d’Arthur”—that securely established his reputation as a major English poet. He continued to compose his elegies for Hallam, and by 1845 the poem we know as *In Memoriam* had reached nearly its present length, but he remained reluctant to publish it. Eventually, early in 1850, he printed a small number of copies for private distribution to his friends. This so-called trial edition had no title, though Tennyson had considered such possibilities as *Fragments of an Elegy* and *The Way of the Soul*. After some further revisions the poem was finally published a few months later; the author’s name was not given, and the title (perhaps suggested by Tennyson’s fiancée, Emily Sellwood) was simply *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

The effect of the poem’s publication, both on the reading public and on Tennyson’s life, was immediate and enormous. *In Memoriam* was hailed as a masterpiece, and Tennyson—who despite the anonymous publication was quickly identified by most reviewers—was widely celebrated in the press. The practical repercussions for him were twofold. The post of poet laureate had been left vacant by the death of William Wordsworth in April, and Queen Victoria was searching for a worthy successor. Tennyson’s name had already been suggested, and his nomination was secured when the queen’s husband, Prince Albert, read *In Memoriam* and expressed his admiration. Second, Tennyson was enabled to marry Emily Sellwood, to whom he had been engaged, on and off, for over ten years. The marriage had been delayed both by Tennyson’s lack of steady income and by Emily’s concerns about his religious faith. But *In Memoriam*, although it expresses much doubt as well as faith, apparently allayed her misgivings. And profits from the sale of the poem, which quickly ran through several printings, together with the modest stipend attached to the laureateship, provided Tennyson with a sufficient income to support a family.

The popularity of *In Memoriam* continued to grow after its initial success. It appealed to the Victorians for a number of reasons, in addition to its sheer poetic beauty. The rituals of mourning were a central feature of Victorian culture: there were elaborate codes concerning everything from dress to stationery for months or years after the death of a loved one. After the death of her husband in 1861, Queen Victoria spent the last forty years of her life in mourning, and she told Tennyson, “Next to the Bible *In Memoriam* is my comfort.” It filled a similar role through all levels of society. Contemporary readers also appreciated Tennyson’s poem because it frankly confronted the crisis of faith that troubled so many mid-century thinkers. For several decades scientific discoveries had challenged the Bible, particularly the biblical account of creation, and by 1850 the



scientific and technological progress on which the Victorians so prided themselves seemed painfully at odds with the religious beliefs and practices of earlier times. Readers were therefore grateful to Tennyson for combining a poetic exploration of such concepts as evolution with an ultimate affirmation of faith. To understand how he managed to do this, it is important first to consider the form and structure of *In Memoriam*.

## Unity and Division

The *Memoir* of Tennyson written by his son, Hallam Tennyson, records a number of the poet's comments about the way he composed *In Memoriam*. "The sections were written," says Tennyson, "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." This information confirms what the reader of *In Memoriam* feels while moving through the poem: that *In Memoriam* is simultaneously one poem and one hundred thirty-three poems, almost any of which could stand independently as a separate elegy. This fragmentation is one of the most surprising features of Tennyson's poem. Most elegies have a single movement or trajectory: the speaker reacts to the death of a loved one by moving steadily from grief to some form of consolation. That continuity, however, is shattered in *In Memoriam*. One section will reach some form of consolation, only to be contradicted by the next section, in which the sense of grief is renewed. Most elegies present a reaction to death; *In Memoriam* presents what T. S. Eliot called a "diary" of reactions to Hallam's death. The fictional time of the poem extends over nearly three years from the moment the speaker learns of his friend's death, and its fragmentary nature reflects the fluctuations that typify such a period: you continue to have good days and bad days, even after you feel you have overcome the immediate shock of grief.

And yet for all its fragmentation, *In Memoriam* also displays an admirable unity. Although it endures more doubts and setbacks along the way than most other elegies, it contains the same overall movement from near despair to a sense of consolation. Moreover, its different sections are often tightly woven together: they react to each other, and sections that share particular concerns (those addressing the ship or those that speculate on the possibility of seeing the spirit of the dead) are grouped together. Above all, the poem is written throughout in a single, unusual stanza form. Tennyson's claim that each section was written independently of the others is a

little misleading: he must have been conscious early on that all of the poems he was writing about Hallam shared a meter and rhyme scheme that he had only rarely used before. The consistent use of a single stanza—what has come to be called the *In Memoriam* stanza—reinforces the sense that although the speaker may feel himself to be filled with conflicting, even contradictory feelings, nevertheless he retains some integrity, a hope of eventually resolving the disparate impulses he feels.

The conjunction of division and unity is not merely an aspect of the poem's structure but its most pressing concern. Tennyson feels himself to be divided into two—a former self, who was young and happy in Hallam's company, and a new self who, at twenty-four, feels already aged. His sense of identity is therefore shaken, leaving him asking "Who am I?" or even on one occasion "What am I?" (LIV, 17). This identity fragmentation is even more painfully acute in the case of Hallam. Tennyson knows that he longs for his friend, but who is his friend? Is he the Hallam so vividly remembered at Cambridge and at the Tennyson home in Somersby? Is he the corpse being brought back on the ship? Is he an angel looking down from above? Or is he the person that Hallam would be now had he survived, as section LXXXIV suggests? These are the pieces that the poem must put together again. How can the poet reassure himself that there is some sense in saying "I" or saying "Hallam"?

Even the stanza itself, the formal feature that provides the greatest unifying force, contains elements of brokenness or dividedness. Each line of the *In Memoriam* stanza is shorter than one would expect. The typical meter for serious English poetry is the pentameter, a line consisting of ten syllables (five "feet"); *In Memoriam* uses a tetrameter line, which is two syllables shorter. Furthermore, what is usually called the "elegiac stanza" in English poetry is a quatrain (a four-line stanza) with interlaced rhymes, *abab*; the stanza of *In Memoriam* rearranges the rhymes *abba*. These may seem like small variations, but they have an immense effect, and together they make the stanza form so unusual that Tennyson thought he was the first to use it: "I believed myself the originator of the metre, until after 'In Memoriam' came out, when someone told me that Ben Jonson and Sir Philip Sidney had used it."

There are several important effects Tennyson achieves by using a tetrameter line rather than the more standard pentameter. The tetrameter or four-beat line is the standard meter for ballads, nursery rhymes, songs—in other words, for what are considered to be the more spontaneous or immediately appealing forms of poetry. The shorter line allows *In Memoriam* to appear more unpremeditated. The poem often wishes to present itself as inarticulate or unthinking, poured forth as naturally as the lament of a bird that has lost its

fledglings (section XXI) or as the cry of an infant in the night (sections LIV, CXXIV). These assertions are still paradoxical—a poem that claims to be speechless—but the self-deprecation derives credibility from the use of the simpler, abbreviated meter. Pentameter had for centuries been used for long or important poems, such as epics and elegies, because it conveys a sense of confidence; this derives in part from the fact that a ten-syllable line is long enough to contain a complete statement. Consider, for instance, the opening line from a major elegy written in pentameters a few decades before *In Memoriam*, Percy Shelley's "Adonais":

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!

The theme and motivation of the poem are summed up neatly. Contrast the opening stanza of section I of *In Memoriam*:

I held it truth, with him who sings  
To one clear harp in divers tones,  
That men may rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.

"I held it truth with him who sings": by itself it is an incomplete and almost meaningless line. We must wait until the second line to get a sense of who this singer is and until the final two lines to learn what "truth" is being repudiated. Tennyson emphasizes the brokenness of the tetrameter stanza, the way that each line falls short of expressing a complete thought—just as words fall short of expressing his emotion, as he insists throughout the poem. Words "half reveal/ And half conceal the Soul within" (v, 3–4); they are insufficient, and the shorter line insists upon this by being itself insufficient.

Like the meter, the rhyme scheme Tennyson employs expresses the poem's self-doubt, or rather its mixture of faith and doubt. In one sense, the *abba* stanza conveys a sense of fulfillment: it begins with one rhyme sound, which is then temporarily lost as we move on to the couplet in the middle; but in the end the initial rhyme returns, clinching the stanza and seeming to redeem or justify the open-endedness of the beginning. The second stanza of section I offers both an example and an image of this forward-looking trustfulness:

But who shall so forecast the years  
And find in loss a gain to match?  
Or reach a hand thro' time to catch  
The far-off interest of tears?

Like the expectant hand in line 3 (a symbol that recurs throughout the poem), the opening rhyme, "years," is extended in good faith and

then left waiting, until it is finally rewarded with the satisfying closure of a matching rhyme at the end.

Yet this hopeful or redemptive reading is only one side of the *abba* rhyme scheme, and even the stanza just quoted seems doubtful: it is phrased, after all, as a question. The same rhyme scheme also conveys the opposite sense, a feeling not of looking forward but of falling back. It begins surely enough with a progression, *a* to *b*, but then it seems almost to give up, to turn around and retreat into what it knows. This sense is conveyed in the third stanza of section 1:

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd,  
 Let darkness keep her raven gloss:  
 Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,  
 To dance with death, to beat the ground.

Instead of moving beyond grief toward some eventual reward, a "far-off interest," the poet wishes to turn around and "clasp Grief," to cling to the past and to what he already knows. It is therefore appropriate that the rhyme scheme itself is one of clasping—the *a* rhyme embracing the *b* and the stanza as a whole ending where it began. Both of the poet's impulses, then—the impulse to move hopefully on and the desire to turn back—are equally represented by the stanza.

But it is worth pausing to consider the notion of *clasping*, which, like the hand, reappears as one of the central images of the poem. The command given at the beginning of the third stanza seems to be backwards: "Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd." Anyone who has ever taken swimming lessons knows that to grab onto a fellow swimmer is the most dangerous thing one can do: rather than prevent one from drowning, it actually causes both to drown. What does Tennyson mean then by saying that Love and Grief should clasp each other to prevent their being "drown'd"? The answer seems to lie in the nature of clasping. To clasp something implies unity; clasping or hugging is a way of bringing two things together. But it necessarily implies separateness or division as well: only two distinct or independent entities can clasp each other. A hand cannot clasp itself but must clasp a different hand; a raindrop cannot clasp another raindrop without their melting into each other, because they are not sufficiently individuated. For Tennyson, both aspects of clasping are equally important, division as much as unity. He strives in his poem to reunify what has been fragmented, to achieve a reunion with his lost friend. At the same time, however, he resists the possibility of total union; he seeks to clasp his friend—not that they should merge entirely.

Hence the importance of clasping or embraces in the poem, begin-

ning with the rhyme scheme. A fine example of the unifying power of clasping comes in section LXXXIX; it is the only direct representation we are given of a conversation between Tennyson and Hallam—although they are shown, significantly, disagreeing:

But if I praised the busy town,  
 He loved to rail against it still,  
 For 'ground in yonder social mill  
 We rub each other's angles down,  
  
 'And merge' he said 'in form and gloss  
 The picturesque of man and man.'  
 We talk'd: the stream beneath us ran,  
 The wine-flask lying couch'd in moss.  
 (37–44)

It has been pointed out that of these eight lines, Tennyson speaks four and Hallam speaks four; none of Tennyson's lines rhyme together, nor do any of Hallam's. This is the threat, as it were, of the rhyme scheme: divide up the quatrains differently and you are left with four unrhymed lines. But Tennyson takes this memory of a simple prose conversation and, by clasping it within his own words, he turns it into verse.

This seems therefore to exemplify the benefits of clasping, which is able to convert unrhymed fragments into a unified whole. But these same lines also express a fear of unity: Hallam decries the tendency of individuals in society to "merge," to become too much like one another. Love thrives on union, but the poem reminds us that love also requires a certain amount of separation. In section XLVII, for instance, in which he describes his notion of heaven, Tennyson renounces the idea that the souls of the dead all become so equally perfect as to be indistinguishable.

That each, who seems a separate whole,  
 Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
 The skirts of self again, should fall  
 Remerging in the general Soul,  
  
 Is faith as vague as all unsweet:  
 Eternal form shall still divide  
 The eternal soul from all beside;  
 And I shall know him when we meet.  
 (1–8)

Division, then, has its purpose: how else can those who love recognize each other? Tennyson therefore rejects the notion of spirits who, being all infinitely good, are all alike parts of the "general Soul," and he gives instead his own notion of a homelier heaven.

And we shall sit at endless feast,  
 Enjoying each the other's good:  
 What vaster dream can hit the mood  
 Of Love on earth? He seeks at least

Upon the last and sharpest height,  
 Before the spirits fade away,  
 Some landing-place, to clasp and say,  
 'Farewell! We lose ourselves in light.'

(XLVII, 9-16)

When Tennyson here asks for the right to "clasp" once more, he is asking for something mundane: angels presumably are no more capable of hugging each other than raindrops are. But "Love on earth" (the only love he knows) demands division.

This concern helps explain the difficulty of the earlier image, "Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd." Tennyson seems to be calling on love and grief to clasp in the sense of bracketing each other, limiting each other. Grief must not become infinite, nor must love grow to become an indistinguishable angel love; both must be kept earthly and distinct, lest they be "drown'd" in a sea of light and infinity. And this is what the *In Memoriam* stanza manages to do, both in its shortened lines and in its claspings rhyme scheme: it stresses its own limits and recognizes the importance of division, even while the consistency of the rhyme scheme lends unity to the poem as a whole.

Section 1 usefully illustrates these effects of the stanza form. It is not, admittedly, the most captivating section of *In Memoriam*: it contains a rather obscure reference to the German poet Goethe (he is the one "who sings" in line 1), and its argument is not immediately clear. But this section boldly introduces the problem of fragmentation or self-division that occupies the whole poem. It begins in apparent self-confidence with the word "I" but then immediately questions what that "I" might mean. Goethe, it is pointed out, believed that people leave behind their former lives, their "dead selves," as they grow older, the way a snake sheds its skin; so "I" is not the same person from year to year.

Tennyson repudiates this view. There is some continuity, he insists, between me now and me then, before the death of Hallam. But the doubt has already been introduced, and it only grows more acute in the following section. Tennyson may well claim that he is not completely cut off from his former life, but it is far more difficult to say the same of Hallam. Having asserted that "I" exists as a continuous, unified self, Tennyson wishes to say the same of "you." As mentioned above, however, Hallam seems to have become many different selves: Hallam the memory, the corpse, the dream, the angel.

Wishing to address his friend but at a loss where to direct his speech, Tennyson turns to the yew tree in the graveyard:

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones  
That name the under-lying dead.

(II, 1–2)

Section I began with “I”; section II begins with “Yew,” but not the “you” Tennyson wished for. One might call this a pun, but that would be misleading. It is rather an indication of the difficulty of establishing a sense of identity after such a shattering event. The very layout of the poem reinforces the sense of unwanted multiplicity where there ought to be unity. The beginning of the poem looks like an epitaph carved on a headstone: the title is a Latin inscription—*In Memoriam A.H.H. Obiit MDCCCXXXIII*—and there follows a Roman numeral (I) above the opening section. Usually, however, one person gets only one headstone. Here on the other hand the original “epitaph” is followed by another, as if the first were insufficient. Even the Roman numerals seem to suggest something amiss: just after the first section has asserted the unity of “I,” we are confronted by “II,” as if “I” had divided nevertheless.

“You,” meanwhile, is even less stable, more difficult to locate. One of the most moving aspects of the opening sections is the difficulty Tennyson has in finding someone or something to address. He begins with “Old Yew” (II, 1), then turns to “O Sorrow” (III, 1), then “O heart” (IV, 5), “Dark house” (VII, 1), and finally “Fair ship” (IX, 1). When one loses the person one loves best, this is the quandary: the very person you would usually turn to in a time of grief is the one person you cannot find. It could be said that the closest Tennyson comes to locating Hallam in these opening sections is in section I, line 11: “Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss”—where the very sigh that escapes the speaker (“Ah”) contains Hallam’s initials. Hallam seems to be both everywhere and nowhere, to be divided into so many different selves as to be irrecoverable. The end of section IX suggests just how fragmented he has become:

My friend, the brother of my love;

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

Hallam is, within the space of five lines, a friend, a brother, a spouse, a mother, a more-than-brother. But none of these will quite do to represent him, nor can the whole of Tennyson’s actual family make up for his loss.

And yet for all the division of “I” and “you” that plagues the speaker

here, section IX also introduces the first note of comfort and consistency in the poem. After searching vainly for an object to whom, or to which, he can direct his lament, the poet here fixes on the ship, which he continues to address for the following ten sections. This may be a small comfort, but it is a certain one. It gives Tennyson a single point of concentration, and it gives the poem a sense of stability. Just as important, the ship represents a return of some sort: the movement is no longer all outward from the poet; now something is coming back to him, coming home. The newfound (if precarious) stability is evident in the opening stanza of section XVIII, when the ship finally arrives and delivers Hallam's body to his homeland.

'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand  
Where he in English earth is laid,  
And from his ashes may be made  
The violet of his native land.

We saw earlier, in discussing the opening of section I, that the eight-syllable line is usually too short to include a complete sentence. Here, however, Tennyson is at last collected enough to fit three complete clauses into the first line. " 'Tis well"—no, not quite that; but at least " 'tis something; we may stand" by his grave. He goes on in line 5 to say, " 'Tis little." It is little, but at least it is more than he had in the beginning; he has begun the process of reassembling the selves shattered by Hallam's sudden death.

## Faith, Science, and Other Critical Concerns

At the end of this volume are reprinted a number of essays representing a century of critical reaction to *In Memoriam*. Some of them, including those by Bradley, Ricks, and Peltason, address the question of the poem's unity; others focus on the poem's form, its language, its erotics, or its place in the elegiac tradition. One of the most persistent concerns (evident in the studies by Mattes and Willey) is also the one that most interested the first reviewers of *In Memoriam*: the conflict in the poem between religious faith and doubt, specifically doubt resulting from new scientific theories. The poem's framework is distinctly Christian: its time scheme, for instance—the three years of mourning—is marked out by the recurrence of Christmas at regular intervals (sections XXVIII–XXX, LXXVIII, and CIV–CV). Moreover, the great consolation on which the poem depends and concludes is the immortality of the individual soul, the assurance (as we have seen) that Hallam is in heaven and that "I shall know him when we meet" (XLVII, 8). Within this broad framework, however, there is plenty of room for doubt. Even the Christmas



poems seem far more concerned with the loss of Hallam than with possible religious consolations. And Tennyson has little to say for most received doctrine; rather, "There lives more faith in honest doubt," he judges, "than in half the creeds" (xcvi, 11–12). But the profoundest moments of religious questioning come when he considers the evidence of science.

Charles Darwin did not publish his treatise *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* until 1859, nine years after *In Memoriam* was published, but there was no dearth of troubling scientific theories earlier in the century. Tennyson was particularly aware of these theories: his poetry reflects a deeper concern with scientific developments than that of any other poet of his time; the allusions to astronomy and geology in *In Memoriam* reveal a sophisticated understanding of current ideas. It might seem odd for a poem of personal grief to refer to complex scientific concepts, but these allusions do not seem out of place, for two reasons. First, science was increasingly depicting both the universe and the human race as doomed to eventual extinction; yet Tennyson's poem is predicated upon an assurance of personal immortality, and such a contradiction could scarcely be ignored. Second, an evolutionary model of development is central to *In Memoriam* from the first section, which speculates whether individuals leave behind their "dead selves" in a constant progression forward. These questions lead naturally to broader speculations about similar evolutions in the natural world.

Doubts about the eternal nature of the world and of the soul had always existed and had been steadily accruing since the eighteenth century; hence there is no single scientist whose work can be said to be the source of the doubts expressed in *In Memoriam*. But we do know that Tennyson was particularly disturbed by reading Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830–33) in 1837. Lyell suggested that the earth's surface was constantly changing: natural forces, such as erosion, altered the landscape slowly but eternally. So whereas other scientists had proposed that extinct species had been wiped out by cataclysmic events that would not necessarily be repeated, Lyell reached quite a different conclusion. The same slow but steady forces that had changed the environment and extinguished earlier species were still in operation and would therefore extinguish us as well. This is the pitiless view Tennyson represents in sections LV and LVI, some of the most despairing in the poem. "Nature, red in tooth and claw," tells humankind,

'I care for nothing, all shall go.

'Thou makest thine appeal to me:  
I bring to life, I bring to death: