

Nature in
**In memoriam by Alfred, Lord
Tennyson**



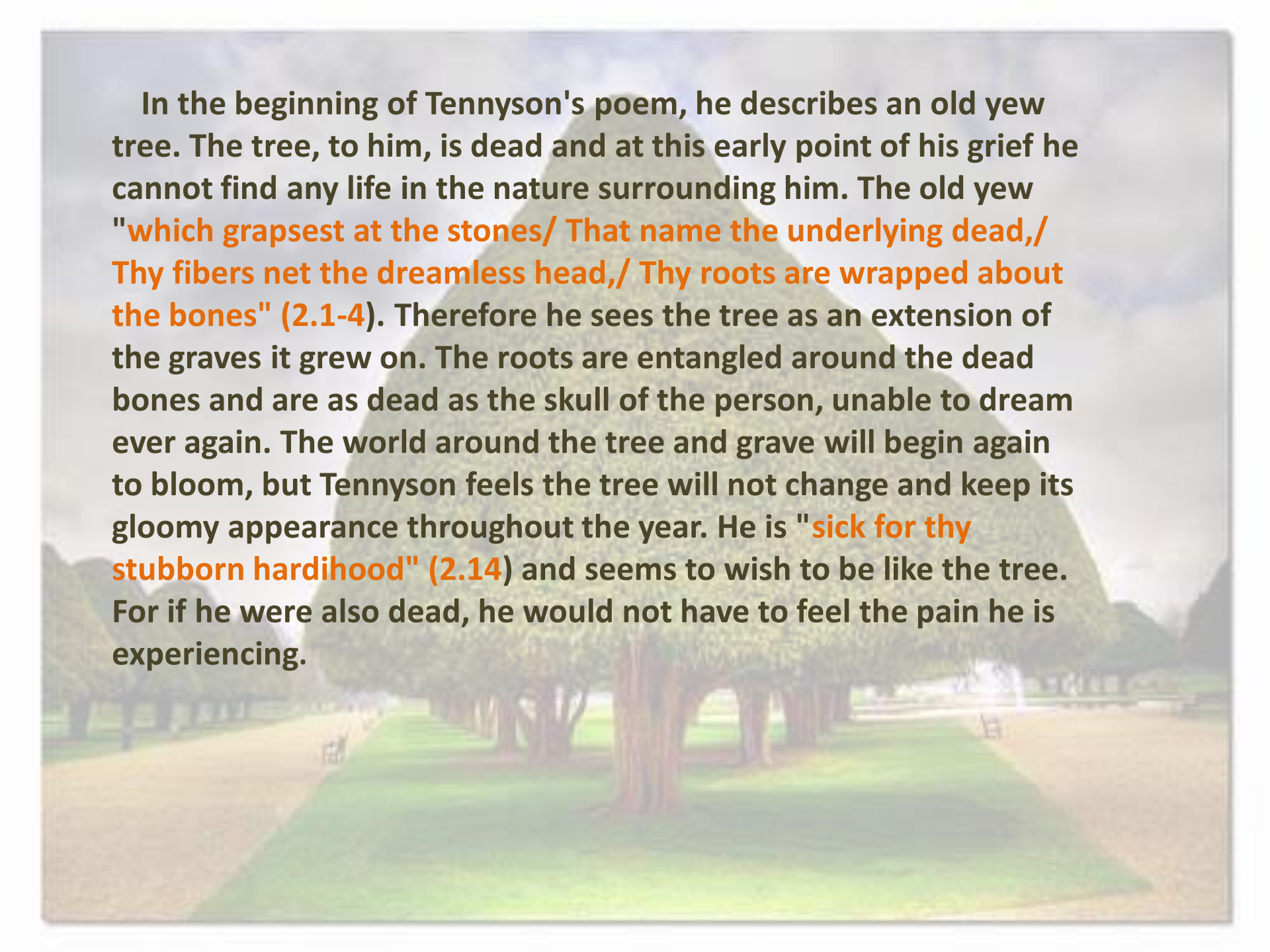
In Memoriam is a long poem written by the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and completed in 1849. It was composed as an elegy to his friend, Hallam, who died at the age of 22 from a fever. The poem consists of many smaller poems, written in iambic tetrameter with an ABBA rhyme scheme. Besides it is divided into 133 cantos (including the prologue and epilogue), and in contrast to its constant and regulated metrical form, it deals with different subjects such as: profound spiritual experiences, nostalgic reminiscence, philosophical speculation, Romantic fantasizing and even occasional verse. At the death of his best friend, Tennyson seeks to understand his senseless death with an exploration of life's meaning. This one man's death spurs this epic elegy to theological and scientific discussions of the purpose of pain in life. In In Memoriam doubt and faith become the key elements in the pursuit of a clear answer from God. The man who inspired this pivotal poem was Hallam.



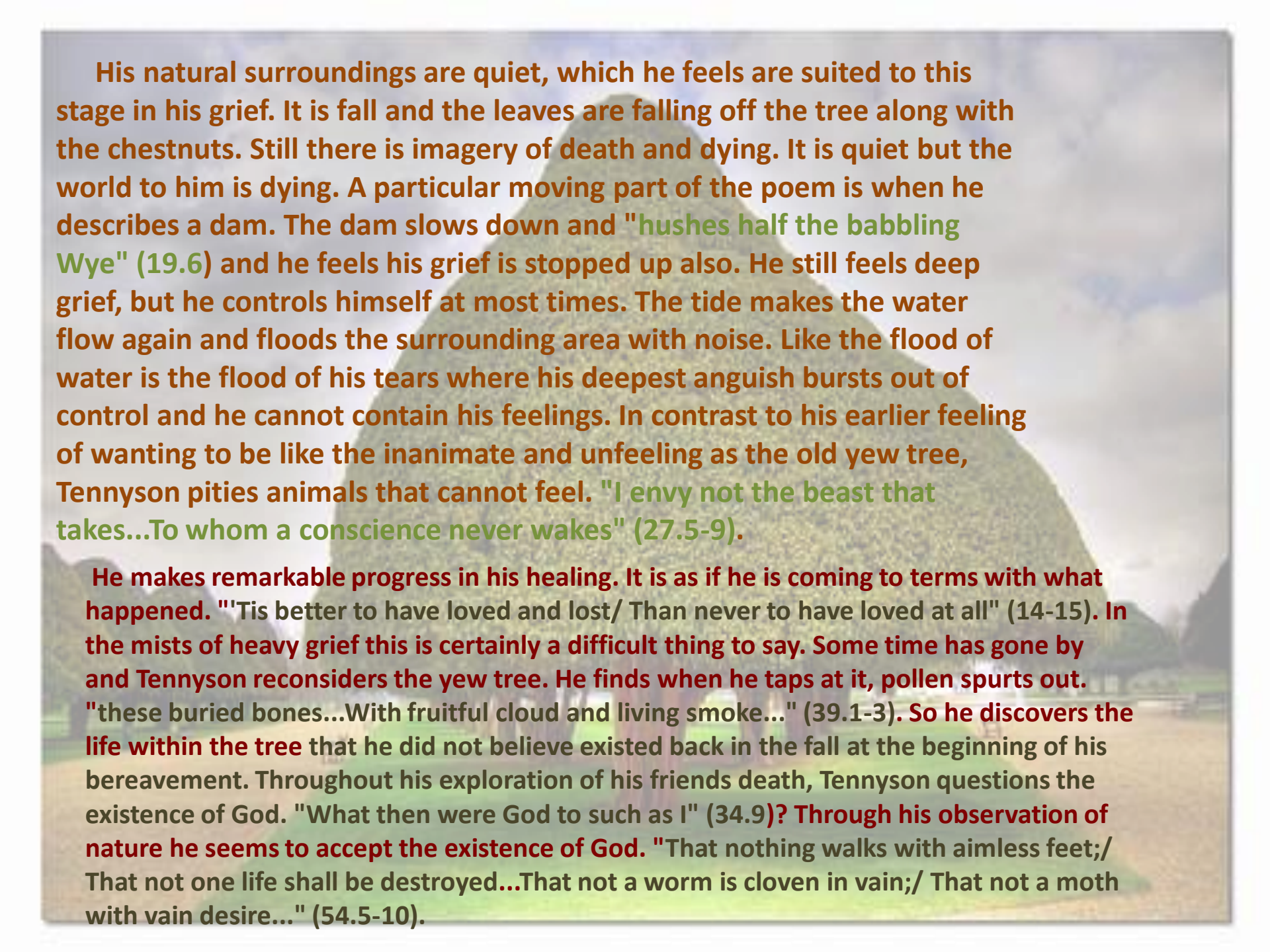


Nature in In Memoriam

In Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, he utilizes many different aspects of nature as metaphors to describe his emotions after the death of a close friend. In writing the poem, Tennyson was influenced by the ideas of evolution presented in *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* which had been published in 1844, and had caused a storm of controversy about the theological implications of impersonal nature functioning without direct divine intervention. Throughout the poem, the poet refers to many aspects of nature such as trees, water, and wind and so on and so forth. He projects his emotions, whether sad or happy, on those natural elements.



In the beginning of Tennyson's poem, he describes an old yew tree. The tree, to him, is dead and at this early point of his grief he cannot find any life in the nature surrounding him. The old yew **"which grapsest at the stones/ That name the underlying dead,/ Thy fibers net the dreamless head,/ Thy roots are wrapped about the bones"** (2.1-4). Therefore he sees the tree as an extension of the graves it grew on. The roots are entangled around the dead bones and are as dead as the skull of the person, unable to dream ever again. The world around the tree and grave will begin again to bloom, but Tennyson feels the tree will not change and keep its gloomy appearance throughout the year. He is **"sick for thy stubborn hardihood"** (2.14) and seems to wish to be like the tree. For if he were also dead, he would not have to feel the pain he is experiencing.



His natural surroundings are quiet, which he feels are suited to this stage in his grief. It is fall and the leaves are falling off the tree along with the chestnuts. Still there is imagery of death and dying. It is quiet but the world to him is dying. A particular moving part of the poem is when he describes a dam. The dam slows down and "hushes half the babbling Wye" (19.6) and he feels his grief is stopped up also. He still feels deep grief, but he controls himself at most times. The tide makes the water flow again and floods the surrounding area with noise. Like the flood of water is the flood of his tears where his deepest anguish bursts out of control and he cannot contain his feelings. In contrast to his earlier feeling of wanting to be like the inanimate and unfeeling as the old yew tree, Tennyson pities animals that cannot feel. "I envy not the beast that takes...To whom a conscience never wakes" (27.5-9).

He makes remarkable progress in his healing. It is as if he is coming to terms with what happened. "'Tis better to have loved and lost/ Than never to have loved at all" (14-15). In the mists of heavy grief this is certainly a difficult thing to say. Some time has gone by and Tennyson reconsiders the yew tree. He finds when he taps at it, pollen spurts out. "these buried bones...With fruitful cloud and living smoke..." (39.1-3). So he discovers the life within the tree that he did not believe existed back in the fall at the beginning of his bereavement. Throughout his exploration of his friend's death, Tennyson questions the existence of God. "What then were God to such as I" (34.9)? Through his observation of nature he seems to accept the existence of God. "That nothing walks with aimless feet;/ That not one life shall be destroyed...That not a worm is cloven in vain;/ That not a moth with vain desire..." (54.5-10).

He views even the smallest creatures with having a purpose. Therefore his friends life held purpose and his death was not in vain. He still struggles with God and nature though. He wonders "Are God and Nature then at strife..." (55.5). He sees nature as destructive, bringing to fruit just one seed out of fifty. He wonders how God and nature co-exist. Nature does not care specifically for life. She brings life and death, as for the spirit--that is for God. So he gropes "To what I feel is Lord of all,/ and faintly trust the larger hope" (55.18-19). At this point he has mixed emotions. He sees the re-birth and hope for life in nature but he also sees the destructiveness of nature. After the one year anniversary of Hallam's death, Tennyson looks forward to spring. "O sweet new-year delaying long;/ Thou doest expectant nature wrong...Can troubles live with April days,/ Or sadness in the summer moons" (83.2-8)? So he is looking forward to having the earth re-awaken and come alive. He feels the energy and life of spring will help him with his sadness. Being surrounded by such activity makes it hard for one to be depressed. Not only is the earth being reborn but his spirit is also.

He sees his grief as causing him to doubt God, but all along he knew that God was there. Tennyson realizes that God cannot be completely understandable to man. He also sees nature as a force of God, something that God uses to make men. God through nature helps men understand themselves, their life and death.



There is throughout the poem a nonlinear narration, due to the cycle technique used by Tennyson in order to illustrate certain fundamental laws behind human time and natural time, Tennyson's notions of time are initially dependent upon the strict division between human time and time existing in nature, the first is linear, the second one is cyclical. This concept is exposed in Section 22. In section 22 it is described a sort of experience of the author and Hallam that consists in a fall out of natural or seasonal time, they coexist with the natural passing of the seasons and at the end this cyclical time changes into a more linear time endowed by the immanence of death, represented by "the Shadow"; it is more explicit in another verse this concept of seasonal time "And every winter change to spring" in section 54 line 16. In my opinion winter represents the death of nature, but the difference is that nature regenerates, whereas human being only dies. I agree with the opinion that Tennyson, throughout the poem, tries to reconcile the natural time with the human time, but I think that he cannot.

'And we with singing cheer'd the way,
And, crown'd with all the season lent,
From April on to April went,
And glad at heart from May to May:'



Tennyson crafts a woman to represent nature, but "she cries from cliff-top", she is not a nurturer who will not betray but one who cares for nothing, Tennyson's woman does not feed human mind, that is to say nature does not teach anything to the poet, it is not the source for the poet's imagination.

**'That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;'**

He says that Nature does not care about the human subject, as a lot of subjects have passed by and have gone after his existence. The verses of this stanza are written as if those were Nature's words on the issue. As if it was Nature herself who was talking to us And Tennyson's ideas on Nature as an evil being, as a destructive force, ideas explained in the next section of this research, are well reflected in this stanza.

In the second stanza Nature continues speaking and expresses her power to give and take away life at her will, an action that has to be done without having on account anything else but her desire and no reason at all. The final verse of this second stanza links with the beginning of the third one where the idea of man as Nature's last work, is expressed. This idea of man as the last work of creation brings to my memory the Christian theory of the creation of the world, in which God created the man after having created the world, the scenery where man was to be set. But in this case the creator is Nature instead of God.



Water is a dominant image throughout the text of In Memoriam that is employed by Tennyson to relate his emotional and intellectual state to the reader as he struggles to come to grips with the loss of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. His use of water imagery is not strictly limited to the body of In Memoriam however, and, examining all of his works, we see that it has been a constant yet dynamic image throughout his entire career, and that it is repetitively employed with various intended meanings. In Memoriam , besides being his greatest work, also has the distinction of being the work in which the intentions behind Tennyson's water imagery undergo a dramatic shift from carrying an overall negative connotation to a much more positive one - a shift that is made entirely possible through the language that he employs in their depiction. In Memoriam highlights Tennyson's use of water imagery and shows how, through the use of simple yet multi-layered language, he shapes this constant, familiar image over and over again.

Tennyson seems exceptionally strong in his ability to use a variety of forms of nature to achieve his point. He demonstrates that man and nature are bound together on earth. Tennyson seems to be the poet who has achieved the most reconciliation with nature imagery and his poetry.



Resources:

<http://mural.uv.es/garofalo/Nature%20in%20Tennyson%20s%20poem%20In%20Memoriam.htm>

<http://mural.uv.es/memaro2/secondpaper.html>

<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=20118>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_Memoriam_A.H.H.#Nature.2C_Red_in_Tooth_and_Claw