



English 40: Victorian Literature + Victorian Informatics

instructor: Rachel Sagner Buurma semester: Fall 2014 time: W 1:15-4, plus occasional labs tba location: McCabe Library Video Classroom (third floor)

assignment: Indexing *In Memoriam A.H.H.* due: to platform of choice and to present informally in class, October 1, 2014

By this point in our exploration of Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, we have closely examined the poem's form; undertaken some individual and collective close readings of selected stanzas; and together constructed an overview of major themes and questions the poem contains and raises. We have also discussed *In Memoriam's* problems of knowledge, asking, how does the poem present the question of knowledge - of the self, of others, of the world? How does the poem present *itself* as a knowledge problem? And how does it appear to us as a problem of knowledge? We have also collectively sketched out some possible, if partial, solutions to the problem of knowing *In Memoriam*. And we have introduced ourselves to some Victorian models of knowledge organization in the form of the index, looking at Henry Wheatley's writing about indexing and examining Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's index to *In Memoriam*.

For next week, the only two assignments are to reread (really!) *In Memoriam*, with one of two specific projects in mind. You may either

1) create your own index - broadly and creatively conceived - to the poem

or

2) using an existing index to construct/curate a new version of the poem, one that has a clear, interesting, and meaningful organization of its own. Your version will probably include only some of the stanzas and/or sonnets/cantos/sections, though you may certainly use all if you like. The fact the question of whether the stanza or the sonnet/canto/section - or the line? or rhyme pair? - will form your base unit will be one interesting question to think about.

The goal of the assignment, as you see, is to ask you to put yourself in the position of either the index-user or the index-maker. The large question shadowing the assignment is about what it means to use technologies of information organization and retrieval on a poem like *In Memoriam* - and more broadly on any imaginative work of literature. What new kinds of reading, practical and theoretical, does the index offer us?

Please present your index in some form on some platform, and come ready to discuss in in class next week.

