



The Epic Battle Of God And Nature In Tennyson's *In Memoriam*

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*"We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow." (Tennyson 339)*

God and Nature are at war in Tennyson's elegy *In Memoriam*. As the speaker experiences a "darkness" of doubt he reaches for a "beam" of "knowledge," from God or Nature, to save him. These two opposing forces dialogue within the poem to reveal a speaker who is both faithful to and doubtful of Christianity. The duality of this elegy marks the poem as "epic" in its attack on the meaning of life and death. Is man only born to die? Elegies are consoling poems meant to bring comfort to the author during his process of grieving. Tennyson not only battles with death but also life. He takes this traditional style a step further and confronts God with the standard question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" At the death of his best friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, 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 Arthur Henry Hallam, whose influence in Tennyson's life and heart can be seen in every line. Tennyson met Hallam at Cambridge University in 1829, where Hallam was regarded as a brilliant young man. They became the best of friends in a short amount of time. Hallam became secretly engaged to Emily Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson's sister, and they planned to be married. Sadly, Tennyson's relationship ended abruptly, when during a trip to Vienna with his father. Hallam died suddenly at sea of a cerebral hemorrhage on September 15, 1833. Tennyson learned of this in October and was

crushed by the sudden tragic death of his bright, young friend. Their four-year friendship and the senselessness of Hallam's death sent Tennyson on a quest to explain the meaning of life. During the seventeen-year period from 1833 to 1850, when *In Memoriam, of Arthur Henry Hallam* was published, Tennyson found the strength to voice a world of pain and grief in his pursuit of a Godly answer. He took his knowledge of the natural world and challenged his personal beliefs, questioning the creation of man, who seems only made to die.

It took Hallam's body four months at sea before it returned to England and was properly buried. The significance of the number four becomes the compositional form with which Tennyson would memorialize his friend. Their four-year friendship becomes the four sections of *In Memoriam*, which are divided by three Christmases. At the end of the third Christmas the speaker makes an allusion to Christ's death and resurrection after the third day, which becomes the third Christmas. The three sections become the three days of dealing with death followed by a new celebration of life in the fourth section, similar to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The speaker rises from his grief to a new understanding of life. After the third Christmas in *In Memoriam*, Tennyson accepts the reality that as a race destined to die, mankind cannot know everything. In this elegy composed of 133 sections, close to 700 stanzas, and about 3,000 lines, Tennyson attempts through his personal grief to discover the meaning of life. Nature or God stole his friend from him and he seeks in this poem to explain the apparent contradiction that these two forces bring.

The Victorian period introduces a multitude of questions about Christianity in opposition to science. Tennyson takes on these opposing universes, those of the believer and the doubter, presenting their arguments and stances in his elegy. This duality raises *In Memoriam* beyond the standard elegiac form. John D. Rosenberg, author of the book *Elegy For An Age*, says "It is a

slow, winding procession that, like mourning, circles back upon itself even as it progresses. It is six times longer than [Shelley's] 'Adonis,' fifteen times longer than [Milton's] 'Lycidas' (Rosenberg 41). Not only is Tennyson's elegy lengthy, but also it is fashioned in a personal and universal style creating a realistic "world" of grief. Alfred Lord Tennyson changes the classic English elegiac form in his poem *In Memoriam*, making it easily accessible yet thought-provokingly profound. Post-structuralism categorizes Tennyson's use of language as binary opposition—where one element combats another. As a devout Christian and amateur scientist, Tennyson shares with the reader his own internal battle through his language, which rises and collapses like waves of grief. The duality that these two opposite sides brings is conceptualized eloquently by post-structuralist Isobel Armstrong, author of the article titled "The Collapse of Object and Subject: In Memoriam." She says, "In Memoriam is a poem about death trying to be about life" (151). In essence Tennyson is trying to explain the point to life through the senseless death of his best friend. If God truly gives life, why does Nature take it away? This question is a sample of what Tennyson's poetic voice addresses in this poem as he seeks to understand life through an exploration of Science in the natural world.

Tennyson finds the beauty of nature to have flaws and blind faith in God is examined. God and Nature are put at points of opposition as the paradox of life and its purpose is explored. To open his poem the speaker says:

*"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;*

*Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot/
Is on the skull which thou hast made"* (Tennyson 339).

How can man trust God when he has no “proof,” but only blind “faith” and “love”? This is the faith behind Christianity and the ignorance that it implies. Why did God create man only to see him destroyed by death? These two questions arouse a seesaw of emotions felt in the speaker’s internal conflict between the natural world full of concrete facts and the unknown God that is worshiped without question. These two points of opposition, Christianity and science, bring a duality to Tennyson’s elegy providing multiple readings for both the believer and the doubter. The battle between these two concepts in the poem displays poetic elements that are exceedingly different from other English elegiac poets.

The poetic voice represents a language that captures the intricate interchange of grief and peace. Tennyson provides a complex persona in this elegy, as he represents not only personal but universal pain. Timothy Peltason, author of the book *Reading In Memoriam*, eloquently describes the speaker when he says “By ‘the poet’ I do not mean the historical Tennyson, but the first person of ‘In Memoriam,’ a figure who inhabits the poem, but also knows that he is creating it in words and meters: not Tennyson, but not just a character or ‘the speaker.’ The evaluative question is not answered, but is at least asked more sympathetically and more searchingly, when we recognize in this way that Tennyson has gone before us and so arranged matters that the mourner’s self-analysis is also a poet’s self-criticism” (8). The vast importance of the speaker’s role is revealed by Peltason, showing that the poet has a job to voice not only a “self-criticism,” but also “the mourner’s self-analysis” when confronting death. So to fulfill this goal Tennyson uses a word game creating a paradox for the reader. This linguistic joust is found when Tennyson says in section sixteen,

*“What words are these have fall’n from me?
Can calm despair and wild unrest
Be tenants of a single breast,
Or sorrow such a changeling be?”* (Tennyson 349).

These two “tenants of a single breast” are “calm despair and wild unrest.” The “calm despair” is the inevitability of death and the “wild unrest” is the emotional response to death. He also explains the roller coaster that “sorrow” can be, a “changeling” jerking him from thoughts that both exalt and crucify his understanding of the world and his place. This dichotomy of language only emphasizes the internal conflict of the speaker between two giants—nature and God. Tennyson’s persona in these short lines voices the obligation of the poem to address difficult issues that lead both a believer and a doubter down a hard road filled with questions. Rosenberg points to an interesting aspect of Tennyson’s language when he says, “The word ‘calm,’ repeated eleven times, pulses like a muffled heartbeat that soothes and disquiets. Tennyson achieves the illusion of movement over vast spaces virtually without the aid of verbs, extending the copulative ‘is’ of line 1 through all five stanzas” (36). His mental combat between the natural world and spiritual world brings the duality of interpretations to a head.

The institution of science can lead a devout Christian to doubt his faith and Christianity as a religion is tested by scientific facts. Tennyson asks the world around him, “Are God and Nature then at strife,/ That Nature lends such evil dreams?” (371). “God and Nature” are at “strife” in *In Memoriam* and through the speaker’s reveries he questions the standing of both institutions, siding sometimes with a believer and sometimes with a doubter. What caused this speaker’s conflict of beliefs? Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* is a reaction poem to the changing time in which he lived. T.S. Eliot, in his essay “In Memoriam,” remarks about this period that, “Tennyson lived in a time which was already acutely time-conscious: a great many things seemed to be happening, railways were being built, discoveries were being made, the face of the world was changing. That was a time busy in keeping up to date. It had, for the most part, no hold on permanent things, on permanent truths about man and God and life and death” (18). The

Victorian period was electrically charged with innovative ideas like the railways of the Industrial Revolution and discoveries in science such as evolution. It is easy to lose faith in the intangible God at such a time. The Industrial Revolution brought the machine to man, a mechanism that was inspiring but threatening also. Doubts emerged from this transitional period as a progression of modern man's intellect caused many to question their dependence on an unseen God.

Tennyson, an avid philosopher, asks the classic philosophical question, "What am I?" If he turns his back on religion, will science be able to fill the void? (Tennyson 371). With these changing times he shows this disquieting reality when he says,

*"Or has the shock, so harshly given,
Confused me like the unhappy bark*

*That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
And staggers blindly ere she sink?
And stunn'd me from my power to think,
And all my knowledge of myself;*

*And made me that delirious man
Whose fancy fuses old and new,
And flashes into false and true,
And mingles all without a plan?"* (Tennyson 350).

These modern accomplishments of man through nature have "stunn'd" the speaker, making him question "all" the "knowledge" of himself—what he is and how he is defined by the world around him. These questions make him "delirious" and all that he thought of as "new" suddenly becomes "old" and he loses the meaning of "false and true," due to the fast pace of change. The speaker searches blindly in a sea of darkness where the "plan" for man becomes lost in the confusion of abundant "knowledge." To understand the natural order of the world, the speaker must know why man was created. The instability of this time period echoes in the dialogue of the poem. Tennyson captures the changing reality of England with the discoveries of science and the public questions that they bring to the temple of religion. If man can make such

wonderful discoveries, does he actually need faith in a higher power or can he trust his own intellect? The stage is set as the drama between science and Christianity sends the speaker on an internal voyage through a sea of disquieting doubts. He searches for a lighthouse of hope that will point to a new understanding of his place in the world.

Tennyson favors his religious upbringing, but when tragedy strikes he cannot help but ask God, "Was man only made to die?" The speaker conveys his split with orthodox Christian beliefs and expresses his search for meaning when he says,

*"Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;*

*That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;*

*That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain."* (Tennyson 371).

The "pangs of nature" are the reality that the natural world is self sufficient and therefore independent of God's intervening hand. He hopes "that nothing walks with aimless feet," but he cannot help but fear that God is "casting" aside "life" "as rubbish" into a "void." When he has met his quota, perhaps then, he will reveal his cause for death. In the second stanza the speaker confronts the logic behind the creation of death and the personality of God. The speaker confronts Nature or God's design of Nature when he says in the third stanza that a "worm" is not made "in vain" or a "moth" with the "desire" for better knowledge is not "shrivell'd in a "fruitless" pursuit of "fire." So the speaker defends his pursuit and inquisition of God and Nature and he hopes his desire for truth and meaning is not lost. He hopes that life is not

meaningless or thoughtlessly “destroy’d.” He relies on a dimming faith that “somehow good will be the final goal of ill,” that “taints of blood” which cause a man to be destined for death will have a purpose and an end result (371). Tennyson’s language in this section shows a diversity of interpretation as he is both defending God, by hoping that good will conquer bad but also questioning his motives. T.S. Eliot captures the speaker’s emotions when he says, “He was desperately anxious to hold the faith of the believer, without being very clear about what he wanted to believe: he was capable of illumination which he was incapable of understanding” (16). At multiple parts in the poem Tennyson makes these beautiful proclamations of faith but in such a way that his belief in and comprehension of God are questioned. Meaningless death spurs the speaker to engage God in an inquisition of his reasoning.

However, Science becomes a substitute for Christianity as the speaker begins to worship the natural world with all its concrete laws. Denying the intangible worship of an unseen God and embracing the natural world, Tennyson allows the possibility that science can answer the questions where God cannot and that the only peace is found in natural death. The speaker says,

*“What then were God to such as I?
’Twere hardly worth my while to choose
Of things all mortal, or to use
A little patience ere I die;*

*’Twere best at once to sink to peace;
Like birds the charming serpent draws,
To drop head-foremost in the jaws
Of vacant darkness, and to cease”* (Tennyson 360-1).

The proclamation here is one of a confused theist who thinks it would be “best at once to sink to peace” but cannot find the way. Doubts, like a “charming serpent,” draw him into its “jaws” making him trust in “things mortal” that he can see and deny what he cannot. His “patience” with God fails him and he cannot help but worry about “death.” So with this free will he

abandons his religion and finds comfort in nature's "jaws." He would rather "cease" to be than be kept in a blind ignorant faith. J. W. Hayes, author of the article, "Tennyson and Scientific Theology," says "Alfred Tennyson, by life of purity and patient research into the secrets of the Universe, by his knowledge of Astronomy, Inorganic Chemistry, and Geology, was pre-eminently fitted to receive higher truths from Nature study" (Hayes 35). Tennyson was brave enough to interrogate his faith and to pledge allegiance to the laws of nature. He was not afraid to test the rising intelligence of man that discards a benevolent design.

Constant doubts cause the speaker to question the message from God to man, which lies behind a veil of mystery where no man can understand. A continual theme that encourages these doubts about God's existence is mentioned as a "veil." The speaker confesses that if God would lift the veil then maybe he could believe:

*"O life as futile, then as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil."* (Tennyson 373).

He knows that "life" is "frail," but is it "futile"? Can he receive an "answer or redress" from God that can provide "hope" for the existence of man? If God would only answer the speaker's pleas then he could find peace with the necessity of this veil. Hayes answers the speaker's cry saying, "All, he insists, lies potentially in the unfolding Universe, but will be revealed by and by ('Behind the veil, behind the veil'), when progressive development will have reached its climax in another sphere and age" (24). Nature will provide the answers for the speaker. When man has discovered all of its natural laws in the universe, the veil will be torn. Deism is exalted at this point in the poem where the speaker believes that discovering the mechanizations of Nature—will possibly help mankind control his own destiny. The speaker mocks the blind worship of Christians when he describes a scene saying,

*"The hall with harp and carol rang:
They sang of what is wise and good
And graceful. In the center stood
A statue veil'd, to which they sang;*

*And which, though veil'd, was known to me,
The shape of him I loved, and love
For ever: then flew in a dove
And brought a summons from the sea: (...)*

*From deep to deep, to where we saw
A great ship lift her shining sides." (Tennyson 406-7).*

He questions the logic of worshipping something that no one knows anything about. Christians worship this mysterious God for he is a "wise," "good," and "graceful" being; but how does anyone know, as he is a "statue veil'd," filled with un-definability? The "veil'd" meaning for his friend's death "flew in" like "a dove" of peace, but this "summons from the sea" does not bring him rest. A man cannot trust what he cannot see, so the reason for his friend's death and the plan of God is "veil'd" from the speaker.

In contrast to God, the natural world lies open to man but also partially hidden when the speaker says,

*"I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within." (Tennyson 342).*

Nature at points defends this veil around God for it "half reveals and half conceals" the purpose of the soul of man. Continually, the language in this elegy imitates the subject in discussion. In these lines the side of the speaker is veiled as much as the purpose of life. Armstrong points this out when she says, "Nature is estranged from language, providing no analogies for it and no connections with it except in so far as it is like words, which, the poem shows, are external forms, refusing the vital change of meaning, the soul within, which renews the life of language,

because they cannot sustain analogy and relationship. They are 'like Nature', empty of self-renewing life, a discord. If there is a soul within language and Nature it is incompletely realized, half concealed, half revealed" (Armstrong 137). The language reflects the inner turmoil of the speaker; so the side in which the speaker believes to be true remains both "concealed" and "revealed" just as Nature. The speaker therefore cannot find the answer to all of life's mysteries because Nature and God are hiding behind this veil of ambiguity. Though he questions their logic and makeup, his interrogation fails to strip their masks away.

If God made all things, does man truly have free will or is the world merely God's game of manipulation? The speaker asks this question in hopes of probing the personality of God, sparring with him in order to gain some response. In section 36 the speaker voices his conflict with free will saying,

*"Through truths in manhood darkly join,
Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
We yield all blessing to the name
Of Him that made them current coin;*

*For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,
Where Truth in closest words shall fail,
When Truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors"* (Tennyson 361-2).

If these "blessings" of "manhood" were made by "Him" then they are not the fruit of free will or chance—they are the product of his "darkly joined" design. The "truths" about "manhood's" design are "seated in" a "mystic frame" that is oblique and impersonal, yet mankind gives praise and "blessings" to him that "made" this "current coin." So the creator, God, who made man with these "darkly joined" flaws gets praise for a flawed mint. The "Wisdom" of God was wasted in the design of these "mortal powers," since the flaws in the mold echo in man's actions as he "fails" by "word" and "tale" to deliver "truth." Since the "truth" of God's plan remains opaque

then the truths that man finds will also be unclear. If God really does give man free will and alternative paths then, as Hayes says, "But anon comes the question, Why is all so obscure?" (Hayes 23). Does mankind really have control over his life? Does God have something to hide? This struggle of the soul is outlined by Hayes, who says, "The struggle of the soul from darkness to light is well shown in parts of "In Memoriam;" more especially (...) when he was tempted to think that, after all there was no direct evidence of God, the Soul, or Immortality. Doubt said, 'Believe no more.' Nothing exists but the materialistic." (Hayes 18-19). A total abandonment of God can only lead to a field of questions that science must answer. If there is no benevolent God and he sees mankind as a science project, then the speaker can turn his back on the divine scientist and face nature alone.

The deep sorrow that brings these doubts is schooled by Nature and healed. The curing medicine of science and its human wisdom has a calming affect on the speaker's heart:

*"From art, from nature, from the schools,
Let random influences glance,
Like light in many a shiver'd lance
That breaks about the dappled pools:*

*The lightest wave of thought shall lisp,
The fancy's tenderest eddy wreathe,
The slightest air of song shall breathe
To make the sullen surface crisp." (Tennyson 368)*

"The sullen surface" is his heart filled with grief turning "crisp" at the knowledge gained "from nature," "from the schools," and from "random influences." He does not need a higher God to justify his identity. So, he finds comfort and relief in the natural world around him. He also finds a power within himself where every "thought" brings a celebration of the intelligent accomplishments of man. He chooses to depend on his own understanding of the world as science reveals it to him. T.S. Eliot marks this praise of Nature when he says, "that strange

abstraction, 'Nature', becomes a real god or goddess, perhaps more real, at moments to Tennyson than God. The hope of immortality is confused (typical of the period) with the hope of the gradual and steady improvement of this world" (Eliot 16). As the poem progresses, Nature turns into a powerful "God or Goddess" that challenges the speaker's Christian beliefs.

Sadly, this exaltation of Nature grows cold in the sea of doubt. Becoming a perversion of Romanticism, the aesthetically pleasing Goddess called *Mother Nature* becomes a malevolent, ugly being. The speaker says,

*"The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run;
A web is wov'n across the sky;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun:*

*'And all the phantom, Nature, stands—
With all her music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own,—
A hollow form with empty hands.'" (Tennyson 341).*

The "phantom Nature" with her sweet song has an intoxicating effect on the speaker, as he admits several times that Nature "echoes" a sorrow similar to his "own," that leads him to doubts. He explains these doubts as "hollow" leading to "empty hands" that are either Mother Nature's hands or "hollow" questions that have no answers. The mystery surrounding this temptress is a veil—a "web is woven across the sky" blocking her form and "cry" that becomes the product of man's presence on earth. The speaker's slow crawl from Nature continues when he says,

*"That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,*

*I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs*

That slope through darkness up to God,

*I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.” (Tennyson 371-2).*

He finds it interesting that, like God, Mother Nature plants many seeds but only “one” springs to life or “bears” fruit, displaying her cruelty, that so many are given life but only “one” seems to thrive. He does not like the design of Mother Nature, so he rests on Christianity and at the “world’s altar-stairs” he looks up from the “darkness” of Mother Nature to “God.” With “lame hands of faith” he gathers his “dust” of doubts and proclaims a “trust in the larger hope” that God does have a plan for man.

A complete mental turn back to God happens in section 55 where the speaker defends God after meeting this “phantom Nature” and finding her not very comforting. He says,

“Man, her last work, who seem’d so fair.(...)

*Who trusted God was love indeed,
And love Creation’s final law—
Though Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek’d against his creed—*

*Who loved, who suffer’d countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal’d within the iron hills?*

*No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music match’d with him.” (Tennyson 372-3).*

There is a dark element to the grasp of this cold female with a lack of care for human life. Like an animal she is “red in tooth and claw” and “ravine.” There is no warmth or solace in her “iron hills” or comfort in the destiny of man to die in a void and be “blown about the desert” as “dust.”

Though mankind may “battle for truth, the Just”, in life as revealed through the findings of science, the only reward is death with nothing beyond. In the last stanza, he recalls the dinosaurs who in their “prime” and “slime” lived at one with Nature, but were eventually killed off by Mother Nature in the Ice Age. He fears that mankind may suffer the same fate if he totally abandons God. If mankind is no different from these dinosaurs, then man will just die and turn into “dust,” like them. Is this all that a study in geology can teach us—that all organisms are moving toward death in a cycle to become a part of a new life, either flora or fauna.? This fictionalization of Nature as a phantasmal female form explains the instability of the speaker’s beliefs as he flips so fluidly from trusting Nature to trusting God. This level of ambiguity makes for multiple interpretations of the speaker’s perspective. In the cold clutches of Mother Nature the speaker finds reason to hope in the existence of a divine Father and the peace of rest in death.

Contrasting these cold realities of Mother Nature, Tennyson seeks to explore the Biblical facts of Christianity. In an attempt to persuade God to perform more miracles the speaker references Biblical stories, the only facts to God’s divine plan. He says,

*“When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
And home to Mary’s house return’d,
Was this demanded—if he yearn’d
To hear her weeping by his grave?*

*Where wert thou, brother, those four days?
There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.”* (Tennyson 359).

In the New Testament Lazarus, a dead friend of Christ, “left his charnel-cave” or burial vault at Jesus’ command. Was it necessary for God to hear Mary “weeping by his grave” in order to bring him back to life? With the allusion to this story he pleads for God to perform a miracle and bring his friend back to life. If he did arise, then he would give God greater “praise” if he were

given the chance to tell about this experience “to die.” What remains ambiguous in section 31 is the speaker’s tone as he considers the mystery of death and what happens after it. He wants to believe the validity of this Christian story, but wonders why Lazarus left us no true account of what happened to him when he died. Tennyson needs answers and thinks God would be more praised if he answered these questions.

Following the preceding section the speaker alludes to the story of Mary Magdalene, who bathed Christ’s feet with her tears. He says,

*“All subtle thought, all curious fears,
Borne down by gladness so complete,
She bows, she bathes the Saviour’s feet
With costly spikenard and with tears.”* (Tennyson 359)

The “thoughts” of doubt and “curious fears” that Mary had turned to a “gladness so complete” when she saw Christ. This relates a hope that the speaker has that once he has worked through his doubts and fears he will be like her, penitent, and the “tears” of pain will turn to joy. After this prayer in the following stanza the speaker asks God why he cannot bless him the way he has others? He wonders:

*“Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure;
What souls possess themselves so pure,
Or is there blessedness like theirs?”* (Tennyson 360).

Does he have to be a “faithful prayer” like these Biblical characters in order for God to answer his pleas? Is there “love” “higher” than his? The purity that they were able to obtain through Christ, did it make them more worthy to obtain “blessings?” These questions capture the passion that the speaker had trying to understand why God lets bad things happen. Hayes says, “He was certainly more a Christian than a mere Theist, or else he could not have left on record such beautiful allusions to the faith as we know it” (12). There is no questioning the speaker’s devout

religion, but undeniably there is an uncertainty to man's purpose and God's personality. These allusions to the Bible show his knowledge of the documented cases of divine intervention, and his search for a Godly answer to his questions.

These biblical references lead the speaker to make himself a prophet for the common man, filled with grief. In selective moments in the text the speaker casts aside Nature and God to believe in his own capabilities absent of a higher order. He says,

*"I wander'd from the noisy town,
I found a wood with thorny boughs:
I took the thorns to bind my brows,
I wore them like a civic crown"* (Tennyson 379).

He hears the outcry from the "noisy town," which is the public, and he takes their hard "thorny" questions to his brow for contemplation. Through this "civic crown" he becomes a hero able to voice the issues of the people, confronting God and Nature. Like a perversion of Jesus Christ, with his "crown of thorns," from the New Testament, the speaker proclaims himself a God of intellect, able to ask the right questions and obtain the right answers. He is concerned for the loss of man in elements of this poem, not for the explanation of Nature or the gain of God. This poem is centered on the explanation of the purpose of life for mankind, asking God, Nature, and himself to find the best answer.

Just as Christ rose from the dead after three days, Tennyson seems to come back to life himself after the first three sections of this elegy. At the beginning of the fourth and final section God answers Tennyson's questions. The speaker at this point decides, after years of grief, to forget the past and open his mind to a peace, which God provides. With the Christmas bells ringing the speaker says,

*"Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;*

Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

*Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true. (...)*

*Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good. (...)*

*Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.” (Tennyson 409-10)*

In section 105 the speaker abandons all the doubts that led him to “false pride” and “civic slander” in “spite” of God. This is his point of epiphany where he chooses not to be sad any longer. He chooses to trust “truth and right” and “common love of good.” So all that God stands for he wants to believe in and trust his pure laws. In the last stanza he casts aside the “darkness of the land” of doubt, choosing to follow the loving “Christ to be.” He has run out of words to battle God and he knows that the greater good is his purpose for man. Through God’s divine intervention, Nature and God are joined together and are designed for the betterment and knowledge of man. Hayes says, “His faith carried him far ahead to a time when ‘we shall know as we are known,’ no more seeing God or Nature ‘through a glass darkly,’ but understanding the Universe as a whole” (12-3). The speaker now understands that God and Nature are integral parts of the universe and work to define one another’s plan. In the following section he comes to understand that all men are moving toward something divinely crafted in Nature.

In Memoriam was a precursor to Charles Darwin’s, book *The Origin of Species*, which teaches the principles of evolution as rising through adaptation to a superior form. Through Tennyson’s interest in geology, he found Sir Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*. Lyell was

the first who observed that the world made gradual changes, not sudden changes as many believed. Lyell was the first to publish all the findings in geology and make them accessible to the world. Tennyson accepted his beliefs on the evolution of the world and the Ice Age's affect on living creatures. From this knowledge of the progression of the world the speaker says at the close of the poem,

*"Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand
Is Nature like an open book;*

*No longer half-akin to brute,
For all we thought, and loved, and did,
And hoped, and suffer'd, is but seed
Of what in them is flower and fruit;*

*Whereof the man, that with me trod
This planet, was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God—*

*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." (Tennyson 428).*

The first "noble type" obtained by man, who was ahead of his "time," was Arthur Hallam. Who at his ripened state was called home to "live in God." Hallam came to earth before his time and the speaker believes that he was taken from the world because God did not want man to figure out his divine plan in evolution too soon. The "far-off divine event" for the speaker, is the fulfillment of man's evolutionary brilliance, which is God's divine plan. The speaker has captured the need for the human race to look to the design of a higher order to escape their personal "grief." Tennyson's elegy progresses in this manner, switching from faith to doubt, and grows into an enlightened state and praises God's will at the close. Hayes observes the elements of evolution in the elegy when he says, "His dead friend Hallam is regarded, not only as a friend,

but as a type of the nobler humanity to come, and as mingled with the Love which is the Soul of the Universe. It is through 'loss of Self' this is to be accomplished, and the Poet maintains that, 'men may rise on stepping stones...to higher things' (41-2). This stepping stone progression is the evolutionary capability of mankind. The speaker views his dead brilliant friend as an ideally evolved man and hopes that the rest of humanity over time will reach this superior status.

The speaker's newfound trust in God unites his scientific ideas and his faith in a beautiful bundle. Hayes describes this union saying, "Now if the law of Evolution did not teach him to deny his Maker, what did it teach him? The necessity, as I have just said, of controlling his animal passions. (...) This great Poet, Scientist, and Philosopher shows us how Nature can 'lead up to God,' and even assist us to know somewhat of His attributes" (47, 52-3). So in the last section of this elegy the speaker helps the reader understand that the modern accomplishments of science are fulfillments of the will of God and they lead man closer to understanding him. The more man knows Nature and its laws, the more he comes to understand his maker. The love of God brings the speaker out of his grief, which is so different from other elegist forms. Peltason responds with a variety of interpretations from these last few lines in the poem, "One God, one law, one element,/ And one far-off divine event,/ To which the whole creation moves/." (Tennyson 428). He replies,

He (the speaker) finds his loss of Hallam analogous to the fall of man and looks forward to reunion with Hallam as he does to the 'far-off divine event' that is the goal of the race. Or he finds his history of the planet or the evolution of the species. Or he finds the model for his own expression of grief and renewal in the forms of pastoral and romantic elegy. In this variety of ways the poet experiences and interprets and calls into question the gathering up of his life into

some larger order, which is at once the gathering up of fragments into the whole of *In Memoriam* and the emergence of the suffering poet as ‘the voice of the human race. (Peltason 12).

The race moves toward this perfect form designed and promised by God.

The speaker at the end of this epic elegy joins the warring sides of God and Nature together giving credence to the resolution that one’s grief can find sanctuary in a firm faith in God. He states this reality in every line of the closing section: that man’s knowledge only leads to a love of the divine plan. Hayes quotes Tennyson in regards to the reception of “*In Memoriam*” saying, “[that] The Personality of God was ultimately a firm article of Tennyson’s faith needs no further proof than his own statement about one of his poems: ‘It must be remembered that “*In Memoriam*” is a poem. The different moods of sorrow as in a drama, are dramatically given, and (also) my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through faith in a God of Love”’ (Hayes 39-40). A higher love can carry a person out of the depths of grief. Tennyson accomplishes this end result in his elegy. The speaker’s fall into sorrow and hard climb out of it by faith in Nature or God mirrors the reality that is personal grief. Man rides out the storms of his grief as if they were great swells at sea, dashing him to the depths of despair many times, but then finally bringing him up to the surface of a calm and peaceful thankfulness for life, even with it’s ups and downs. As Tennyson said, “I hold it true (...) / Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all.” (Tennyson 356). The high cost of losing someone he loves is finally replaced by the calm acceptance that a better time is ahead for all men, that the actions of God and Nature will someday make sense and man will understand the meaning of life and death. He will see Hallam again, according to his Christian beliefs, and they will see the fulfillment of God’s overall plan and be satisfied.

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