

**‘MY OWN BELOVED POET’: COMMUNITY, KIN, AND CULTURE IN THE  
TENNYSON DEATH CORRESPONDENCE**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Humanities

**2022**

**JEAN-MARIE SHERRY**  
**SCHOOL OF ARTS, LANGUAGES AND CULTURES**

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**Final word count: 65,236**

## ABSTRACT

This research analyses 72 unpublished, handwritten poems and condolence letters written to the family of Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson in response to his death on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892. This body of English-language ‘death correspondence’ was written by 52 people, mainly from the working- and middle-classes of the British Victorian public. Through my transcription and analysis of these original documents – for what I believe to be the first time in 130 years – this thesis asks: how did working- and middle-class poets commemorate Tennyson through the written form? What does their writing tell us about late-nineteenth-century British mourning culture? What does condolence correspondence from the late-Victorian, English-speaking public to Tennyson’s family reveal about literacy, class, community, and family at the nineteenth century *fin de siècle*?

Chapter one analyses the social and legal forces that impacted upon nineteenth century literacy and education, and the varying access to formal education that was available to the poor and working-class communities. This chapter then argues that Tennyson’s celebrity death provided a unique impetus for ordinary people to write poetry, and evoked anxieties relating to their perceptions of dying traditions, perishing moralities, and notions of belonging and nation.

Chapter two argues that a sub-group of these death correspondents ‘individualised’ their responses to Tennyson’s death, often by appropriating Tennyson as kin. I argue that correspondents constructed idealised notions of marital roles and ‘queenly widows’ to demonstrate their deference to cultural traditions and class divisions—while simultaneously bridging class delineations through the self-same acts of writing.

Chapter three argues that ‘communal mourners’, another sub-group of the death correspondents, drew upon literary, biblical, and newspaper references to inform their correspondence – often representing themselves as part of an extended, non-kin cultural family or an ‘emotional community’. In particular, this chapter argues that these writers employed influences from their social groups and newspapers, literature, and oral traditions to devise the Poet Laureate as a communal ‘Father Tennyson’ – with clear connotations of Tennyson as a moral guide or teacher.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis, from its earliest inception to completion, has been possible thanks to the generosity, kindness, and guidance from several people who helped me, both indirectly and directly.

Foremost, I extend my profound gratitude to Professor Hal Gladfelder and Professor Michael Sanders, who co-supervised my research. Their astounding knowledge, expert advice, insightful (and often sardonic) critiques, patience, and humour have been vital to the pursuance and completion of my thesis.

I am acutely indebted to: Grace Timmins, whose irreplaceable knowledge of the Tennyson Research Centre Archive directly shaped my thesis; Professor Jon Cook, who informed my early research questions; Dr Pamela Anderson, Professor Imelda Whelehan, Dr Gerard Moran, and Dr Anastasia Valassopoulos, who supported and advocated for my PhD study at the University of Manchester; and Professor Julie-Marie Strange, who critiqued my work kindly and perceptively.

I'm extremely grateful to members of the Twitter community who helped me to transcribe some enigmatic, handwritten words, including @MinxMarple, @DrFloraPoste, @TwirlingTeacups, @annascottpiano, @brokenbiros, @theowl, @waveatthetrain, @victorianclare, and @VictorianLondon.

I thank the 52 authors of original poetry and letters whom I analysed for this study, for their decision to write in 1892 despite their often-challenging circumstances. I hope that I have given your work and your lives the respectful handling and measured attention that you deserve.

Finally, my deepest appreciation and thanks go to my husband, best friend, and comrade, Dr Jamie Sherry. Through his endless empathy, encouragement, generosity, and wisdom, he provided me with the vital support to contemplate, let alone complete, this thesis.

## Introduction

On the evening of the 11th [October, 1892] the coffin was set upon our waggonette, made beautiful with stag's horn moss and the scarlet *Lobelia Cardinalis*; and draped with the pall, woven by working men and women of the north, and embroidered by the cottagers of Keswick; and then we covered him with wreaths and crosses of flowers sent from all parts of Great Britain. The coachman, who had been for more than thirty years my father's faithful servant, led the horse. Ourselves, the villagers, and the schoolchildren followed over the moor through our land towards a glorious sunset, and later through Haslemere under brilliant starlight. The coffin was taken to Westminster Abbey, and, at the request of the Prince of Wales, covered with a Union Jack[.] He was laid that night in the chapel of St Faith.<sup>1</sup>

This passage from Hallam Tennyson's *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (1897) illustrates the manner in which members of the public contributed to the funeral preparations for his father, Poet Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson, in October 1892. Working people and villagers were prominently included in the material preparations and funeral procession and were explicitly described within Hallam's recounting of the day. Tennyson's coffin is covered with a 'pall' (a cloth draping) made by northern weavers, which is embellished with embroidery by 'cottagers'—the rural poor who lived as tenants on wealthy landowners' property. The pall is itself covered with wreaths and flowers from all over the nation. Finally, the Tennysons' local community, including schoolchildren, participate in the solemn, star-lit evening procession from the poet's family retreat in Haslemere, Surrey. Tennyson's 'faithful servant' coachman leads the procession. The ritual of Tennyson's death is described as a communal event, and in simple, reflective terms. That the public would participate in Tennyson's funeral is neither astonishing nor cause for special announcement. The family is willing to share their loss with their community.

This community of mourners proved to be worldwide. Significant evidence of the nation's involvement in Tennyson's death and mourning procedures is found in the many

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<sup>1</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (New York: The Macmillan Co., [1897] 1899), pp. 777-778.



condolence letters and poems written to the Tennyson family. These letters are catalogued in The Tennyson Research Centre (TRC), in Lincoln, England, and form the focus of my thesis. Immediately following the Poet Laureate's death on the 6th October 1892, the Victorian public responded with thousands of condolence letters. Through my transcription and analysis—for the first time—of a selection of these unpublished, original condolence letters and poems written and sent to Tennyson's family, it is clear that a notable proportion of these writers were also from the UK's working-class and middle-class population. This research provides samples of the written language Victorians from these classes used to articulate condolence. These compositions are often formulaic reflections of existing poetry or biblical verses, but the correspondence from Tennyson's readers reflects wider societal and cultural attitudes, beliefs, practices, and influences. This study analyses a 'shared vocabulary' throughout these poems that relate to and draw from faith, domestic life, family, work, and community.

### **Research questions and contexts**

This research is primarily focused upon 72 unpublished, handwritten poems and condolence letters written in English by 52 people in the autumn of 1892, of which 26 items of correspondence are cited in this thesis. The correspondence is mainly from the British Victorian public, with additional letters and poems from readers in Ireland, the USA, and Australia.

On the most general level, this thesis asks: How did these middle-, lower-middle-, and working-class correspondents commemorate Tennyson through the written form? Why did they do so? What did they write? What does their writing tell us about late-nineteenth-century British mourning culture? More specifically, through my transcription and analysis of these handwritten letters and poems, this study aims to answer further questions: what does condolence correspondence from the late-Victorian, English-speaking public to Tennyson's

family reveal about literacy, class, community, and family at the nineteenth century fin de siècle? What literary and cultural insights can be gleaned from their writing? What did they read, and how did they access and interpret their reading? How did their reading influence their understanding of themselves and their places in society? Did they appropriate or adapt established literary forms and models to assert their place within their own communities? As these questions are larger than a single thesis can fully answer, a case-study approach is employed. For context and where possible, the lives and cultures reflected in the content of each correspondence are examined, both as individuals and as members of their communities.

In an attempt to answer these relatively broad questions within the limited confines of a thesis, this study investigates original source materials for clues, and crucially, without limiting the materials to those deemed to be sufficiently skillful for publication. At the time of this study, it is not known if any of these correspondences may have been published prior to, or following, their delivery to the Tennysons. This investigation found that two of the working-class correspondents would later publish other works of poetry, and this is noted where confirmed. However, the correspondents' suitability for publication is incidental to this study.

To further aid in answering these complex social, cultural, and literary questions, the application of shorthand terminology is required. In order to delineate the writers' responses to death, this thesis draws on the work of Julie-Marie Strange (2005), who argues that Death is both a specific medical event and "an abstraction and...a cultural process".<sup>2</sup> Thus, Tennyson's "death" also includes declarations of death through Tennyson's doctor's notes and newspaper obituaries. The thesis also uses Strange's definitions of various aspects of this cultural process. Hence, 'loss' refers to "the removal or deprivation of something (or

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<sup>2</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 14.

someone) that one had at a previous time.”<sup>3</sup> *Grief* “indicates the emotional pain and suffering an individual feels at such loss.”<sup>4</sup> *Bereavement* “is a state of being that usually refers to the process of loss and . . . the aftermath of death.”<sup>5</sup> *Mourning* refers to “cultural representations of bereavement.”<sup>6</sup>

Because this study focuses upon the correspondence from ‘non-elite’ writers: the middle-, lower-middle-, or working-classes, it must be acknowledged that the majority of these writers can only be identified as such through the retrospective investigation of public records. Some writers stated their occupations and social background within introductory notes, or within their signatures – although these details occasionally differ from public records and suggest the authors may have misrepresented themselves. Others simply signed their correspondence with addresses or names of towns. Roughly half of the documents hold sufficient details to enable identification of the individuals and their families in public records. Equally, this means that half of the individuals cannot currently be identified beyond their letter or poem.

Because the Tennyson family collected correspondence from people living in the UK, Ireland, France, the USA, India, and Australia from the 1850s onward—and incorporated some of these into the family memoir—it has long been known that the majority of these letter-writers were from upper classes, aristocracy, and royalty. Condolence letters from the elite and well-known are well-documented: correspondents included Queen Victoria; the Duke of Argyll; scholar and Anglican deacon Benjamin Jowett; and philosopher and art critic, John Ruskin. Therefore, this study breaks new ground by examining non-elite correspondence from a consolidated group of unpublished middle- and working-class writers

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<sup>3</sup> Strange, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Strange, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Strange, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Strange, p. 15.

who were all compelled to write for the same purpose: to acknowledge the death of the Poet Laureate. This correspondence represents a small but significant collection of writing over a period of roughly two months – October through November 1892 – and bears witness to what was happening within mourning culture, literature, communities, families, and religion in Britain in the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*.

The project of transcribing previously unpublished letters and poems from a significant archive is formidable. This is owing to an overwhelming volume of materials which require analysis before focussed transcription can commence. As further explained in Methodology, I first leafed through c.9,000 handwritten letters and poems within the Tennyson Research Centre, and selected and read c.500 of these based on the criteria that they were dated in the year following Tennyson’s death—from 6 October 1892 to 31 October 1893. Of these, I then selected 109 letters and poems for transcription and analysis, using the criteria that they must be written in English and that their contents must specifically address Tennyson’s death. I further analysed 72 of the documents that demonstrated either repeated themes or unusual anomalies, of which the 25 that most strongly demonstrated these criteria are featured in this thesis. As part of this research, my transcriptions of the featured writers are available, in full, in the appendices. These and the remaining transcriptions will be made available for future scholars to investigate.

Because these letters and poems were all written in response to Tennyson’s death, these authors will be referred to henceforth as “death correspondents”. These death correspondents provide a significant, unexplored body of evidence, in the population’s own words, relating to nineteenth-century culture, including literacy, mourning, family, community, and gendered domestic roles. The respectability of middle-class widowhood is displayed through many of

these poems, and often as a shared social status that blurred the divisions between the classes. For example, “A weary hearted woman, from afar – Sends greetings to another lonely heart”, was composed by Mary Gaddess, a 65-year-old woman living in the USA, for Lady Emily Tennyson. Similarly, a 15-year-old working-class Yorkshire girl affectionately—if not necessarily appropriately—describes herself and Emily together as “Sisters in mutual love and suffering”. Themes of the paterfamilias, or the ‘Fatherhood of God’ are prevalent, including an elegy by a Glasgow Inspector of Police who asserted: “For though our father Tennyson, is gone from us today, / The noble works he’s written, for all times shall endure.” Most of the writers suggest community through shared grief, such as Annie Martell, ‘one of England’s poor’, who writes: “But with the loved ones left behind; / To day, their grief ever share. / As fancy, leads us by the side; / Of that ever vacant chair.” Several writers proclaim comfort in belonging to the wider community of their country, such as Fanny Edge from Nottingham: “But oh I think with pride, / I belong to the same Nation, / As my Hero greatest, who died.” Indeed, British and English patriotism are standard tropes across these correspondences, and Tennyson is consistently employed as a figure to represent ideals of Britishness, Englishness, and tradition.

The correspondence also provides significant evidence of working-class literacy and education in the late-nineteenth century. Even so, some of these working-class writers inaccurately suggested that their abilities were unique, including an Islington stone mason who wrote: “[Y]ou have received many [writings] from the upper classes no doubt, but not from working men.” Indeed, the Tennyson Research Centre’s archive holds many writings from working men and women, although locating and identifying them required roughly two years of investigation. This correspondence proves that by the 1890s, people of all classes were literate and interested in reading books and poetry and had experience with writing formal letters and traditional forms of poetry. Scholars of nineteenth-century culture and

literature, such as Jonathan Rose (2001), Julie-Marie Strange (2005, 2007, 2015), Michael Sanders (2008, 2019), Florence Boos (2008), and Kirstie Blair (2009, 2019, 2020)—to name but a few—have long demonstrated that members of the Victorian British working classes were widely literate, despite challenges such as limited local offerings of reading materials, prolonged working hours, social pressures, and financial limitations (including the costs of books and the economic sacrifices of attending school at the expense of time spent at work); all of which impacted upon their access to both formal education and books in the long nineteenth century.

Blair, Sanders, and Strange have also evidenced that while the works of unpublished working-class writers are less easily attained than published works, unpublished, and non-elite writing was prevalent in the early-to-mid-nineteenth-century. These scholars, as well as popular interest books, including Albert Stanley Jasper (1971), and Flora Thompson (1939), further demonstrate the willingness and capacity of many working people to both read and write throughout the nineteenth century, despite their social and economic restrictions. This fact is evidenced through the flourishing publications written by and for working people in the nineteenth century, such as *The Northern Star* (1837 – 1852), the Chartist newspaper which published working-class letters and poetry; the newspaper, *Yorkshire Factory Times* (1889 – 1918), which featured poetry from northern England’s textile factory workers; and *The Dundee People’s Journal* (1858 – 1930), a Scottish publication with poetry contributed by servants and tradespeople.<sup>7</sup>

The relative scarcity of unpublished Victorian working-class writing, along with the existence of publications like *The Northern Star* that feature nineteenth-century working-

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<sup>7</sup> See: *The Northern Star*, <[www.bl.uk/learning/citizenship/campaign/myh/newspapers/gallery1/paper2/northernstar.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/citizenship/campaign/myh/newspapers/gallery1/paper2/northernstar.html)>; *The Factory Times* <[www.historyworkshop.org.uk/sarah-ann-robinson-working-class-womens-poetry-and-the-yorkshire-factory-times](http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/sarah-ann-robinson-working-class-womens-poetry-and-the-yorkshire-factory-times)>; *The Dundee People’s Journal* <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/dundee-peoples-journal>> [accessed 20 December 2020].

class writers, could create a skewed perception that those who were *published* demonstrated exceptional scholarly aptitude or determination, or that they were impassioned for a cause. To the contrary, historians and scholars such as Blair, Boos, Rose, Sanders, and Strange have demonstrated that *unknown* and *unexceptional* working-class people wrote prolifically. While it can be challenging, and frequently impossible, to discover the individual motivations for unpublished writers, or if publication was an unfulfilled aim for those whose writing remained unpublished, these scholars have long demonstrated that working-class and middle-class Victorians wrote ballads, memoirs, prose, and poetry. My research contributes to this growing field by providing original, handwritten evidence of the prevalence of unexceptional and unpublished working-class and middle-class authors.

Regardless of the *form* of the works investigated within this study—poems, letters, or both—the fact that these were written and posted for the purpose of communicating with Tennyson’s family confirms that these compositions function as correspondence. The volume and contents of the correspondence to Tennyson’s family following his death certainly reflect an extraordinary impetus to write; but these also demonstrate a ‘willingness to write’ across a wide cross-section of ordinary people. These writings originated from a large age range, spanning from ages 10 to 89. The death correspondents also came from different income levels—from ‘one of England’s poor’ to a retired Headmistress ‘living on her means’. Some subsequently disappear from all records—such as a nineteen-year-old coal miner. Some will appear in later records for their activism, such as the teenaged telephone operator who became a suffragette, ardent socialist, and a published anti-war poet. As seen in Chapter 2, her later poetry is perhaps also influenced by Tennyson’s patriotic bombast in *Charge of the Light Brigade*.

By analysing these works of correspondence, this research provides uniquely detailed information about late-Victorian life through a corpus of ordinary words from ordinary people. For modern scholars, accessing published, working-class writing by otherwise unknown individuals depends upon historic acts of archiving, collection, publication, or accident, or a combination of these factors; while modern access to a substantial, *unpublished* collection of working-class Victorian writing remains restricted.<sup>8</sup> The availability of unpublished writing from non-elite Victorians is dependent upon historic acts of preservation, such as those found in the Tennysons' private family collections. Continued safeguarding and physical or digital access from museums, libraries, and archives is critical. Mike Sanders (2019) acknowledges similar challenges relating to early-nineteenth-century source materials, stating: "Key problems confronting scholars interested in working-class culture in the first half of the nineteenth century are the fragmented and scattered nature of the archive. Despite the existence of a number of Chartist Churches and Democratic Chapels throughout the 1840s, none of their records appear to have survived."<sup>9</sup> Florence Boos acknowledges that the survival of Victorian working-class women's writing depended upon "the dedication . . . of a few patrons and . . . editors."<sup>10</sup> As a result, "The intimate contexts

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<sup>8</sup> For discussions about the challenges of sourcing sufficient quantities of original, unpublished, non-elite, nineteenth-century writing, see: Trev Lynne Broughton, 'Life Writing', in *The Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature* (2019); Florence S. Boos, *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology* (2008); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001); John Burnett, et al., *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography, vol. 1: 1790-1900* (1984), and David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography* (1982). For nineteenth-century working-class radical literature, poetry and songs, see: The Working Class Movement Library, Salford; *The People's Journal*; *The Yorkshire Factory Times*; and *Piston, Pen and Press* <[www.pistonpenandpress.org](http://www.pistonpenandpress.org)>.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Sanders, "'God's Insurrection': Politics and Faith in the Revolutionary Sermons of Joseph Rayner Stephens", in *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion: Literary, Historical, and Religious Studies in Dialogue*, Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner (eds), (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2019), pp. 65-80 (pp. 66-67).

<sup>10</sup> Florence S. Boos, *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology* (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2008), p. 15.



that gave these [Victorian working-class women's] writings life have vanished, and most of the documents . . . are irrevocably lost.”<sup>11</sup>

Fortunately for this study, the Tennyson archive provides an extreme example of a family undertaking deliberate archival activities, with the individual pieces of ephemera having reached nearly 40,000 letters and poems by the time of Tennyson's death in 1892. This corpus is available in the form of an extensive physical archive, with the volume of materials exceeding the cataloguing data at the time of my access (2013-2015). While modern research and popular non-fiction publications demonstrate and celebrate the extraordinary fortitude of some working-class writers, this research is able to offer a uniquely wide cross-section of working-class and middle-class writing relating to Tennyson—and the concomitant Victorian responses to representations of Tennyson—that has largely remained overlooked until now.

These unpublished letters and poems provide additional insights into three aspects of late Victorian Britain: 1) access to education and the availability of books, periodicals, and newspapers; 2) cultural practices surrounding death, grief, and mourning, and; 3) religious schooling, faith, and the broad moral traditions rooted in Christianity. For example, these writings show that the non-elite classes consumed the works of Tennyson, Shakespeare, and Classical Greek and Roman literature, works that were plainly not limited to the Victorian middle and upper classes. The writers also exhibit their awareness of funeral and mourning customs and etiquette – and occasionally, individual interpretations of how to put such customs into practice, or decisions to disregard conventions. Finally, the subject matter within the correspondence frequently reflects affirmations of religious faith – a particular

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<sup>11</sup> Boos, p. 14.

feature of Tennyson's writing – and their associated moral traditions (including gendered household and social roles and an idealised cultural and literary adherence to chivalry).

Unsurprisingly, the death correspondence nearly unanimously incorporated tropes of an afterlife. Most of the correspondents in this study wrote in terms of an unquestioning affirmation of their faith in Christian teachings. While this religious confidence appears to be at odds with Tennyson's persistent questioning of his beliefs in *In Memoriam*, it aligns with his claimed ultimate acceptance of his faith at the elegy's conclusion. Only one of the correspondents, carpenter Harry Cox (studied in Chapter 1) admitted to sharing Tennyson's religious skepticism and described his renewed desire to believe in the words of the Bible after reading *In Memoriam*. (He is also the sole death correspondent included in this study who did not write a poem). Surprisingly, no other correspondents plainly stated that they had interrogated their faith, which one could be forgiven for expecting from readers of *In Memoriam*. By contrast, letters predating Tennyson's death exist in the TRC from Tennyson's friends and family in which these correspondents engage in dialogues about questioning faith with Tennyson, which certainly demonstrates the Poet Laureate's willingness to debate his religious conviction with those familiar to him—who are primarily from the elite classes.

However, an analysis of these comparative materials from the elite classes is not included in this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, they represent a narrow and tangential focus that is a project in itself, and therefore beyond the scope of this study. Secondly, they pre-date Tennyson's death, and their content is therefore not comparable with that of condolence letters. Indeed, through my transcription and analysis of the death correspondents' language, it is obvious that their particular affirmative messages of faith are intended to be reassuring to Tennyson's family at the time of bereavement – rather than an attempt to engage in the

religious dialogue seen with Tennyson's intimates. Instead, this thesis is focused on interrogating not only why, but also *how* the death correspondents from the middle and working classes wrote to Tennyson. For instance, although Biblical passages and platitudes of sympathy are present across the death correspondence, these non-elite writers also analysed or reinterpreted passages of the Bible in their efforts to offer comfort, such as 69-year-old stonemason Paul Hann, who reimagines Tennyson as the 'righteous' 'Cedars of Lebanon' in Psalm 92:12, and 89-year-old Ms M Collins, who places Tennyson within 'The Parable of Talents' in Matthew 25:14-30. Death correspondents also interpreted, adapted, and reworked poetry, thereby actively demonstrating a breadth of literary and cultural knowledge. For example, Alice Godwin, a 26-year-old domestic servant, rewrote 'Crossing the Bar' to envisage Tennyson's death; and an anonymous poet combined Milton's 'Sonnet 19' with Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur'.

The majority of the correspondents who cite or adapt biblical passages drew from the King James Bible. These letters provide evidence of the ways in which religious beliefs were integrated into the daily consciousness of working-class and middle-class Victorians. Although this thesis is not focused upon religion or religious writing, Christian discourse is one of the more consistent and apparent themes that connect Tennyson's works, death and burial with the correspondents' writing. This obvious interrelation demands sufficient investigation to provide one of the key cultural contexts for analysing these materials. This research therefore contributes to a recently growing field of study of Victorian religion and its cultural uses, and the changing religious landscape of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Scholars such as Sanders (2009, 2019), Kirstie Blair (2009, 2019, 2020), Andrew Tate and Jo Carruthers (2010); and Mark Knight and Emma Mason (2006)<sup>13</sup> are contributing to recent growth in this

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see: Mike Sanders, "'God's Insurrection': Politics and Faith in the Revolutionary Sermons of Joseph Rayner Stephens", in *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion: Literary, Historical, and Religious*

area, by—according to Blair—“. . . revisiting the Victorian poetry of faith . . . which attempts to show their continuing importance for studies of nineteenth-century literature and culture.”<sup>14</sup> While the scholarly study of working-class Victorian culture and literature has grown in recent decades, Sanders (2019) challenges researchers to undertake deeper interrogation of Victorian religious culture. He asserts that, while there are exceptions, “Religion, like poor sanitation, is treated [by scholars] simply as an inescapable fact of Victorian working-class life, a part of the Victorian worldview which apparently requires no further exploration.”<sup>15</sup> This study, therefore, also attempts to explore the interface across non-elite Victorian culture, literature, and religion, including the working and middle classes.

### **Mudlarking the correspondence for cultural clues**

With their overtly religious and moral overtones, the majority of these writings could be easily dismissed as formulaic. The correspondence could even be seen as monotonous, with little cultural or literary significance beyond a modern reader’s voyeuristic curiosity. This thesis therefore looks beyond the repetition and platitudes to analyse the cultural and literary influences behind the correspondence. In doing so, this research contributes original work on unpublished middle- and working-class Victorian verse. Perhaps because these death correspondents primarily communicated through the medium of religious verse and conventional language of sympathy, their value as documents which provide witness to cultural details has been overlooked by scholars until now. The relative scarcity of these materials is further complicated by a historic need to visit a single physical archive within the

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*Studies in Dialogue*, Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner (eds), (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2019); Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Andrew Tate and Jo Carruthers (eds), *Spiritual identities: literature and the post-secular imagination* (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2010); Mark Knight and Emma Mason (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Sanders, “‘God’s Insurrection’: Politics and Faith in the Revolutionary Sermons of Joseph Rayner Stephens’, in *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion: Literary, Historical, and Religious Studies in Dialogue*, Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner (eds), (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2019), p. 66.

UK—thus reducing the availability of the death correspondence for those reliant upon access to digital archives. Some of the more natural and endearing letters that were written prior to Tennyson’s death have risen above the death correspondents’ obscurity, such as a heartbroken plea from Lucy Hingley, Worcestershire, begging Tennyson to write an elegy for her dog who was “poisoned by some wicked person.”<sup>16</sup> The humanity of Hingley’s letter resonates with pet lovers across the decades, and The British Library featured its timeless relatability, which has kept this particular letter from the obscurity. Yet, this thesis shows that the seemingly repetitive death correspondence consistently discloses valuable information about Victorian culture. Dwelling covertly within the painstaking formality of these letters and poems are first-hand examples of mourning culture and practices, the influence of a celebrity death on those practices, the social and cultural impetuses that influenced strangers to write to Tennyson’s family upon his death, and the ways individual correspondents negotiated and responded to commonplace social and cultural influences. This research also shows how these materials highlight the impact of celebrity culture on expressions of mourning, and ways in which the non-elite classes repurposed and adapted social customs. By researching original correspondence materials, this research reveals important insights into the ways in which working-class and middle-class people participated in late-nineteenth-century British society both as individuals and as communities.

Scrutiny beyond the formal and formulaic prose shows that the works of these writers both followed and diverged from performative grief and mourning traditions. Some employed symbolism and metaphor in the elegiac or lyric traditions. Others divulged deeply personal details about their own losses or professed intense love for Tennyson. They reflect the changing social landscape relating to domestic roles, such as a man’s responsibility to

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Letter to Alfred Tennyson from a fan’. *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/letter-to-alfred-tennyson-from-a-fan>> [accessed 7 October 2020].

provide moral leadership in the home, and a woman's responsibility to soothe a dying husband. They frequently reveal tropes of nation and community as family by speaking on behalf of their social group, or by describing Tennyson as a member of a wider family.

The visible social tenets to which British Victorians adhered following a death – such as attire (black crepe ‘Widow’s Weeds’) and funeral carriages pulled by black horses wearing black plumes – are well known. As with any generalisation of British Victorian culture, mourning and funerary customs must account for variances in practices across different social classes. For example, mourning attire and funerals were often commodified and expensive. Indeed, Patricia Jalland (1996) stated: “Even the Queen admitted in 1875 that mourning expenses were excessive, advising less wealthy women to ‘use their common sense and discretion.’”<sup>17</sup> Although Jalland asserts that, by the late nineteenth century in Britain, advice manuals emphasised moderation.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, even a modest but unanticipated expense relating to mourning had the potential to create hardship to those within the poorer communities.<sup>19</sup> Through written words, and for relatively little cost, literate members of society could contribute to the cultural event that Tennyson’s death precipitated. This research features both the followers of customs, and the divergent writers who interpreted or disregarded such customs. For example, publications such as *Cassell’s Household Guide* provides extensive

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<sup>17</sup> Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 307. See also: Claire Wood ‘Profitable Undertakings and Deathly Business’, in *Dickens and the Business of Death*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 10-57; Anonymous, ‘Death in the Household I’ in *Cassell’s Household Guide, New and Revised Edition, 3* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, c1880), p. 266.

<sup>18</sup> Jalland, p. 307.

<sup>19</sup> See also: Anonymous, ‘Death in the Household II’ and ‘Death in the Household III’, in *Cassell’s Household Guide, New and Revised Edition, 3* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, c1880), p. 219 and p. 314. Page 219 provides the costs related to “the manner in which the trade [of death and funerals] is sub-divided, and also the cost of burial,” adding that “it is customary for undertakers . . . to give their customers . . . particulars of the various classes of funerals . . . with the prices printed at which they can be performed.” The costs include hearses, horses, coffins, palls, and attire for attendants. Page 314 provides the costs related to burials in metropolitan cemeteries, prefacing the prices with the following advice: “As the incurring of only a moderate expense in interments is often an object to the survivors, especially where they are left in straitened circumstances, we will now give information about the expense of burial in the various metropolitan cemeteries. Of course, interment in a brick vault is the most costly, and is only suited for those in comfortable circumstances.”

guidance for the appropriate mourning conduct, with prescriptive details relating to attire depending upon the wearer's relationship with the deceased.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, *Cassell's* advises on the appropriate stationery depending upon the letter-writer's relationship:

During the period while mourning is worn it is customary [for the family of the deceased] to employ envelopes and note-paper edged with a deep border of black. It is also usual for friends when writing to them to employ black-edged paper and envelopes, but in this case the black border must be extremely narrow.<sup>21</sup>

While *Cassell's* is clear that the black border used in condolence correspondence should be adjusted based on degrees of intimacy with a deceased person or their family, the guidance fails to recommend appropriate stationery from those unacquainted. However, in separate guidance relating to the etiquette of letter-writing, they warned that to overlook the use of 'proper' paper and ink is to signal disregard to the recipient:

[T]he proper choice of paper and envelopes, pens and ink. . . . are so cheap and easily obtainable that there is seldom any excuse for the use of inferior materials, which are at once impediments to good writing, and indications of neglect.<sup>22</sup>

However, the condolence correspondence in the TRC archive demonstrates that the public did not necessarily follow formal advice for such guidance. Indeed, 32% of the correspondence (23 of 72) was written on poor-quality plain paper rather than stationery or black-edged mourning paper. Many of the letters and poems included misspelled words and

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<sup>20</sup> See: Anonymous, 'Death in the Household IV', in *Cassell's Household Guide, New and Revised Edition*, 3 (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, c1880), pp. 344-345. In particular: "[W]ith reference to mourning, it has been customary for mourning apparel not to be put on until the day of the funeral, but at the present time it is more usual to wear it as soon as possible. The width of the hat-bands worn differs according to the degree of relationship. When worn by the husband for the wife they are usually at the present time about seven inches wide. Those worn by fathers for sons, and sons for fathers, are about five inches wide. For other degrees of relationship the width of the hat-band varies from two and a half inches to four inches. After the funeral deep mourning is worn by the widower or widow for about a year. The same is also the case with mourning for a father or mother, sons or daughter, sister or brother. Occasionally, at the end of that period, half mourning is worn by the widow or widower for about six months longer."

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, 'Death in the Household IV', in *Cassell's Household Guide, New and Revised Edition*, 3. (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, c1880), transcribed by Lee Jackson, *Victorian London*, <<https://www.victorianlondon.org/cassells/cassells-35.htm>>, [accessed 18 September 2020].

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, 'Hints to Letter Writers I', in *Cassell's Household Guide*, 1 (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin: c1880), p. 79.

had been written in poor-quality ink or even pencil. These materials diverge from *Cassell's* formal etiquette guidance for letter-writers.

*Cassell's* also advised on the appropriate content for memorial cards, which families traditionally presented to mourners following burial:

It is usual to present the relations and friends of the deceased persons with what are called memorial cards, stating the name, age, date of death, where interred, and date of interment, and also a verse of Scripture appropriate to the occasion.<sup>23</sup>

However, there is an absence of guidance for the appropriate written content for a condolence letter. The evidence suggests that it was common practice to include words of faith and an afterlife in letters of condolence for families who practiced religion—nearly all of the correspondence in this research included these—although it is worth noting that the prevalence of this type of content within this collection could be equally a function of the types of letters that the Tennysons chose to collect. However, the frequency of lengthy, personal expressions of grief that diverge from routine condolence language or assurances of an afterlife further demonstrates that British Victorians adapted customs to fit their individual approaches to letter-writing.

Letters and elegies from Tennyson's global readership relating to his death were published in newspapers and periodicals, but the unpublished correspondence holds content meant specifically for the Tennyson family, person to person. Although some writers cited aspirations to publish, the death correspondence in this study were largely intended for the addressed recipients. The middle- and working-class responses to the Poet Laureate's death were primarily addressed to Tennyson's widow, Emily, and his adult son, Hallam.

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<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, 'Death in the Household IV', in *Cassell's Household Guide, New and Revised Edition*, 3. (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, c1880), transcribed by Lee Jackson, *Victorian London*, <<https://www.victorianlondon.org/cassells/cassells-35.htm>>, [accessed 18 September 2020].



This portion of the introduction has focused on the body of handwritten, late-nineteenth-century mourning correspondence, which provides insights into literacy and education; the pervasiveness of idealised domesticity and gendered family roles; and notions of community. The Tennyson death correspondents communicated these through verse, letter content, and occasionally through autobiographical details. The following section will discuss the Tennyson family's role in selecting and destroying correspondence, and the implications of these acts of curation as a means of reputational control on modern, scholarly interpretations of life in the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*.

### **Curating and archiving a lifetime of correspondence**

Tennyson's death on the 6th October 1892 initiated four curatorial and archival projects for Emily, Tennyson's widow; Hallam, his surviving son; and his daughter-in-law, Audrey. First, they selected and responded to hundreds of letters of condolence immediately following Tennyson's death with the help of friends,<sup>24</sup> which is explored in detail in the next section of this introduction. Second, they burned approximately thirty thousand letters of correspondence, including courtship letters between Alfred and Emily, and all letters from Tennyson's friend Arthur Henry Hallam—the subject of *In Memoriam*.<sup>25</sup> Thereafter, Emily, Hallam, and Audrey began their enormous, third curation project: gathering the letters Tennyson had written to friends and colleagues over the decades. The family then

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<sup>24</sup> Ann Thwaite, 'Beginning at the End,' in *Emily Tennyson: The Poet's Wife* (London: Faber and Faber, [1996] 1997), pp. 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Gerhard Joseph, 'Review: *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* by Robert Bernard Martin', in *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), 196-199 (196-197). In particular: "Emily and Hallam burned three-fourths of the 40,000 letters they had collected at his death, including most of those to Emily before the marriage, all the ones Tennyson had received from Arthur Hallam, and presumably others that would have undermined the impression of unruffled respectability that the family, following Tennyson's lead, was determined to convey."

incorporated these letters when writing *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (1897) – the fourth output of the Tennyson family curation and archival project.

### ***Responding to the death correspondence***

Tennyson’s family members were accustomed to managing Alfred’s correspondence throughout his Poet Laureateship. Hallam had acted as his father’s secretary during Tennyson’s life, with considerable assistance from Audrey; and Emily had drafted the majority of Tennyson’s responses to letters over the years.<sup>26</sup> But Tennyson’s death provoked such unwieldy volumes of condolence correspondence that the family procured the help of friends in order to manage the workload of responding. Thwaite describes the immense project of managing Tennyson’s death communications: “With their team of helpers, Emily and Hallam acknowledged the great piles of letters of sympathy, the hundreds of letters, extremely quickly.”<sup>27</sup> The letters and poetry came from strangers as well as from those intimately acquainted with the Tennysons, and the family responded accordingly.<sup>28</sup> Emily, Hallam and Audrey composed personal responses to correspondence from family members, friends, cultural organisations, such as Shakespeare’s Birthplace, and Queen Victoria. For people either marginally or not acquainted with the family, Emily drafted one courteous acknowledgement, which the team of helpers copied on her behalf in an assembly-line fashion.<sup>29</sup> Thwaite states that:

The numerous surviving drafts of letters written after Tennyson’s death are an extraordinary indication of Emily’s determination to involve herself in everything. Aldworth [the family’s Surrey summer home], she told her sister, was full of people working away (‘some sat upstairs . . . some in the drawing room’) but there were still many letters, which ‘Hallamee and I must write together’. The drafts show that these were not just letters to personal friends and the Royal Family . . . but to all sorts of organizations and, though this must have been later, to admirers all over the world. They were dashed off in Emily’s own hand – and then were presumably copied,

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<sup>26</sup> Thwaite, pp. 1-18.

<sup>27</sup> Thwaite, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> See: The Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

<sup>29</sup> Thwaite, pp. 17-18.

signed by Hallam and addressed and put into envelopes by their team of helpers around the house.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the surviving condolence response drafts within the TRC show a variety of responses tailored to the individual recipients, as Thwaite reported. Many of these drafts were clearly works in development, with words or lines crossed out, or afterthoughts hastily scrawled along the edges. For example, across three sheets of paper, Emily had written four individual drafts for four separate recipients. It is impossible to know why she drafted these as a set, and why her scrawling handwriting continued across the pages, front and back, to create a disjointed but indivisible set. In a single document, she wrote to each of the following recipients: the Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace, the Council of the Royal Colonial Institute, Greenoch [book] Club, and "a member of the Royal Family" (as recorded in the TRC). The draft written for the Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace reads:

I beg you to convey from my mother and myself our grateful acknowledgement to the Executive Committee and of their most kind extensions of sympathy.

My Father asked for a volume of Shakespeare on the last morning of his life here I said you must not try to read he answered I have opened it & I found he had opened one of his favourite passages We could not part with that volume but we buried another with the page marked in his grave<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, the draft for the 'member of the Royal Family' (clearly, Queen Victoria) stated:

Madam

May I be allowed to offer from my mother & myself for your RH's tribute of the wreath & to say that your kind and gracious visits were a bright gleam in my Father's memory<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thwaite, pp. 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Draft letter to Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace*, October 1892, letter, Tennyson Research Centre, UK. (Henceforth TRC, UK).

<sup>32</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Draft letter to A Member of the Royal Family*, October 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

The draft letter of thanks to the Queen is brief, polite, and complimentary, while the letter to the Trustees appears to be more personal and includes the details of Tennyson's dying request and burial. However, as we will see in Chapter 3, Tennyson's deathbed request for Shakespeare was a 'personal' detail that the Tennyson household shared widely with the newspaper press. The Trustees, therefore, were not entrusted with precious, confidential information as it may have seemed.

The differences in handwriting between Emily and Hallam are subtle, but the TRC archivists were able to differentiate sufficiently to attribute authorship to Emily, Hallam, and Audrey. Emily's and Hallam's writing are visually quite similar: bold and untidy cursive lettering that slants to the right. Emily's cursive is narrower and includes more flourishes to her capital letters. Hallam's is more sprawling, with wider letters, and can be difficult to read. Audrey's handwriting is comparatively tidy and considered, and while the writing is smaller than both her husband's and mother-in-law's, it was easiest of the three to transcribe.

Indeed, the previously described drafts, although they are written as if from Hallam, are actually in Emily's hand. As Thwaite asserted, "In some [letters] Emily writes as herself . . . More often she writes as if in Hallam's voice."<sup>33</sup> My inspection of the Tennyson family's 'response' letter—possibly the 'single, courteous draft' that Thwaite asserts the Tennysons sent to the unacquainted correspondents—shows that there were at least three versions written in three different hands (see Fig. 1). The first, written in Audrey's small, nearly vertical handwriting, says:

Lord Tennysons [sic] wife and son – unable to acknowledge each of the many letters, messages, and tokens of sympathy that have reached them at this time from all lands would ask all who have felt with them – to accept their deep and heartfelt gratitude.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thwaite, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Audrey Tennyson, *Draft letter of thanks*, 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

Directly beneath Audrey's draft, a second response draft in Hallam's widely spaced and difficult to decipher scrawl, says, in part:

We would desire to thank each kind hand that closed a shutter, tolled a bell or weaved a wreath or wrote words of sympathy but this is impossible we can but pray God bless all for the love and heaven will [?] to the memory who loved all your [?] deeply grateful.<sup>35</sup>

On the left side of Hallam's draft, Emily appears to have added notes: "To the memory of and who loved all who."<sup>36</sup> A third draft in Hallam's hand combines some of the above themes:

Wife and son would wish to thank each one of the many who have closed a shutter or tolled a bell or woven a wreath or written words of sympathy or expressed it by their presence yesterday they can but say "God Bless all for the love and reverence shown to the memory of him who above all loved to love."<sup>37</sup>

This third draft's message of gratitude spanned multiple forms of condolence that strangers would have expressed and was not limited to the written form that this research investigates. This would have allowed for its use as both a letter and as a public notice – although there is no record of such a notice. The third draft appears to be the most completed generic draft in the collection, and this was likely to have been the 'one courteous reply' Thwaite cites as being used for 'others'. However, Audrey's draft has a subtle but important edit that raises more questions than can be answered. In this image (Fig. 1), it is clear that Audrey originally wrote: "letters, *poems*, messages and tokens of sympathy...".

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<sup>35</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Draft letter of thanks*, 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

<sup>36</sup> Emily Tennyson. Draft letter of thanks. 1892. TRC, Lincoln.

<sup>37</sup> Hallam Tennyson. Draft letter of thanks. 1892. TRC, Lincoln.

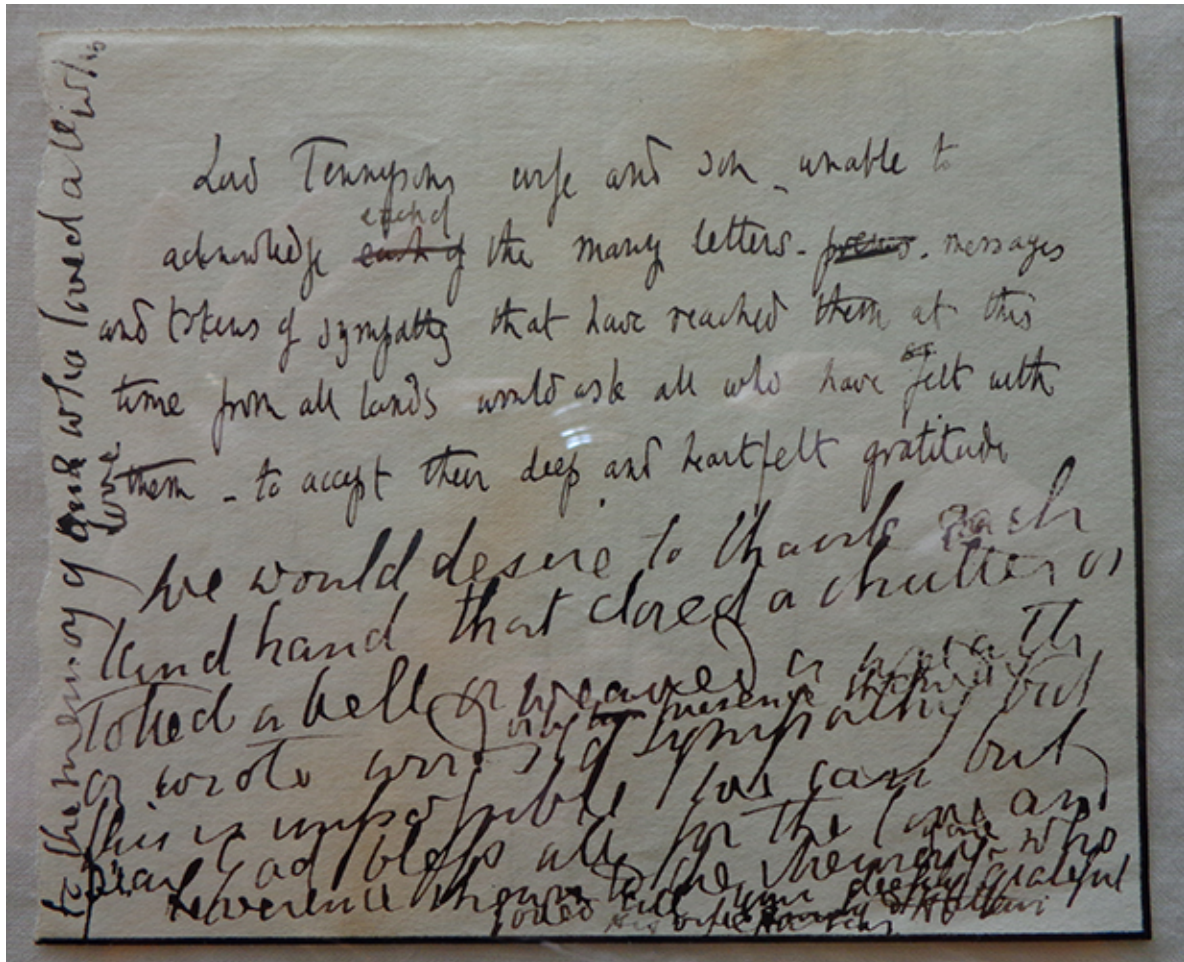


Fig. 1. Draft letter of thanks by Emily Tennyson and Hallam Tennyson. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

As seen in Fig. 1, the inclusion of the word ‘poems’ was removed from the letter. Was the family unwilling to refer to these amateur writings as ‘poems’? Had they considered writing a separate draft response for the poets? Did they simply decide that “written words of sympathy” sufficiently encompassed all non-acquaintances who wrote? It is impossible to know the answer, but we can clearly see that Audrey initially acknowledged the poetry in tandem with but different to the letters. This may provide insights into the family’s view of the poems as ‘other’ to the other forms of written condolence. Although the word ‘poems’ was scribbled out of the draft, there may also have been an element of appreciation that informed the family’s collection practices, so that they saved the poems – published and

unpublished; anonymous and personalised – separately from the letters, telegrams, cards, and drawings.

### ***Reputational curating and archiving***

The family retained approximately ten thousand letters from their reputational bonfire (of which approximately nine thousand reside within the TRC<sup>38</sup>), apparently saving documents that would best demonstrate both Tennyson's and his surviving family members' respectability<sup>39</sup> (see Hallam Tennyson, 1897; Robert Bernard Martin, 1981). These included laudatory letters from "Lear, Fitzgerald, Gladstone, Browning and Queen Victoria".<sup>40</sup>

As the penultimate step in the four-stage family curation project, the family requested the return of Tennyson's letters from Tennyson's influential friends and associates in order to write a memoir, published in 1897 as *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son*. This family undertaking certainly served as means of coping with the death. Emily wrote in an October 1892 letter: "Hallamee and I live in the past, those happy days of our journals and journ-letters – a past made wonderful by the glorious skies of October."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the Tennyson death correspondence is included within the remaining collection. It is impossible to know if any of the death correspondence was burned, but it is sensible to surmise that, as a sub-set of the main correspondence collection, it was as thoroughly curated as the rest to maintain the "unruffled respectability that the family, following Tennyson's lead, was determined to convey."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 'Tennyson Resources' <[www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article](http://www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article)> [accessed 20 September 2019].

<sup>39</sup> Joseph, pp. 196-197.

<sup>40</sup> 'Tennyson Resources' <[www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article](http://www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article)> [accessed 20 September 2019].

<sup>41</sup> Thwaite, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Thwaite, p. 21.

The family's five-year curatorial endeavour that would culminate in the authorship of *Memoir* undoubtedly served to preserve a carefully crafted afterlife for Tennyson. Thwaite identified that Emily was the main author of *Memoir*, which she credited to Hallam in order to transfer some of Tennyson's reputation to their son. Thwaite asserts: "Now perhaps the *Memoir* would not only celebrate appropriately the great poet, but at last provide a stepping stone for the son into a wider world, as the peerage he had inherited would also do."<sup>43</sup> At their request, Tennyson's correspondence flowed back into the household from their friends and contemporaries, accompanied by these individuals' additional responses of adoration for the deceased Poet Laureate. The family also requested permission to dedicate the published book to Queen Victoria, which she granted, stamping the epitome of Victorian status at the outset of the contents. The half-decade family project culminated in a c. 900-page book that served as the ultimate piece of reputational curation for Tennyson (1897).

The Tennyson family's need—perhaps even their passion—for collection and preservation is clear. However, their well-evidenced need for reputational control—such as their culling of 75 per cent of all correspondence, and their decisions to curate the most laudatory correspondence for *Memoir*—brings uncertainties to analysis of these materials. Ann Thwaite states that the Tennyson family upheld Tennyson's belief, quoting Emily as saying: "the worth of a biography depends on whether it is done by one who wholly loves the man whose life he writes, yet loves him with a discriminating love." Thwaite asserts: "Where they went wrong was in deciding on the sort of biography that would best help to preserve and enhance Tennyson's reputation after his death."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Thwaite, p.20.

<sup>44</sup> Thwaite, p.27.



The family's decisions did not take place without Tennyson's influence. For decades, the Poet Laureate had lamented the 'ghouls' who would pick him apart in life, and feared them intensely following his death, with a family friend quoting him:

In my youth the grows!  
In mine age the owls!  
After death the ghouls!<sup>45</sup>

As Thwaite stated, "Hallam told Anne Thackeray Ritchie that 'they kept journals – in view of the ghouls.'"<sup>46</sup> Tennyson's fear of public invasion into his private life could appear to be a contradiction to the family's vast collection and cataloguing of correspondence and personal mementos. For example, he had expressed horror in response to the public's passion for knowing details about Byron's life, stating: "What business has the public to want to know about Byron's wildness? He has given them fine work, and they ought to be satisfied."<sup>47</sup> Regarding his own privacy, compounded with fears of criticism, he reportedly said in a conversation with a family friend: "When I am dead they will tear me to pieces, limb from limb."<sup>48</sup> By obfuscating the less savoury details of Tennyson's life, the family could preserve the reputational afterlife they desired the world to remember.<sup>49</sup> Emily is clear about the family's intentions to venerate Tennyson in a letter to her sister:

My Hallam tells me that I can be a help in the work to be done and nothing I can do is too much to be done either for the Father or the devoted son of our love . . . He and I feel that we live with Him still and that in this is our best hope of a fuller life in God.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Thwaite, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Thwaite, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> Thwaite, pp. 26-27.

<sup>48</sup> Thwaite, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Ann Thwaite asserts: "Emily must have been aware that people talked about Tennyson's coarseness, his taste for infantile obscenity, his drinking, his 'petting' of young women visitors." Thwaite, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> Thwaite, p. 22.

With a loss of three-quarters-worth of materials, it is impossible to determine how many original letters or poems were originally received from the public. We also cannot know how many letters in total the family received from members of the working classes, poor, or middle classes, nor how many of them were destroyed alongside intimate personal correspondence. The archived materials that are currently available have each been mediated through the Tennysons' decisions nearly 130 years ago. As such, the modern availability of this generous body of death correspondence cannot with confidence be considered to be fully representative of the public's responses to Tennyson's death. While there is no evidence that the death correspondence was curated in the same manner as the correspondence for *Memoir*, and culled in kind alongside those who met their fate in the reputational bonfire, it is reasonable to presume so. Emily was an avid record-keeper and is unlikely to have overlooked the content of these materials in the process of responding to or collecting them.

Ann Thwaite reports:

Emily's . . . record-keeping was formidable. She had written lists of everything possible – inventories of furniture and linen, catalogues of books. Even the surviving lists of wine and spirits . . . are in Emily's hand, not in that of the butler.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, Hallam is known to have admonished contemporaries who spoke of or wrote about his father without the family's approval, and sternly advised against attempting to do so. Ann Thwaite cites a letter from Hallam to an old family friend, the Anglican priest Hardwicke Rawnsley, upon discovering that Rawnsley had been writing a Tennyson biography :

My mother and I are taken aback by the news that you – who knew next to nothing of my Father – are going to write his Life . . . My mother and I are preparing the only

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<sup>51</sup> Thwaite, p. 19.

authorized Life. . . . My Father expressly desired that if any Memoir were written – it should be written (so as to preclude the necessity of any other Memoir) by those who knew him best. We alone have the documents on which an authentic Memoir can be founded.<sup>52</sup>

Tennyson's wishes were to be the foremost considerations in any 'official' record of Tennyson, which, as the bonfire demonstrates, extended to the family's collection. Of the surviving 10,000 letters, at least, the death correspondence spans the social classes. The non-anonymous death correspondents' census records show that 26% were working-class and 20% were middle-class, while 43% are unknown, and 11% were from the elite classes. The latter appear to be Tennysons's personal friends—thus, are likely to have been mis-filed with the public correspondence (see Appendix 18, Table 3 and Chart C). Religious affiliation data is inconsistently recorded, and therefore not included here.

The family deliberately retained these documents, although apparently without sufficient time or motivation to curate them in a separate collection. It also remains impossible to know if the Tennysons deliberately preserved letters and poems from the working classes and poor *because* of their social identities. Indeed, Tennyson could be disparaging about working-class poetry. As Kirstie Blair (2009) identified, Tennyson, in a 1852 letter, referred to the enormous quantities of poetry that working-class people sent to him as “shoals of trash.”<sup>53</sup> However, it may be reasonable to assume that the family deliberately curated these materials in order to demonstrate the Poet Laureate's charity to the poorer classes — benevolence which he performed in his writing. For example, towards the end of his life, Tennyson expressed the view that the wealthy held a responsibility to show kindness and generosity to the poor in ‘Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After’ (c1886). In this

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<sup>52</sup> Thwaite, p.25.

<sup>53</sup> Kirstie Blair, ‘Men my brothers, men the workers’: Tennyson and the Victorian Working-Class Poet’, in *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 276.

poem, the elderly Lord of Locksley Hall narrates, and passionately lectures Leonard, his grandson, on the virtues of charity he has followed since the death of his wife sixty years prior:

Silent echoes! you, my Leonard, use and not abuse your day,  
Move among your people, know them, follow him who led the way,  
Strove for sixty widow'd years to help his homelier brother men,  
Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school, and drain'd the fen.<sup>54</sup>

Hallam Tennyson ensured that Tennyson's earlier altruism was further demonstrated in *Memoir* (1897). For example, Hallam details his father's generosity in 1837, in which Tennyson donated a work of his poetry as a "really charitable deed"<sup>55</sup> to a "charity book of poetry for the destitute family of a man of letters,"<sup>56</sup> which Lord Northampton organised. Hallam Tennyson noted that the charity piece for Northampton's *The Tribute* (1837) entitled 'O, that 'twere possible', became the foundation of 'Maud'.<sup>57</sup> In 1847, Tennyson emphasised that "the housing and education of the poor man before making him our master" was one of the "great social questions impending in England."<sup>58</sup> And Tennyson concluded a letter to Irish poet Aubrey Thomas de Vere by stating: "I have seen no papers for an age, and do not know how your poor are going on. I fear this bitter weather is very hard upon them."<sup>59</sup> Hallam also recounted his father's words a week prior to his death:

[H]e talked long about the Personality and the Love of God, "That God, Whose eyes consider the poor," "Who catereth even for the sparrow." "I should," he said,

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<sup>54</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After', in *Ballads and Other Poems, Vol. VI of The Works of Tennyson*, Hallam Lord Tennyson (ed), annotated by Alfred Lord Tennyson, (London: Macmillan, [1886] 1908), stanzas 265-268, in Ian Lancashire, *Representative Poetry Online* (University of Toronto Libraries, 1999) <<https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/locksley-hall-sixty-years-after>> [accessed online, 18 April 2020].

<sup>55</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (New York: The Macmillan Co., [1897] 1899), p. 160.

<sup>56</sup> Hallam Tennyson, p. 157.

<sup>57</sup> Hallam Tennyson, p. 160.

<sup>58</sup> Hallam Tennyson, p. 249.

<sup>59</sup> Hallam Tennyson, p. 261.

“infinitely rather feel myself the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth with a God above, than the highest type of man standing alone.”<sup>60</sup>

Although the latter end of this quote shows Tennyson’s preference to be poor in an environment centred around God rather than the ‘highest type’ in a Godless one, he also asserted his Christian faith by connecting the ‘love of God’ with consideration for the poor. It is therefore reasonable to speculate that the Tennysons deliberately collected these particular letters from the poor, the working people, and solely those not ‘the highest type’. Perhaps they did so in order to demonstrate Tennyson’s impact on less fortunate individuals, and to preserve evidence of the admiration for Tennyson and his work from the non-elite public. Although there is no definitive proof that the letters were collected *because* they were from the non-elite classes, their existence shows they were considered to be valued sufficiently to be withheld from the reputational bonfire. The death correspondence is now securely stored at the Tennyson Research Centre.

### **The Tennyson Research Centre (TRC)**

Most of the Tennyson family’s 10,000 documents of correspondence, including the death correspondence, are currently scattered across the TRC, which is a relatively small archive surviving amid budget constraints of a typical council-run public library. According to the TRC’s Archive Manager at the time of my visits between 2013 and 2014, the archive’s correspondence had remained catalogued “only by author, recipient and date.”<sup>61</sup> The boxes which contain decades worth of letters from strangers – including some of the death correspondents whose writing was not stored along with the handwritten poems – also hold letters from friends, family members, the aristocracy, and literary celebrities such as Charles

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<sup>60</sup> Hallam Tennyson, p. 311.

<sup>61</sup> Email correspondence with G.T., TRC Archive Manager, 2013.

Dickens. There is no evidence that the letters from famous or noteworthy writers were once separately grouped from those of the general public. In fact, the archive's non-elite contents appear to have been inadvertently masked because, rather than being catalogued separately, they are instead stored in disparate locations within the archive. Indeed, the TRC archive staff reported that "Victorian working-class or poor don't get much of a look-in in this archive."<sup>62</sup> Yet, the Tennyson family originally curated these documents alongside those from family and friends – which would indicate that their content, as much as the respectability of the authors, contributed to their curation criteria. Moreover, following my transcriptions and records analysis, it is probable that the contents of the death correspondence contributed to their curation and preservation, being almost unanimously Christian, moral, and favourably deferential to the work and memory of Tennyson. The themes of the death correspondence, therefore, suggest that the family deliberately curated correspondence based on content. It appears that the Tennysons applied a unilateral selection criterion for correspondence from the public, regardless of the authors' social classes: correspondence that upheld Christian morality and notions of widespread adoration of the Poet Laureate were saved; those that did not were burned. In doing so, the family curated a body of correspondence that effectively established Tennyson as the epitome of morality; seen, for example, in poem from 15-year-old S. Gertrude Ford: "[Tennyson,] Whose light-invested influences combine / To make of man a God, of earth a Heaven."<sup>63</sup>

### **The cultural complexity of class**

Definitions of the British Victorian class system are complex and fluid, relating to the evolution of occupations, income, living conditions, access to social mobility, political

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<sup>62</sup> Email correspondence with G.T., TRC Archive Manager, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> S. Gertrude Ford, untitled, undated (c. 1892), poem, TRC, UK, ll. 159-160.

movements, religion, and education throughout the nineteenth century—thus evading static definitions for at least 200 years. There were various attempts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to define the fluctuating strata comprising the British class system. In the late eighteenth century, Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith believed that only an individual's occupation and their means of producing their labour determined their social status.<sup>64</sup> The concept of labour as an indicator of class prevailed throughout the nineteenth century. In 1840, British illustrator George Cruikshank drew *The British Bee Hive*, which depicted occupations in a strictly hierarchical pyramid.<sup>65</sup> At the top of the hive, Cruikshank placed 'The Royal Family by Lineal Descent', and at the bottom, occupations such as cabman, dustman, coal-heaver, and shoe black. The broad middle section was allocated to the various strata of working- and middle-class. On the second tier, one layer above the street-based workers, Cruikshank placed skilled labourers such as stone masons, tailors, weavers and bootmakers, forming the upper-working class. On the third tier, green grocers, dairy maids, and butchers stood as the lower level of the middle-class. Office-based 'work for men and boys' such as clerks, 'free-trade' agriculture, and mechanics formed the second tier of the 'middle' class; with intellectuals, scholars and artists filling the highest level of the middle hierarchy. Also in 1840, journalist Henry Mayhew's newspaper article series, 'London Labour and the London Poor', described the occupations, 'morality', and hardships of London's working-classes, and later published in a four-volume book series (1851). Similar to the bee-hive hierarchy, Mayhew placed street-based workers at the base of the class

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<sup>64</sup> See: Adam Smith, 'The Theory of Moral Sentiments: To which is Added, a Dissertation on the Origin of Languages' (1767); and 'An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations', 1791). See also: Edward W. Coker, 'Adam Smith's Concept of the Social System', in *Journal of Business Ethics* Vol. 9, No. 2 (Feb. 1990), pp. 139-142.

<sup>65</sup> George Cruikshank, *The British Beehive* [1840] 1860, *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-british-bee-hive>> [accessed 18 September 2020].

hierarchy, pejoratively describing them as a ‘curious class of people’ dependent upon juvenile labour.<sup>66</sup>

More than a century later, scholar R.S. Neale (1968) devised a “five-class model” to encompass “an unstable Middling Class during the early stages of industrialization in early nineteenth-century England” and the political class following *The People’s Charter* (1838).<sup>67</sup> Neale’s five-tier class system was: *Upper Class* (aristocratic); *Middle Class* (senior military and professional men, property owners); *Middling Class* (aspiring professionals and artisans); *Working Class A* (industry proletariat); and *Working Class B* (factory and domestic workers, and most working-class women).<sup>68</sup> These class distinctions which merge occupation, income, and status can be difficult to characterise in scholarly study, particularly relating to the instability of the Middling Class and Working Class A and B.

Julie-Marie Strange (2005) described the challenges relating to Victorian class definitions and the “slippery concept” of respectability relating to the working-classes and their presumed “absorption of middle-class values,”<sup>69</sup> ultimately accepting the fluidity of class concepts without attempting the static definitions seen in earlier historians. Strange states that “‘class’ is a notoriously problematic concept and frequently perceived to be at odds with an acknowledgement of decentered identities.”<sup>70</sup> Citing the analytical class frameworks of Andrew Miles and Mike Savage (1994) which challenge class-defining language as “unduly restrictive”, Strange highlights that “‘Class’ is not used as a tool of analysis here; it

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<sup>66</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work, and Those that Will Not Work, Volume 1*, (London: G. Woodfall and Son. January 1851).

<sup>67</sup> R.S. Neale, ‘Class and Class-Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Three Classes or Five?’ *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1968), 32.

<sup>68</sup> Neale, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Strange, p. 21.



is used as an adjective to loosely signify manual workers and their families”.<sup>71</sup> Florence Boos (2008) similarly acknowledges the fluid notions of Victorian class definitions, stating: “There is . . . danger that well-intended efforts at coherent analysis may oversimplify a subject fraught with paradox and contradictions. Rubrics such as ‘working-class poetry’ derive from assimilations that may have effaced real differences.”<sup>72</sup>

The problematically oversimplified attempts over the centuries to define class notwithstanding, I have employed loose terminology that is informed by the work of Miles, Savage, Strange and Boos, based on the occupations and living conditions of the individuals detailed within this body of correspondence. These function as shorthand terms rather than static definitions. Their use is not an attempt to redefine notions of class-based language, nor do these broad descriptions serve as frameworks for analyses. Solely for the sake of readability within this thesis, the correspondents are described, where appropriate, as follows: *Middle-class* – professionals, including teachers; *Lower-middle-class* – non-labouring workers, such as clerks; *Skilled working-class* – working-class artisans such as stone masons; *Working-class* – labourers such as coal miners and mechanics; and *Poor* – those living in financial deprivation, regardless of their occupation. Where relevant, I refer to royalty, the aristocracy, and the wealthy upper classes in those terms, or in a shorthand, “elite”. As shorthand, I refer to all correspondents who are not royalty, aristocracy, or wealthy as “non-elite”. I applied further shorthand to populate class data in Appendix 18, merging the strata to encompass working-class, middle-class, upper-class/wealthy, and Aristocracy. These terms are neither congratulatory nor punitive, nor do they attempt to create new delineations or redefine historic terminology. They function solely to signal the broad social groups being analysed, while acknowledging the contemporary hierarchies in the long nineteenth century,

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<sup>71</sup> Strange, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Boos, pp. 16-17.

and the broader definitions still used by historians today. Despite these existing complexities, I also defer to the classifications that the correspondents use to define their own social identities – even if these occasionally conflict with my own terminology, and with the delineations that scholars and historians have attempted to use over the centuries. The archive offers a uniquely rich opportunity to gain insights into the reading, writing, and cultural practices of a disparate group of people. When one is provided with the hitherto lost voices of Victorian women, men, children and the elderly from all classes, the responsible decision is to listen.

Connected to the complexity of class identities are equally complex cultural influences which informed the death correspondents' differing approaches to their compositions. In order to understand the cultural influences, it is important to understand their varied reading and writing practices and access to education. The reading habits of and compositional inspiration for the death correspondents, such as a young labouring collier from Cumbria (J. Brown) might bear no resemblance to others, such as a 60-year-old stonemason from Plymouth (Paul Hann) – particularly as nineteenth-century stonemasons were frequently the “ardent self-taught intellectuals” of the working classes—as reflected in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).<sup>73</sup> A 15-year-old aspiring poet (S. Gertrude Ford) living with her chapel-keeper father and woollen mill worker siblings in a single-family home might have little compositional commonality with another death correspondent, a middle-aged Irish homemaker and mother (Annie Martell) living in a crowded Middlesex home with her eight children. Working people with access to a Glasgow mutual-improvement society or the Marylebone Public Reading Room may have had more in common with the reading habits of death correspondents such as a retired Headmistress from Bath (Miss Collins), or

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<sup>73</sup> Edith Hall and Henry Stead, 'Prologue', *A People's History of Classics: Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689-1939*, (Routledge Taylor Francis, 2020), p. i.

the retired property manager (W. Hutton Braysay) who quotes Goethe in his correspondence, than with rural working counterparts, whose access to books was generally more limited to the Bible, and therefore, more dependent upon local borrowing and sharing habits than personal choice. While scholarly study of working-class literacy has grown in recent years, within the scope of this study, it is necessary to streamline notions of ‘class’ and reading. Throughout the chapters, and where relevant, poetic structures are examined in tandem with their contents to allow us to understand the death correspondents’ possible literary and cultural influences. Census details and documented information about the correspondents’ lives and communities are also analysed where possible.

There are some consistencies in content across the letters and poems analysed in this research. The Tennyson death correspondents most often communicated their views through verse, yet they occasionally also did so through autobiographical details. Of the 56 poems, fifteen (27%) either refer to or quote Tennyson’s *Crossing the Bar*, which was set to music by Emily Tennyson and played at Tennyson’s funeral. This, in turn, was widely reported upon in newspapers and periodicals.<sup>74</sup> Nearly all of the poems are based on the elegiac tradition—including ten (17%) which employ a lyre within their composition—or offer a contemporary update to this tradition. As one could expect, several borrow from Tennyson’s elegy, *In Memoriam*, whilst others mention ‘The May Queen’ and other Tennyson works. Many quote Shakespeare. Nearly all quote or refer to verses in the Bible. Indeed, all of the poems include at least one of these recurring features. However, individualised expressions that diverge from their counterparts are also investigated in later chapters.

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<sup>74</sup> The Tennyson Research Centre holds a catalogue of obituary newspaper clippings from the UK and abroad. Also see *Memoir* for descriptions of these reports and the Tennyson family’s response.

Kate Flint's book, *The Woman Reader* (1993) revealed aspects of working-class Victorian women's education and reading habits by researching published materials: autobiographical texts, such as Flora Thompson's *Lark's Rise* (1939) and Alice Foley's *A Bolton Childhood* (1973); and data relating to Victorian book-purchasing habits. Later, Jonathan Rose's extensive research for *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2002) tackled hitherto under-researched British working-class developments in literacy, spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Great Britain. Rose accessed library records, the memoirs of workers (including Thompson and Foley), surveys, and labour history to contextualise the population's progression from pre-industrial-revolution to twentieth-century literacy, including the development of intellectual cultivation. More recently, scholars such as Mike Sanders and Kirstie Blair have further explored the fields of British Victorian working-class literacy, education, authorship, and history, to which this thesis aims to contribute.<sup>75</sup>

The Tennyson death correspondence demonstrates not only the authors' breadths of reading, but also their abilities to analyse and personalise literary sources, including the Classics, philosophy, the Bible, and works of the Romantic period. Pierre Bourdieu (1979); Jonathan Rose (2001); and Mary Hammond (2006) argue that non-elite reading practices from the nineteenth century were often partially aspirational to display 'literary taste' or performative acts of 'high' reading for the purpose of social manoeuvring. Autobiographies such as Thompson's *Lark Rise* (1939) also provide evidence that displaying admirable books

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<sup>75</sup> See, for example: Kirstie Blair, "'Let the Nightingales Alone': Correspondence Columns, the Scottish Press, and the Making of the Working-Class Poet", in *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47:2, Summer 2014; "'Men my brothers, men the workers': Tennyson and the Victorian Working-Class Poet", in Douglas-Fairhurst R & Perry S (eds), *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and "The Newspaper Press and the Victorian Working-Class Poet", in Goodridge, John and Keegan, Bridget (eds), *A History of British Working Class Literature*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017). See also: Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and "'God's Insurrection": Politics and Faith in the Revolutionary Sermons of Joseph Rayner Stephens', in *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion: Literary, Historical, and Religious Studies in Dialogue*, Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner (eds), (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2019).

to demonstrate respectability and deflect attention away from habitual lighter reading was common in working homes in the late nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> However, I contend that this cannot be proven to be a common feature of working-class homes, nor should we overlook that the same performative displays took place in middle- and upper-class homes. It is equally possible that the death correspondents have referenced, quoted, emulated, and discussed works of literature that they actually read, and without evidence to the contrary, I have investigated their writing at face value. However, Tennyson death correspondents occasionally misrepresented or misremembered their social and cultural situations at the time of writing in 1892, when compared to public records such as the Census – which we will see in chapter two with the gardener J. Brown. These factual gaps may be attributed to the one-year interlude between the 1891 Census and the year of Tennyson death correspondence in 1892, or to historic Census errors; but it is equally likely that some death correspondents deliberately modified their personal details, for reasons which remain obscure.

The majority of memorial poems were written to Tennyson himself, following the elegiac tradition of calling out to the deceased. Additionally, a substantial portion of the death correspondence is addressed individually to either Emily or Hallam, but rarely to both. This suggests a common desire for members of the public to extend their feelings of personal acquaintance with the Poet Laureate to Tennyson's individual family members. In doing so, the death correspondents used written communication and verse in order to participate in the mass mourning event for 'the people's poet'.

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<sup>76</sup> Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise*, (London: Penguin Books, [1939] 1973), p. 110.

### **Celebrity mass mourning**

Tennyson's publication of *In Memoriam* and subsequent appointment as Poet Laureate, both in 1850, had projected him into the public sphere. As evidenced in the correspondence Tennyson and his family received and collected both during his lifetime and after his death, Tennyson's poetry transcended class. Samantha Matthews supports the evidence seen in the death correspondence, stating: "Typically poets were appreciated by an elite group of poetry readers, but had limited wider influence: Tennyson transcended the poet's relatively marginal social role, and was mourned as a national hero."<sup>77</sup>

Following four decades of letters and poems pouring into their home and consciousness, Emily, Hallam and Audrey would have anticipated condolence letters following Tennyson's death, both from friends and members of the public. This correspondence to Tennyson's family in 1892 included personal (non-anonymous) declarations of love and powerful statements of individual bereavement, demonstrating that people had come to view Tennyson as their own to love and mourn. The inclination for members of the public to personally engage with literary celebrities through correspondence was clearly established prior to the mid-nineteenth century, such as with Lord Byron, whose compromised privacy Tennyson had bemoaned on Byron's behalf, as noted earlier. Despite his stated aversion to the public wanting more from a poet than the writing itself, by 1892, Tennyson had attained a vast and diverse audience; and upon his death, readers sent expressions of mourning to Tennyson's family. Matthews adds: "Tennyson was the only Victorian poet whose death prompted a spontaneous outbreak of mass mourning comparable to that for royals such as Prince Albert (d.1861) or Queen Victoria herself (d.1901), or for popular figures such as the Duke of Wellington (d.1852), Charles Dickens (d.1870), or W. E.

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<sup>77</sup> Samantha Matthews, 'Burying Tennyson: The Victorian Laureate immortalized', in *Mortality: Promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying*, 7.3 (2002), p. 247.

Gladstone (d.1896).”<sup>78</sup> The death correspondence from the Victorian British public demonstrates that, while Tennyson’s readers certainly viewed him as a celebrity figure, they also apparently related to Tennyson as a member of their own social and familial spheres. Although these correspondences offered condolence to the bereaved family, they regularly included articulations of personal mourning for Tennyson in language typically seen among close friends or family members. The authors also demonstrated mourning for Tennyson in gendered domestic forms, representing Tennyson as a husband, father, or brother to society. Others wrote as if they were Tennyson’s widows, children, siblings, or neighbours – demonstrating an inclination for readers to view themselves as being members of Tennyson’s family and community. Indeed, Victorian readers from different social classes drew upon their reading to construct imagined communities, often adapting Tennyson’s poetic verses or the Bible to devise complex thoughts.

### **Contexts of late Victorian condolence correspondence**

The correspondence sent to Tennyson’s family in 1892 occasionally diverged from brief, courteous condolence notes, as appropriate for one stranger to send to another in the late nineteenth century, into expressions of individual loss and grief, such as an elegy by 34-year-old Fanny Edge from Worksop (discussed in Chapter 2), which cries:

Oh that before God took you,  
I might have grasped your hand.  
I should have committed [sic] it to me,  
The greatest honor [sic] sent  
Or to have gazed upon thy face,  
I should have been content.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Matthews, “Burying Tennyson: The Victorian Laureate immortalized”, p. 248.

<sup>79</sup> Fanny Edge, untitled, undated (c. 1892), poem, TRC, UK, ll. pp. 31-36.

As seen previously, etiquette handbooks such as *Cassell's Household Guide* (1880) outlined the required social etiquette for non-familial mourning conduct. In contrast to Edge's personalised grief for Tennyson, *Cassell's* advised that polite condolence correspondence required no words:

Whenever death, illness, or any domestic event affecting the happiness or welfare of a family is generally known, by advertisement in the public journals or otherwise, it is customary for acquaintances to leave cards of . . . condolence. . . . No words need be written on such cards unless it be particularly wished.<sup>80</sup>

As this extract further illustrates, *Cassell's* places “any domestic event” together with death and illness in recommending appropriate behaviour towards non-relatives experiencing such events. The *Cassell's* chapter, ‘Death in the Household’, also provides in-depth guidance regarding public notices, funeral scheduling, permissible cloth and jewellery to utilise in mourning clothing, and appropriate stationery. But this instruction is limited to *practical* and *visible* mourning procedures rather than stipulating content guidelines for composing death-related communication. *Cassell's* offers death announcement templates, with minimal text for use on death announcement stationery, such as name, dates of birth and death, and funeral details; but no content requirements for condolence correspondence are addressed in this popular Victorian guidance book. However, the guidance indicates erring towards restraint. Even in the absence of specific directives regarding nineteenth-century condolence letters, *Cassell's* intones that ‘appropriate’ conduct within all forms of written correspondence was simply expected of its readership. For example, *Cassell's* warns: “It may happen that the

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<sup>80</sup> Anonymous, ‘Society I. Etiquette of Visiting, Etc’, in *Cassell's Household Guide, New and Revised Edition*, 3 (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1880), p. 111.



character of a young writer will be partly estimated by his regard to correctness in his letters; and we all know how much may depend on the estimate formed.”<sup>81</sup>

*Cassell's* phrasing regarding condolence conduct implies that it was socially appropriate to acknowledge a death once one is aware of it, even if only through a newspaper obituary (“[w]henver death . . . is generally known, by advertisement in the public journals or otherwise, it is customary for acquaintances to leave cards of . . . condolence.”).<sup>82</sup>

Although there is no evidence the Tennyson death correspondents read or followed conduct guidance, the existence of their letters and poems demonstrates that they considered it socially acceptable to send condolences, as strangers, to the bereaved. The news of Tennyson's death was widely circulated in newspapers and reached all sections of the Victorian population. This type of guidance, however, does not define ‘acquaintances’ as referring solely those who have a mutual, reciprocal relationship, or indeed any relationship at all. Again, whilst there is no indication that Tennyson's readers bothered with such guidance, the omission from widely accepted conduct guidance, such as *Cassell's*, of any definition of acquaintanceship demonstrates that culturally, this definition was left to individuals to interpret. To be ‘acquainted’ with an individual—whether in social and domestic life, or by distance through fame—suggests a sufficient ‘relationship’ by which to justify words of condolence. The archive of letters written in response to Tennyson's death, funeral and obituaries suggest that the status of ‘celebrity’ created a new form of ‘acquaintance’ – just as Romantic poets Byron and Shelley experienced unsolicited and personalised correspondence. Indeed, in the context of understanding the national event that

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<sup>81</sup> Anonymous, ‘Hints to Letter-Writers’, *Cassell's Household Guide*, 1 (1869), p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Anonymous, ‘Society I. Etiquette of Visiting, Etc’, in *Cassell's Household Guide, New and Revised Edition*, 3 (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1880), p. 111.

was Tennyson's funeral, Samantha Matthews points to the 'Romantic standard' in order to identify the "cultural context for understanding Victorian attitudes to their poets."<sup>83</sup>

The contents of the death correspondence feature a blend of religious, mythological, pastoral, and monarchic metaphors. While these tropes fit appropriately within the traditions of the elegy, lyric, and ode, they also indicate a wider societal tendency in the late nineteenth century to idealise literary celebrities—which again, scholars cite as being traceable to the Romantic period.<sup>84</sup> Thomas Mole (1996) argued that, in the Romantic period, "the industrial alienation between readers and writers" created a scene in which individual readers longed for a relationship with an author, which "resembled an intimate connection between individuals."<sup>85</sup> Corin Throsby argues that this phenomenon is connected with the Romantic period, particularly Byron.<sup>86</sup> Throsby states:

Byron was one of the first writers ever to receive what would now be described as fan mail, that is, unsolicited letters from his readership, on a mass scale. The collection of these letters in the Murray Archive contains correspondence from mostly anonymous, mostly female readers, who were so moved by Byron's poetry that they felt compelled to write to a man they had never met.<sup>87</sup>

Different impulses motivated Byron's and Tennyson's readers to write. According to Throsby, Byron's readers communicated love and desire for Byron, and were cynically

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<sup>83</sup> Matthews, p. 247.

<sup>84</sup> John Batchelor, *Tennyson: To strive, to seek, to find*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2012), pp. 26-27. Batchelor cites the Romantics as both the influence on Tennyson's early work, and the impetus for his fame: "The young Alfred Tennyson loved both the poetry and the political daring of Byron and Shelley. . . . The Romantics, then, both nurtured him and made way for him, and his work between 1830 and 1850 was in a sense filling a vacancy created by the early deaths of their first generation. In literary terms, much of the nineteenth century would be the age of Tennyson. He would become a national monument."

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 3-22, in Corin Throsby, *Flirting With Fame: Byron and his Female Readers*, (Doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2009), p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Corin Throsby, *Flirting With Fame: Byron and his Female Readers*, (Doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2009), p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Corin Throsby, 'Byron, commonplacing and early fan culture', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750–1850*, Thomas Mole (ed), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 228.

viewed as both ‘hysterical’ and uncritically more interested in the poet than in his poetry.<sup>88</sup> Tennyson’s readers more frequently communicate interest in Tennyson’s intellectual, moral, and literary influences. Although some of Tennyson’s readers express love for the Poet Laureate within these letters and poems, they represent the minority of correspondence, particularly compared to the professions of love from Byron’s readers. Yet, a tendency to view an author as a subject of adoration, and to communicate a perceived individual relationship with a writer clearly thrived beyond the Romantic period—as Tennyson’s fans demonstrated in 1892. The tens of thousands of letters sent from friends and strangers alike to Tennyson during his lifetime demonstrate that the general public viewed him as being both accessible to them, and an individual with whom they shared a personal relationship. This is despite the derision with which Tennyson could regard the working classes. Bob Watts (1999) recalls that “in his poetry, Tennyson figures the working class as a rough, dangerous presence, a pressure troubling the stability of the social structure and, like Enoch Arden, a threat to ‘shatter all the happiness’.”<sup>89</sup> Kirstie Blair (2009) recalls an 1852 letter, in which he complained about “the 200,000,000 poets of Great Britain” who ‘deluged’ him “daily with volumes of poems.”<sup>90</sup> Yet, as Blair states, “he was more visible than any other previous poet laureate”, largely owing to increased access to published materials from the mid-nineteenth century onward, and the rise of the publication of non-elite poets in the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> Tennyson—or typically, his family acting on his behalf—responded to unsolicited correspondence from strangers. Countless archived letters that Tennyson received during his

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<sup>88</sup> Throsby, ‘Byron, commonplacing and early fan culture’, p. 228.

<sup>89</sup> Bob Watts, “‘Slow Prudence’: Tennyson’s Taming of the Working Class”, in *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (1999), p. 493.

<sup>90</sup> Alfred Tennyson, ‘Letter to Elizabeth Russell’, 28 September 1852, in Kirstie Blair, “‘Men my brothers, men the workers’: Tennyson and the Victorian Working-Class Poet”, in *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 276-295 (p. 45).

<sup>91</sup> Blair, “‘Men my brothers, men the workers’: Tennyson and the Victorian Working-Class Poet”, 277.

lifetime are noted 'Answered', 'Ans' or simply 'A' in pencil [see Fig. 2], often in the upper-left or upper-right corners.

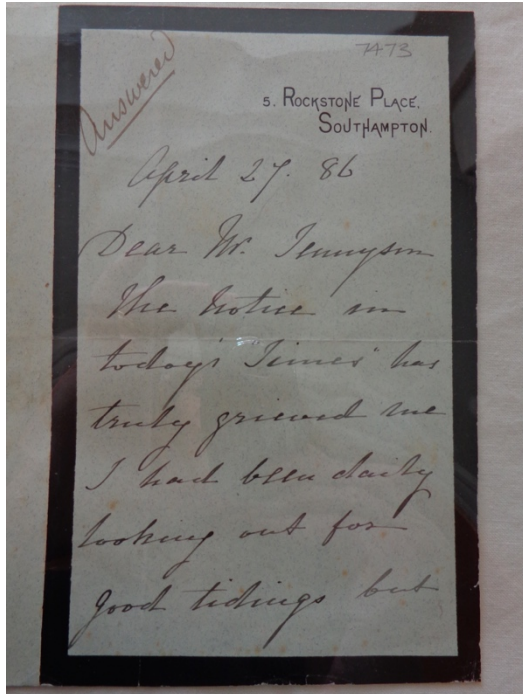


Fig. 2. A characteristic example of the frequently seen 'Answered' annotation on letters to Alfred Lord Tennyson, which his family usually managed on his behalf. This annotation on a condolence letter from the 27th April 1886 relating to the death of the Tennysons' youngest son Lionel is thought to be in Audrey Tennyson's handwriting (see Audrey Tennyson's journal, Tennyson Research Centre). Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

Rather than passively discouraging unsolicited letters by ignoring them, he or his family on his behalf answered them. The majority of Tennyson's responses to members of the public are not currently known to be archived;<sup>92</sup> but as Blair stated, as his popularity grew, so did the chances that his responses would become published, such as his correspondence with Joseph Senior, a Sheffield blacksmith—correspondence which was published in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* and subsequently included as the preface to the second

<sup>92</sup> In contrast, several letters to Tennyson's noteworthy friends and peers were returned to the family at their request for inclusion in *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son* (1897) and are therefore archived both in original form and in the book of memoirs.

edition of Senior's book of poetry.<sup>93</sup> Blair asserts that as Poet Laureate, Tennyson felt an obligation to working-class writers:

[D]espite his complaints he was . . . prepared to lend his name and reputation to the cause of those working-class writers who seemed peculiarly deserving. His advice to the working-class poets who sent him their works was kind, although his letters seldom offer encouragement for pursuing poetry as a career.

Blair further asserts: "While his lyrical gifts were strongly praised by working-class critics, the fact that his poems were difficult to pin down in terms of their politics meant that his anointment as 'poet of the people' was always problematic."<sup>94</sup> While we may struggle to pinpoint each of the myriad reasons why Tennyson was seen as 'poet of the people' over a period of 42 years, the exaggerated '200 million poems' sent during Tennyson's lifetime, and the factual tens of thousands of letters sent after his death, show that the people viewed him as one of their own. Certainly, aspiring working-class poets would have heard about or read the correspondence from the Laureate to working people; and cynically, there is little doubt that some aspiring writers sought approval from Tennyson, and from his family after he died, in order to improve their chances for publication. As Blair states:

[Tennyson's] near-legendary status in his own lifetime meant that it was not surprising that eager poets pursued Tennyson, knowing that his endorsement of their work might mean the difference between success and failure, or that they tended to define their own writings in relation to the 'real' poetry he produced.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, while most of the death correspondents simply send their writing along to Hallam or Emily, some are keen to be seen as established poets. One correspondent signs his elegy as "James Joseph Barrett, The Poet"; and while it appears that his work did see publication in 1896, the publisher "J.J. Barrett" suggests this work was self-published. Another signs her

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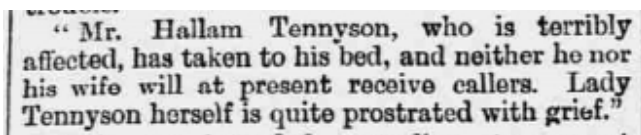
<sup>93</sup> Blair, "Men my brothers, men the workers", p. 279.

<sup>94</sup> Blair, "Men my brothers, men the workers", pp. 276-295.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

poem, “The Composer Annie Martell”. The latter poem from Annie Martell is addressed to Hallam Tennyson, imploring: “Will Lord Tennyson, please accept the enclosed lines, composed on the day of your dear Fathers [sic] funeral.”

The correspondence immediately following Tennyson’s death was primarily addressed to Hallam Tennyson rather than Emily. A possible explanation is that Hallam was Tennyson’s personal secretary from the 1870s onward and would have been seen as the family scribe. However, with newspapers reporting that Emily was ‘prostrated with grief’ (Fig. 3), an equal possibility is that it may have been seen as ill-mannered to further distress her with letters of condolence. However, substantive letters and poems did arrive addressed to Emily, and of those who wrote, few withheld emotions from their words of condolence. Interestingly, many of the condolence messages that diverged from minimal or polite correspondence were most frequently addressed to Emily, reasons for which are unclear. The readers’ ‘acquaintanceship’ with Tennyson through his celebrity status may have extended to Emily upon his death; but equally, it is clear that readers felt sympathy for Emily and identified with her widow’s grief. Declarations of a lost or unrequited love or a ‘shared grief’ weren’t uncommon in the letters Emily received, and as we will see, are often phrased in the familiar terms typically reserved for correspondence among kin or friends.



“Mr. Hallam Tennyson, who is terribly affected, has taken to his bed, and neither he nor his wife will at present receive callers. Lady Tennyson herself is quite prostrated with grief.”

Fig. 3. *London Evening Standard*, 7th October 1892.

## **Methodology**

The core of my research was informed by original source materials from a single physical archive that contains approximately 9,000 of the surviving 10,000 letters: The Tennyson Research Centre (TRC), Lincoln. Through the patient guidance and inexhaustible knowledge of the TRC's Archives Manager at the time, G.T., I combed through these c. 9,000 documents one at a time across three separate visits. My time spent in archival research alone equates to approximately 85 hours.

In order to focus my research to fit within the scope of a PhD thesis, over the course of three months, I concentrated on locating one year's worth of correspondence: letters written to Tennyson's family between Tennyson's death on 6th October 1892 through 31 October 1893. Although 42% of the 57 core items of correspondence in this study were undated (see Appendix 18, Table 2), the majority of the poems and letters were written in the weeks following Tennyson's death, according to the TRC: between October and November 1892. I applied the same date-range criterion to select letters from the Tennyson family's personal collection that did *not* include a poem. I then transcribed 109 handwritten documents within that date range that were written in English.

### ***Selection and omission criteria***

From my 109 transcriptions, I selected 72 (66%) for study (56 poems and 16 letters), written by 52 individuals (some wrote more than one item of correspondence – noted where relevant). Of these, I have directly cited 25 (35%) correspondences; and 16 (22%) of these and their authors function as in-depth case studies by which to explore answers to this thesis's questions. To select the above, I looked for both the contents' consistencies and anomalies for deeper investigation. Where repeated themes and topics revealed themselves, I selected the documents which most clearly represented these themes for deeper study; and

inversely, I selected the anomalies which did not necessarily follow the typical patterns within the collection (see Chapter Overview for themes). These latter two criteria determined my selection of the of the 25 works for inclusion and 16 authors for case studies. These are supported with contextual information, such as the writers' likely communities, education and literary influences—as well as their religious and societal beliefs.

Of the 52 writers, I located 27 confirmed census details. This provided 8 known countries of origin. In present-day terms, these are: England (17); Scotland (5); Wales (2); Northern Ireland (2); Republic of Ireland (1); Canada (1); USA (1); and Australia (1); with 20 unknown (see Appendix 18). Authors' physical residences, rather than their nations of origin, were used for these figures – although nationalities are noted where known. While 23 (43%) of personal details are lost to time, based on self-descriptions and census details, the 52 correspondents' apparent, broadly identifiable classes are: working-class: 14 (26%); middle-class: 11 (20%); and elite: 6 (11%) (see Appendix 18, Table 3 and Chart D). As this thesis is focused upon the general public, I omitted from further study the six correspondents who had relationships with the Tennyson family, seen through their modes of address ('My dearest Hallam' vs 'Dear Sir') or nostalgic content recounting memories with Tennyson. These happen to also represent the six elite correspondents, who were likely misfiled, including an 'anonymous' poem from the Duke of Argyll, one of Tennyson's pallbearers.

The personal identity traits of the death correspondents, such as race, ethnicity, and genders, are tricky to ascertain without evidence or self-identification. As we will see throughout this study, errors, misrepresentations, misrememberings, and misidentifications of ostensibly factual information, while rare, do exist within this relatively small sample study of 109 documents and their available corresponding historic records. As we have very little evidence relating to the death correspondents' identities, I have therefore reluctantly taken a 'face value' approach.



This section of my methodology uses the dual terminology ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ because, although this discussion refers to the census question which specifically asks for ethnicity, the two terms are not interchangeable. As Debra Thompson (2015) stated:

[T]he terminology of ‘race’ versus ‘ethnicity’ is a tricky business. . . . Like race, ethnicity is a social signifier of identity, but it is also fundamentally different. Ethnicity, which can overlap and intersect with race, often describes a collectivity with common ancestry, a shared past, culture and language, and a sense of peoplehood or community.<sup>96</sup>

None of the death correspondents stated their race or ethnicity, and the available census records yielded no insights. According to the UK Cabinet Office (2019), “[i]n every Census since 1841, people have been asked to state their country of birth and, in most cases, their nationality. However, asking about people’s ethnicity is a relatively new concept,” first included in the 1991 Census for England and Wales, and the 1991 Census for Scotland (there is no data for Northern Ireland).<sup>97</sup> It is possible that some of the correspondence within this thesis was written by a variety of races and ethnicities, but this is impossible to determine. Importantly, the terminology used in this study—‘death correspondents’, ‘writers’, etc—must be considered as encompassing all races and ethnicities, while acknowledging a likelihood of a white ethnic majority.

I apply the same principle to the genders of the death correspondence authors.

Terminology such as female/male relates to the manner in which public records are stated, such as census, birth, death, and marriage records. Corresponding pronouns (she/he, her/him, etc) follow on from the records and are not intended to indicate an individual’s gender

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<sup>96</sup> Debra Thompson, ‘The Ethnic Question: Census Politics in Great Britain’, in *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics*, Patrick Simon, Victor Piché, Amélie A. Gagnon (eds), (2017), pp. 113, <[https://citations.springernature.com/item?doi=10.1007/978-3-319-20095-8\\_7](https://citations.springernature.com/item?doi=10.1007/978-3-319-20095-8_7)> [accessed online 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020].

<sup>97</sup> Richard Laux, ‘50 years of collecting ethnicity data’, in *History of government, Cabinet Office*, 7 March 2019. <<https://history.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/07/50-years-of-collecting-ethnicity-data>> [accessed online 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020].

identity. Although I scrutinised writers' content for gender identity details, I have been unable to confirm an instance of individuals who identified as a gender other than that indicated by their census details, or the information contained within their correspondence (such as titles and typically male or female names). Therefore, I note 'gender' data based solely on the stated evidence within these records, while acknowledging this may not be consistent with the individuals' identities. Therefore, according to records, of the 52 death correspondents (not solely those selected as case studies) the 'genders' are as follows: Female: 15; Male: 22; unknown: 15 (see Appendix 18, Table 3 and Chart C).

Returning to my initial trial-and-error 'methodology', I first took a narrow approach. My original research question asked: did Tennyson's *In Memoriam, A.H.H.* (1850) influence the way the British Victorian public subsequently perceived death and mourning, and if so, how did they then express grief through letters? I spent c. 30 hours examining 9,000 letters written to Tennyson from 1850 onwards, looking for references to *In Memoriam*. I disappointedly photographed the eighteen or so letters that did so. On my subsequent visit, realising that both my approach and my research question were flawed, I searched the 9,000 letters for a second time for keywords, such as 'death', 'grief', and 'funeral'. This approach yielded a handful of materials that I photographed. I would later abandon these when I found that they were mainly from friends or distant relatives rather than the British public. I also began to photograph letters written in black-edged mourning stationery, but again abandoned this approach when it became clear that virtually every writer was in the process of mourning somebody, but without writing about it in their correspondence. In the last hour on my third and final day of that visit, I expressed my despair to G.T. After asking me to clarify what I hoped to locate, her face brightened, and she unshelved a box. This box contained press clippings and handwritten elegies from the public following Tennyson's death on the 6th

October 1892. Poetry was not initially the focus of my research, but I gratefully, if tentatively, removed the contents. I had roughly thirty minutes before I needed to board the first of four trains home, so I hastily photographed half of the box's contents – the handwritten elegies – and only glancing at the subject matter. These materials would formulate the core of this research.

I spent the next several months transcribing the unpublished poems. When I returned to the archive on two subsequent visits, I photographed the other half of the box – the published elegies. I also looked again through each of the 9,000 letters. This time, I photographed everything catalogued between September 1892 and October 1893, in order to capture correspondence relating to the month before Tennyson's death and the year-plus afterwards. This included Audrey Tennyson's deathbed journal and items of personalia, such as Tennyson's medicine cup, and the note the family doctor pinned on their gate announcing Tennyson's death. Following this visit, and excluding the personalia, I had now photographed more than 500 letters and poems (most containing several pages). I read each one, and omitted any that were obviously from friends, family, the elite, or the aristocracy. These were easy to locate, as their stationery was embossed with their aristocratic titles, or the names of their manor houses. Furthermore, familiar language—such as 'My Dear Emily', as opposed to the appropriately formal terms of address from strangers, such as 'Dear Lady Tennyson'<sup>98</sup>—highlighted the authors as Tennyson family familiars. Subsequent research confirmed their elite status.

After excluding these letters, I discovered that roughly one fifth of the correspondence in this collection, dated from October to November 1892, was from the general public. Indeed, where the public dated their correspondence, the letters and poems were almost

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<sup>98</sup> For example, see: Anonymous, 'Hints to Letter Writers II', in *Cassell's Household Guide*, 1 (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin: c1880), p. 101.

exclusively written in the days and weeks after Tennyson's death. There was no surviving correspondence from the public to Tennyson or his family during his illness, or in the months following November 1892. In contrast, there were considerable letters from friends and family throughout his illness, and for the subsequent year. It is impossible to know if the surviving letters from the public were curated to include only the brief, intense period of communication following Tennyson's death and funeral, or if the public felt an urgency to write, which subsequently waned. A combination of the two is likely. Certainly, the content from these non-elite letters shows that the public felt impassioned to write immediately after learning about the Poet Laureate's death. Additionally, the Tennyson family began to focus on selecting influential letters for *Memoir* almost immediately after the death. Indeed, Thwaite reports that F.T. Palgrave offered his help with *Memoir* on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1892.<sup>99</sup> It is therefore possible that they reduced their attention to collecting random letters as they turned their attention to the letters that they intended to include in the book. Additionally, on the 20<sup>th</sup> October, the family departed their summer home in Aldworth, where Tennyson died, and returned to their home in Farringford on the Isle of Wight.<sup>100</sup> It is obvious from the markings on some of the surviving envelopes that letters had been forwarded to Farringford, but others may have been overlooked.

Once I applied the September 1892 to October 1893 date range, I subsequently selected and studied 109 items from the roughly 500 letters and poems I had photographed. Half of these materials are handwritten poems or elegies; and half are handwritten letters. Some materials include both a poem and a handwritten letter of introduction. Over the years of my investigation, I would find that some of the materials from my 'letters from 1892 archive search' had been separated from their poems, and I was able to reunite the

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<sup>99</sup> Thwaite, p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> Thwaite, pp. 20-21.

information over the course of this research and have included these corresponding documents when they are relevant.

Following months of selection and photography, I then spent a year transcribing the individual correspondences and creating a digital archive. During my transcription and archival year, I also undertook quantitative and qualitative analysis, which resulted in two databases: a keyword database and a database to isolate themes (such as clasping hands and a moonlit death chamber). Following my transcriptions, I compared the writers' names and addresses with UK public records: primarily the Census for England, Wales and Scotland, but also school enrolment; military; immigration; and death, birth, and marriage records. The records provided an unanticipated revelation: the majority of the available, non-anonymous correspondences were from the working or middle classes. The envelopes which might have included the death correspondents' return addresses were discarded at some stage of the collection or curation process, eliminating the potential to investigate records for authors who wrote anonymous letters – usually unsigned, or only initialled. Because this study relies upon some elements of identifying features in order to triangulate the cultural clues, I initially prioritised non-anonymous correspondence which provide identifying data such as addresses. Therefore, although I transcribed, analysed, and archived the anonymous correspondence, I have rarely included these in this research except to illustrate further examples seen in the non-anonymous death correspondence.

In 2017, Lincolnshire County Council moved the archive's place of operation and its contents from the Lincolnshire Public Library to the Lincolnshire Archives on St Rumbold Street.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Guy Owen, 'Lincoln Tennyson Research Centre reopened in new home', in *The Lincolnite*. <<https://thelincolnite.co.uk/2017/07/lincoln-tennyson-research-centre-reopened-in-new-home>> [accessed online 31 January 2020].

G.T. is no longer the archive manager, and it is a misfortune that her irreplaceable knowledge of the archive is no longer available to Tennyson researchers and enthusiasts. By the TRC's own description, the archived documents had always been beholden to "idiosyncrasies of the Tennyson collection and its cataloguing systems, [thus] it can sometimes be difficult to retrieve records at short notice."<sup>102</sup>

It is fortunate that, in contrast to the scattered letters, the TRC holds a collection of 126 "Memorial Poems sent to the family of Alfred Tennyson after his death",<sup>103</sup> which were taken "from the papers of Hallam Tennyson".<sup>104</sup> This catalogue holds both published and unpublished amateur poems, of which roughly 56 are handwritten condolence poems from members of the public. The majority of correspondence from the general public is both undocumented and undigitised at the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln. Therefore, the exact number of existing poems is unknown. Indeed, the process of this research has unearthed 12 handwritten poems that were misfiled in other locations. Further discoveries of this kind are likely to continue beyond the scope of this investigation. Most of these handwritten poems are not known with certainty to be published, although some within that collection include notes claiming their poem had been published. The box also contains clippings of elegies that were published in the UK or international press. G.T. confirmed that the Tennysons had originally collected the poems together with newspaper clippings about Alfred's death, and believed they may have been saved separately. Deliberately curating memoriam poems does not necessarily prove that the Tennysons valued the verses or were interested in the lives of their authors; but it is certain that they placed sufficient value on

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<sup>102</sup> *The Tennyson Research Centre Archive*. <[www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/tennyson-research-centre](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/tennyson-research-centre)> [accessed online 20 September 2019].

<sup>103</sup> 'Memorial Poems sent to the family of Alfred Tennyson after his death', TRC, UK. See the catalogue at <<https://www.lincolntothepast.com/Memorial-Poems-sent-to-the-family-of-Alfred-Tennyson-after-his-death/1527820.record?pt=S>> [accessed online 19 September 2019].

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

these poems from the public to save the documents, and may have curated them together as a single body.

The family also preserved personal items relating to Tennyson's death. Additional boxes contain a funeral scrap book containing dried flowers and additional press clippings. Other boxes contain the family's deathbed journal, with Audrey tracking Tennyson's final weeks of life and his funeral and interment arrangements. A glass display case held the implements of Tennyson's healthcare and death: his eyeglasses, nail clippers, medicine cup, and hairbrush. Written in Audrey's hand, a note accompanies the handkerchief that "covered the dear face"<sup>105</sup> upon his death; and the death notice that Tennyson's physician Dr Dabbs wrote and secured to the gate of the family home announcing a moonlit death to would-be visitors. With the exception of Dr Dabbs's note, each of these pieces includes Audrey's handwritten tag to identify the item, showing that the family intended to curate these specific items within their personal collection more deliberately than others. It is likely that the family carefully labelled each item for the purpose of display – perhaps in the family home, or in a more public setting such as the TRC archive. Certainly, the curatorial processes the family undertook following Tennyson's death indicates a self-awareness that access to Tennyson's private life could become inevitable, and may have been encouraged.

The family's attempts to control both the longevity of Tennyson's reputation as well as the public's access to his persona is clearly demonstrated: firstly, by their destruction of most ephemera, and secondly, by their selection of only the letters that best demonstrated Tennyson's appeal for inclusion in the publication of *Memoir*. The deathbed journal, funeral scrapbook, and the box of poems were collected at the same time as the labelled personal items, and although we cannot know if they were intended for display, these materials, unlike

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<sup>105</sup> TRC, UK.

the doomed thirty-thousand letters, were sufficiently valued to warrant their independent preservation.



## Chapter overview

### *Chapter 1: Literacy, education, correspondence, and fear*

Chapter one focuses on the social forces that impacted upon nineteenth century literacy and education, correspondence etiquette, and an anxiety-driven ‘willingness to write’ for middle- and working-class people. Legal policies impacting upon formal education included the Education Act of 1870 (1872 in Scotland), which established a nationwide system of school boards, and the subsequent Education Act of 1880, which instituted compulsory education for children between the ages of 5 and 10; legislation against child labour such as the Factory Act (1833) which raised the minimum working age to 9 and limited working hours for children, and the first of several Mines Acts in 1842, which raised the minimum working age for children to 10; and various non-governmental education advocacy movements associated with religion (Parsons, 1845) and Chartism (Lovett, 1876).

While indirect access to reading and writing through, for example, oral storytelling or dictation, is relevant to literacy studies, literacy in this thesis refer specifically to an individual’s direct ability to participate in written content. By examining and contextualising the writers’ access to education and reading materials, chapter one fortifies details about popular literacy in 1892 Great Britain. Of particular focus, this chapter examines varying modes of education available to the correspondents in this study, including those from poor-, working-class, or lower-middle-class communities. This chapter explores the progression of nineteenth-century education and reading opportunities through churches, libraries, reading rooms, and reading societies. These facts provide crucial data to show that the Victorian working-class and poor actively pursued different forms of education, despite facing greater impediments to literacy and education than the middle-, upper-, and elite classes did. Chapter one also serves to preface and anticipate the death correspondents’ own statements relating

their willingness or ability to compose formal letters and poetry, which they frequently—and incorrectly—perceived to be unique within their social groups.

Chapter one further investigates the development of reading practices among Victorian women in particular, demonstrating that, although non-elite girls and women faced economic and social barriers to formal education compared to those from the middle- and upper-classes, they frequently undertook innovative (and often secretive) approaches to accessing learning and literacy. This chapter also argues that Tennyson himself endorsed the maintaining of social barriers to women's access to education, through his derisory critiques of inquisitive, literate women.

Chapter one then contextualises acts of writing undertaken by the death correspondents, demonstrating that even those individuals who were sufficiently educated faced significant impediments to undertake their own forms of writing—such as lack of privacy, time, or materials—which, I argue, required stimulus in order to sustain a 'willingness to write'. This chapter argues that the mass mourning spawned by the celebrity death of Tennyson provided a unique impetus for ordinary people to write, which resulted in the letters and amateur poetry seen in the correspondence with Tennyson's family, including from those who stated that they rarely or never write, and those who maintain that they *needed* to write. Building on the analysis of Tennyson's celebrity in the nineteenth century<sup>106</sup> I argue that Tennyson's death equally evoked anxieties amongst his readership relating to their perceptions of dying traditions, perishing moralities, and notions of belonging and nation—which they linked to Tennyson's life and works as exemplars. I argue that the death correspondents deliberately employed concepts derived from mythology, Arthurian legends

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<sup>106</sup> See: Samantha Matthews, 'Burying Tennyson: The Victorian Laureate immortalized', in *Mortality: Promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying*, 7.3 (2002), 247-268; Charlotte Boyce, Páiraic Finnerty, and Anne-Marie Millim, *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson's Circle* (2013); and John Morton, 'Longfellow, Tennyson, and Transatlantic Celebrity' in *Critical Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2015), pp. 6-23.

and chivalry to defend the traditions they valued, which builds upon scholarly studies pertaining to Tennyson's own scrutiny of the decline of chivalry.<sup>107</sup>

### ***Chapter 2: My widow'd race: possessive poetry, individual grief and appropriation***

Chapter two explores two primary themes: implicit and explicit tendencies from death correspondents to 'individualise' their expressions of mourning; and their inclinations to appropriate Tennyson as kin, in which individual members of the general public claimed to suffer Tennyson's death as a personal bereavement. In particular, this chapter identifies a coherent focus on a family bond with Tennyson, which demonstrates ways in which the public appropriated the loss of Tennyson as a familial bereavement.

These correspondents used literary and religious tropes to navigate their articulations of grief and condolence. Through both symbolic and literal language, they deliberately concocted fantasised or metaphorical relationships between themselves and Tennyson, or between themselves and his family members. By exploring gendered mourning roles and language, this chapter also shows that complete strangers claimed to experience Tennyson's death as comparable to the loss of a father, brother, or husband.

The correspondents demonstrated and upheld societal roles—or actively rejected them—particularly as they navigated women's prescribed domestic responsibilities from marriage to deathbed to the afterlife. In particular, chapter two builds upon existing debates about nineteenth century widowhood, sisterhood, and female friendship (see C. Curran, Margaret Homans, F.M.L. Thompson). I argue that women correspondents consciously devised a 'sisterhood of grief' to blur class divisions among widows. I also argue that both

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<sup>107</sup> See: Catherine Phillips, "'Charades from the Middle Ages'?: Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Chivalric Code', in *Victorian Poetry*, Vol. 40, No. 3, (2002); Clare A. Simmons, *Medievalism and the Quest for the 'Real' Middle Ages* (2001), and; Marion Sherwood, 'To Serve as Model for the Mighty World: Tennyson and Medievalism', in *Tennyson and the Fabrication of Englishness*, (2013).

men and women writers applied idealised concepts of widowhood and constructed notions of ‘queenly widows’ to their writing—doing so in order to demonstrate their literary wisdom and their deference to cultural traditions and class divisions—while simultaneously bridging class delineations through the self-same act of writing.

### ***Chapter 3: Communal mourning, emotional communities, and cultural kinship***

In order to assess direct or implied messages of kin and community, Chapter three reviews the messages of introduction and conclusions some of the writers included with their mourning poems. Details from the England, Wales and Scotland censuses between 1861 and 1911 are reviewed in tandem with the poetry and letters to identify the mourners’ communities and individual places within them. In this chapter, I argue that these writers represent themselves as part of wider social identities. I refer to these writers as *communal mourners*. Some writers represent themselves as both individual mourners, and as a member of a communal family – these are *dual mourners*.

Chapter three builds on education-, literacy-, and religion-related findings seen in Chapter one to argue that dual and communal mourners drew widely upon literary, biblical, and newspaper references to inform and navigate their written communication. I argue that, in doing so, these correspondents employed concepts of kin and community that extend beyond literal family groups. This chapter argues that communal and dual mourners share language of grief or mourning in terms that were customary within biological families and can therefore be identified as belonging to larger societal ‘families’ who are connected through the death of Tennyson. This is typically achieved through adaptations of newspaper reports and illustrations; reworkings of Tennyson’s poetry, and through symbolism and the

religious allegory seen in Anglican hymns and Scottish working-class ‘muckle sangs’ – a form of ballad that glorifies nobility and originates from oral tradition.<sup>108</sup>

In particular, this chapter argues that these writers employ their cultural, musical, and literary influences to devise symbols of ‘Father Tennyson’, building on studies relating to Victorian fatherhood (see T. Broughton, H. Rogers), brotherhood (see K. Ittmann, J. Tosh) and community (see J-M. Strange, E. Gordon, G. Nair). Through these examples, the chapter demonstrates that Tennyson is reimagined as a parent who has departed the community ‘family’, or a ‘holy father’ – with clear connotations of Tennyson as a moral guide or teacher. Newspapers, furthermore, conveyed the nationwide acts of collective mourning for several consecutive weeks, which allowed individuals to know that they shared the emotional experience with the wider mourning public – with whom they were otherwise unacquainted. I argue that through their awareness of shared acts of mourning, some of the death correspondents envisioned themselves as part of a ‘cultural family’, and wrote correspondence that detailed a variety of interpretations of kin and community in order to navigate their individual responses to Tennyson’s death.

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<sup>108</sup> J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, ([1997] 1999), p. 32.

## Chapter 1: Victorian Literacy, Education, Correspondence, and Fear

Oct 7<sup>th</sup> 1892

To Hallam Tennyson, Esq.

Dear Sir

Please excuse a working man troubling you at this time of sorrow, but I could not let the sweetest singer of this age pass away without bearing testimony. That the writing of your Father have given me much comfort in times of trouble and sorrow that I was unable to find in any other writer.

His poem In Memoriam have been a source at which I could at all times find comfort and hope; and helped me to see a clear sky behind the clould [sic] that was hiding for a time the great directing power.

Now the great and splendid mind is at rest from his Labours  
He have gone from us in full age like a shock of corn in its season

Please accept the heart-felt sympathy for you and your sorrowing ones

Your obt servant,

Harry Cox,

Carpenter

*All spelling, punctuation, and grammar provided as written in the original.*

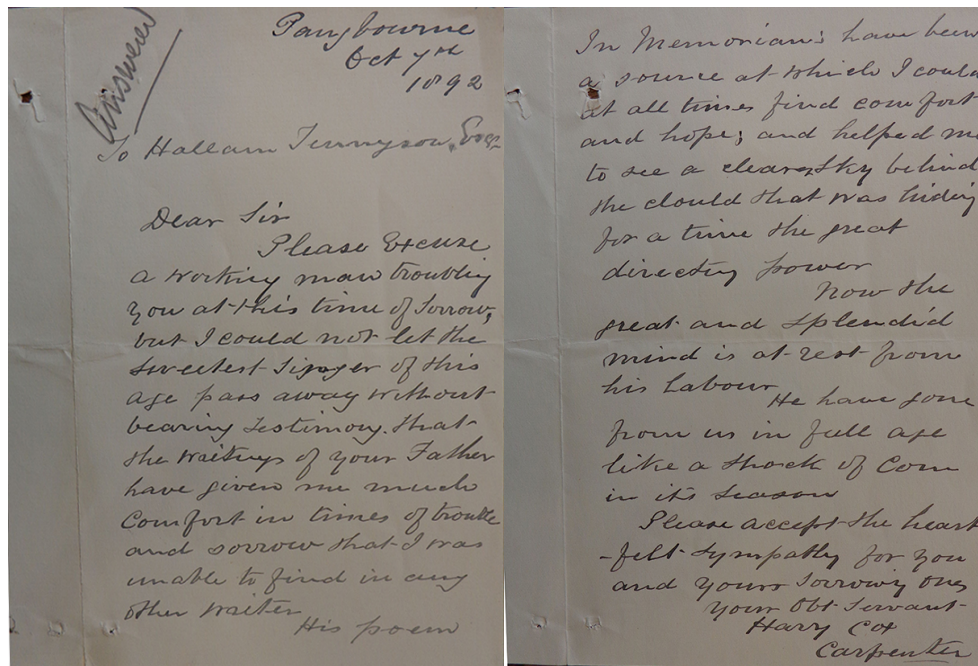


Fig. 4. Letter from Harry Cox, 7 October 1892. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

One day after Tennyson's death, 51-year-old carpenter Harry Cox (Fig. 4 and Appendix 12) wrote a short letter to Hallam Tennyson on plain, unlined paper, which the family appear to have answered (Fig. 4). Although he closes his letter with words of comfort for the Tennyson family, Cox's writing functions both as a condolence letter and a 'testimony' affirming the impact Tennyson's writing had upon Cox's life. As is typically seen in the available Tennyson death correspondence, Cox's letter echoes New Testament biblical passages. For example, Cox's phrase "Now the great and splendid mind is at rest from his Labours" recalls Revelation 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." The subsequent line: "He have gone from us in full age like a shock of corn in its season" refers to Job 5:26: "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."

Although it is impossible to confirm his reading materials, Cox's terminology relating to Tennyson's "great and splendid mind" suggests he is possibly quoting from a popular early Victorian book of sermons, *The British Pulpit* (1844) which describes a "nobleman of high birth and higher talents" with a "great and splendid mind"<sup>109</sup> who set out to refute The New Testament, and by reading it, instead had his faith affirmed. This reflects *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson questioned his faith throughout, and ultimately affirmed it. Whilst the latter quote provides a clue to the value Cox places upon reading, the plain content of his letter is proof: rather than finding comfort in the Bible, Cox is clear that instead, Tennyson's writing, and *In Memoriam* in particular, gave him "much comfort in times of trouble and sorrow". For Cox, *In Memoriam* is "a source" at all times of "comfort and hope". He further indicates that he had questioned his faith for a period of time: but *In Memoriam* had helped him return to

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas Tegg, *The British Pulpit: a collection of sermons by the most eminent Divines of the Present Day in Six Volumes*, Vol. 4, London (1844), p. 295.

his beliefs, e.g., “to see a clear sky behind the cloud [sic] that was hiding for a time the great directing power”, in the same way Tennyson famously concluded *In Memoriam* with an assertion of his renewed faith. Cox communicates Tennyson’s religious and literary influence upon him by directly referencing the faith-affirming Stanza XCVI from *In Memoriam*:

[T]hus he came at length / To find a stronger faith his own; / And Power was with him in the night, / Which makes the darkness and the light, / And dwells not in the light alone, / But in the darkness and the cloud.<sup>110</sup>

There is a subtle difference in Tennyson’s verses, which convey power within the cloud; whereas Cox writes of the light behind the cloud as a source of strength. Cox’s interpretation of these verses in combination with references to the Bible demonstrate how religion and literacy were inextricable for him—as they were for many Victorians.

### **Contexts of education: impediments and enablers**

By the 1880s, more of the labouring and lower-middle classes were reading than ever before in history.<sup>111</sup> Tennyson’s later career, his 1892 death, and the subsequent Tennyson death correspondence fall within a period of a changing reading landscape, marked by several simultaneous movements in literacy and access to reading materials.<sup>112</sup> Multiple factors, such as the education acts of 1870 and 1880, the growth of reading societies, shilling publications, W.S. Smith’s rail station shops, access to libraries, and machine-made printing presses all contributed to greater access to literacy.<sup>113</sup>

In the wider cultural context of reading, even Tennyson had received little formal schooling, with the exception of four years of grammar school. Instead, he was primarily

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<sup>110</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, ‘In Memoriam, A.H.H.’, (1850), in *Poems of Tennyson*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950). s. XCVI, ll. 16-21.

<sup>111</sup> Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing, and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Hammond, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



taught at home by his father, a local rector, Dr George Clayton Tennyson, reading widely from his father's personal library of approximately 700 volumes prior to attending Trinity College, Cambridge in 1827.<sup>114</sup> By Tennyson's death in 1892, many of the individuals belonging to the labouring and poor classes undoubtedly valued literacy and education, whether through formal education, schooling at home, or self-directed learning. Yet, some of the Tennyson death correspondents believed that writing to Tennyson's family was atypical within their social groups.

For example, a 60-year-old stone mason named Paul Hann wrote to Hallam Tennyson on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1892: "[Y]ou have received many [letters] from the upper classes no doubt, but not from working men." It is unclear if Hann's claim relates to his perception that working-class literacy was rare, or if he believed that working-class people were less empowered to write to celebrities such as Tennyson. The 1892 death correspondence proves that reading abilities were becoming more common during this period, and more rarely, occasionally involved the critical analysis of books, writing poetry, prose and letters, and choosing to share these materials and insights with the family of a Poet Laureate.

Jonathan Rose (2001) contends that "Most nineteenth-century Sunday schools were indigenous working-class self-help institutions: even the Chartist *Northern Star* extolled them for creating a literate proletariat".<sup>115</sup> With the exception of non-Christian religious communities, therefore, nineteenth-century British education frequently began in Sunday school. Teachers within these institutions were "largely drawn from the working class, where the Sunday school experience was nearly universal"<sup>116</sup> and by 1834, one in five Sunday schools provided a library. Rose cites the following data: "91 percent of workers in twelve

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<sup>114</sup> *The Tennyson Research Centre Archive* <[www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article](http://www.lincstothepast.com/home/tennyson-resources/309.article)> [accessed online 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020].

<sup>115</sup> Rose, 62.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

Manchester cotton mills in 1852 had attended at least for a time. By 1881, no less than 19 percent of the entire population of Great Britain . . . were currently enrolled.”<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, access to books remained limited for the working classes. Chartist movement leader William Lovett described the dearth of books or newspapers during his apprenticeship as a rope-maker in the early 1820s in Newlyn:

With the exception of Bibles and Prayer Books, spelling-books, and a few religious works, the only books in circulation for the masses were a few story-books and romances, filled with absurdities about giants, spirits, goblins, and supernatural horrors.<sup>118</sup>

More than sixty years later, Edward G Salmon (1886) claimed that “the Bible is less popular than formerly but still amongst the most common books to be found in the average home”<sup>119</sup>—although Simon Frost (2015) notes that Salmon was “less-than-supportive of progress and upward mobility” for the working classes, and that he complained that the *London Journal*, which specialised in working-class fiction between 1845 and 1912, “had lost its earlier modicum of dignity and now published only trash”.<sup>120</sup>

Scholars such as Nicholas Barker (1978) and Mary Hammond (2006) analysed the Bible’s influence, with Barker calling the 1880s the highpoint of “the Victorian cult of the Bible,” and Hammond arguing that the period between 1881 and 1909 was pivotal to reading and development of literary taste across the classes. Hammond states that by the 1880s, a higher proportion of the British population was reading than at any other point in British

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Rose, 63.

<sup>119</sup> Edward G Salmon, ‘What the Working Classes Read’, in *Nineteenth Century*, July 1886, quoted in Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing, and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Simon Frost, ‘Reconsidering the Unknown Public: A Puzzle of Literary Gains’, in *Studies in Victorian and Modern Literature: A Tribute to John Sutherland*, William Baker (ed), (London, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2015), p. 8.

history.<sup>121</sup> Hammond contends that two publishing milestones represent “a series of revolutions” in publishing and ‘religiosity’ including the 17 May 1881 Oxford University Press publication of *The New Testament*.<sup>122</sup> Hammond also acknowledges that popular books were not unusual by 1881, but the success of this edition of the Bible was ‘unprecedented’. Rose contends that “individuals of that [working] class were pursuing, in the face of intimidating obstacles, a liberal self-education. . . . [and] their primary objective was intellectual independence.”<sup>123</sup> The Tennyson death correspondence from at least 15 non-elite men and 12 non-elite women provides evidence that, long before Tennyson’s 1892 death, reading had become common in most British households, and not merely those of the middle and upper classes. Education legislation, greater access to affordable reading materials through the industrial press, social activism, and libraries all encouraged literacy among the non-elite population.

Harry Cox’s 1892 ‘testimonial’ letter to Hallam Tennyson exhibits the fundamental reading materials that scholars such as Barker, Rose, and Hammond identified, as it reveals that one of his literary influences was indeed the Bible, while the other was *In Memoriam*. More intriguingly, Cox’s public records further confirm his personal interest in literature, and hint towards possible social activism as well. At the time of the 1891 Census for England, Wales and Scotland, Cox was recorded as being fifty years old, and, as his letter cites, working as a carpenter. Additionally, the Census notes that Cox was widowed and living with his six children, aged 9 to 25. Ten years earlier, Cox’s wife, Hannah, was still living, and seven children were living at home. The eldest, William, was 16, and also a carpenter. The other children, including two daughters, were scholars or pre-school age. The youngest

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<sup>121</sup> Nicolas Barker, ‘The Oxford University Press and the Spread of Learning: An Illustrated History’, (Oxford, 1978), p. 51, quoted in Hammond, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Hammond, pp. 2-3.

<sup>123</sup> Rose, p. 12.

children in school were two boys: Victor, aged seven and Raspail, aged five. Victor's full name was Victor Hugo Cox, indicating that one or both Cox parents admired Victor Hugo's writing and possibly his politics. Victor Hugo Cox was born in roughly 1875 (records vary between 1874 and 1876), shortly after Victor Hugo published his poem detailing the siege of Paris in 1870, 'L'Année terrible' (1872), by which time Hugo had returned to France from exile as a republican hero. Harry and Hannah Cox's other unusually named son, Raspail, further indicates an appreciation within the Cox household for French writers exiled for their political activities. François-Vincent Raspail (25 January 1794 – 7 January 1878) was a French physician, chemist, and socialist writer. Raspail led the Society of the Rights of Man and was twice imprisoned for leading revolts in Paris.<sup>124</sup> Whilst the clues begin and end with the boys' names, they sufficiently demonstrate a Cox family connection with literacy, and a possible interest in French socialism and social activism.

Additional family details indicate the Cox family's leanings towards reading and education. The 1880 addendum to the 1870 Education Act had long since established compulsory attendance at school-based education between the ages of five and ten. In both the 1871 and 1881 Census, Cox's male and female children were attending school both prior to and beyond the legally required ages. In 1871, six-year-old William Cox was listed as a scholar; but so was three-year-old Emma Cox. Allowing for census record errors—Emma's age is listed as 14 in the 1881 census,<sup>125</sup> suggesting she was four rather than three when she entered school—Emma was certainly under the compulsory age of five at the time of her

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<sup>124</sup> See: *Foreign Record: Northumberland and Durham, Ward's Directory, 1850*. "April. The trial of the Paris insurgents of May 15th, 1848, terminated. General Courtais was acquitted; Barbes and Albert transported for life; Blanqui for ten years; Sobrier for seven; and Raspail for six."  
<<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=S2/211992/0084>> (accessed online 26 April 2019).

<sup>125</sup> Census surveys took place 2 April 1871 and 3 April 1881 (and indeed each April between 1861 to 1891), indicating there was an error with her age in one of Emma's two relevant records. Source: *The National Archives*. <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/census-records>>. [accessed online 5 July 2019].

admission. In particular, a working widower without access to childcare may have been compelled to place his children into education earlier than the compulsory age of five to enable him to earn an income unfettered by full-time homemaking responsibilities. This was not unusual in working communities, as it enabled children to reach the minimum schooling certification by the legal exit age of 10. Flora Thompson (1939) recalled the child-rearing and schooling practices of her neighbour, Mrs Arless, in Thompson's Cambridgeshire hamlet in the 1880s, offering insights into some instances of early schooling in working communities:

Although she was herself a grandmother, she still produced a child of her own every eighteen months or so, a proceeding regarded as bad form in the hamlet, for the saying ran, 'When the young-uns begin, 'tis time for the old 'uns to finish.' But Mrs Arless recognized no rules, excepting those of Nature. She welcomed each new arrival, cared for it tenderly while it was helpless, swept it out of doors to play as soon as it could toddle, to school at three, and to work at ten or eleven.<sup>126</sup>

While Mrs Arless is described as an unconventional villager, Thompson's account indicates that the Cox family's census details, rather than being a recording error, probably reflect a practice of sending children to school before the age of five in the mid-to-late 1800s. In the case of Mrs Arless, early formal school attendance is described as a means to accelerate each child's school-leaving in order to earn an income at the minimum legal working age. Further records reflect the practice of early school attendance in working communities. In Cox's region alone, the Berkshire National School Admission Registers for 1870 record several three-year-olds in school records: Charles Fasanya, Aldermaston Church of England School; Elizabeth Bradley and Alice Brooks, Brimpton Church of England (Controlled) School; Fred Batt, The Girls British School; Daniel Bulpitt, Hartley Wespall Church of England School;

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<sup>126</sup> Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise*, (London: Penguin Books. 1973 [1939]), p. 112.

and Horace Patey, Mary Reeves, Louisa Smith, and Lucy Teakle, Bearwood County Primary School. Bearwood also admitted two-year-olds Frederic Poole and Ernest Smith.<sup>127</sup>

Yet, despite her early school admission, Emma Cox is again listed as a scholar in the 1881 census, at the age of 14. If this record is accurate, Emma's age was four years beyond the compulsory attendance age of 10 (following the 1880 amendment to the 1870 Education Act). By 1901, the number of children working outside of school hours was 300,000,<sup>128</sup> yet truancy remained a significant problem, as families often required the income their children earned.<sup>129</sup> As we will see with some of the death correspondents, such as the 'young gardener' J. Brown, some working-class families appear to have sacrificed the contribution of their children's income by keeping them in school beyond the legal age; and as seen in 1871 and 1881, single-parent Cox seems to have also made this income sacrifice in favour of his children's education.

In contrast to the Cox children's school attendance seen in previous family records, Harry Cox's 12-year-old son, Dudley, was working as a baker instead of attending school at the 1891 Census (he, too, would later become a carpenter). Whilst Dudley was no longer in education at the age of 12, Harry Cox had remained in education at the same age, forty years earlier. The 1851 Census shows the young Harry Cox, aged 12, and his brother Charles, aged 13, were both 'scholars' 19 years before the 1870 Education Act. As the youngest of the seven children of a labourer – their father was also a carpenter – voluntary scholarship at 12 and 13 involved sacrificing annual income and represents a significant investment in and valuing of education.

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<sup>127</sup> *National School Admission Registers and Log-Books 1870-1914*. <<https://www.archives.org.uk/latest-news/548-national-school-admissions-records-published-by-findmypast.html>>. (accessed online 4 July 2019).

<sup>128</sup> *The Education Act 1870. Parliament*. <[www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact](http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact)>, [accessed online 26 April 2019].

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Details of the Cox family members' learning habits are only available through retrospective study, as are details of their deaths. In his letter to Hallam Tennyson, Cox disclosed none of these, and offered few personal details beyond his occupation and his familiarity with *In Memoriam*. He reflects on his loss only briefly in his letter, and only in the context of reading: "His poem *In Memoriam* have been a source at which I could at all times find comfort and hope and helped me to see a clear sky behind the cloud [sic] that was hiding for a time the great directing power" – a statement which hints that his grief caused him to question his faith for a time. In contrast to most of the other correspondents who express personal grief, Cox wrote no such details beyond the comfort Tennyson's work brought him. Yet census details show that Cox had experienced significant bereavement by the time he wrote his letter. The 1871 Census shows a one-year-old daughter, Phoebe Cox, residing in the household; yet there is no death record for Phoebe, nor does she appear in the 1881 Census or in any subsequent record set. It is clear that Phoebe vanishes from Harry Cox's life between 1871 and 1881. Similarly, Cox's wife Hannah disappears from all records following the 1881 Census, and whilst there is no death record for her either, we know that Harry Cox was recorded as a 'Widower' in the 1891 Census. Other Cox daughters vanish from public records, with the exception of Emma, indicating that they worked outside the home, married, or died. Cox's letter shares none of these personal details. The vital information that Cox communicates relates only to reading, and the comfort he found in doing so.

Cox demonstrates the wider trend among the labouring classes who wrote to the Tennysons during this period. While none of the death correspondents discuss their access to either formal or informal education, the corresponding members of the labouring classes in particular appear to deliberately communicate their interests in literature or convey literature's influence on their writing. While formal education is not sufficiently relevant or

appropriate for discussion within condolence correspondence, the writers have taken care to ensure that they convey their literary knowledge through prose and lyrics modelled on Shakespeare, Milton, or Tennyson; or through assessments of the impact various works have had on how they navigate events and society.

There are 15 women among the death correspondents, all of whom cite poetry, literature, or the Bible, and while it isn't possible to confirm that these women read for pleasure, there is evidence to suggest that they probably did. The author Flora Thompson (1939) recalls the ravenous reading habits among the women in her rural labouring community in the 1880s:

Most of the younger women and some of the older ones were fond of what they called 'a bit of a read', and their mental fare consisted almost exclusively of the novelette. Several of the hamlet women took in one of these weekly, as published, for the price was but one penny, and these were handed round until the pages were thin and frayed with use . . . . and there was always a quite a library of them in circulation.<sup>130</sup>

Thompson's terminology—mental fare—equates reading with sustenance, but Thompson differentiates between the books that the hamlet's residents consumed as standard fare, and those which had become items for display:

There had been a time when the hamlet readers had fed on stronger food, and Biblical words and imagery still coloured the speech of some of the older people. Though unread, every well-kept cottage had still its little row of books, neatly arranged on the side table with the lamp, the clothes brush and the family photographs. Some of these collections consisted solely of the family Bible and a prayer-book or two; others had a few extra volumes which had either belonged to parents or been bought with other oddments for a few pence at a sale – *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Drelincourt on Death*, Richardson's *Pamela*, *Anna Lee: The Maiden Wife and Mother*, and old books of travel and sermons.<sup>131</sup>

Thompson's descriptions show an appetite amongst the younger women for reading easily

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<sup>130</sup> Thompson, p. 109.

<sup>131</sup> Thompson, p. 110.



digestible novelette fare, rather than for the ‘stronger food’ of the Bible. Yet such reading was secretive, masked behind displays of loftier novels and the Bible:

The novelette was kept . . . carefully out of the children’s way[.] [A]lthough they devoured them, the women looked upon novelette reading as a vice, to be hidden from their menfolk and only discussed with fellow devotees. . . . but they did the women good, for, as they said, they took them out of themselves.<sup>132</sup>

Thompson’s recollection supports arguments by scholars including Kate Flint, Jonathan Rose, Mary Hammond, and Simon Frost, who cite evidence of performative ‘high’ reading amongst the middle- and working-class literate public in their pursuit of cultural development and literary taste, while reading penny novels for enjoyment in private. As Thompson recalls, having ‘a bit of a read’ and talking about books over tea was seen as a necessary break for the women in her village, falling between their completion of housework and the household filling up with boisterous family members in the afternoon and early evening. “This tea-drinking time was the women’s hour. Soon the children would be rushing in from school; and then would come the men, with their loud voices and coarse jokes and corduroys reeking of earth and sweat.”<sup>133</sup>

Kate Flint (2014) credits the growing availability of books for borrowing or sale through vendors at British railway stations, and cites Agnes Repplier’s 1893 reflections on working-class reading during their travels: “The clerks and artisans, shopgirls, dressmakers, and milliners, who pour into London every morning by the early trains, have, each and every one, a choice specimen of penny fiction with which to beguile the short journey.”<sup>134</sup> Simon Frost (2015) contends that people who read penny novels and journals “were to be found

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Thompson, 109.

<sup>134</sup> Agnes Repplier, ‘English Railway Fiction’, *Points of View* (Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1893), p. 209, cited in Kate Flint, ‘Victorian readers’, *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians. The British Library*, <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/victorian-readers>> [accessed online 18 September 2020].

among higher levels of disposable income, which included domestic workers. By 1861 over 1.5 million domestic servants worked in Britain, topping at two million around 1914.”<sup>135</sup> Frost cites the late-nineteenth-century income for a maid as £10 to £16 pounds annually; and £20 to £40 for a footman; whilst domestic servants, with room and board provided, would have had a disposable income of 4s to 6.5s per week. “For this group, penny journals were a thrifty alternative to the 3s or 6s novel or the similarly priced single-volume reprints of a standard three-volume commercial library novel at 5s to 6s.”<sup>136</sup>

However, Frost cites the author Thomas Wright (1883), who, along with the novelist Wilkie Collins (1865) aimed to identify the population of penny readers. Frost contends:

For Wright, the penny public had a specific class and gender. They came from “several cuts above the domestic class. They belong to the Young Lady classes—the young ladies of the counters, of the more genteel female handicrafts generally and the dressmaking and millinery professions in particular.” To these readers Wright also added a small army of unattached “real genteel” ladies, who lived comfortably on an albeit limited family allowance, and, in what Wright considered was a feminine aptitude for cooperation, “by a system of ‘exchanges’ . . . [they] manage to obtain a practically unlimited supply of this reading at an outlay of two to three pence per week.”<sup>137</sup>

Wright’s observations demonstrate the increases in female literacy and readership. Yet, the death correspondence suggests that Wright’s higher-tier ‘young lady class’ which omits the ‘domestic class’ is condescendingly false in its assessment. Wright had also dismissed the relevance of servants from the penny novel readership, stating: “Thousands of servants are to be found among the millions of the unknown public; but they are comparatively outsiders and of little account.”<sup>138</sup> In scoring a large population of literate servants and reducing the

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<sup>135</sup> Simon Frost, ‘Reconsidering the Unknown Public: A Puzzle of Literary Gains’, in *Studies in Victorian and Modern Literature: A Tribute to John Sutherland.*, William Baker (ed), (London, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

‘young lady class’ as a consumer group of primarily penny novels, Wright overlooks the nuanced reading within the working- and lower-middle classes. For example, as we will see later in this chapter, household servant Alice Godwin demonstrates that she has not only read Tennyson widely but also composed sophisticated adaptations of Tennyson’s verses in her poetry. The death correspondence shows that Tennyson’s poetry was widely read and reinterpreted by labouring and domestic workers and was viewed by his readers as similarly ‘lofty’ as the bible.

The reading choices that ‘Lady Readers’ made, including that of Tennyson’s works, was a topic for scrutiny throughout the nineteenth century, and would be linked to gender-specific debates about access to education for girls and women, spanning into the decades following the Education Acts of 1870 and 1880.

### ***The Princess: taming woman readers***

Quick answered Lilia 'There are thousands now  
Such women, but convention beats them down:  
It is but bringing up; no more than that:  
You men have done it: how I hate you all!  
Ah, were I something great! I wish I were  
Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,  
That love to keep us children! O I wish  
That I were some great princess, I would build  
Far off from men a college like a man's,  
And I would teach them all that men are taught;  
We are twice as quick!' And here she shook aside

The hand that played the patron with her curls.<sup>139</sup>

Although reading was decidedly commonplace within all strata of the British classes by the late 1800s, influential people including Tennyson shared an ideological set of rules for restraining and structuring women's study. They imparted their ideology to women readers with cautions against moral danger—particularly relating to the perils of reading alone or too frequently. Advice manuals for girls and women – such as *What Girls Can Do* by the popular novelist Phyllis Browne (1885), and the 1878 lecture 'Home and the Higher Education' by the women's education advocate Emily Davies – cautioned women against solitary study. Browne warned that girls who studied alone would become “either a bookworm or conceited,”<sup>140</sup> whilst Davies recommended reading societies as protection against a woman's “own idleness and desultoriness.”<sup>141</sup> In her 1866 publication, *The Higher Education of Women*, Davies called for inclusion in higher learning – for middle-class girls – citing their recent access to the University of London. The London examinations tested requisite knowledge without the stipulation of having gained scholarly knowledge through college attendance, or through a formal education system. Yet Davies insisted that an “increase in the number of colleges and a higher standard of efficiency” was needed for girls, including access to home study “where circumstances make it inconvenient for a girl to attend classes . . . so long as there is some definite and intelligible object in view.”<sup>142</sup> Davies criticised the inequitable, societal pressures for 'commonplace' women to be of exceptional intellect and stamina in order to access education:

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<sup>139</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson. *The Princess*, in *Poems of Tennyson*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 102-103.

<sup>140</sup> Phyllis Browne, *What Girls Can Do: A Book for Mothers and Daughters*, (London, Cassell's, Limited, 1885), p. 107, quoted in Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837 – 1914*, (Oxford, [1993] 2002), p. 106.

<sup>141</sup> Emily Davies, 'Home and the Higher Education' (lecture delivered 1878), quoted in Flint, 107.

<sup>142</sup> Emily Davies, 'The Higher Education of Women', (United Kingdom: Library of Alexandria, [1866] 2020), p. 44.

There must be something wrong in social regulations which make a demand for exceptional wisdom and strength on the part of any particular class; and that such a demand is made upon average young women is sufficiently clear. What society says to them seems to be something to this effect. Either you have force enough to win a place in the world, in the face of heavy discouragement, or you have not. If you have, the discipline of the struggle is good for you; if you have not, you are not worth troubling about. Is not this a hard thing to say to commonplace girls, not professing to be better or stronger than their neighbours? Why should their task be made, by social and domestic arrangements, peculiarly and needlessly difficult?<sup>143</sup>

Davies further asserts that women's higher education must extend beyond books and formal education; but her view is that the purpose of women's education is for training women who belong to the 'leisurely classes' in order to support the betterment of society:

[T]he women who act as the almoners of the rich and the advisers of the poor need for their difficult task something more than mere gushing benevolence. Or to take national education. Unpaid work, such as the management of hospitals, workhouses, prisons and reformatories, and charitable societies, naturally devolves upon the leisurely classes, and offers a field in which cultivated women may fitly labour. And the moment they enter upon such work, or attempt in any way to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, they find that a strong, clear head is as necessary as a warm heart.<sup>144</sup>

Davies, therefore, omits working-class and poor women from her argument in support of women's education, and defends its relevance to labour and society as the domain of the leisurely class and 'cultivated women'. For Davies, the purpose of higher education is primarily to enable middle- and upper-class women to develop the requisite knowledge and compassion for 'cultivated' women's roles that were dependent upon altruism. She is adamant that possessing a capacity for imagination is equally crucial to education for the success of such women's societal labour:

The business of the imagination is not merely to build castles in the air . . . it has other and most important duties to perform. For, manifestly, an unimaginative person is

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<sup>143</sup> Davies, pp. 44-45.

<sup>144</sup> Davies, pp. 45-46.

destitute of one of the main elements of sympathy. . . . [I]njustice and unkindness . . . are the result of an incapacity for imagining ourselves to be somebody else.<sup>145</sup>

Tennyson evidently held similar views on women's education. In *Memoir* (1896), Hallam Tennyson stated that at the time at which Tennyson wrote *The Princess* (published 1847), both Tennyson's stance and the contemporary debates surrounding women's access to education in England were incorporated into the poem:

His friends report my father to have said, that the two great social questions impending in England were "the housing and education of the poor man before making him our master, and the higher education of women"; and the sooner woman finds out, before the great educational movement begins, that "woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse," the better it will be for the progress of the world.<sup>146</sup>

For Tennyson, women are not less developed than men, but neither are they equal: and women's educational requirements fulfil a different purpose from those designed for men. Hallam's analysis of *The Princess* further details his father's stance on the ultimate purpose of women's higher education:

[T]he various characters in the poem . . . give all possible views of Woman's higher education; and as for the heroine herself, the Princess Ida, the poet who created her considered her as one of the noblest among his women. The stronger the man or woman, the more of the lion or lioness untamed, the greater the man or woman tamed. In the end we see this lioness-like woman subduing the elements of her humanity to that which is highest within her, and recognizing the relation in which she stands towards the order of the world and toward God— "A greater than all knowledge beat her down."<sup>147</sup>

Tennyson's warning is clear: a woman who primarily educates herself for the purposes of mental exercise ('memory only') or for improving her social conditions would risk losing the 'reverence' of men, implying that such an approach to self-betterment could earn disapproval.

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<sup>145</sup> Davies, p. 52.

<sup>146</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, p. 206.

<sup>147</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, p. 208.

In *Memoir*, Tennyson's belief—that the purpose of women's education was to serve humankind and to maintain their counterpart roles in the chivalric relationship with men—is laid bare:

She must train herself to do the large work that lies before her, even though she may not be destined to be wife or mother, cultivating her understanding, not her memory only, her imagination in its highest phases her inborn spirituality and her sympathy with all that is pure, noble and beautiful, rather than mere social accomplishments; then and then only will she further the progress of humanity, then and then only men will continue to hold her in reverence.<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, although Tennyson enjoyed imagining the “beautiful picture of girl graduates . . . like a bed of flowers with daffodil and lilac,” for Tennyson, ultimately bettering humanity and sustaining a moral focus ‘toward God’ were the principal aims for women's higher learning.<sup>149</sup> Simultaneously, Tennyson's “main test for manhood was his ‘chivalrous reverence’ for womanhood”.<sup>150</sup> Thus, maintaining men's chivalrous reverence was equally crucial to the success of both women's education and their place in society. As seen here and further argued later in this section, Tennyson's advocacy for an educational trajectory for religious, moral and social purposes provided his readership with notions of idealised respectability and belonging to ‘their’ nation.

As evidenced by 43-year-old widowed domestic servant, Elizabeth Cookson (Appendix 14), the death correspondents frequently reflected upon Tennyson's moral ‘lessons’ with trepidation and in anticipation of their concomitant loss upon the Poet Laureate's death. For example, in her elegy to the Tennyson family, Cookson employed muses to describe women's moral purpose in serving mankind:

Of woman in each place it tells

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, p. 213.

<sup>150</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, p. 208.

With depth and insight sure and rare,  
And on her nobler respect dwells  
Till muse enshrined, we see her there.  
There, Wisdom for a hearing pleads  
Mute the heart of every man,  
And something [undecipherable] and suit his needs  
Instruct his mind, or nothing can.<sup>151</sup>

Cookson's writing demonstrates her familiarity with and understanding of the 'lofty' literature that Davies surmised to be out of reach for the 'domestic class'. Yet she simultaneously upholds moral and education traditions designed specifically for women. Cookson's protagonist stoically maintains her intelligence until, gaining the full nobility of respect, she is 'enshrined' as a muse, Wisdom. She requests permission to be heard ("for a hearing pleads"), then instructs 'his' mind like 'nothing [else] can'. Cookson's woman-muse exemplifies restraint and respectability, similar to Princess Ida's ultimate 'taming' which Tennyson described in *The Princess*.

Similarly to Cookson, S. Gertrude Ford – a fifteen-year-old girl living in Halifax, West Yorkshire, with her family of woollen mill workers – employs a muse, Sympathy, as an embodiment of femininity, morality, and purity robed in white. In her condolence letter to Emily Tennyson, Ford writes:

[H]eavenly Sympathy, whose sweet sad eyes  
Are alway[s] jewelled with the pearls of tears,  
And whose fair form in vestal white is robed,  
Upon the rankling smart of aching hearts  
Lays soothing balm with hands whose cool, soft touch  
Is in itself a remedy. And she,

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<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Cookson, untitled, undated (c. 1892), poem, ll. 17-24. TRC, UK.



My chosen messenger, now comes to thee.<sup>152</sup>

While it would be an exaggeration to state that these individuals actively and consciously endeavoured for the ‘betterment of humanity’ that social messages of the time instructed, without exception, all of the correspondents—male, female, or unknown—used language that reflects the idealised roles that Tennyson advocated for women. Although we will never know whether correspondence that critiqued or strayed from the ‘moral focus towards God’ or failed to sustain male chivalric reverence met their end in the Tennysons’ bonfire, the correspondence demonstrates that the non-elite writers were employing these types of gendered codes which Tennyson endorsed.

By adapting Tennyson’s conventional view of gender roles, and offering them to the Tennyson family, these two working-class women poets communicate that upholding moral tradition through delineated male and female roles provides comfort to the bereaved. Ford and Cookson show that some working-class women writers employ the gendered and moral traits from literature to elevate Tennyson as a defender of virtue. (Later in this chapter, we will also see similar moral defenses in the verses of death correspondents Eleanor Henry and W. Hutton Brayshay). The two compositions by Ford and Cookson also provide clear evidence that non-elite individuals not only gained literacy, but also interpreted and adapted literature in order to navigate their desires for relationships with the Poet Laureate and his family. For example, Ford’s muse, Sympathy, functions as an elegiac device; but she also uses the muse as a mouthpiece to allow her to cross class and age divides in order to communicate intimately with Emily Tennyson:

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<sup>152</sup> S. Gertrude Ford, untitled, 16 November 1892, poem, ll. 6-12, TRC, UK.

My chosen messenger, now comes to thee. / O hear her speak! O let her tell to thee //  
To whispering accents, tremulously soft, / My message well delivering to thine ear: / I  
loved him too! I loved him passing well.<sup>153</sup>

Indeed, Ford's muse not only demonstrates her literacy to Emily, but also enables a working-class teenager to figuratively whisper in Lady Emily's ear.

Nevertheless, the relationships between working women and literature were as scrutinised, moderated, and prescribed as the manners in which they deployed their education. Reading, like education, was to be supported for poorer women – but, with tremendous condescension, only sufficiently to refresh them from their labours, and of adequate moral content to maintain their ability to appropriately serve. Thus, for non-elite women and particularly for poorer working women, their permitted allowances of reading and education were designed to ultimately serve the upper classes who employed them. Yet as we will see, women both participated in and challenged the reductive stance society took regarding their education. The female death correspondents actively participated in paradoxes: their words demonstrate that they upheld significantly traditional and subservient gender values – but the act of their writing suggests they may have taken a more independent stance on education, reading and writing.

Decades after Tennyson's *The Princess* and both Browne's and Davies' publications, in the year of Tennyson's death, the magazine *Our Mothers and Daughters* – “a magazine with a conservative, Christian, temperance slant” – published an essay by novelist and early feminist Edna Lyall (1892).<sup>154</sup> Lyall emphasised that time spent reading was important for ‘the Busy and Tired’ women, “particularly mothers and grown-up daughters, who were in

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<sup>153</sup> Ford, ll. 12-13 and 16-18.

<sup>154</sup> Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837 – 1914*, (Oxford, [1993] 2002), p. 107.

danger of exhausting themselves with domestic duties.”<sup>155</sup> Although Lyall warned that women should not read poetry for more than six weeks out of every year, she, Browne and Davies promoted reading groups, clubs, and societies for women’s home study. The act of collective reading and discussion was seen to provide appropriate spaces in which middle- and upper-class women who had left formal education could develop their thinking within a sphere of structured study. This structure was intended to prevent, as such commentators advised, succumbing to idleness, depression, snobbery, or selfishness, ‘subduing the elements of her humanity’ in order to give rise to magnanimous tendencies that are ‘highest within her’.<sup>156</sup> This stance on women’s access to reading and literary discussion prioritised highly restrictive and gendered spheres, and excluded women of the working classes, and all women who had not had formal schooling.

Yet, Cookson’s and Ford’s compositions demonstrate their involvement in literary consumption and examination, which belie Lyall’s implicit exclusion of their class, and suggests they may have had access to literary discussions – perhaps via reading groups for non-elite women. For example, organisations such as the National Home Reading Union (NHRU), founded in 1889, actively sought membership from working-class women, including those who had left formal education.<sup>157</sup> Yet, similarly to the reading groups for middle- and upper-class women, NHRU prescribed non-elite women readers with literary materials deemed to encourage morality and self-help.<sup>158</sup> Both elite and working-class women’s reading societies simultaneously enhanced educational access for women, while

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> *Memoir*, 248.

<sup>157</sup> Indeed, Flint notes that the NHRU secretary “suggested that [members] be sought from Juvenile Clubs and Guilds, Sunday Schools, Girls’ Friendly Societies, and Associations for Befriending Young Servants: indicative of a strong base among the working classes.” Flint, p. 108.

<sup>158</sup> Flint, p, 107.

reinforcing the prevailing societal stance that women's education must reinforce morality and ideals of service.

### **Reading rooms, libraries, and collective learning**

Friendly Societies for working boys and men dated back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, originating with the concept of "mutual improvement" in Scotland.<sup>159</sup> Jonathan Rose (2001) states:

In addition to the mutual improvement societies *per se*, the working classes organized innumerable adult schools, libraries, reading circles, dramatic societies, and musical groups. They all belonged to the mutual improvement tradition, in that they relied on working-class initiative rather than state provision or middle-class philanthropy.<sup>160</sup>

By the 1830s, Rose estimates that approximately 25% of male workers were members of a friendly society, rising to roughly 75% or more by 1880.<sup>161</sup> In 1854, reading rooms in northwest London's Marylebone Free Library were opened for the first time to members of the public who were over the age of 14, and stocked with "works of interest and utility to every class of reader."<sup>162</sup> The Free Library's working-class reader numbers were substantial within the first 18 months. In 1855, male readers totalled 25,721 and of these the largest group was schoolboys and male pupil teachers (10,187) followed by carpenters, plumbers, painters, decorators, and the building trade (5,693). Other male users were identified as labourers, costermongers, clerks, shoemakers, tailors, smiths, artists, and missionaries. Amongst the female readers (444), the largest identified groups were governesses and pupil teachers (146) and schoolgirls (91). Dressmakers and servants were the other specified female occupations.<sup>163</sup> These figures demonstrate that nearly half of the female users and

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<sup>159</sup> Rose, pp. 58-59.

<sup>160</sup> Rose, p, 58.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Margaret Makepeace, Lead Curator, East India Company Records, "The People Teaching Themselves" – Marylebone Free Library', in *Untold lives blog, The British Library*, 9 January 2016, <<https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2016/01/the-people-teaching-themselves-marylebone-free-library.html>>, [accessed online 21 May 2019.]

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

approximately 25 per cent of the Marylebone Free Library's male users were skilled tradespeople and labourers. Roughly 40 per cent of males and more than half of females (237) were directly involved with education as teachers, governesses, or scholars. Thus, the British public was benefitting from "the achievement of mass literacy" by the time of Tennyson's 1892 death. Indeed, Rose contends that by the late nineteenth century, working-class culture was "saturated by the spirit of mutual education."<sup>164</sup>

Why, then, did working-class writers plainly state that writing to Tennyson's family must surely be out of the ordinary? One likelihood may be that the newspapers depicted Tennyson's Westminster Abbey funeral as a celebrity event, with the public activities associated with mourning Tennyson seen as the exclusive domain of noble, fashionable guests. As Alice Godwin, a domestic servant employed in a Kew household wrote to Emily Tennyson on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1892:

Alone upon the bridge I weep in silence / While now they bear him gently to the tomb. / The high the rich, the noble, all are these / To do him honour as to honour due.<sup>165</sup>

The distinction between the working classes and the rich and nobility is clearly delineated in Godwin's lines. She contrasts herself—a domestic servant, weeping alone outside of the intimate space of Tennyson's funeral—with the 'high' upper classes who are permitted to 'honour' him within Westminster Abbey.

Another possible reason that the working-class writers presented themselves as being unique could be owing to a self-consciousness relating to the stigma of independent learning—particularly among the older writers, who gained their literacy prior to the enactment of the 1870 Education Act, and among women, who, when compared to their male

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<sup>164</sup> Rose, p. 83.

<sup>165</sup> Alice L Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', 12 October 1892, poem, ll. 11-14, TRC, UK.

counterparts, faced additional socially constructed disapproval of, and barriers to, reading and learning. Whilst mutual education and the sharing of knowledge within homes and workplaces was commonplace and largely accepted by 1892, solitary learning could be construed as haughtiness or selfishness. Emily Davies and Phyllis Browne, in 1878 and 1880 respectively, had already cautioned women from the conceit of solitary reading. Rose argues, “Reading was acceptable provided it was a collective activity, as it commonly was in working-class homes.”<sup>166</sup> Flora Thompson provides an example of her village’s disdain for scholarly proficiency, stating that, to parents of schoolchildren in the village, “outstanding ability was no better than outstanding stupidity.”<sup>167</sup> Thompson’s father had taught Flora and her brother, Edmund, to read at home prior to their attending school, which infuriated some of the village’s parents:

As she was seldom seen without an open book in her hand, it was not long before the neighbours knew she could read. They did not approve of this at all. None of their children had learned to read before they went to school, and then only under compulsion, and they thought that [Flora], by doing so, had stolen a march on them. So they attacked her mother about it, her father conveniently being away. ‘He’d no business to teach the child himself,’ they said. ‘Schools be the places for teaching, and you’ll likely get wrong for him doing it when governess finds out.’<sup>168</sup>

Similar accounts from Alice Foley’s turn-of-the-century upbringing in *A Bolton Childhood* (1973), describe her mother, who was unable to read, feeling affronted by her children’s quiet absorption when reading, exclaiming that she “met as weel goo eaut, for this place is nowt but a deaf an’ dumb schoo’.”<sup>169</sup>

While solitary reading and learning remained a contentious social issue for women throughout the nineteenth century, the frequent lack of access to a quiet area for the purpose

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<sup>166</sup> Rose, p. 89.

<sup>167</sup> Thompson, p. 86.

<sup>168</sup> Thompson, p. 71.

<sup>169</sup> Alice Foley, *A Bolton Childhood*, (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1973), cited in Rose, p. 87.

of *writing* added another obstacle for many British women and men alike—particularly the poor working-classes. This problem persisted into the twentieth century. Citing the novelist Margaret Thompson Davis (b. 1926), Rose asserts: “Any kind of serious writing involved prolonged solitude and rumination, and that ran against the grain of working-class culture.”<sup>170</sup> Davis recalls that “Writers . . . were so far removed from the tenement flat in the middle of Glasgow in which we lived. For anyone in such an environment to have writing pretensions was treated with the utmost suspicion.”<sup>171</sup> John Goodridge (2005) recounts a heartbreakingly severe community backlash to the published success of Mary Maria Colling, a Devon farm labourer’s daughter who “worked as domestic servant for most of her life. After being ‘sent to school to an old woman . . . to be kept out of the way’, she was placed in a Free School at the age of ten” where she realised her skills with reading and an acute memory for ‘minding’ poems. In 1831, while employed as a domestic servant, “Colling’s sole volume, *Fables and Other Pieces in Verse*, was published by subscription under the patronage of novelist Anna Eliza Bray.”<sup>172</sup> In her newly ‘elevated’ position as a published poet, Collings was suddenly “the target of such intense resentment from local people that she would lie ‘crying in her bed’ at the thought of their attacks, and once ‘whilst so ill’ had ‘made up her mind to die’.”<sup>173</sup> Yet, despite the potential for this community resentment that poets such as Collings suffered, and the pervading environmental obstacles to individual, quiet reflection and composition, working-class people persisted with their writing and aspirations to publish throughout the nineteenth century. As Kirstie Blair stated:

Although this tradition reaches back to the eighteenth century and beyond, with important predecessors for the Victorian poet in writers such as Stephen Duck, Ann

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<sup>170</sup> Rose, p. 86.

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Thomson Davis, *The Making of a Novelist* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982), pp. 3-6, quoted in Rose, p. 86.

<sup>172</sup> John Goodridge (ed), *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

Yearsley, John Clare, and, dominating the field, Robert Burns, the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented number of lower-class poets entering print.<sup>174</sup>

Additionally, Mike Sanders (2009) demonstrated that between 1838 and 1852, “The leading Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Star*, published over 1,000 poems written by more than 350 poets”.<sup>175</sup> *The Northern Star* was originally founded in 1837 as a means for working-class writers and sympathisers to challenge the Poor Law; but the Chartist cause became the core focus of the paper following The People’s Charter (1838). Yet, as Sanders argues, “historians have been reluctant to grant literary production the same significance and agency which they so readily accord literacy” and only recently has Chartist poetry been seen as “a central rather than an incidental aspect of the movement.”<sup>176</sup> The Chartist poems published in the *Northern Star*, Sanders confirms, “were the work of at least 390 Chartist poets, the vast majority of whom were working men.”<sup>177</sup> However, Sanders’ research also includes a range of Chartist working-class women’s poetry, for example, from ‘a Factory Girl of Stalybridge’.

The compositional approaches of working-class Tennyson death correspondents and those of politically inspired Chartist poets should not be conflated, not least because the later writing of the death correspondents was from all ages and genders of the working population; and the compositions were largely derivative testaments to a moral, Christian status-quo. Even so, the data Sanders provides functions as an indicative profile of working-class male literary productivity between 1838 and 1852 that can be applied to the wider working-class British populations, particularly populations of working men motivated by significant events. The primarily male, working-class Chartist poets, which Sanders investigates, and the male

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<sup>174</sup> Blair, ‘Men my brothers, men the workers’, p. 276.

<sup>175</sup> Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>176</sup> Sanders, p. 69.

<sup>177</sup> Sanders, 70.



and female working-class Tennyson death correspondents forty years later are similarly motivated to write: the Chartists by political ardour; and the death correspondents by the loss of an admired poet.

While both groups benefitted from participating in writing activity as part of a community of contemporaries, acknowledgement of male and female working-class writing differed. Florence S. Boos (2008), in her anthology of working-class women poets, insists that “Victorian proletarian women wrote thousands of lines of poetry, but twentieth-century critics and anthologies focused primarily on the writings of male ‘artisans,’ many of them Chartists.”<sup>178</sup> As Sanders confirms, the wide circulation of *The Northern Star* enabled its contributing poets to be the most read working-class poets of the time. By contrast, Boos asserts the need for ‘tasks of recovery’ in order to access works of poetry authored by women in the same period: many unpublished manuscripts were destroyed upon the authors’ deaths. “Even when their authors were alive, most mainstream editors and reviewers ignored their contributions, and class-based condescension and malign neglect silenced their poetic efforts.”<sup>179</sup> While small pockets of readers supported the poetic work of working-class women, Boos argues that “[f]ewer women than men could ever hope to see their poems appear between boards, and all but those few therefore published most of their work in pamphlets or local or regional newspapers.”<sup>180</sup> Boos states that pamphlet and newspaper editors preferred women’s poetry that focused on “the rigors of winter and redeeming consolations of family life”.<sup>181</sup> Boos contends that these limited outlets in which women could publish amounted to “an amiable form of censorship.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Boos, p. 13.

<sup>179</sup> Boos, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> Boos, p. 15.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

It is as fortunate as it is unusual that several women chose to write to Tennyson's family in 1892. Indeed, the presence of female-authored compositions among the death correspondence provides evidence that Tennyson's death generated a unique motivation for women to write. Indeed, Chapter 2 explores the possibility that Tennyson's death may have enabled women to temporarily suspend existing barriers to writing, particularly when corresponding with other women. It is also likely that the Tennyson death correspondence was as 'amiably censored' for morality and respectability as the working women's lost poetry that Boos rightly laments. Nonetheless, the Tennyson family chose to save women's works, and those from labourers as well as from aristocrats. We are therefore enabled to access the views from under-represented authors on loss, literature, religion, kinship, and community—most of which would otherwise be lost, and forever out of the realms of recovery.

Equally, through the correspondence we are provided with irrefutable evidence that 'the rich [and] the noble' were not the sole mourners, nor were they the sole writers – despite their frequent assertions to the contrary. According to the letters and the notes included with the poems, many individuals commented upon a presumed rarity of correspondence from the working class to public figures. For example, a letter from London stonemason Paul Hann prefaces the verses that he sent to Hallam Tennyson on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1892 and plainly states that his poetry is rare and his verses are humble:

My Lord

May it please Your Lordship

To accept the enclosed lines as a tribute from a working Stone Mason – you have received many from the upper classes no doubt, but not from working men

I enclose the Harvest Home, to show that I sometimes write a few lines in my humble way.

Yours Obediently

Paul Hann

A clue to the prevalence of statements such as Hann's may be found in one of Kirstie Blair's studies of working-class Scottish poetry featured in the Comments section of Scottish newspapers, in which she states that when submitting verses in response to previously published working-class poets: "The poets emphasize their humble position and consequent lack of poetic skill while praising their fellow poets for having managed to achieve such skill despite their lowly status."<sup>183</sup> Blair's study primarily focuses upon working-class-to-working-class praise and humility, and I suggest that the working-class death correspondents applied the same principles of deference to the Poet Laureate's family as a matter of learned courtesy. With the prevalence of amateur poetry published within working-class newspapers and mainstream press, the poets studied within this thesis will have undoubtedly been familiar with working-class newspaper poetry and, I suggest, they further adopted social cues for correspondence from their published counterparts. Blair notes that:

The relationship between the aspiring working-class poet and the newspaper press has always been crucial. Indeed, it is possible to argue that at least from the late eighteenth century onwards, every laboring-class or working-class poet had a significant relationship with the press.<sup>184</sup>

It is therefore possible that the death correspondents observed and practiced the humility exhibited in newspaper commentaries.

While the letter was sent from working-class poet to the son of the Poet Laureate, rather than from one working-class poet to another, Hann's self-effacing introduction contrasts his 'working Stone Mason' status with 'the upper classes', and specifically contextualises his poetry in humble terms. Hann's claim of the relative rarity of a poem from

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<sup>183</sup> Kirstie Blair, "'Let the Nightingales Alone': Correspondence Columns, the Scottish Press, and the Making of the Working-Class Poet", in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 47:2 (Summer 2014), p. 198.

<sup>184</sup> Kirsty Blair, 'The Newspaper Press and the Victorian Working-Class Poet', in *A History of British Working Class Literature*, John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (eds), (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017), 264–280, (268).

‘working men’ is somewhat accurate: as explained in my introduction, the poetry and correspondence from the middle- and working-classes filled one archive box, while their counterparts from the upper classes over Tennyson’s lifetime filled an archive.<sup>185</sup> Hann’s is only one example of humility-led death correspondence. Additional examples, which are further explored in Chapters 2 and 3, include J. Brown, a ‘young gardner’, who implores Emily: “I hope you will kindly excuse the liberty I have taken in composing the enclosed lines.” Alice Godwin, a 27-year-old domestic servant asks Emily: “Will you please forgive me if I have done wrongly in sending the verses.” 47-year-old Annie Martell asks Hallam: “Will Lord Tennyson, please accept the enclosed lines. By the wife of a working man.” 13-year-old Percy Wells states: “I am only a mechanic – but I loved the late Lord Tennysons [sic] poetry. And may I, with sincere respect, ask your acceptance of the enclosed verses to his memory.”

These examples of humility suggest that the working-class poets were profoundly aware that they were not unique amongst their class. As Blair and Sanders have demonstrated, working-class poetry was prevalent in local and national British newspaper columns, commentaries, advertisements, and letters to the editor.<sup>186</sup> The working-class death correspondents’ humble introductions, apologies for intrusions, and claims of being unique in their willingness or ability to write verses were likely exercises in humility-led correspondence etiquette.

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<sup>185</sup> As stated in my Methodology, I did not include condolence correspondence from the elite classes in this study, and therefore comparative data is unavailable.

<sup>186</sup> For detailed reading about working-class newspaper poetry, see four (of many) studies by Kirstie Blair: “‘Let the Nightingales Alone’ Correspondence Columns, the Scottish Press, and the Making of the Working-Class Poet’, in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Summer 2014), 188-207; *Poets of the People’s Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (2016); ‘The newspaper press and the Victorian working-class poet’, in *A History of British Working Class Literature*, John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (eds), 2017, 264-280; and ‘Advertising Poetry, the Working-Class Poet and the Victorian Newspaper Press’, in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 23:1 (2018), 103–118. Also see: Michael Sanders, “‘A jackass load of poetry’: the *Northern Star’s* poetry column 1838–1852’, in *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, by Michael Sanders, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 69-86.

There is further evidence that working-class poets used deferential language in order to appear ‘deserving’ of the Tennyson family’s attention. As an example of a ‘deserving model’ of a working-class poet, Blair recounts the patronage from Tennyson’s predecessor Robert Southey (Poet Laureate from 1813 until his death in 1850) for John Jones, a servant in a ‘good family’. Blair states that:

[Jones’s] essay is an important plea to recognize the existence of a labouring-class tradition, but Jones, in Southey’s account, is a deserving model of the lower-class poet both because his loyalty and humility indicate his contented adherence to class divisions, and because his poetry demonstrates that literature can offer ‘moral improvement’ to the lower classes.”<sup>187</sup>

As previously discussed, some working-class poets used deferential or humble language in order to demonstrate good manners, signal individual respectability, and to portray themselves as exemplars of their class.

### **Defending the Round Table: anxiety, tradition, and the incentive to write**

Tennyson’s celebrity death and the public events and news features surrounding his funeral created a momentum that compelled people around the world to reflect upon and write about their responses to the loss of the Poet Laureate. Scholars such as Samantha Matthews (2002), Charlotte Boyce (2013), and John Morton (2015), among others, have analysed Tennyson’s prominence within nineteenth-century celebrity culture, and Tennyson’s celebrity status unquestionably encouraged people to write.

While the celebrity death created the impetus for the death correspondents to write at the *time* they did so, and provided them with a compelling *reason* to write, the correspondence shows that several conventional social constructs—which conservative,

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<sup>187</sup> Kirstie Blair, “‘Men my brothers, men the workers’: Tennyson and the Victorian Working-Class Poet’ draft article, 2009, p. 4.

traditional Victorians feared losing—equally created a *willingness* to write, informed by collective, reflective rumination over the cultural symbolism of Tennyson’s death. Regardless of their social class or education, and as the correspondents navigated their responses to Tennyson’s mortality, their language conveys the literary and cultural traditions that Tennyson personified for them, and communicates their apprehensions relating to a perceived erosion of conventions. Tennyson’s celebrity status is therefore only a partial motivation for the death correspondents to write and share their compositions. An equally fundamental set of conditions is the range of methods by which these writers memorialised the public persona of Tennyson and his works, which are repeatedly presented interchangeably: Tennyson’s physical death is clearly presented as being inextricable from literary and cultural death. Although the common notion that genius transcends death provides some of the correspondents with the comforting language of Tennyson’s immortality, for the primarily working-class writers in this study, burying Tennyson equally evoked fears of dying traditions and the death of righteousness. Tennyson represented ideals of ‘nation’, belonging, Britishness, or Englishness—themes that the letters and poems prominently incorporate. The writers’ responses to these physical, literary, and cultural deaths, and their apprehensions about the negative, interconnected societal implications further indicate the breadth of literature they had consumed, and the cultural traditions they felt compelled to defend in their prose. For many of the death correspondents in this study, they did so by valorising Tennyson as a representative of tradition in attempts to soothe their anxieties.

For example, John Develin, a fifty-one-year-old ‘rent collector’s agent’ from Dublin specifically refers to Tennyson as a “bold Defender of the Christian Faith / For God, Queen, Country; firm, inviolate.”<sup>188</sup> Develin reveals his trepidation of the changing age, continuing his verses with the proclamation that Tennyson’s Laureateship was spent: “Upholding well

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<sup>188</sup> John Develin, ‘The Laureateship’, undated (c.1892), poem, ll. 29-30, TRC, UK.

the Nation's Dignity. / Fos'tring the virtues by his kindly Page / Rebuking sharp the vices of the Age."<sup>189</sup> For Develin, Tennyson set an example through his verses to defend faith and the nation's dignity, which he considers to be an antidote to modern 'vices'. Similarly, a sixty-six-year-old retired Yorkshire schoolmaster, Richard Vasey, cries: "Who now will call from mundane fields of song, / And harp laboriously the shadowy forms, / And scenes "Arthurian" with their motley throng."<sup>190</sup> Vasey blends elegiac conventions of harps and song with Arthurian scenes to convey the loss of Tennyson's influence.

Another death correspondent, A. Chambers (Appendix 2), described Tennyson's coffin, which the family had covered with the British flag as the funeral procession travelled by horse and cart from the family's Surrey retreat in Haslemere to the train station, and then onward to burial in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Chambers's imagery is precisely chosen. Rather than describing the procession, Chambers focuses on Britain and the flag, which serves to exemplify and idealise Tennyson as the nation's poet – while simultaneously signalling national turmoil:

Lay down your wreaths before him  
On Britain's earth that bore him  
For Britain's sons deplore him  
Wrap close her ensign o'er him<sup>191</sup>

Chambers's somewhat jarring claim that "Britain's sons deplore" Tennyson means 'regret' in this context. Chambers concludes the poem with protective imagery. 'Britain's earth' has given birth to Tennyson. Furthermore, 'her' ensign—which can be interpreted as a military banner or a national flag—is not draped across the coffin. It is wrapped protectively, in a

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<sup>189</sup> Develin, ll. 34-38.

<sup>190</sup> Richard Vasey, 'After hearing "The Silent Voices" sung', undated (c.1892), ll. 5-8, TRC, UK.

<sup>191</sup> A. Chambers, 'Lines on the death of Alfred Lord Tennyson Poet Laureate', 25<sup>th</sup> October 1892, poem, ll. 9-11, TRC, UK.

post-battle scenario, to symbolically shield Tennyson's body from desecration in the manner of a fallen battlefield hero. Chambers's allegorical protection of Tennyson and his works—with the symbolism of Britain's ensign as a defending shroud over Tennyson's body—implies an anxiety over the loss of Tennyson's works and the dissolution of the idealised traditions they imparted.

These sentiments are echoed in another poem, written by an anonymous death correspondent on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892 (Appendix 1), which, like Chambers's verses, lauds Tennyson's adherence to literary tradition and moral virtue, while lamenting the end of an age:

Farewell, great poet; last of Spencer's [sic] stately line,  
A proud & fond adieu, not funeral dirge, be thine;  
Thy heart is still, thy sweet, poetic soul hath fled,  
But great Tennyson, the Laureate, is not dead.  
Like to thine own ideal knight;  
Thou sought for aye to the Holy Grail,  
Thy blest reward can never fail.  
Farewell, a loyal nation mourns thee –  
Whom we, on earth, no more shall see;  
Whose songs through all the land have rung,  
The sweetest songs which man e'er sung.<sup>192</sup>

The poem bids farewell to Tennyson, the “great poet, last of Spencer's [sic] stately line”.<sup>193</sup> By linking Tennyson to Spenser—who intended that the reading of ‘The Faerie Queene’ (1590) should both serve to represent a national identity for England<sup>194</sup> and also to “fashion a

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<sup>192</sup> Anonymous, ‘Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam, Oct 6th, 1892’, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1892, poem, ll. 1-11, TRC UK.

<sup>193</sup> Anonymous, ‘Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam’, l. 1.

<sup>194</sup> See: Katharine Cleland, ‘English National Identity and the Reformation Problem of Clandestine Marriage in Spenser's Faerie Queene, Book I’, in *Spenser Studies*, 29, (2014): 75-103; and Andrew Hadfield,



gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline”<sup>195</sup>—the correspondent upholds Tennyson as imparting similar lessons in virtue to readers through his works. This theme continues as they glorify Tennyson’s morality, “whose life was pure, and whose death serene.”<sup>196</sup> The poem then offers assurance that Tennyson’s fame will prevent the loss of the traditions he upheld:

Oh! glorious name, oh! heart so true and brave,  
Thy name for ever rests on deathless fame’s high waves.  
Thy great renown can never die,  
Thro’ ages of eternity.<sup>197</sup>

Indeed, the anonymous writer asserts that Tennyson’s fame remains immortal. The writer then declares that Tennyson’s verses brought Arthurian legends to life despite their pessimism about the contemporary ‘unfeeling age’:

And, in the past days, many happy moments spent,  
O’er those soft, poetic verses, with majestic language blent;  
And in imagination seen, the noble king.  
Of the great Table Round, whose praises ring,  
Still thro’ this unfeeling age; him & each true knight  
Of his, methought I saw, in armour bright  
Pass before me, so great the power,  
Of those most noble verses,<sup>198</sup>

In Line 39— “methought I saw, in armour bright / Pass before me”—the anonymous writer

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‘Introduction: Spenser, Colonialism, and National Identity’, in *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl*, (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>195</sup> “‘The Faerie Queene’ by Edmund Spenser, 1590’, *The British Library*. <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-faerie-queene-by-edmund-spenser-1590>>, [accessed online 18 September 2020].

<sup>196</sup> Anonymous, ‘Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam’, l. 1.

<sup>197</sup> Anonymous, ‘Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam’, ll. 16-19.

<sup>198</sup> Anonymous, ‘Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam,’ ll. 34-41.

asserts that Tennyson's writing brought Arthur's knights to life. Simultaneously, the line echoes Milton's 'Sonnet 19': "Methought I saw my late espoused saint". This suggests that their reactions to Tennyson's physical death and the corresponding demise of chivalry are akin to a widower's grief. Tennyson is portrayed as a knight in armour, displaying his adherence to medieval knights' code of conduct—while simultaneously tempering this mortality with the poem's earlier equation of the Poet Laureate's fame with eternal life.

This, along with the 'great power' of Tennyson's verses, his renown and his 'glorious name' appear to be broadly synonymous with his decades of poetry, and specifically linked to the mythology of King Arthur's Court and the longevity of the chivalric tradition. Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' (1833) and 12 poems comprising *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) scrutinise the decline of chivalry, its associated morality, and the quest for the Holy Grail. It is therefore no surprise that death correspondents such as this anonymous writer frequently incorporated masculine social codes of morality, knighthood, and Arthurian legends or chivalry into their writing. W. Hutton Brayshay (Appendix 13), a 58-year-old who described himself on the 1891 Census as: "After 17 1/2 Yrs Of Property Management Not Working Through My Age"—compared Tennyson to a member of King Arthur's court. Brayshay's imaginings of Tennyson as a medieval Christian knight, alongside his nationality, further serves to claim that his role in upholding chivalric morality is synonymous with Englishness:

"English" we deemed – and claim thee – as we fair would have England be –  
True and trusty and honest, - plainspeaking and fair and free.  
True "Knight", - as of "Arthurs' tables" – to battle with all things Wrong  
And fight for Right with Sword of might, Lance [undecipherable] true and strong<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> W. Hutton Brayshay, 'In Memoriam Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oct 1892', October 1892, poem, ll. 5-8, TRC, UK.

Brayshay's version of Tennyson as a knight battling 'Wrong' and defending 'Right' upholds the traditions of chivalry as a 'True and trusty and honest' English characteristic. Brayshay is clear: the English have 'claimed' Tennyson as their symbol of a 'fair and free' England.

Eleanor Henry (Appendix 15), an 81-year-old widow of a Presbyterian Minister, similarly connects traditions, morality and Englishness as seen in Brayshay's poem. Henry, from Bushmills, Ireland, likens heaven to King Arthur's Court and places Tennyson directly at the mythic knights' Round Table, where he will await Emily's eventual arrival:

His Pilot, Captain, and his King  
Have welcomed him above  
And placed him at a table round  
Where's naught but purest love  
And there he'll wait to meet the bride  
Who strove his life to cheer  
And longs to touch the vanished hand  
Now gone from Hazlemere [sic].<sup>200</sup>

Henry merges Christian and chivalric contexts in her first three lines. "His Pilot, Captain, and his King" – presumably God, Christ and King Arthur – simultaneously greet him in heaven. Henry conveys that a chivalric afterlife is the appropriate eternity for Tennyson. Rather than becoming an angel or saint, the trio convey Tennyson to Arthur's Round Table. Henry implies that Tennyson has earned his place amongst the Arthurian knights through the morality he imparts in his verses. Henry briefly cites Tennyson's works to illustrate her point: 'His Pilot' (used in *Idylls of the King*: 'The Passing of Arthur', and 'Crossing the Bar'); and 'the vanished hand' (seen in 'Break, Break, Break'). These literary and mythological references are anchored in reality: Tennyson has departed from Haslemere, the Tennyson

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<sup>200</sup> Eleanor Henry. *Lines on Tennyson*. Poem. Undated, c. 1892. TRC, Lincoln. Lines 16-24.

family home in Surrey. Henry adapts Tennyson's works into her own composition and these works provide her with the themes by which Henry navigates the language of her correspondence. Both Henry's and Brayshay's poems allude to their anxieties of the end of moral traditions symbolised in Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur' from *Idylls of the King*:

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:  
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?  
For now I see the true old times are dead,  
When every morning brought a noble chance,  
And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
Such times have been not since the light that led  
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
Which was an image of the mighty world,  
And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."<sup>201</sup>

The 'Round Table' and its synonymy with the chivalric code of Christian knighthood and gentlemanly behaviour has expired. The 'true old times' are dead. Sir Bedivere cries out with the distress of being alone and questions his ability to bear the 'strange' new ways of thought. Henry and Brayshay echo these uncertainties by presenting Tennyson in terms comparable to those in Tennyson's description of the 'bold' Sir Bedivere – the sole remainder of the extinct, fabled 'noble' and 'light' era.

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<sup>201</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Passing of Arthur', *Idylls of the King*, ll. 34-46, in *A Victorian Anthology, 1837-1895*, Edmund Clarence Stedman (ed), (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895) <[www.bartleby.com/246](http://www.bartleby.com/246)>, [accessed 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020].

Catherine Phillips (2002) states that, while Tennyson began to work on the Arthurian legends in the early 1830s—beginning with ‘The Lady of Shalott’—Tennyson “was also experimenting with a larger allegorical framework for the material”.<sup>202</sup> Tennyson “knew all three of the English editions of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* published in the Romantic period”<sup>203</sup> and explored and adapted Malory’s storylines for his own version of *Le Morte D'Arthur* in 1842. Phillips asserts:

The ‘Morte d'Arthur’ was the first of the poems which Tennyson ultimately shaped into the *Idylls of the King*, where he prefaced it with a longer description of the battles that result in the destruction of the Round Table. Tennyson kept the narrative strand of the tale as it is in Book XXI, Chapter 5 of Malory, although he made one significant change in that Malory's Arthur is buried and Bedivere spends the rest of his life as a monk praying for the King's soul.<sup>204</sup>

This last point is significant. Malory’s Sir Bedivere dies fighting in King Arthur’s war with Emperor Lucius of Rome, whereas Tennyson’s Bedivere commits his life to prayer for the eternal wellbeing of the King’s soul. Likewise, Eleanor Henry clearly states that Tennyson will take his place in heaven beside Arthur. Her combined setting of heaven/Arthurianism alludes to Bedivere’s embodiment of both chivalry and Christianity. The verses of Anonymous, Henry and Brayshay similarly communicate that persistent acts of remembrance are needed to ensure the preservation of Tennyson’s moral lessons. As these death correspondents exemplify, the death of Tennyson could be seen as synonymous with the demise of moral traditions – anxieties which urged members of the general public to write: in this case, to author mythologised testimonies of Tennyson’s idealised, exemplary morality.

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<sup>202</sup> Catherine Phillips, “‘Charades from the Middle Ages’? Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Chivalric Code’, in *Victorian Poetry* 40(3) (2002), 241-253 (241).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Phillips, 245.

It is little wonder that anxieties fuelled these death correspondents with the compulsion to challenge threats to the moral and literary conventions of the time. Tennyson's detailed portrayal of the mortal wounding of each member of King Arthur's Round Table, who "man by man had fall'n . . . about their Lord, King Arthur",<sup>205</sup> symbolised the destruction of Christian morality and Chivalry. Tennyson's depictions seem to have catalysed a moral call-to-arms from his more conservative and steadfastly traditional readers, who appear to have been compelled to defend the moral values symbolised in Tennyson's literary Medievalism. Clare Simmons (2001) argued that for nineteenth-century Great Britain—and in England in particular—Medievalism "seems to encode desire or mourning for loss of . . . the ordered society of the Middle Ages, or even for an age where romance and chivalry were still possible."<sup>206</sup> Anonymous, Brayshay, and Henry show that some of the death correspondents used Arthurianism as a conduit for grieving the traditional moral values that they believed to be dwindling. Simultaneously, their verses expressed sorrow for Tennyson's expiry, both as an adored poet of the people, and as a personification of traditional British values.

These examples are particularly notable when compared to an example of a working-class elegy written to a working-class poet. Written by 'weaver-poet' David Lawton, his elegy for fellow weaver and poet Samuel Laycock (1826 – 1893), employs many of the elegiac traditions that are seen in the death correspondence; but crucially, the elegy bids Laycock farewell without mythologising him:

Adieu, sweet singer, gone to sing elsewhere,  
Thy voice has ceased within our earthly choir,  
To join the swelling chorus sung up there;  
And we shall miss the music of thy lyre;

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<sup>205</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Passing of Arthur', *Idylls of the King*, (London: Macmillan and Co, 1893), p. 382.

<sup>206</sup> Clare A. Simmons (ed), 'Introduction', *Medievalism and the Quest for the 'Real' Middle Ages*, (Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

But in our memories we shall cherish long  
The sweet remembrance of thy life and song.<sup>207</sup>

Lawton precisely summarises the intent of his elegy: it is a ‘sweet remembrance’ of Laycock’s life and works, rather than an attempt to recreate Laycock as a mythological figure or a fallen knight. His mourners will miss, cherish, and remember the man and his poetry, but for Lawton, Laycock’s memory is unburdened with further responsibilities to his readers—unlike Tennyson’s.

Furthermore, shifts in the poetry landscape may have added to the death correspondents’ sorrows and fears. Firstly, Tennyson’s critical popularity had begun to wane by the fin de siècle. Samantha Matthews summarises the contemporary scholarly texts that outline the declining cultural and literary reception of Tennyson’s work between the time of his death and the early twentieth century, stating:

Brooke (1894) is a key contemporary commentary, reflecting the broadly positive assessment of Tennyson’s life and works at his death. Overviews written in the early 20th century reflect the modernists’ distaste for their Victorian predecessors and tend to be dismissive—Nicolson (1923) reflects this trend and modifies it.<sup>208</sup>

Secondly, it is clear that these anxieties which accompanied Tennyson’s death were further fuelled by the national “fear that poetry was dying” along with Tennyson, exemplified by the fact that no successor to the role of Poet Laureate had yet been determined.<sup>209</sup> Matthews states that an 1895 article in *The Idler* contends that the still-vacant post remains under debate, with the author, Aaron Watson, exclaiming that “Tennyson carried [the laureateship]

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<sup>207</sup> David Lawton, ‘Samuel Laycock’, undated (c.1893), poem, ll. 9-14.

<<https://minorvictorianwriters.org.uk/laycock/index.htm>> [accessed online 18 September 2021].

<sup>208</sup> Samantha Matthews, ‘Alfred Tennyson’, in *Oxford bibliographies: Victorian literature*, 2011. <<https://www-oxfordbibliographies-com.manchester.idm.oclc.org/view/document/obo-9780199799558/obo-9780199799558-0068.xml>>, [accessed 18 September 2020].

<sup>209</sup> Samantha Matthews, ‘After Tennyson: 1892-1918’, in *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 322.

to heights so sacred that we must henceforth, be very careful how we dispose of his halo”.<sup>210</sup>

Linda Peterson states that the debate about Tennyson’s successor began as early as 1890:

*The Fortnightly* named the obvious candidates, as well as many less likely: Algernon Swinburne and William Morris, the most worthy poetically; George Meredith, Lord Lytton (“Owen Meredith”), Coventry Patmore, Edwin Arnold, Andrew Lang, and Austin Dobson, capable but less distinguished; Augusta Webster, Christina Rossetti, and F. Mary Robinson, chief among the women poets; and Lewis Morris and Alfred Austin, acknowledged contenders but dismissed by the *Fortnightly* as imaginatively and technically inferior.<sup>211</sup>

Rumours existed that William Morris declined the offer of the Laureateship. Morris—a socialist and political agitator who had been “arrested for disorderly conduct at the trial of Lewis Lyons, a tailor, and others who had been charged with resisting arrest at a mass meeting of Socialists” in 1885<sup>212</sup>—refused to be considered for the post with admirable disdain. He comment in a 1892 letter to Ulster academic and historian James Bryce: “I could not accept a post which would give me even the appearance of serving a court for compliance sake.”<sup>213</sup> In 1892, Morris wrote to the *Daily Chronicle*, “Will you kindly contradict the report that I have been offered the Laureateship, as it is not true.”<sup>214</sup> Ultimately, four years after Tennyson’s death, Alfred Austin, a journalist for the Tory newspaper, *Spectator*, and the founding editor of the Conservative Party’s *National Review*, was appointed as Poet Laureate in 1896.<sup>215</sup> Austin’s association with the Tories, along with his patriotic poetry, demonstrate the Laureateship’s conservative traditions that Tennyson’s equally conservative readers

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<sup>210</sup> Matthews, ‘After Tennyson’, 322.

<sup>211</sup> Linda Peterson, ‘On the Appointment of the ‘Poet Laureate to Her Majesty, 1892-1896’, undated, *Branch*, <[http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=linda-peterson-on-the-appointment-of-the-poet-laureate-to-her-majesty-1892-1896#\\_ftn1.body](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=linda-peterson-on-the-appointment-of-the-poet-laureate-to-her-majesty-1892-1896#_ftn1.body)>, [accessed 18 August 2021].

<sup>212</sup> Terry L Meyers, ‘An Interview with William Morris, September, 1885: His Arrest and Freedom of Speech’. *Victorians Institute Journal*, 19, (1991), pp. 2-3.

<sup>213</sup> Norman Kelvin (ed). *Collected Letters of William Morris*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), iii. 460.

<sup>214</sup> Kelvin, *Collected Letters of William Morris*, 462.

<sup>215</sup> Amy Tikkanen, ‘Alfred Austin’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-Austin>>, [accessed 18 August 2021].



appear to have feared losing. I conclude that the impending gap in the Poet Laureateship, compounded by the physical death of Tennyson, created the necessary, collective, additional impetus for non-elite but traditionalist Victorian death correspondents to navigate a complex range of emotions through written verses and letters. For example, death correspondent Harry Vere Barker calls for the post to be left fallow: “Ah! who shall dare to lift that golden lyre? / And who shall dare to sweep its silver strings / So let it lie amidst the bruise’d flowers. / For still that dead voice in our mem’ry rings.”<sup>216</sup> Barker’s verses communicate the national fear that poetry was dying by proclaiming that the Poet Laureate’s position is unfillable.

It is easy to see, therefore, why individuals such as Chambers, Anonymous, Henry, and Brayshay ensured that they wrote about Tennyson’s life and works as flawless and beloved artefacts belonging to the British people. Indeed, their writing asserts Tennyson’s immortality in response to the shifting literary trends and cultural conventions in 1892. Their correspondence demonstrates that traditional, conservative British Victorians derived comfort from preserving the very traditions that they feared losing—by composing testimonials of Tennyson’s moral immortality in their own writing. While Tennyson’s death inspired thousands of letters, poems, and various public memorials, it is clear that anxieties stemming from desires to retain traditions and prevent their destruction, equally compelled the public to write.

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<sup>216</sup> Harry Vere Barker, *In Memoriam, Tennyson*, undated (c.1892), poem, ll. 9-12, TRC, UK.

## Chapter 2: My Widow'd Race: Possessive Poetry, Individual Grief and Appropriation

Of the 52 death correspondents within this study, 11 (21%) chose to communicate anonymously or via initials only, 40 (77%) revealed their identities by including their full names or return addresses, and one (1.9%) included undecipherable personal information. The four examples within this chapter—works by three women (Fanny Edge, S. Gertrude Ford, Mary Gaddess), and one man (J. Brown)—are differentiated from an extensive body of condolence letters and memorial poems because their content focuses on their individual responses to Tennyson's death. For this reason, I will refer to them as *individualised mourners*. While this category of correspondents often reflects upon kinship and community, their correspondence focuses upon their individual places within these real and metaphorical social groups. Some of the death correspondents even imagine a kinship with Tennyson or his family members.

This chapter demonstrates that these four correspondents applied their own interpretations of the expectations placed upon women in society and marriage, while using a range of literary and biblical influences and adaptations to create fantasies about widowhood, lost or unrequited love, and the 'elevation' of women's domestic duties – such as Emily Tennyson's 'holy' role of enabling her husband's moral verses and as an angelic presence guiding him from his deathbed to his afterlife. This chapter will initially focus on the three women poets and will return to Brown. I argue that, by claiming to share Emily's grief, these three women correspondents reinterpreted themselves as being widows through Tennyson's death. In doing so, they created a 'sisterhood of grief' which bridged the classes and allowed unacquainted widows to become sisters and friends. I also argue that both women and men constructed 'queenly widows' by using idealised versions of widowhood to demonstrate their literacy and cultural skills, and to reflect upon Tennyson as if he were kin.

Nottingham-based correspondent Fanny Edge uses possessive language in her untitled, 46-line memorial poem (circa 1892) addressed to Emily (see Appendix 3). Edge's poem claims Tennyson as her own poet, while incorporating bodily imagery that reflects Tennyson's *In Memoriam*:

My own beloved Poet,  
My hero great and grand,  
Oh that before God took you,  
I might have grasped your hand.  
I should have committed [sic] it to me,  
The greatest honor sent  
Or to have gazed upon thy face,  
I should have been content.<sup>217</sup>

Edge yearns to grasp Tennyson's unattainable hand and see his absent face. Images of an absent face and grasping hands are notably repeated throughout Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. In section LXX, for example, Tennyson's memory of Arthur's face is fading into darkness (masks of night):

I cannot see the features right,  
When on the gloom I strive to paint  
The face I know; the hues are faint  
And mix with hollow masks of night,<sup>218</sup>

In section VII, Tennyson visits Arthur Hallam's home in the early morning hours after a sleepless night, and yearns for his deceased friend's hand:

Dark house, by which once more I stand

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<sup>217</sup> Fanny Edge, untitled, undated (c.1892), poem, v. 2, ll. 30-37, TRC, UK.

<sup>218</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, stanza LXX, ll. 1-4.

Here in the long unlovely street,  
Doors, where my heart was used to beat  
So quickly, waiting for a hand,  
A hand that can be clasp'd no more—  
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,  
And like a guilty thing I creep  
At earliest morning to the door.<sup>219</sup>

The similarities between the corporeal language in Fanny Edge's poem and *In Memoriam* are clear. Another death correspondent, S. Gertrude Ford, discussed in Chapter 1, also bemoans her inability to hold Tennyson's hand ("Nor has this hand within his own been clasped"<sup>220</sup>) and laments Tennyson's unseen face ("Nor ever, on this side the gloomy grave / Can feast, if but for once, my hungry eyes / Upon the god-like face I held so dear."<sup>221</sup>). Yet another writer, Eleanor Henry, represents Emily Tennyson's grief in the context of Alfred's absent hand ("he'll wait to meet the bride / Who strove his life to cheer / And longs to touch the vanished hand / Now gone from Hazlemere [sic]"<sup>222</sup>). Other death correspondents refer to the 'Pilot's face' in reference to 'Crossing the Bar', or mention Tennyson's hands as instruments of composition; but these references differ from poems such as Edge's, Ford's and Henry's, in which the writer expresses personal bereavement through the symbolism of an absent hand or face.

### **The sisterhood of grief**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1892, fifteen-year-old S. Gertrude Ford (see Appendix 4), a stranger to the Tennyson family, composed a 10-page, untitled, blank-verse poem addressed to Emily.

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<sup>219</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, stanza VII, ll. 1-8.

<sup>220</sup> Ford, l. 56.

<sup>221</sup> Ford, ll. 87-89.

<sup>222</sup> Eleanor Henry, 'Lines on Tennyson', undated (c.1892), poem, ll. 21-24, TRC, UK.

Ford's poem employs elegiac devices, which demonstrates that the teenager has had access to education. For example, Ford employs a muse, 'Sympathy', to personify her own emotions.

Dear Lady, here my tenderest sympathy  
To thee I humbly offer – Sympathy  
Unlike to Pity cold and negligent,  
...  
But heavenly Sympathy, whose sweet sad eyes  
Are alway [sic] jewelled with the pearls of tears,  
And whose fair form in vestal white is robed,  
Upon the rankling smart of aching hearts  
Lays soothing balm with hands whose cool, soft touch  
Is in itself a remedy. And she,  
My chosen messenger, now comes to thee.  
O hear her speak! O let her tell to thee  
The love and grief which she best express!<sup>223</sup>

Ford's 'heavenly Sympathy' evokes the elegiac tradition in which an author appeals to the muses for protection or guidance. She describes Sympathy as a personification of human sorrow, and as a spirit who can soothe through touch alone. Ford then uses Sympathy as her messenger, pleading to be 'heard' through the muse so that she may share with Emily her own grief for Tennyson:

My message well delivering to thine ear:  
I loved him too! I loved him passing well  
Long years ago, although I knew him not.  
Thy loss is therefore mine, as mine is thine,  
...  
Conscious of what in him the world has lost;

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<sup>223</sup> Ford, ll. 1-3, 6-14.

And mine the greater, in that never once  
I, loving him so dearly, saw his face, –  
Sisters in mutual love and suffering we.<sup>224</sup>

Ford proclaims that, having never seen Tennyson's face, her loss is 'greater' than the rest of the world's. Despite the majority of the population having also failed to see his face, she asserts that her individual experience separates her from the world and elevates her grief to that of Emily's level – implying that Ford views herself as Tennyson's widow. Sympathy also communicates on Ford's behalf that Ford and Emily share a mutual loss in Tennyson, declaring that the two are 'sisters' in their shared love and suffering. Although these startling statements may appear to be inappropriate for a young, working-class woman to write to an elderly aristocratic widow, Tennyson may have set a particular literary precedent in *In Memoriam* for Ford to draw upon. The Irish poet Aubrey de Vere commented upon Tennyson's uses of muses in *In Memoriam*<sup>225</sup> in a private letter to Hallam on the 16th October 1892:

He seldom claimed to write what is commonly understood as "religious poetry". His feelings on that subject are probably illustrated by the exquisite poem in "In Memoriam" in which Urania reproved Melpomene ie: but there is little poetry in the world which so profoundly reminds us that "Love & Duty" are sisters & that all true love, like the poet himself, makes its confession to Him who is the "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love".<sup>226</sup>

Although the terminology and co-joining of women through love and suffering in both Ford's and De Vere's correspondences reflects the symbolic personification of the muses, rather than literal domestic bonds, Ford's emotional words perform the intense language of shared

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<sup>224</sup> Ford, ll. 17-20, 27-30.

<sup>225</sup> For example, in Section 37, Tennyson imagines that two of the Nine Muses are critiquing his grief for his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. A sympathetic Melpomene, muse of lyric poetry, speaks on Tennyson's behalf and defends his sorrow to a disapproving Urania, muse of astronomy. Later, in Section 58, Tennyson is sobbing for Arthur, which attracts the protective concern of the high Muse.

<sup>226</sup> Aubrey de Vere, untitled letter to Hallam Tennyson, 16 October 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

mourning between affectionately bonded people. Furthermore, by projecting her extraordinarily personal message through the voice of a muse, Ford has created distance between her words and Emily's 'ear'—tempering its intensity while maintaining the sisterhood she creates. Ford may have been employing the muse with the knowledge that an elegiac device would diffuse literal interpretations of her claimed kinship, in order to strike a balance between decorum and intimacy. Indeed, Ford would again employ muses as messengers ('Peace' and 'Messenger Of Truth') in her 1917 poetry collection, *A Fight to a Finish*.<sup>227</sup> Returning to her elegy, in lines 65-70, Ford claims that her love for Tennyson is both enduring and eternal, which she expresses in both familial and spiritual language:

Yet how this heart has loved him! As we love  
 The Christ whom he so long and nobly served,  
 And whom His followers, having not beheld,  
 Yet even dearer hold than life and love,  
 To I my sweet idea, hero, king,  
 Having not seen, yet loved, and love for aye.<sup>228</sup>

These lines also evoke Tennyson's Prologue in *In Memoriam*, in which the absent face Tennyson longs to see is Christ's, not Arthur Henry Hallam, the human object of his love:

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;<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> S. Gertrude Ford, 'The Conscientious Objector (Founded in Fact)', in *"A Fight to a Finish" and other Songs of Peace Sung in War Time*, (London: CW Daniel, Ltd, 1917), ll. 1-6. "His crime was that he loved Peace; followed her / For Christ's sake, in His name, even to the death / Faithful; and felt in war red murder's breath / Volleying the flames of hell, the blasts that stir / Bedrock of world-foundations. Messenger / Of Truth, and hearing what the Spirit saith."

<sup>228</sup> Ford, untitled, ll. 65-70.

<sup>229</sup> Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', ll. 1-4.

Ford adapts the Prologue, in which Tennyson addresses Christ as the symbol of 'immortal Love' and asserts his faith despite having never seen 'thy face'. Notably, Tennyson does not compare his love of Christ to his love for Arthur. Ford, by contrast, compares her love for Tennyson to the love 'we' have for Christ, stating: "Yet how this heart has loved him! As we love / The Christ whom he so long and nobly served / And whom His followers, having not beheld." In doing so, she appears to simultaneously reflect upon and adapt Tennyson's assertions of faith in Christ despite having never seen his face, by merging her love for Tennyson with the faith of Christ's followers. Indeed, Ford overlaps these two forms of human and spiritual love as shared with Christ's followers, then immediately departs from this association by differentiating her own experience from the rest of the world's: "Yet even dearer hold than life and love, / To I my sweet idea, hero, king, / Having not seen, yet loved, and love for aye." While the rest of the world follows Christ, Ford follows Tennyson. She claims that her love for Tennyson is 'dearer' than life, while understanding that he is an unattainable, ethereal notion: a 'sweet idea, hero and king'.

Furthermore, Ford claims (through her muse) that she and Emily are as intimately linked as if they were members of the same family, stating that "Thy loss is therefore mine, as mine is thine . . . Sisters in mutual love and suffering we". Their love for the same man joins them as 'sisters' in grief. Although this language from one stranger to another could appear to be a remarkable misappropriation of another woman's grief, shared grieving between family members or intimate friends was viewed as a suitable subject for nineteenth-century condolence letter-writing. It is therefore Ford's chosen language which is of interest, as it implies a relationship of kinship between Ford and Emily. Indeed, as there was no family link between the two women, Ford is claiming an emotional kinship.

Additionally, while conduct manuals cannot be proved to be a source of guidance for these authors, they can be accepted as a partial reflection of idealised social conduct. In *The*



*Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Handbook* (1872), Florence

Hartley states:

One of the most touching letters of condolence ever written was sent by a literary lady . . . to her sister, who had lost her youngest child. The words were few, merely: "Sister Darling: I cannot write what is in my heart for you to-day, it is too full. Filled with a double sorrow, for you, for my own grief. Tears blind me, my pen trembles in my hand. Oh, to be near you! to clasp you in my arms! to draw your head to my bosom, and weep with you! Darling, God comfort you, I cannot. S."<sup>230</sup>

Using this example, Hartley urges female condolence letter-writers, when comforting a close friend, to "[l]et your friend feel that her sorrow makes her dearer to you than ever before, and that her grief is yours."<sup>231</sup> There is no indication that Ford read such guidance; but Hartley's and Cassell's guidance indicates the presence of social constructs for condolence correspondence at the time of Ford's writing. Ford may have viewed her professions of love for the celebrity poet, and her shared grief and her declaration of a sisterhood with Emily as appropriate within the context of condolence language. However, Hartley's advice is intended for family and friends of the bereaved. It would be logical to speculate that Ford's intimacy may have been met with consternation. Indeed, her correspondence is not annotated as 'answered' by the Tennysons. However, it also survived the curatorial bonfire, leaving us to surmise that her verses did not sufficiently offend the Tennysons to warrant burning.

Ford's choice of stationery is also significant: she has used informal, lined writing paper rather than traditional black-edged mourning stationery. As described in the Introduction of this thesis, *Cassell's*, while not directly stating the requirements for mourning stationery, sternly advises great care when selecting the materials of correspondence and warns that to overlook the use of 'proper' paper and ink is to signal disregard to the recipient.

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<sup>230</sup> Florence Hartley, *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Handbook*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard. New York: Lee, Shepard, and Dillingham, 1872), p. 124.

<sup>231</sup> Hartley, pp. 122-123.

Only speculation upon the choices behind Ford's writing materials is possible, but the wider archive of letters and poems sent to the Tennyson family in 1892 demonstrate a notable absence of traditional mourning stationery, to include ledger, unlined, meticulously hand-lined, and everyday lined paper such as Ford's. In the context of her familiar words to Emily, her writing materials appear consistent with ordinary correspondence.

Ford's shared grief with Emily, as 'sisters in mutual love and suffering', resembles a similarly intimate letter of shared grief between widows, also sent from one stranger to another: the 1865 condolence letter from Queen Victoria to Mary Todd Lincoln following President Lincoln's assassination. Victoria's letter demonstrates a connection and friendship through mutual widowhood, although the women were not otherwise acquainted:

Dear Madam,

Though a Stranger to you I cannot remain silent when so terrible a calamity has fallen upon you & your Country & must personally express my deep & heartfelt sympathy with you under the shocking circumstances of your present dreadful misfortune —

No one can better appreciate than I can, who am myself utterly broken-hearted by the loss of my own beloved Husband, who was the Light of my Life, — my Stay — my all, — what your sufferings must be; and I earnestly pray that you may be supported by Him to whom Alone the sorely stricken can look for comfort, in this hour of heavy affliction.

With the renewed Expression of true sympathy, I remain,

dear Madam,

Your Sincere friend

Victoria Rg<sup>232</sup>

Although strangers to one another, Victoria's commiseration with Mary, along with her conclusion of "Your Sincere friend" exemplify a mutual, if temporary, relationship between widows. Mary responded on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1865 with similar sentiments of shared grief:

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<sup>232</sup> Shaun Usher (ed). *Letters of Note*. 9 June 2011. <[www.lettersofnote.com/2011/06/i-cannot-remain-silent.html](http://www.lettersofnote.com/2011/06/i-cannot-remain-silent.html)>

I have received the letter which Your Majesty has had the kindness to write and am deeply grateful for its expressions of tender sympathy, coming as they do from a heart which from its own Sorrow, can appreciate the intense grief I now endure. Accept, Madam, the assurances of my heartfelt thanks and believe me in the deepest sorrow, Your Majesty's Sincere and grateful friend.<sup>233</sup>

Both women communicate with equal assurances of shared sorrow and 'sincere' friendship, although there is no evidence of further correspondence between the women. This suggests that the two women mutually employed a common language of friendship in condolence correspondence between widows, also seen in Ford's correspondence to Emily.

Queen Victoria's letter to Mary Todd Lincoln is one of mutual widowhood. The familiarity with which S. Gertrude Ford writes to Emily implies a shared intimacy between the women, similar to the widow's intimacy Queen Victoria (perhaps performatively) demonstrated to Mary Lincoln; but Ford and Emily were neither sisters nor friends, nor were they mutually acquainted with one another and shared no social bonds. Tennyson's death enables Ford to assert a 'mutual' bond that unites them.

Whilst nineteenth-century bereavement correspondence enabled motifs of varying degrees of fictional intimacy, Ford's idealised gender roles along with her claims of a shared sisterhood and widowhood with Emily are further complicated when considering Ford's biography. By the early twentieth century, S. Gertrude Ford had become a prolific poet, socialist, social critic, peace campaigner, and feminist. Her poetry was later published in compendia including *Poetry Review* and *Poetry*, and she edited more than 30 books of poetry for London publishers Erskine MacDonald, the series *Little Books of Georgian Verse*. Books of her own poetry include: *Sung by the Way* (1905); *Lyric Leaves* (1912); "*A Fight to a Finish*" and *other Songs of Peace Sung in War Time* (1917); and *A Crown of Amaranth*:

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<sup>233</sup> 'Mary Lincoln's Response to Queen Victoria', *The White House Historical Association*, <<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/mary-lincolns-response-to-queen-victoria>>, [accessed online 1 September 2021].

*Being a Collection of Poems to the Memory of the Brave and Gallant Gentlemen who Have Given Their Lives for Great & Greater Britain* (1917). An advertisement for Ford's *Lyric Leaves* on the back cover of 'A Fight to the Finish' endorses Ford's skills and authenticity:

In these finely wrought Poems the true lyrical note is associated with seriousness of thought, generous human sympathies and authentic vision, and that delicate imaginative quality without which the most polished verse falls short of poetry.<sup>234</sup>

The promotional copy then details how Ford's poetry came to be 'discovered' and published, and provides insight into the working-class foundations of her early life:

A writer in the Daily News says that he "received one day some verses offered for publication in a Northern newspaper. They were written in a girl's large round hand, but they breathed the true spirit of poetry and were accepted. The author, then fourteen, was living in poor circumstances in a manufacturing town in the North. Physically weak, she had a hard struggle to earn a living at the drudgery of telephone work. Finally, she broke down, and for years the Industry of her pen has sustained her."<sup>235</sup>

Ford's census records confirm that in 1901, she worked as a telephone operator while living with her widowed father and siblings in Rochdale, Lancashire – present-day greater Manchester. Her 61-year-old father, Frederick, worked as a machine builder in a woollen mill, while her 22-year-old brother, also named Frederick, was a clerk in a velvet fabric dye works. These details confirm the Epilogue's reference to a northern manufacturing town, as Rochdale had been a woollen textile manufacturing centre from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the late 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Anonymous, back cover advertising copy on "*A Fight to a Finish*" and other Songs of Peace Sung in War Time, by S. Gertrude Ford, (London: CW Daniel, Ltd, 1917), *Archive.org* <[https://archive.org/stream/afighttofinishot00fordiala/afighttofinishot00fordiala\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/afighttofinishot00fordiala/afighttofinishot00fordiala_djvu.txt)>, [accessed online 23 June 2018].

<sup>235</sup> Anonymous, back cover advertising copy on "*A Fight to a Finish*" and other Songs of Peace Sung in War Time, by S. Gertrude Ford, (London: CW Daniel, Ltd, 1917), *Archive.org* <[https://archive.org/stream/afighttofinishot00fordiala/afighttofinishot00fordiala\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/afighttofinishot00fordiala/afighttofinishot00fordiala_djvu.txt)>, [accessed online 23 June 2018].

century.<sup>236</sup> In the year before Tennyson's death, Ford and her family lived in Halifax, West Yorkshire – another textile manufacturing town. Frederick Sr. is a chapel keeper. Ford's 19-year-old sister is a woollen weaver. Sadly, 12-year-old Frederick Jr. is a 'worsted doffer'—filthy, strenuous work typically done by the children of the poor, sometimes as young as six.<sup>237</sup> The work of a doffer involved replacing filled thread spools with empty ones, which required rapidly hauling heavy carts from spool to spool over 12-14 hour workdays while breathing stifling air, and could involve stress injuries and beatings.<sup>238</sup> Frederick Jr's toil in lieu of school or skilled apprenticeship suggests the Ford family was among the poorer labouring classes. Indeed, at each census, the family resides in a different region of England and the younger family members frequently work in strenuous labour. This transience indicates a need to relocate frequently to follow work opportunities wherever they arose. Nevertheless, ten years later, the census shows that Frederick Jr worked as a clerk, demonstrating that he successfully pursued social mobility. There is no record that young Sophia Gertrude Ford attended formal education – possibly because the 1881 and 1891 Census dates span her legal school attendance ages. In 1891, her Census record details no employment or school attendance. At 15, Ford's correspondence demonstrates significant literacy, confirming that she undertook education in some manner prior to 1892—which she undoubtedly nurtured to become a published poet by the early 1900s.

In 1911, the Census records 34-year-old Ford's occupation as 'Journalist'. By 1913, Ford was Secretary of the Bournemouth branch of the Women's Freedom League (WFL),<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> 'The Textile Mills of Lancashire', *Historic England*, <<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/textile-mills-lancashire-legacy/textile-mills-lancashire-legacy>>, [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>237</sup> Barbara J Starmans, 'Child Labour', *The Social Historian*, <<https://www.thesocialhistorian.com/child-labour>>, [accessed 28 September 2021].

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2000), p. 73.

a fracture suffragette group opposed to violence – including that seen in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) suffragette movement. Her poetry vocalised the impetus behind the women's movement and satirised war as a male construct – enabled by the invisibility of women and the absence of their voices, and a disregard for the opinions of both the dead and the living poor.<sup>240</sup> Her passion for peace and insistence that women's views were crucial to the peace movement led her to write and publish anthologies of anti-war poetry, such as *Poems of War and Peace* (1915), which included 'A Fight to the Finish':

“Fight the year out!” the War-lords said:  
What said the dying among the dead?  
“To the last man!” cried the profiteers:  
What said the poor in the starving years?  
“War is good !” yelled the Jingo-kind:  
What said the wounded, the maimed and blind?  
“Fight on!” the Armament-kings besought:  
Nobody asked what the women thought.<sup>241</sup>

Ford condemns the male ruling classes who benefit from war for their willful omission of opinions from those most affected by wars: dying and maimed soldiers, society's poor, and women. These lines confront the fact that so-called voter 'reform' acts from 1832 – 1884 continued to omit voting rights for all women, and for poorer men who were not property owners, thus ensuring power remained with aristocratic and middle-class men until The Representation of the People Act (1918).<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, Ford's correspondence is an early echo of her later exclamation: ““Fight on!” the Armament-kings besought: / Nobody asked

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<sup>240</sup> For example, see Ford's collections of pacifist poetry: *Poems of War and Peace* (1915); *A Crown of Amaranth* (with Erskine Macdonald, 1915); *Our Heroes* (1916); and especially *A Fight to the Finish* (1917).

<sup>241</sup> S. Gertrude Ford, 'A Fight to the Finish', *Poems of War and Peace* (1915), ll. 1-8.

<sup>242</sup> 'The Struggle for Democracy', *The National Archives*, <[https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/struggle\\_democracy/getting\\_vote.htm](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/struggle_democracy/getting_vote.htm)>, [accessed 28 September 2021].

what the women thought.” Ford’s 1892 correspondence similarly calls out to be heard. She implores Emily to allow her to speak—“Now may I speak (for speech can yield relief)”<sup>243</sup>—and through a muse, Sympathy, “My chosen messenger, now comes to thee. / O hear her speak! O let her tell to thee”.<sup>244</sup> These lines demonstrate the linguistic development that was underway for Ford, linking her 1892 correspondence with her 1915 poetry. Fifteen-year-old Ford was aware that a voice within society was not guaranteed for women. Even within her own letter, she must beg to be heard on two occasions. She must employ a muse to speak on her behalf—Sympathy in 1892 and Peace in 1917. She uses protracted and highly emotive language in order for her declarations to rise above the din of the other death correspondence: by the time she wrote in late November 1892, she certainly knew her own words could be obscured amongst many others.

Despite her future political radicalism, Ford’s poem to Emily Tennyson defers to traditional, feminine domestic roles. Rather than satirical, Ford’s tone is intensely earnest, presenting a celebration of idealised, gendered roles. Furthermore, the context of her chosen language to Emily is in conflict with her later feminist activism, indicating that her political views would develop with experience. In 1892, her death correspondence verses could be read as a performance of tradition. For example:

A royal handmaid, serving thou didst rule,  
Obeying guide, and governing submit.  
How lofty in a lowliness sublime  
The sceptre power of this thine high estate,  
The majesty of this thy queenlihood!<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ford, l. 39.

<sup>244</sup> Ford, ll. 12-13.

<sup>245</sup> Ford, ll. 140-144.

However, these lines are paradoxical. Ford likens Emily Tennyson to a ‘royal handmaid, serving’—undoubtedly intended to glorify the prevalent middle-class notions of respectability through women’s ‘serving’ to men. But as a royal handmaid, Emily ‘didst rule’ and was guided by obeying: she is a modest but powerful ruler. Her wifely role is ‘lofty in a lowliness sublime’, offered to assure Emily that ‘serving’ her husband is powerful and is appropriately traditional, implying that tradition, in turn, provides women with power. Yet this lowliness is also Emily’s ‘sceptre of power’ – her ‘queenlihood’. These lines, which challenge the rigid distinctions between deference and power, may be predecessors to Ford’s later feminism and political activism. Perhaps the young Ford was performing traditions to give deferential comfort to an elderly widow, while privately questioning these traditions.

Indeed, Ford introduces herself with humble language: “Dear Lady, here my tenderest sympathy / To thee I humbly offer – Sympathy”. Ford’s introduction may have served to present herself as being a ‘deserving model’ of a non-elite poet, as discussed earlier, by using humility and deference to signal individual respectability. But the humility concludes where it begins. The remainder of her poem is fervently intimate and implies a personal relationship with Emily.

Death correspondent Mary Gaddess (Appendix 16) from Maryland also suggests that she and Emily possess a personal connection through their shared grief for Tennyson. Writing to Emily on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1892 on lined paper—again, similar to Ford’s choice of everyday stationery—Gaddess’s ten-line poem addresses Emily as “another lonely heart”.

To Ms Tennyson

A weary hearted woman, from afar –

Sends greetings to another lonely heart.

What matter that the Oceans intervene –

And we each others [sic] faces have not seen.



You mourn a Husband, gone beyond love's call;  
And we, a Poet, sweetest of them all.  
God keep thee! if it be thy tired feet –  
Shall tarry long within "this weary land"  
For Human love is helpless, till you meet –  
"God keep thee, in the hollow of his hand"<sup>246</sup>

She acknowledges the pair have never met – 'we each other's faces have not seen' – but dismisses this as meaningless in the context of their mutual loss. Although they are strangers – 'the Oceans intervene' – Gaddess's 'weary-hearted' grief joins her intimately with Emily. Unlike Ford, Gaddess does not imply that she is Tennyson's widow. She instead suggests that she understands Emily's widow's grief through her own experience with loss. Whether she is referring to her grief for Tennyson or another individual is unclear; but Gaddess is clear that her grief allows her to communicate intimately with Emily. She also asserts that 'we' share Emily's widow's grief: "You mourn a Husband, gone beyond love's call; / And we, a Poet, sweetest of them all." Gaddess respectfully differentiates the world's relationship with Tennyson from Emily's.

Conversely, Ford proclaims that as 'sisters in mutual love and suffering' they are equals, thus elevating herself and her own grief to Emily's. Both Gaddess and Ford use broadly similar language, but in significantly different contexts. Gaddess alludes to all of society sharing in Emily's loss, while S. Gertrude Ford portrays her individual loss as if she were Tennyson's widow. Ford proclaims: "I loved him too! I loved him passing well" – communicating that the love for Tennyson is shared between Ford and Emily. Gaddess and Ford both comment on an unseen face to denote the gulf between themselves and the object of their attention, but for significantly different purposes. When Gaddess concedes that she

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<sup>246</sup> Mary L. Gaddess. *Untitled*. 8th October 1892. Poem. Lines 1-10. TRC, Lincoln.

and Emily have not seen each other's faces, her purpose is to illustrate that women are connected in grief despite the distance of an ocean. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Ford claims that her loss is greater than the public's and shared equally with Emily.

Gaddess's and Ford's chosen contents and metres also suggest their differing intentions. Gaddess uses couplets (lines 1-6) and elegiac stanza (lines 7-10) and brief words from the Bible.<sup>247</sup> In contrast with Gaddess's more conventional approach to condolence, Ford uses a blank-verse poem and conveys heightened emotion and intimate familiarity. Ford's poem is markedly bold in comparison to Gaddess's more conventional expressions of sympathy.

Ford's poem differs from the elegiac tradition in which the *dead* are idealised. Instead, Ford idealises the living – Emily – by reinventing her as “queen of womanhood”:

Yet weep now thou, O queen of womanhood!  
Among all women blessed, richly crowned  
By Joy and Honour, beauteous sisters twain,<sup>248</sup>

Ford's personification of Joy and Honour as “beauteous sisters” further progresses her theme of strength in sisterhood. In this context, the sisters bestow Emily with a crown to elevate her to “queen of womanhood”.

### **Queens of womanhood, queenly widows, and respectable reliance**

When Ford presents domestic female roles as an embodiment of Victorian queenship, she is reflecting the manufactured notion of domestic queenliness that was present in the mid-to-late

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<sup>247</sup> “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee” (Numbers 6:24-27); “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span . . .” (Isaiah 40:12), King James Bible.

<sup>248</sup> Ford, *Untitled*, lines 136-138.

nineteenth century Great Britain. John Ruskin's 1864 lecture and corresponding 1865 essay, 'Of Queens' Gardens', embodied this trope:

Oh, you queens, you queens! Queens ... you must always be; queens to your lovers; queens to your husbands and your sons; queens ... to the world beyond, which bows itself ... before the myrtle crown, and the stainless sceptre, of womanhood.<sup>249</sup>

Ruskin's talk was delivered in Manchester to a primarily female, middle-class audience. It encouraged Victorian women—particularly middle-class women—to view their roles of wives and mothers as monarchic and their homes as a domain in which to reign.

Indeed, Queen Victoria famously embodied and performed the role of a middle-class wife, a persona which also served to exemplify and normalise literary representations of domestic queenliness. Margaret Homans (1998) argues that Victoria created an environment of everyday queenliness following the death of Albert in 1861. The first ten years of Victoria's protracted, 40-year widowhood and her equally prolonged absence from the public following Albert's death "produced multiple queens in the vacuum created by Victoria's absence ... To survey the British literary scene of this time is to find queens everywhere" in gothic revival and fantasy literature.<sup>250</sup>

Additionally, Homans argues, Victoria's subjects came to view her as a middle-class wife. The public "could read her marriage as no different from any other ... it made her a model for the middle class because gender hierarchy was becoming a hallmark specifically of the middle-class family."<sup>251</sup> Queen Victoria's public displays of middle-class domesticity were further symbolised in her choice of apparel worn to public events. Throughout her reign, Victoria wore a bonnet rather than a crown, and in place of the customary robes of state, she

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<sup>249</sup> John Ruskin. "Lecture II—Of Queens' Gardens." *Sesame and Lilies*, 1865, pg. 74.

<sup>250</sup> Margaret Homans. *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>251</sup> Homans, 7.

wore her wedding veil and lace. By choosing visual representations of everyday domesticity through her clothing, Victoria publicly demonstrated her commitment to her marital roles. First, she portrayed herself to her subjects as a dutiful wife by wearing her wedding veil; and then as a widow in full mourning for forty years rather than the customary two years: a highly visible and ardent widow.

Death correspondent S. Gertrude Ford reflects upon these two idealised versions of domestic queenliness. For example, Ford describes Emily Tennyson as a weeping “queen of womanhood”—and “among all women blessed”. Portraying Emily’s widowhood as a blessing suggests that Queen Victoria’s visible mourning has informed Ford’s representation of an idealised widow. Ford’s interpretation of blessed grieving women would likely have been informed by symbolic representations of women’s grief within art and literature. Jenny Hockey (1997) argued that such depictions evoke “not only grief but also femininity, motherhood, purity and devotion in a single idealised figure.”<sup>252</sup> Additionally, Ford’s intimate approach to her elegy may have been informed by a “female tradition (of elegy)”.<sup>253</sup> Rhian Williams (2013) argues that by the nineteenth century, elegiac poems by female writers such as Christina Rossetti and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley established this female elegiac tradition which explored “cherished assumptions about women . . . using repetition to emphasize . . . and even manufacture . . . the female persona.”<sup>254</sup> Although Ford’s poem is unlike those of Rossetti or Shelley, it adheres to the repetition of elegiac tropes, such as muses, angels, weeping women, and unrequited love, and applies these notions to manufacture Emily as a feminine ideal—suggesting that female elegiac poems may have informed Ford’s literary influences.

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<sup>252</sup> Jenny Hockey, ‘Women in Grief’, in *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*, David Field, Jenny Hockey and Neil Small (eds), (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 98-99.

<sup>253</sup> Williams, p. 52.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

Williams's examples – women writing about women – may appear out of context with Ford's elegy about a man. However, scrutiny reveals that while Ford's poem mourns for Tennyson, she utilises the Poet Laureate's death as a mechanism for writing about women and their place in society at the fin de siècle. Indeed, Ford writes from multidimensional and conflicting perspectives as she navigates the topics of marital and societal roles within her poem.

While Ford ardently mourns for Tennyson, the 'main characters' in Ford's piece are Emily Tennyson and Ford herself. Furthermore, an additional manufactured ideal of Emily's feminine persona emerges. She portrays Emily's life—in particular, the “entwining” of her life with Tennyson's—as monarchic. Emily's queenhood is therefore achieved through her particular role their marriage. Emily's marital life is described as “[a]n angel's life and mission” and asserts that the Tennysons' “Love” for one another and the Poet Laureate's “Genius” complement “sweet Religion” to elevate them both:

An angel's life and mission, then, were thine,  
and at his side, throughout these long bright years,  
Thou didst abide, thy life entwined with his,  
Sharing with him his intellectual throne,  
Haloed with threefold glory, born of Love,  
Genius, and sweet Religion, triple powers  
Whose light-invested influences combine  
To make of man a God, of earth a Heaven.<sup>255</sup>

Here, Ford transfers the concept of 'divine rule' into the domestic sphere. Ford's language of idealised domesticity suggests power in Emily's role: “and at his side, throughout these long bright years, / Thou didst abide, thy life entwined with his.” Although her “angel's life and

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<sup>255</sup> Ford, ll. 153-160.

mission” are defined by Alfred’s love and genius, Emily is an empowered partner in their interwoven marital roles. For Ford, Tennyson’s ‘genius’ work alone did not ennoble him to ‘make of man a God’. Instead, this required a triffecta of Genius, Religion, and Love (the last of which Ford exemplifies through Emily entwining her life with Alfred’s to create these necessary “light-invested influences”). However, Ford’s words of idealised female empowerment are equally disempowering: Emily is *Queen of Womanhood* because she has attached herself to Alfred. Ford’s word ‘entwined’ is phrased to imply inseparability, but it is also a capitulation to the prevalent nineteenth-century female dependency on men. Ford’s language seems to reflect the contradiction of Queen Victoria’s public displays, which are also simultaneously empowering and disempowering. Although Victoria publicly presented herself as a wife and a widow to her subjects, she was also the head of a dominating world power.<sup>256</sup> In a further example of her authority, in this time, Victoria would rule solo for nearly half a century.

In the latter context, Homans argues that the widowed Victoria was required to be “available for idealization and . . . willing to relinquish active participation on political affairs, so that others could perform remarkable deeds in her name.”<sup>257</sup> Homans further asserts:

During the years of Queen Victoria’s marriage (1840-1861) . . . the popularity of the monarchy depended in large part on the apparent authenticity of Victoria’s performance as an ordinary middle-class wife, even though the maintenance of her monarchic power depended equally on the ironic distance between these two roles.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Under Victoria’s reign, the British Empire expanded to colonise nearly 25% of the world. See, for example: Máire ní Fhlathúin, ‘The British Empire in the Nineteenth Century’, *19th Century UK Periodicals*, (Detroit: Gale, 2008) <<https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/maire-ni-fhlathuin-british-empire-nineteenth-century>>; David Cody, ‘The British Empire’, *The Victorian Web*, <<https://victorianweb.org/history/empire/Empire.html>>; and Alleyne Ireland, ‘The Victorian Era of British Expansion: II. The Colonies and India’, *The North American Review* Vol. 172, No. 534 (May 1901), pp. 734-750.

<sup>257</sup> Homans, p. 3.

<sup>258</sup> Homans, p. 58.

Beyond the literary sphere, Victoria's influence on female domestic roles reached across Victorian society. For Homans, Victoria served as a "public, highly visible symbol of national identity and her nation's values, just as a middle-class wife might be expected to display her husband's status."<sup>259</sup> Likewise, Ford suggests that Emily displays Tennyson's status, stating in line 153 that Emily is "Sharing with him his intellectual throne", which symbolises the Poet Laureateship. The throne is Tennyson's, but Emily shares it.

Furthermore, Ford suggests that Tennyson's status is attributed to Emily's influence:

An angel's life and mission, then, were thine,  
and at his side, throughout these long bright years,  
Thou didst abide, thy life entwined with his,  
Sharing with him his intellectual throne.<sup>260</sup>

Ford thus assigns significant authority to Emily. Tennyson alone did not ascend to the Poet Laureateship. Emily was the necessary force in order for him to occupy his throne.

Paradoxically, Ford simultaneously disempowers Emily. She honours Emily's entwining her marital life with Tennyson's in pursuit of his ambitions as an 'angel's life and mission', effectively celebrating a woman's self-subjugation. In doing so, Ford appears to be reflecting on Tennyson's presentation of women's marital roles as he rendered them in the relationship between Arthur and Guinevere in *Idylls of the King*.

In 'The Coming of Arthur', Arthur's pursuit of Guinevere is driven by his ambition to reign. As Arthur rides towards a battle, he recalls Guinevere's father's words: "Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts / Up to my throne, and side by side with me ? / What happiness to

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<sup>259</sup> Homans, p. 3.

<sup>260</sup> Ford, ll. 150-153.

reign a lonely king.”<sup>261</sup> Arthur concludes his musings with an awareness he is ‘nothing’ and powerless without Guinevere to help him complete his work:

I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
And cannot will my will, nor work my work  
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
Victor and lord. But were I join’d with her,  
Then might we live together as one life,  
And reigning with one will in everything  
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
And power on this dead world to make it live.<sup>262</sup>

Arthur’s desire to be ‘join’d with’ Guinevere is fuelled by his personal ambitions. He is clear that alone, he is incapable of fulfilling his determination to reign: he cannot “make myself in mine own realm”. A wife is required to ensure her husband’s power, in order to reign “with one will”. Ford seems to draw from these verses writing:

O, wherefore shouldst thou do so? Thou and he  
Have reigned as sovereign-consorts, two in one,  
United in duality divine.<sup>263</sup>

These verses indicate a representation of Arthur and Guinevere’s dual reign “with one will” through Tennyson and Emily’s reign “two in one”. Yet, further tensions are revealed as Ford transforms Emily into a more subservient version of Tennyson’s Guinevere. Here, Ford reflects upon Emily’s path to the couple’s shared reign as a mission of serving and submission. The more acquiescent Emily’s role, the more power she obtains for herself:

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<sup>261</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, ‘The Coming of Arthur’, *Idylls of the King*, in *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Vol. III*. (New York: Macmillan and Co, 1894), p. 18, ll. 84-79.

<sup>262</sup> Tennyson, ‘The Coming of Arthur’, p. 18, ll. 85-93.

<sup>263</sup> Ford, ll. 143-150.



A royal handmaid, serving thou didst rule,  
Obeying guide, and governing submit.  
How lofty in a lowliness sublime  
The sceptre power of this thine high estate,  
The majesty of this thy queenlihood!<sup>264</sup>

Ford has strayed slightly from Tennyson's version of Guinevere. She adds another dimension to 'The Coming of Arthur' by seemingly commenting on Victorian cultural notions. By serving, Emily is a 'royal handmaid'. Her obedience and submission are acts of 'lofty lowliness'. This lifetime of dutiful service elevates Emily to power and 'queenlihood'.

Simultaneously, Ford is commenting on the commodification of a wife's sacrifices: while Emily forfeited her individual aspirations, Tennyson's gifts benefited Emily to sufficiently offset these losses. Here, Ford outlines the benefits that Emily received in her marital role:

Haloed with threefold glory, born of Love,  
Genius, and sweet Religion, triple powers  
...  
All three, through him, were doubly thine, rich gifts  
Whose value was enhanced a thousandfold  
In that thou didst receive them at his hands.<sup>265</sup>

Ford's verses intone a societal expectation that a wife sacrifices her own freedoms and pleasures, which will be supplanted with a husband's love. For example, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (c. 1875) reminded married men of the many

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ford, ll. 153-154, 158-160.

sacrifices of “freedom and pleasures” wives have made for the sake of matrimony. Although this passage urges a semblance of reciprocity through “love” that “will replace” a married woman’s forfeited freedoms, the advice reflects the domestic conduct Victorian society expected of married women:

Your wife claims your courtesy more now, even, than when you were courting her. She has given up, for your sake, all the freedom and pleasures of her maiden hood, and to you she looks for a love that will replace them all.<sup>266</sup>

Ford suggests that Emily’s dependence was rewarded through the ‘rich gifts’ Tennyson’ provided. Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair (2003) argue that “(f)or Victorians, dependence on men was not only regarded as the norm, but as a badge of respectability, the natural and proper state of womanhood”<sup>267</sup> – a notion that Ford seems to celebrate. Yet once again, Ford adds to the received notions of an ideal marriage. She asserts that the husband must also contribute to a marriage in order to benefit the wife and to render her sacrifice as worthwhile. Indeed, Ford describes the ‘gifts’ she received in return: “Genius, and sweet Religion, triple powers // All three, through him, were doubly thine, rich gifts / Whose value was enhanced a thousandfold / In that thou didst receive them at his hands.”<sup>268</sup> Ford thus assures Emily that her sacrifices to Tennyson have significantly benefited her, being returned to her ‘a thousandfold’.

By empowering Emily through her lifetime of self-sacrifice, Ford evokes the nineteenth century ideology of domestic queenliness encapsulated by Ruskin, as described earlier in this chapter; but Ford also reveals her paradoxical tensions with society and

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<sup>266</sup> Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen’s Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness; Being A complete Guide for a Gentlemen’s Conduct in All His Relations Toward Society*, (Boston: DeWolfe, Fiske and Co. Undated: circa 1875), pp. 234-235.

<sup>267</sup> Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair (eds), *Public Lives: Women Family and Society in Victorian Britain*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 168-169.

<sup>268</sup> Ford, l. 153, ll. 158-160.

literature. This extraordinarily literate working-class teenager is grappling with her sense of place within society at the fin de siècle, and her blooming but yet-unrealised future place within literature. Ford's poetry appears to enthusiastically uphold notions of a wife's self-sacrifice, suggesting she has reflected upon and repurposed the received cultural and literary tropes described here, including Tennyson's works regarding women's roles in society and the home. Simultaneously, Ford appears to be demonstrating her own developing doubts with these received, gendered ideals. Through her sorrow for her absent beloved, Tennyson, and her emotional pleas to be heard through her muse, Sympathy, the young poet appears to be questioning notions of women's submissive 'power' and challenging women's passive or silent voices. These tensions may demonstrate the infancy of Ford's extraordinary aptitude for challenging the status quo, which by WWI would become the roar of a formidable working-class suffragette, anti-war activist, and Socialist poet.

### **Tennyson's deathbed and the ideal widow**

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.<sup>269</sup>  
Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, IX.

Tennyson composed Section IX of *In Memoriam* from the stance of a widow, mourning 'my Arthur' as a departed husband. His 'widow'd race' reflects upon Arthur's premature death and the ensuing long years of passage before he will see his spouse again. Perhaps to self-consciously obfuscate the overtly marital similes in these verses, Tennyson adds layers of

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<sup>269</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, IX, lines 16-20.

other types of familial grief, but his widow's grief is notably foremost in this stanza. In XIII, he inverts the gender and marital roles:

Tears of the widower, when he sees  
A late-lost form that sleep reveals,  
And moves his doubtful arms, and feels  
Her place is empty, fall like these;  
Which weep a loss for ever new,  
A void where heart on heart reposed;  
And, where warm hands have prest and closed,  
Silence, till I be silent too.<sup>270</sup>

Tennyson is now the widower and Arthur the departed wife. Indeed, the manner in which Tennyson conveyed his grief for Arthur as both a widow and a widower appears to have been adopted by the death correspondents within this chapter.

As we have seen through the condolence correspondence from Fanny Edge, S. Gertrude Ford, and Mary Gaddess, readers' personal and *individual* expressions of mourning Tennyson were often conveyed in terms of the gendered grief of a widow. As Ford and Gaddess particularly exemplify, upon Tennyson's death, letter-writers also expressed a desired intimacy with Tennyson's family—and often in gendered terms of idealised domesticity. Although many correspondents composed well-mannered letters and poems consistent with a courteous distance, their words still reveal a yearning for intimate connection with the Tennysons. The death correspondents presented romanticised Victorian ideals through illusory descriptions of imagined private scenes. This also allowed women and men to contemplate their own roles within real and imagined relationships, as seen with Edge, Ford and Gaddess.

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<sup>270</sup> Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', stanza XIII, ll. 1-8.

This is also demonstrated in the elegy by J Brown (see Appendix 5), ‘A young gardner [sic]’ from Cockermonth. Brown wrote a brief letter to Emily on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1892, which was accompanied by an elegy he composed for Tennyson:

Madam

I hope you will kindly excuse the liberty I have taken in composing the enclosed lines on the death of your late lamented Husband whose death has caused universal regret – trusting you will kindly except [sic] this small tribute from one who was a great admirer of your late Husband [sic] works and with deepest Sympathy for the great loss you have sustained I beg to remain your humble and obedient servant

J. Brown

A young gardner

In Brown’s corresponding elegy, ‘In loving memory of the late Lord Tennyson: A Tribute’, he envisions Tennyson in his final moments of life under Emily’s attentive care:

Now he’s robed in heaven’s own white  
in yonder realms of bliss  
and I trust that when I am called from earth  
my end may be like his,

Calm and filled with holy peace  
thus ebbed away his life  
from the watchful care of her he loved  
A true devoted wife.<sup>271</sup>

Brown highlights his hope for a peaceful end of life similar to Tennyson’s, with the attentive presence of ‘a true devoted wife’ like Emily. That Brown should wish for his own death to include a loving, dutiful wife in attendance reflects the rhapsodised deathbed scenario that was prevalent in the nineteenth century. The domestic ideal of a lovingly attended deathbed

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<sup>271</sup> J. Brown, ‘In loving memory of the late Lord Tennyson: A Tribute’, 24 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-4, TRC, UK.

surrounded by caring family members was long established by the time of Tennyson's death in 1892. This type of deathbed vision has roots in the tradition of the good Christian death. The 'good death' entailed quiet endurance and spiritual reflection as a final act of faith and atonement for the dying. This provided both the dying and the surviving family members with the assurance that the departed had prepared themselves for their death and could pass unhindered into the afterlife. Patricia Jalland (1996) captured an example of the good death in a letter from an Anglican Englishman, William Roundell, to his son-in-law, describing his wife's 'ideal death' in the early 1850s:

The Manner of her Death was what she had always prayed for, her Illness was short and not attended with Pain [...] I commend myself to the Mercy of God [...] and Intercession of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all my Sins. And having so said, she expired without a groan, or single struggle.<sup>272</sup>

As Jalland points out, Bishop Jeremy Taylor's 1651 book, *The Rule and Exercises for Holy Dying*, was reprinted several times over the coming centuries. *Holy Dying* remained a "standard reference book in Victorian homes"<sup>273</sup> and continued to influence nineteenth-century families of all Christian denominations. Jalland states that other devotional literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was also popular with Victorians keen to practice *ars moriendi* (the art of dying), but none so much as Taylor's publication. For Jalland, Evangelicalism, which drew upon *ars moriendi* for ideals of dying, had influence on the Victorian population as a whole—not merely those who attended its churches—and became the foundation for Victorian morality and values. Jalland points to G. M. Young's observation that "Evangelicalism had imposed on society, even on classes which were indifferent to its religious basis and unaffected by its economic appeal."<sup>274</sup> The wide-reaching

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<sup>272</sup> Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 34-35.

<sup>273</sup> Jalland, p. 18.

<sup>274</sup> Jalland, p. 19.

impact of Evangelical piety, discipline and duty “showed at their best in the upper ranks of society.”<sup>275</sup>

Deathbed scenes in works of fiction were also influenced by the Evangelical movement. Jalland points to Dickens as one of “the most famous creators of deathbed scenes.”<sup>276</sup> Jalland states that the Evangelical emphasis on atonement before dying had declined from the 1880s, citing the development of biblical criticism creating an environment unsuitable for literal interpretations of the Bible. Regardless, Evangelical magazines continued in popularity and typically included memoirs of recently deceased Evangelical Christians. Jalland states:

Such deathbed scenes in journals and tracts were highly selective and much depended on presentation and editing. As Geoffrey Best reminds us: ‘In these descriptions of death-bed scenes there was of course much art; art certainly in the narrator, fashioning the incident to fit the model he had in mind.’<sup>277</sup>

The young gardener J. Brown’s loving deathbed scene demonstrates this narrative ‘art’ by devising a fictional and idealised deathbed scene for Tennyson. Tennyson’s deathbed as imagined by Brown reflects the Evangelicalism that encouraged nineteenth-century families to express their love, faith and sorrow whilst holding vigil at the deathbed. The importance of Brown’s construction is that Tennyson’s death becomes the desired model for Brown’s own. Notably, Brown’s deathbed scenario is private. Rather than being surrounded by an audience of mourners, Brown has envisaged Tennyson’s last moment as existing solely between Emily and the poet. Brown’s wish for his end to be like Tennyson’s, with attendant comforting from

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Jalland, p. 24. Whilst Jalland does not provide examples, the following Dickens deathbed scenes illustrate her point: Little Nell being taken to Heaven by angels in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841); Jo the crossing sweeper reciting ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ in *Bleak House* (1853); and Magwitch the convict attended by Pip in *Great Expectations* (1861).

<sup>277</sup> Jalland, p. 23.

a devoted wife such as Emily, exemplifies both the desire for private, family participation in nineteenth-century deathbed archetypes, and the ideal nineteenth-century wife.

Whilst deathbed attendees provided spiritual reassurance to the dying through prayer recitation and singing hymns, affection and weeping were appropriate for both male and female family members. Jalland cites the deathbeds of the elite classes as examples of Victorian deathbed affection, such as Gib Acland's five family members in 1874 kneeling beside his bed to read the commendatory prayer; the deathbed attendance of Catherine Gladstone in 1875 lying with her niece "stroking and soothing her"<sup>278</sup> until the end; and Lord Carrington in 1879 holding his sister in his arms until she died.

The public version of Tennyson's deathbed was similarly designed to reflect a lovingly attended and peaceful death – although notably dispensing with holy ideals in favour of a literary scene. The deathbed notice that Tennyson's physician, Dr George Dabbs, attached to the family's gate on the morning of Tennyson's death on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892, depicted Tennyson's death as serene and literary:

Nothing could have been more striking than the scene during the last few hours. On the bed a figure of breathing marble, flooded and bathed in the light of the full moon streaming through the oriel window; his hand clasping the Shakespeare which he had asked for but recently, and which he had kept by him to the end; the moonlight, the majestic figure as he lay there, 'drawing thicker breath,' irresistibly brought to our minds his own 'Passing of Arthur'.<sup>279</sup>

In contrast to the Evangelical good death focused on contrition and atonement, Tennyson's deathbed as presented by Dabbs instead emphasises peace and the devotion of loved ones. Dabbs's version of the death is also seen in Brown's family-focused deathbed. For Dabbs and Brown, Tennyson's death retained the 'lovingly attended' elements of the Evangelical good

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<sup>278</sup> Jalland, p. 27.

<sup>279</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, p. 777.



death but dispensed with others. For Brown, Tennyson is “filled with holy peace”, but his death is watched over by the devoted Emily instead of holy figures. For Dabbs, in place of a religious scene is a literary one: Shakespeare’s and Tennyson’s works replace biblical allusion.

Dabbs’s notice also accounts for the prevalence of newspaper reports and obituary illustrations depicting moonlit scenes in Tennyson’s final hours (see Fig. 7 and Fig. 11). However, Ann Thwaite (1996) affirms that Emily spent the final weeks of Tennyson’s life reading quietly in solitude beside a portrait of her husband.<sup>280</sup> According to his official death certificate, Tennyson was unconscious for the final 15 hours of his life,<sup>281</sup> in contrast to the idealised, precisely crafted deathbed scenario of Shakespeare requests shortly before expiration, as Dabbs and the newspapers reported, and Hallam repeated in *Memoir* (1896). Further, Emily was not with Alfred at the time of his death. Hallam had removed Emily from the room shortly before her husband’s death “for fear there should be anything to pain her.”<sup>282</sup>

J. Brown’s elegy and its preceding letter were dated 24<sup>th</sup> October 1892—12 days following Tennyson’s funeral. In keeping with widely publicised news and published illustrations that rhapsodised Tennyson’s ‘good death’, Brown idealised Emily as a watchful, domestic figure both during Tennyson’s life and at his death. In the final lines of Brown’s poem, Tennyson has died – but their loving relationship is preserved for the afterlife:

But those whom death has severed here  
still have that promise given  
the sweet fellowship thy held on earth

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<sup>280</sup> Thwaite, p. 8.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

may be renewed in heaven.<sup>283</sup>

As seen in Edge's, Ford's and Gaddess's poems, Brown's elegy also demonstrates a romanticised view of nineteenth-century marriage and widowhood, embodied through eternal devotion; but Brown's deathbed scenario equally illustrates the contradictory expectations placed upon the Victorian wife. Whilst 'the upper ranks' of Victorian society deemed a middle- or upper-class lady to be too emotionally delicate for attending her husband's funeral, conversely, she was expected to keep vigil at her husband's deathbed, along with all adult family members. Husbands, brothers and sons; wives, sisters and daughters all attended to the needs of the dying. Jalland states: "There were considerable variations in the number and composition of the attendants at the last vigil, according to personal preference, family size and status, the age of the dying person, and the nature of the disease."<sup>284</sup> Although Jalland acknowledges that her body of research is limited to deaths within the elite classes, she refers more generally to the affectionately attended nineteenth-century deathbed:

There are countless examples of Victorian families' recognition of the need of dying relatives for affection and companionship, particularly in the final days, when holding the hand or stroking the hair could be more meaningful than words.<sup>285</sup>

Despite expectations for a middle- or upper-class wife to attend to the excruciating business of a death, there were contradictory societal demands relating to women's funeral attendances. Middle- and upper-class widows were expected to remove themselves from the public activity of the funeral procession and burial, although whether or not women followed this expectation is another matter.

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<sup>283</sup> Brown, ll. 5-8.

<sup>284</sup> Jalland, p. 27.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

In the case of Tennyson’s funeral, Emily did not attend and women from the general public were strictly forbidden. Indeed, Westminster Abbey issued two types of admission tickets to Tennyson’s funeral: one ticket for ‘Mourners’ – those whom the Tennysons invited; and a second general admission ticket for male members of the public to attend via the Triforium (upper gallery) of the Abbey (see Fig. 5). The differing instructions printed on the two tickets imply differing motives for the ticketholders’ attendance and seem to anticipate varying levels of comportment. While both ticket types confirm the funeral would begin “At 12.30 o’clock precisely”, the 75 Mourners need only ensure they arrive at the correct door at the West Cloister through Dean’s Yard. Furthermore, newspaper accounts of Tennyson’s funeral include lists of women Mourners who attended (see Fig. 6). By contrast, the 200 attending Triforium ticketholders required two warnings: “not to lean over the barrier” and “Gentlemen only – Ladies not admitted.” The different tickets imply that women from the general public could not be relied upon to conduct themselves at the funeral with emotional gravitas. In contrast, those admitted as Mourners were there by invitation by the Tennyson family and therefore this group of primarily upper-class men and women could be entrusted to exhibit appropriate manners. Furthermore, that the Abbey provided Triforium ticketholders with a condescending reminder not to risk crashing through a barrier while gawping at the corpse demonstrates an unease with their anticipated behaviours and a need to mitigate them. While there is certainly a degree of danger when admitting 200 people to gather 16 metres above the floor of the Abbey,<sup>286</sup> the notice serves as more than a safety warning not to lean over the railing. The alert is specifically personalised for these attendees, in bright red lettering, stating: “*The Holder of this ticket is particularly warned to be careful not to lean over the barrier*” (Fig. 5, right).

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<sup>286</sup> ‘The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Galleries’, *Westminster Abbey*, <<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/visit-us/plan-your-visit/the-queens-diamond-jubilee-galleries>>, [accessed 18 September 2020].

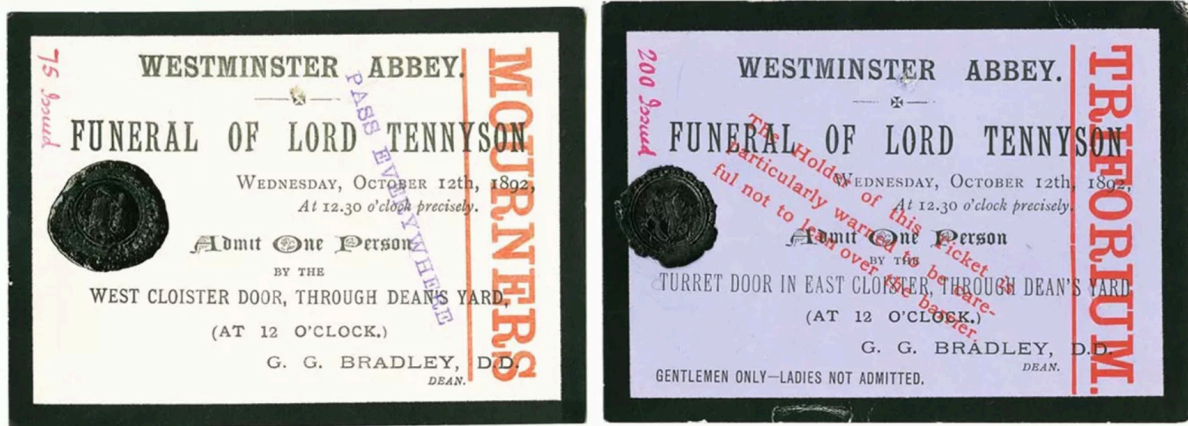


Fig. 5. Admission tickets to Tennyson’s funeral at Westminster Abbey. Left: ‘Mourners’ ticket; Right: ‘Triforium’ ticket, stating: “Gentlemen only—Ladies not admitted.” Image courtesy of and © 2021 Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

of Trinity), and Mr. Lecky. Among the chief mourners were Mr. and Mrs. Hollam Tennyson, Masters Lionel and Aubrey Tennyson, Rev. W. Pope and Mrs. Pope, Mr. Ernest Boyle, Mr. and Mrs. L. Boyle, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Boyle, Mr. A. Harbottle Estcourt, Mr. James Baillie, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Tennyson, Admiral Tennyson D'Eyncourt, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis D'Eyncourt, Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Tennyson, Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Lushington, Miss Tennyson, Mr. Frank Lushington, Captain and Mrs. Tennyson, Mr. Alfred Tennyson, Mr. and Mrs. Arden, Miss Violet Tennyson, Mr. and Mrs. Birrell, Masters Alfred and Charles Tennyson, Mr. Walter and Mrs. Ker, Captain Arthur Jesse, Mr. and Mrs. W. Rawnsley, Rev. Canon Wright, Mrs. and Miss Weld, Colonel and Mrs. Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Locker Lampson, Lord and Lady Boyne, Mr. Godfrey Locker Lampson, Mr. A. Lefroy, Sir Andrew Clark, Mrs. Mordaunt Boyle, Rev. H. D. and Mrs. Rawnsley, and Mr. G. L. Craik. Following them were nearly a hundred and fifty representatives of the Church, literature, law, learning, art, statesmanship, and arms who had been invited to join the funeral procession. Among those invited were Lord

Fig. 6. *London Daily News*. Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1892.

Further reflecting the societal circumscriptions specifically designed for women mourners, *Cassell's* warned the widow to refrain from attending her husband’s funeral for fear she might present characteristics of ‘the poorer classes’, or make a public spectacle of her grief: “[A]mong the poorer classes . . . female relatives attend the funeral; but this custom is by no means to be recommended as . . . too frequently . . . being unable to restrain their emotions, they interrupt and destroy the solemnity of the ceremony with their sobs or even by

fainting.”<sup>287</sup> On the other hand, a widow’s private deathbed sorrow was encouraged. The contradiction in the widow’s role is clear. The funeral tickets demonstrate that even late nineteenth-century British society demanded a differentiation between women’s private and public displays of sorrow.

Although J. Brown’s elegy is factually inaccurate—Emily reading in solitude beside the portrait of her husband, and Hallam removing her from the room shortly before Tennyson’s death, details which were publicly unknown until the 1896 publication of *Memoir*—his elegy accurately reflects Britain’s nineteenth century, culturally acceptable, solemn, private deathbed scenario, with Emily lovingly attending to her husband in his final hours. Brown concludes his poem with a ‘final consolation’ prevalent in the elegiac tradition—a hopeful reassurance of moving forward, as seen in lines 23-24. In this case, Tennyson is in heaven, and Brown comforts Emily by declaring that she, too, will have a place there (the sweet fellowship thy [sic] held on earth / may be renewed in heaven).

As previously discussed, Brown’s apologetic letter is intended to offer humility as a form of respect to Emily. Yet, it may simultaneously function to convey a familiarity with the elegiac tradition. Brown’s apology to the implied reader, his assurance of faith, and his offering of a final consolation may have been used to display his knowledge of the elegy. Eric Smith (1977), in his study of *In Memoriam*, refers to the elegiac tradition Tennyson exemplified (through his apologetic and self-critical verses) as part of “the self-consciousness of the poet-figure”, which typically takes the form “of deprecation and apology.”<sup>288</sup> As previously shown, Brown also provided a version of an elegy’s ‘final consolation’, when he writes that Tennyson will “inspire more, those left behind / with stronger faith and hopes

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<sup>287</sup> Anonymous, ‘Death in the Household’, in *Cassells Household Guide, New and Revised Edition* Vol. 3, c.1880, transcribed by Lee Jackson, *Victorian London*, <<https://www.victorianlondon.org/cassells/cassells-35.htm>>, [accessed 18 November 2014].

<sup>288</sup> Eric Smith, *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in English Elegy*, (Ipswich: Boydell Press, [1977] 1978), p. 103.

more bright.”<sup>289</sup> Whilst both Brown’s and Tennyson’s final consolations are intended to offer assurance of the deceased’s place in the afterlife, one difference is in their implied audience. While Tennyson’s final consolation in the Epilogue of *In Memoriam* is written for an unnamed and implied audience – humanity, Christ, Arthur, Tennyson himself (or all of these) – Brown’s final consolation is directed individually to Emily. However, like Brown’s concluding image of Tennyson’s place in Heaven, Tennyson’s Epilogue also concludes with the certainty that the deceased is now part of “a far-off divine event”:

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.<sup>290</sup>

Yet another difference between the consolatory languages emerges. For Tennyson, the assurance that Arthur “lives in” God is a source of comfort. By contrast, Brown focuses his condolence away from the religious and philosophical notions of heaven seen in Tennyson’s verses. Brown instead offers Emily assurance that upon her death, she will be reunited with Tennyson. He emphasises that a married couple’s reunion in heaven offers the ideal afterlife and intones that Emily will eternally continue her role as an ideal woman and wife.

Through J. Brown’s poem, we are also given a glimpse of how the public, newspaper announcement version of Tennyson’s private deathbed was received and interpreted. Like the

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<sup>289</sup> Brown, ll. 11-12.

<sup>290</sup> Tennyson, ‘In Memoriam’, ll. 296-297.

*Illustrated London News* image from the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1892, the scene is peaceful. However, unlike the illustrations, in Brown's version of Tennyson's deathbed only Tennyson and Emily are present. As well as imagining Tennyson's death, J. Brown has been compelled to consider and express his own future death. Eric Smith states: "The death of the poet cannot but bring to mind the poetic purpose and the future death of that other poet who is now writing."<sup>291</sup> However, Brown is not satisfied with limiting his poem to the language of personal mourning and immortality frequently seen in elegies. For Brown, Tennyson's and his own ideal death are highlighted with the presence of a loyal wife, demonstrating that Brown and indeed society placed importance on the roles of family members in life, death, and the afterlife.

As the letters and poems from Fanny Edge, S. Gertrude Ford, Mary Gaddess, and J. Brown, illustrate, Tennyson's readers frequently expressed intimate and individualised grief for the Poet Laureate. These letters and poems recurrently feature the grief of a widow, whether expressing their grief in the language of marital loss, or by idealising the status of widowhood. Kirstie Blair (2009) points out that *In Memoriam* paints a view of mourning as a state of inter-gendered widowhood, with Tennyson, as the elegy's narrator, alternately speaking as a (male) widower reaching for Arthur Hallam, presented as his departed bride; and also comparing himself to a (female) bride departing the family home to marry her lord. Blair states:

By comparing himself to a widower in XIII, Tennyson casts Hallam as his wife and their friendship as a relation as strong as marriage. Five sections earlier, in VIII, he similarly compares himself to a male lover lamenting the absence of a female beloved, and in XL he compares the absence of Hallam's spirit to a bride departing from her family home. Elsewhere in the poem, however, these implicit roles become confused as Tennyson imagines himself in the role of a female lover awaiting her

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<sup>291</sup> Smith, *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in English Elegy*, 11. Smith offers Milton's *Lycidas* (1637) and Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) as examples of the language of kindred spirits between poets within the elegy, from a living poet to a deceased poet.

‘future Lord’ (VI:38), and thinks of his ‘widowed race’ (IX:18) and of ‘my spirit as a wife’ to Hallam (XCVII:8).<sup>292</sup>

Similarly, the death correspondents demonstrate that Emily Tennyson’s widowhood provided writers with a focal point for imagining their own grief in terms of a widow. As we have also seen, Tennyson’s readers also transferred intimate expressions of idealised and gendered domestic roles onto Tennyson’s family.

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<sup>292</sup> Kirstie Blair, ‘In Memoriam XIII and The Corsair’, in *Notes and Queries*, Volume 55, Issue 1, (1 March 2008), 34–37.



### Chapter 3: Communal Mourning, Emotional Communities, and Cultural Kinship

This chapter builds upon Chapters 1 and 2 by focusing on death correspondents' likely communities and their roles within their wider social groups. It analyses a new group of death correspondents, in which I argue that notions of *kin* were synonymous with concepts of *community* for these correspondents. This chapter also analyses correspondents' likely cultural and literary influences, such as a Glasgow Inspector of Police who, I argue, valorises Tennyson in the language and meter of the working-men's oral tradition.

Building on Chapter 1, I also argue that these correspondents reflect upon complexities and anxieties within the changing landscapes of the Victorian family, religion, and community. Some correspondents responded by celebrating Tennyson's poetry and the traditions they imparted in order to create a cultural and literary immortality for the Poet Laureate. Indeed, preserving traditions was critical for these correspondents, even as they challenge the same traditions through the act of writing.

Death correspondents frequently imply or describe the Poet Laureate as being a member of their communities or families. Some readers employed various interpretations of newspaper reports about Tennyson's death and burial to reflect on their places within the national acts of mass-mourning, which functioned to create an emotional community of mourners. Others navigated their emotions by affirming the ways in which they benefitted from his labour, as a child reflects upon the sacrifices of a father. Others valorise Tennyson as a holy father or a spiritual guide.

Within the condolence letters and poems written to the Tennysons in 1892, some are notable for their declarations of 'status' in their introductions or conclusions. Along with the content of the elegies, this chapter looks closely at the introductory notes and postscripts

included with some of the mourning poems. Whether they were never written or lost over time, most of the condolence poems have no letter of introduction or note of conclusion. For this reason, the anomalous poems that include personalised notes or other indications of the authors' status have been selected (or revisited from previous chapters) in order to further assess direct or implied concepts of kin and community. Where possible, occupational and household member details from the England, Wales and Scotland censuses between 1861 and 1911 are included to help identify the mourners' communities and individual lives. By including demographic, employment, and family data alongside the personal letters and elegiac narratives the writers provide, we can further understand the mourners' likely places within their communities. Occasionally, interesting discrepancies arise between the census data, and the personal information they reveal, suggesting that the correspondents occasionally fictionalised the way they presented themselves.

Unlike individualised mourners such as Ford and Gaddess in Chapter 2, the *communal mourners* don't grieve alone. The correspondents studied in this chapter may describe their individual responses to Tennyson's death; however, I argue that their identities and the means by which they express grief are anchored within their social groups. Through their stated social details, or via clues within their verses, I argue that the *value* these individuals attributed to their communities—and their place within them—is a version of *kinship*. I further argue that there emerges in the correspondence a wider definition of familial relationships in which the domestic ideal of the family sphere extends to communities. The communal mourners actively present themselves as members of a larger societal family, with whom they share their grief and mourn comparably to the shared grief customary within biological families. 'We' is more prevalent in their letters than 'I'.

Within most of the elegies discussed in this chapter, Tennyson is presented as one who has departed from the family sphere, whether he is mourned by an individual, or by a

wider cultural ‘family’. The elegists often express their solidarity symbolically rather than directly, often utilising religious allegory, particularly evoking Tennyson as a ‘holy father’, and expressing a common understanding of the afterlife. Others represent him as a spiritual guide who imparts moral lessons through his verse. These are described similarly to a vicar guiding his congregation; a teacher imparting lessons to his pupils; or a master mentoring his apprentices. Several of the communal mourners also evince a solidarity in grief through symbols of patriotism, such as Britannia or the nation’s flag. Many writers also express *both* individual and communal grief, underscoring that their identities and their places within their cultural spheres are irrevocably connected. Across these community mourning themes, Tennyson is consistently seen as a member of the various communities to which the correspondents belonged.

### **Emotional communities**

Returning to ‘the young gardener’ J. Brown’s correspondence from Chapter 2, the first line of his introductory letter asks Emily to excuse him for writing his memoriam: “I hope you will kindly excuse the liberty I have taken in composing the enclosed lines on the death of your late lamented Husband.”<sup>293</sup> J. Brown’s appeal to Emily to excuse his writing is both an act of deference and a signal of Tennyson’s reach. His combined apology and signature act together as a gesture to Emily: he is young, he is a labourer (gardener), he is familiar with Tennyson’s work and he is educated and capable of composing memorial poetry. Announcing both his age and his social status by signing his letter, *J. Brown, a young gardner*, he is assuring Emily of her husband’s influence by showing her that Tennyson’s work has touched someone ‘young’ and of the labouring class.

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<sup>293</sup> Brown, In loving memory of the late Lord Tennyson: A Tribute, introduction letter.

It is significant that Brown included details relating to his age and occupation as part of his signature, rather than as part of the content of his letter. In doing so, he presents his identity separately from his apology. Although Brown's introduction is a gesture of humility to Emily, his youth- and class-focused signature demonstrates the influence of her 'late lamented Husband' beyond the elite classes. Brown's introduction also offers comfort in the knowledge that the influence of Tennyson's life will continue to inspire across all ages and sectors of society. Lines 9-12 of Brown's poem reiterate this expression, whilst also acknowledging the tradition of a poet's immortality:

Though the example of his noble life  
will live through fading light  
And inspire more, those left behind  
with stronger faith and hopes more bright.<sup>294</sup>

It is through the 'example of his noble life', Brown asserts, that Tennyson will continue to live 'through fading light' (the passage of time). Brown wants Emily to know that Tennyson's inspiration of 'those left behind', a literary and moral immortality, is of importance. Brown is offering Emily a view of Tennyson's afterlife on earth by way of consolation: all of Tennyson's readers—not solely the elite—will benefit from 'stronger faith and hopes more bright'. While Brown apologises for writing, he does not apologise for his social rank or his job. Indeed, he proudly identifies himself as a young gardener, signalling that his elegy originates from both a youthful age group and from a labouring social class, which acts as evidence of Tennyson's reach and influence.

While his 1891 census details indicate that J. Brown – whose full name was John Brown – was nineteen years old in the year prior to his letter to Emily, his occupation is listed

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<sup>294</sup> Brown, ll. 5-12.

as ‘coal miner’—not a gardener, as he claimed.<sup>295</sup> His father and two of his five brothers, aged twenty-one and fifteen, were also coal miners. The youngest three brothers, aged four, nine and twelve, were “scholars” – indicating that the Brown family valued education. Indeed, within the years covered by the 1881 and 1891 censuses, the family sent their children to school beyond the compulsory age of ten enforced by the 1880 Education Act.<sup>296</sup> Eleven years before his poem to Emily, the 1881 census lists John Brown as ten years old – drawing his age into question, as a decade later he was listed as 19 rather than 20. Ten-year-old John Brown, his eleven-year-old brother, and his five-year-old brother are all recorded in the 1881 census as scholars. All three would be coal miners by the 1891 census. Also recorded as scholars in the 1881 census are three sisters: aged seven, twelve, and fourteen. None of the girls were recorded in the Brown household by the 1891 census, indicating that they had moved, married, taken roles outside the home, or died. But in both the 1881 and 1891 censuses, Brown family teenagers were attending school. Whether they were employed outside of school hours is impossible to determine, but the consistent schooling of both male and female Brown children up to the age of fourteen reveals a family investment in education. A wish to demonstrate what Bourdieu (1986) described as “scholastically acquired cultural capital”<sup>297</sup> is potentially behind the declaration of class and occupation within

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<sup>295</sup> J. Brown included his address with his letter, which matches the household details in the 1881 and 1891 censuses.

<sup>296</sup> ‘The Education Act’, in *Houses of Parliament*, <[www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact](http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact)> [accessed 20 December 2015]. However, half-time compulsory education was in place following the Factories Act of 1833 until 1918. According to the Working Class Movement Library: “The half-time system was the first compulsory education in Britain and it arose out of the provisions of the Factories Act passed in 1833. This said that no child under nine years of age could be employed in any factory concerned with the textile trade in its widest sense. Children between nine and thirteen had to have a certificate from a schoolmaster showing that they had attended school for at least two hours a day during the preceding week. After compulsory primary education was introduced in the 1870s the half-time system was allowed to continue. However, it soon became apparent that those going to school on a half-time basis were unable to keep up with children able to attend school full time. Gradually the hours and ages were changed to ease the situation and after the First World War in 1918, the half-time system was ended.” <[www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/activists/alice-foley](http://www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/activists/alice-foley)>. [accessed 27 August 2019].

<sup>297</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Oxford: Routledge [1986] 2010), p. 75.

Brown's letter; but this does not explain the variation in his stated occupation (gardener) versus the recorded one (coal miner). Kirstie Blair (2020) cites a similar experience when researching the poetry of factory workers who were published in *The Yorkshire Factory Times*, a newspaper published for textile workers from 26 July 1889 to 24 December 1918.<sup>298</sup> Blair states: "Not all authors representing themselves as factory workers were 'real' factory workers, and no poem by a working-class author should ever be read as an unmediated and authentic account of real-life experience,"<sup>299</sup> which aligns with the disconnect between John Brown's letter and his census records.

In both the 1881 and 1891 census records for Brown's hometown of Dovenby, Cockermouth, the adult males in neighbouring homes are almost exclusively coal miners or occupied in colliery-related roles. The exceptions include a shoemaker, a general servant, and three gardeners (all three of whom resided next-door to John Brown in 1891 as a head-of-household and his two boarders). Brown disappears from UK census records after 1891. It is therefore impossible to determine if the departure from his coal-mining career into an occupation as a gardener was genuine or aspirational by the time of his letter in autumn 1892; if Brown was employed in two roles; or if his garden work was for hobby or domestic purposes rather than professional. Industrial settlements in nineteenth-century Great Britain were sometimes designed with garden allotments for the use of the miners.<sup>300</sup> Although there is no evidence that the mining community most likely associated with John Brown—the Dovenby Colliery—featured such gardens, the housing developed for miners of the nearby

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<sup>298</sup> 'University of Leeds Special Collections', *University of Leeds Library*, <<https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/400479>>, [accessed 24 August 2020].

<sup>299</sup> Kirstie Blair, 'Sarah Ann Robinson, Working-Class Women's Poetry, and the Yorkshire Factory Times', in *Historian's Watch*, <[www.historyworkshop.org.uk/sarah-ann-robinson-working-class-womens-poetry-and-the-yorkshire-factory-times](http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/sarah-ann-robinson-working-class-womens-poetry-and-the-yorkshire-factory-times)>, [accessed 27 August 2020].

<sup>300</sup> See, for example: 'Industrial Settlements', *South Yorkshire Historic Environment Characterisation*, <<http://sytimescapes.org.uk/zones/barnsley/B11>>; and 'Life and Death of/in the Coal Pits: A History of Coal Mining in Ferryhill', in *Ferry Hill Local History*, <<http://ferryhilllocalhistory.com/Ferryhill/DeanChapterColliery.htm>>, [both accessed 19 December 2015].

Rosegill and Bullgill coal mines in the mid-nineteenth century were designed with allotment gardens for the workers' personal use.<sup>301</sup> The complexity of class and the sub-sets of occupations (such as domestic gardeners versus those employed in stately homes or in municipal gardens; and coal miners versus colliery managers) complicates any attempt to assign reasons behind the variance in John Brown's occupation(s).

What is more easily concluded is that a significant value was placed on education within the Brown household, particularly when considering the necessity of combining incomes for coal-mining families. According to the National Coal Mining Museum for England (NCM), miners were paid based on the quantity of coal each worker produced, not the hours they worked. We can see that John Brown's father maximised the opportunity for pay in the manner the NCM described:

Some miners would take their whole families underground to try to get as much coal as possible, so they could earn more money. Each member of the family would be given a different job to do which would help the miner to get as much coal as possible.<sup>302</sup>

The Brown household children were in school until they began working at age fifteen. The Mines Act of 1842 raised the minimum working age to ten. This limitation on child labour was further sustained by the Education Act of 1880, which required children to be in education until the age of ten.<sup>303</sup> The Browns would have been legally entitled to remove their children from school and place them into earning roles five years earlier than they elected to do so. The family's choice to extend their children's learning by five years longer

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<sup>301</sup> 'Dovenby Colliery', *Durham Mining Museum*, <[www.dmm.org.uk/colliery/d024.htm](http://www.dmm.org.uk/colliery/d024.htm)>, [accessed 19 December 2015].

<sup>302</sup> 'Working Conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Mines', *National Coal Mining Museum for England*. <[www.ncm.org.uk/downloads/23/C19\\_working\\_conditions.pdf](http://www.ncm.org.uk/downloads/23/C19_working_conditions.pdf)>, [accessed 19 December 2015].

<sup>303</sup> Emma Griffin, 'Child Labour', *The British Library*, <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/child-labour>>, [accessed 20 December 2015].

than legislation demanded indicates both a willing financial investment through sacrificed household income, and a cultural investment in their children. Brown is keen to demonstrate that he is a cultured labourer. He displays his education in his letter to Emily: he is working class, and he demonstrates his educational capital through his appreciation of Tennyson's work and his own poetic composition. His poem represents his class through his promise of Tennyson's continued influence within it.

In addition to J. Brown, other writers also signalled their economic conditions or working roles within their introductory address. For example, Annie Martell (see Appendix 6) defines herself as "one of England's poor." By sharing their status or occupation, these authors also make known the reach of Tennyson's influence. This is more than fans simply expressing their sorrow for themselves as individuals. By stating their social status, occupation, economic conditions, or age, they also identify Tennyson as being significant to, and part of, their wider social class and cultural community.

Although each writer acted independently, the wide availability of newspaper and magazine memorials would have provided an awareness of the national mourning taking place. Furthermore, the public nature of Tennyson's funeral, for which admission tickets and souvenirs were sold, created a public setting in which an "emotional community" could develop. Indeed, 11,000 people applied for tickets to his funeral in Westminster Abbey.<sup>304</sup> The notion of emotional communities, first postulated by Barbara H. Rosenwein (2006), extends not only to those communities in which members are acquainted by physical proximity, relationships and occupations, but also to those whose members share an emotional experience and culture—even if they are unacquainted with one another on an

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<sup>304</sup> Stephanie Forward, 'Tennyson's Rise and Fall', *British Library*, <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/tennysons-rise-and-fall>>, [accessed 25 March 2016].



individual basis.<sup>305</sup> That some of the writers to Tennyson's family viewed themselves as part of a wider population of mourners is clear. The correspondents demonstrate an awareness that they are among a 'community' of mourners with whom they are personally unacquainted, such as seventeen-year-old Lincolnshire farm labourer Henry Jackson Pywell, who addresses his community of mourners with assurances of Tennyson's spirit transporting to the afterlife: "Mourners, I know you feel it much, / But Jesus we trust his thoughts will touch; / Though dead, his earthly form may be, / His spirit will eventually / To Heaven ascend, in peace to rest;"<sup>306</sup>

Although one of Rosenwein's definitions of emotional community states that individuals may be "at least members of the same locality, defined and circumscribed by place . . . and its ongoing traditions", her research offers a second model of community through a case study of the emotional connections of seventh-century anonymous authors.<sup>307</sup> Although these authors did not know one another, Rosenwein identifies an emotional community through their awareness of one another's writing, tracked through repeated portrayals—or "ghosts", as Rosenwein describes them—of emotional terminology. Rosenwein does not explain her choice in terminology; however, 'ghosts' implies a type of palimpsest, in which the traces of previous writings remain visible within new writing.<sup>308</sup> For Rosenwein, these ghosts include "coded", public displays of emotion that the writers borrowed from one another: uninhibited and dramatic expressions of joy and sorrow; and political uses of emotions intended to display the power of kings.

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<sup>305</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Reveling in Rancor', *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 163-189.

<sup>306</sup> Henry Jackson Pywell, 'In Memoriam Alfred Tennyson October 1892', October 1892, ll. 17-21, poem, TRC, UK.

<sup>307</sup> Rosenwein, p. 165.

<sup>308</sup> The scholarly use of 'ghosts' to express palimpsests can be seen, for example, in: Kristen Abbott Bennett, (ed), *Conversational Exchanges in Early Modern England: 1549 - 1640*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), p. 226; Dale A. Johnson, *Living as a Syriac Palimpsest*, (New Sinai Press, 2010), p. 102; and James Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), p. 236.

Applying this theory to the community of writers to Tennyson's family in 1892, it is clear that, whilst the unpublished mourners of Tennyson would not have been aware of one another as individuals, the prevalence of elegies, illustrations and newspaper reports published across the UK meant that the British population would have been witness to, and able to participate in, the spectacle of national mourning.<sup>309</sup> Rosenwein supports her theory of emotional communities through 'coded' public displays of emotion. While the death correspondence is not coded, the writers provide public displays of emotion through their repeated affirmations of an afterlife and Tennyson's immortality, and Tennyson's good death under a glorious moon. Furthermore, they were conscious of being participants in a wider national public event. Thus, the death correspondence occupies a space between private and public mourning. While thousands of these letters and poems were created as individual responses to the death, their contents were frequently informed by the public spectacle of the death and the accompanying newspaper reports and sent with the knowledge that many others were also doing so – as stated by death correspondent Paul Hann (Appendix 10).<sup>310</sup>

Rosenwein acknowledges the difficulties in differentiating between individual emotion and convention, and the potential pitfalls in attributing the vocabulary used in funerary conventions to true emotions:

We may be able to glimpse different contemporaneous emotional communities of the Early Middle Ages—groups that drew upon the traditional vocabulary in different ways—via the funerary epitaph[.] Although often scattered, important clusters exist in a few places, allowing us to associate type of epitaphs—and the sentiments they express—with places and settlements[.] They must always be seen as partial indicators because, while they can hint at norms about expressing grief, affection, and

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<sup>309</sup> Between 6-12 October 1892, approximately 290 articles relating to Tennyson's death and/or funeral were published in British newspapers. See: *The British Newspaper Archive*. <[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1892-10-06/1892-10-12?basicsearch=%2Btennyson%2c%20%2Bdeath%2c%20%2Bfuneral&freesearch=tennyson%2c%20death%2c%20funeral&contenttype=article&sortorder=score](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1892-10-06/1892-10-12?basicsearch=%2Btennyson%2c%20%2Bdeath%2c%20%2Bfuneral&freesearch=tennyson%2c%20death%2c%20funeral&contenttype=article&sortorder=score)>, [accessed 26 April 2016].

<sup>310</sup> See Figs. 7-13.

other emotions connected with death, they cannot tell us about the emotions invoked in other aspects of life. Furthermore, they are rare.<sup>311</sup>

Despite the pitfalls in the interpretations of a ‘repertory of emotion words’ as evidence of true emotions, Rosenwein defends their value, arguing that epitaph inscriptions cannot be completely attributed to those who carved the inscriptions: the ‘role of the client’ and their involvement in the language used cannot be ignored. Rosenwein refers to “scholarly opposition to the use of epitaphs to recover emotions: the sentiments expressed are conventional rather than ‘genuine.’”<sup>312</sup> However, defending the value of conventional epitaph vocabulary for the purpose of ‘recovering emotion’ she states: “. . . we have seen that emotions are indeed expressed through conventions, and for conventional, habitual, and ‘automatic’ purposes”, adding that the spontaneous ‘welling up’ of emotions is highly scripted by social norms.<sup>313</sup> This phenomenon is equally visible in the newspaper features at the time of Tennyson’s death and funeral.

### **Newspaper reports: guiding emotional community responses and poetry adaptations**

There is evidence of scripted emotions throughout the correspondence to Tennyson’s family. Many writers appear to have used the social norms of funerary expression as published in the British press as source material for their compositions. Indeed, even the journalists providing the reports borrowed language from one another, using nearly identical words. Moreover, some misinterpreted the original source information from Sir Andrew Clark’s death-under-moonlight narrative. The 6<sup>th</sup> October *Pall Mall Gazette* (Fig. 7) reported that Tennyson’s death chamber was backlit by the moon providing a “Rembrandt like background”; whilst the

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<sup>311</sup> Rosenwein, pp. 58-59.

<sup>312</sup> Rosenwein, p. 59.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

7<sup>th</sup> October *London Evening Standard* (Fig. 8) described the scene according to Clark's report, with Tennyson himself—or, his face—as being Rembrandt-like.

From the point at which the gravity of Tennyson's illness became publicly known in early October 1892 until his funeral on the 12<sup>th</sup> October,<sup>314</sup> newspapers updated the British population daily (and sometimes twice daily) on the status of Tennyson's illness, death and funeral.<sup>315</sup> Newspaper correspondents at Haslemere—the Tennyson family retreat in Surrey used during the poet's illness—provided regularly telegraphed updates on the status of Tennyson's failing health; his moonlit death; and the death notice left on the gate. They also vigorously reported on various funeral events: the Dean of Westminster Abbey George Granville Bradley's invitation to Tennyson's family to bury the Poet Laureate in Poet's Corner; transcripts of the numerous Sunday sermons across the UK relating to Tennyson and his 'lessons'; the family procession with Tennyson's coffin from Haslemere to the Surrey train station; and the funeral at Westminster Abbey. After Tennyson's burial, newspapers continued the funerary spectacle with descriptions of the funeral and its sermons; accounts and assessments of the floral offerings; lists of the elite and famous who attended; and protracted, scathing condemnations of the Prince of Wales for his failure to attend. In response to the variety of 'news' flooding the press through the month of Tennyson's death and funeral in October 1892, the letters and poems in this study consistently and sombrely reflect upon Tennyson's last moments of life; his death; his funeral; his relationships (including 'relationships' with his reading public); and his afterlife.

By comparing these published newspaper reports (as well as the illustrations that would follow) to the poems and letters within this study, we can see clear traces of the

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<sup>314</sup> Samantha Matthews, 'Burying Tennyson: The Victorian Laureate immortalized', in *Mortality: Promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying*. 7.3 (2002), 255.

<sup>315</sup> See: Figs. 7-13. See also: Matthews, 'Burying Tennyson: The Victorian Laureate immortalized', 255; and Thwaite, *Emily Tennyson: The Poet's Wife*, pp. 14-15.

published content – Rosenwein’s “ghosts”. One such ghost is seen in Annie Martell’s description of Tennyson’s idealised and moonlit deathbed: a reflection of both Dr George Dabbs’s death notice, and Sir Andrew Clark’s accounts – both of whom were physically present at the time of Tennyson’s death. In London alone, and within 24 hours of Tennyson’s death, there were 34 newspaper features recounting his moonlit deathbed scene.<sup>316</sup> Dabbs’s and Clark’s reports also subsequently informed newspaper illustrations<sup>317</sup> and articles nationwide (Fig. 7-11), demonstrating that their statements became source material for journalists and illustrators in the first instances, and secondly, for letter-writers and poets.

As previously noted, Annie Martell identified her social status within her introductory letter, just as J. Brown did. Annie Martell wrote to Hallam Tennyson from Kilburn, Northwest London, highlighting her class and economic situation in her introduction. Martell distinguishes herself as poor, and in her signature, Martell also adds information about her identity:

Will Lord Tennyson, please accept the enclosed lines, composed on the day of your dear Fathers [sic] funeral.

By the wife of a working man. They may serve to show you: the esteem in which he was held by one of England’s poor. With deepest sympathy from her who has known Sorrow

Your obedient Servant  
The Composer  
Annie Martell<sup>318</sup>

She is not simply Annie Martell: she is ‘The Composer’ Annie Martell. Whether she is identifying herself as the composer *of this poem* or as a creative practitioner, she signals her

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<sup>316</sup> *The British Newspaper Archive*, <[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)>, [accessed 25 March 2016].

<sup>317</sup> Dr Dabbs’ death notice was the first public notice of Tennyson’s death. The visual scene Dabbs composed, along with Sir Andrew Clark’s corroborating interview statements, became widely published in British newspapers. See Fig. 7 as well as ‘The Death and Burial of Lord Tennyson’ in *The Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1892; and ‘The Late Lord Tennyson, The Last Idyll’ in *The London Illustrated News*, 22 October 1892.

<sup>318</sup> Annie Martell, untitled introduction, 12 October 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

compositional ability although poor and ‘the wife of a working man’. By placing this detail prior to her name, she highlights her creativity and education as crucial elements of her identity. In doing so, Martell makes a direct proclamation of her cultural capital instead of implying it, as John Brown, the young gardener, did.

Annie Martell is also keen to communicate that her personal mourning for the poet resonates both privately and within her social class. Martell’s demonstrated grief and her admiration for Tennyson are linked to her identity as part of a community: She is not simply ‘poor’ but ‘one of England’s poor’. Martell, who was born in Tipperary, Ireland, was forty-seven years old in 1892, the year she wrote her memorial poem. The 1891 Census for England, Wales and Scotland shows that she was married to Patrick Martell, a “Builders [sic] Carman” – in today’s terms, a van driver. Also residing in the home in Middlesex were her widowed mother-in-law and eight children. Her children ranged in age from six to twenty-two, with the eldest three sons, aged seventeen to twenty-one, also employed as Builders’ Carmen. Similarly to John Brown’s household, the five youngest Martell children are listed as scholars, with three at or exceeding the compulsory age ten for education: two sons, aged ten and thirteen; and a daughter, aged twelve. Although she is self-described as poor, the 1891 census delivers evidence of the value placed on education within the Martell household—which Martell also demonstrates through her additional choice of self-identification as ‘the composer’. As with John Brown, the inclusion of these details serves to communicate the reach of Tennyson’s work, and to show that the impact of his death extends to the labouring community.

Both Brown and Martell use language that implies that Tennyson was a part of their wider social and cultural spheres. This approach differs from that of S. Gertrude Ford, Fanny Edge, and Mary Gaddess, all three of whom notably wrote intimate, emotive poems to Emily—unlike Martell who wrote to Hallam. Whilst the social classes of Ford, Edge and

Gaddess are unidentifiable from their correspondence alone, their compositions are notably individualised: Tennyson is theirs to mourn—although they acknowledge that their grief is shared with Emily. Revisiting the language of S. Gertrude Ford’s poem, and in contrast to Brown’s and Martell’s language, we can see that her sympathy is individualised. Indeed, Ford claims her grief to be greater than that of the rest of the country:

[Sympathy] [f]or him whom all his country mourns to-day,  
Conscious of what in him the world has lost;  
And mine the greater, in that never once  
I, loving him so dearly, saw his face,<sup>319</sup>

Martell, by contrast, makes no such claim of individual possession. She identifies with Hallam’s loss ‘With deepest sympathy from her who has known Sorrow’, but her grief is not expressed in terms of individual loss. Further differing from the individualised writing of Ford, Edge and Gaddess, Annie Martell voiced her grief from a courteous distance. Martell’s memoriam poem, like the young gardener J. Brown’s, begins with the romanticised, moonlit deathbed scene reported in newspapers. Whilst lines five onward are more conventional endeavours in elegiac composition, her first four lines reflect the newspapers’ accounts of Tennyson’s moonlit deathbed:

A chamber lighted only by  
The moonlight’s feeble ray.  
A group stand watching by the bed  
Where the dying poet lay<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Ford, ll. 26-29.

<sup>320</sup> Annie Martell, ‘In Memoriam’, 12 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-4, TRC, UK.

In these initial lines, a loving but unidentified ‘group’ keep watch over the poet in his dimly lit death chamber.

By the time of Martell’s writing on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, approximately 719 British newspaper articles recounted Tennyson’s death or funeral.<sup>321</sup> As seen in Figs. 7-11, many of these described Tennyson’s moonlit death as presented by Dr George Dabbs and Sir Andrew Clark. Newspapers soon began featuring illustrations of Tennyson’s death chamber flooded with moonlight, and in scenarios that ranged from a peaceful family scene (Fig. 11) to a fanciful death accompanied by Tennyson’s own literary characters (Fig. 12). These were primarily published after Tennyson’s funeral (see *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, and *Punch, or the London Charivari* all on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1892; and *The Illustrated London News*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1892). The similarities between Dabbs’ note, Clark’s statement, the newspaper articles and illustrations, and Martell’s poem are examples of a shared emotional experience, which Rosenwein characterises as an emotional community. The ‘group’ depicted in Martell’s elegy were identified in several newspaper features as Emily, Hallam and Audrey Tennyson; Dr George Dabbs; Sir Andrew Clark; and Tennyson’s two nurses (see Fig. 7).

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<sup>321</sup> *British Newspaper Archive*, <<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>>, [accessed 25 March 2016].



FOURTH EDITION.

DEATH OF LORD TENNYSON.

HOW THE POET PASSED AWAY.

"A GLORIOUSLY BEAUTIFUL DEATH."

THE CLOSING SCENE.—SPECIAL DESCRIPTION.

We announce with deep regret the death of Lord Tennyson.

The first message to hand at half-past eight this morning from the Press Association stated simply that "Lord Tennyson died at 1.25 this morning."

A minute or two later the Haslemere correspondent of the Exchange Telegraph Company sent the following copy of the bulletin posted at the gate of Aldworth House this morning:—

"Lord Tennyson passed away quite peacefully at 1.30 a.m.  
(Signed) "ANDREW CLARK.  
"G. H. R. DABBS."  
October 6, 1892.

The Press Association's special correspondent, telegraphing from Haslemere at 8.30, states that he has had an interview with Sir Andrew Clark, who in the course of conversation said that the death of Lord Tennyson was the most glorious he had ever seen.

The room, said Sir Andrew, was almost in darkness, and the poet lay in the moonlight with a Rembrandt-like background.

The family were assembled round the bedside.

Sir Andrew himself was by the poet's side from the time of his arrival yesterday morning until Lord Tennyson breathed his last.

Lady Tennyson, added Sir Andrew, is very delicate, and her husband's death is a great trial to her, but she bore herself well during the closing scenes of the Laureate's life.

Sir Andrew left Haslemere this morning for London.

Clark—is that death was the result partially of suppressed gout and partly of an attack of influenza, but principally of natural decay.

From the time when Lord Tennyson last took to his bed up to the early hours of this morning when he passed peacefully away, all that medical skill could do had been done, but from the first it was apparent that though the end might be delayed, there was no probability of recovery.

With the exception of Lady Tennyson, the Laureate's immediate relatives were present at his bedside when he passed away; but Sir Andrew Clark, who passed practically the whole of yesterday beside the death-bed of his old friend and distinguished patient, had left the room for a moment, and was not in attendance when death occurred.

Those who witnessed the poet's end describe it as a most peaceful and almost imperceptible transition from life to death, and an end that Lord Tennyson himself might well have pictured and earnestly desired as his lot.

Sir Andrew returned to London by an early train this morning, and on arriving at his residence in Cavendish-square seemed greatly distressed at Lord Tennyson's death and not a little exhausted by his protracted attendance on the patient.

SPECIAL MEMOIR.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was born on August 5, 1809, at Somersby, a village in Lincolnshire, about halfway between Spilsby and Hornesby. He was one of twelve children, of whom seven were sons.

THE POET'S ANCESTRY.

Alfred Tennyson's father was the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, LL.D. rector of Somersby and vicar of Grimsby, who married Elizabeth Fytche, daughter of the vicar of the neighbouring town of Louth. Dr. Tennyson was the son of a wealthy retired lawyer, George Tennyson of Bayennes Manor, Lincolnshire, but the bulk of the property went to the second son Charles, uncle of Alfred, who subsequently took the name of D'Eyncourt by Royal licence, and was for some time member of Parliament for Lambeth. The poet's paternal grandfather "was well known some fifty years ago as solicitor and land-agent to most of the county families in that part of the world, some of whom still have in their libraries 'advance copies' of Alfred Tennyson's first published poems, presented by the proud grandfather to his old friends and clients." Charles Tennyson, the poet's uncle, was in his time a noted Liberal politician as M.P. for Stamford. Charles married an heiress—one of the Huttons of Lincolnshire—entered Bayennes in grand style, and took the name and crest of D'Eyncourt, having purchased an estate in the village of Eyncourt in France, from whence he

Fig. 7. Pall Mall Gazette. 6 October 1892.

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**DEATH OF LORD TENNYSON.**

We deeply regret to announce that Lord Tennyson died at about half-past one o'clock yesterday morning. Later in the day the following bulletin was affixed to the gates of Aldworth:—

"Lord Tennyson passed away quite peacefully at 1.35.  
(Signed) "ANDREW CLARK.  
"H. R. DABBS."  
"October 6, 1892."

Fig. 8. London Evening Standard. 7 October 1892.

Sir Andrew Clark subsequently gave to an interviewer the following record of his impression of the scene:—"Lord Tennyson has had a gloriously beautiful death. In all my experience I have never witnessed anything more glorious. There were no artificial lights in the chamber, and all was in darkness save for the silvery light of the moon at its full. The soft beams fell upon the bed, and played upon the features of the dying poet like a halo." One who was afterwards

Fig. 9. London Evening Standard. 7 October 1892.

As the evening drew on, and the sick-room became shrouded in darkness, the moments of returning consciousness were fewer. The dying poet lay apparently in quiet slumber, watched by Lady Tennyson, his only son, Mr. Hallam Tennyson, and his wife, Sir Andrew Clark, Dr. Dabbs, and the two nurses. No attempt was made to administer nourishment, beyond a little brandy and milk given to him at half-past ten. The full moon had, meanwhile, risen in the sky, and its clear rays fell upon the face of the poet, giving to it, as one of the watchers afterwards remarked, the character of a Rembrandt etching.

Fig. 10. *London Evening Standard*. 7 October 1892.



Fig. 11. *The Illustrated London News*. 15 October 1892.



Fig. 12. A. Forestier. 'The Late Lord Tennyson. The Last Idyll'. *The Illustrated London News*. 22 October 1892.

Martell's deathbed scene appears to combine the moonlit deathbed frequently published in the popular press with an idealised good death. However, the 'group' are not praying, comforting or otherwise interacting with the dying poet as we would expect to see in a 'good death' scenario. They are instead watching by the bed, suggesting the respectful vigil also held by the mourning public. Through her careful language, Martell implies communal reverence, reflecting a narrative of shared grief within the general public.

Annie Martell's memorial poem utilises literary devices one would expect in an elegy. In lines 5-12, Tennyson has died, and Martell employs conventional elegiac imagery: a laurel wreath (the symbol of poets), flowers, and the representation of the departed as sleeping rather than dead:

A laurel wreath upon his brow.  
Sweet scented flowers strewn o'er  
The couch on which that form lies still  
Who soon will be no more.

Sleep on sweet bard, thou art not dead  
But only gone before  
Your many friends, who love you now  
As hundreds did of yore.<sup>322</sup>

However, although her language is traditionally elegiac, the popular press again appears to play a role in Martell's composition. For example, *The London Evening Standard* on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1892 quoted an unnamed 'privileged' visitor to the death chamber, who reported that Tennyson's corpse was covered in flowers—"principally Virginia creepers"—and "a laurel wreath crowns the head, and another reposes on the feet." (See Fig. 13)

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<sup>322</sup> Martell, ll. 5-12.

dying poet like a halo." One who was afterwards privileged to enter the death-chamber says:—"As he reclines lifeless upon his bed Lord Tennyson looks some fifteen years younger than before death, the lines and wrinkles having passed from the face, while the beard, unkempt enough in life, is carefully brushed and trimmed. The hands are folded over the chest. A laurel wreath crowns the head, and another reposes at the feet. Flowers, principally virginia creepers, almost hide the coverlet from view. Wax tapers supply a subdued light to the death-chamber, which is wrapped in solemn silence."

Fig. 13. *London Evening Standard*. 7 October 1892.

Martell also incorporates the post-Classical elegiac tradition of calling to a famed elegist<sup>323</sup> – Tennyson – who is also the ‘sweet muse’, for whom Britannia mourns.

Farewell sweet muse, a long farewell  
 Brittania [sic] weeps for you  
 Submissive th’o she bows & says  
 Tennyson, adieu.<sup>324</sup>

For Martell, all of Great Britain mourns Tennyson, clearly symbolised through imagery of Britannia. This time, Martell is expressing the grief of the nation through a patriotic representation. The symbolic weeping of Britannia was an established device in elegies and pastorals, particularly for esteemed personages—as seen, for example, in ‘The Tears of Britannia: an Elegiac Poem, Occasioned by the Death of His most Sacred Majesty King George II’ (1760). Annie Martell’s version of Britannia is one who ‘submissively’ bids farewell to Tennyson. Britannia is more than quietly respectful; she is deferential as she bows to ‘the poet King’—thus the public she represents is deferential, too.

By consuming the daily newspaper accounts of Tennyson’s private death chamber, readers could view themselves as part of the media-informed, national grieving event. By

<sup>323</sup> Williams, *The Poetry Toolkit*, p. 46. Williams lists the common features of the post-Classical elegy to include “calls to a muse, figures from Classical myth, or previous famed elegists.”

<sup>324</sup> Martell, ll. 21-24.

gaining access to Tennyson's death through the press, readers could view themselves as witnesses within the private family death chamber. By drawing on these narratives, Martell and Brown established themselves as part of an emotional community of writers.

Samantha Matthews also acknowledges the span of Tennyson's funeral newspaper accounts. Referring to the journalists and illustrators published in the press, Matthews states: "Thanks to the cordon of privacy around Aldworth,<sup>325</sup> artists and writers wanting to depict Tennyson's death-scene were reliant on the doctors' descriptions and their own imaginations: their work was to reconstruct the elusive corpse."<sup>326</sup> Matthews argues for a journalistic and public interest in Tennyson's body, asserting: "When news of his death filtered through to the public on 6 October by telegraph and telephone, and was announced the following day in newspaper reports, obituaries and elegies, the body was the primary subject of interest."<sup>327</sup> Indeed, the minor inaccuracy of this cited date notwithstanding—newspaper reports of his death were published the same day, not the following (for example, see Fig. 7)—some of the published newspaper articles and the letters in this study function as entry points for the public to envisage Tennyson's body. However, with the benefit of the original materials newly available since Matthews's 2002 publication, the death correspondence shows that while the public did occasionally focus on corporeal idealisation, the newspaper articles and illustrations primarily functioned as sources for writers wishing to access and include themselves in Tennyson's immortality, family, home and the wider community of the grieving nation. For example, an anonymous death correspondent visualises the deathbed:

The moonbeams shone  
Around his aged head.

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<sup>325</sup> Aldworth House was the Tennyson family's summer home near Haslemere in Surrey, and, as a place of retreat, became Tennyson's place of rest during his illness and death. Their permanent residence was on the Isle of Wight.

<sup>326</sup> Matthews, p. 257.

<sup>327</sup> Matthews, p. 254.

His wish: that there should  
be no other light.  
Shone the pale moonbeams  
lingering bright.  
Within the room.<sup>328</sup>

Gladys Fanquier, a ten-year-old child in British Columbia wrote:

Meekly on his bed He lay  
Waning like the summer's day,  
When across the room there stole –  
A silvery moon-light ray.<sup>329</sup>

72-year-old Northern Ireland widow Eleanor Henry wrote:

And through the veil moonbeams shone  
And shimmered on his brow.  
Where love had twined a laurel wreath  
And glory crowns it now.<sup>330</sup>

S.J., observes:

Ere yet the winter of our year had come,  
The moonlight fell on that mysterious hour  
That saw the passing of our poet – home.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Anonymous, 'Violet – Hope', undated (c.1892), poem, ll. 7-13, TRC, UK.

<sup>329</sup> Gladys Fanquier, 'The death of Poet Tennyson', 6 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-4, TRC, UK.

<sup>330</sup> Eleanor Henry, 'Lines on Tennyson', undated, (c.1892), poem, ll. 5-8, TRC, UK

<sup>331</sup> S.J., 'Yet Speaketh', undated, (c.1892), poem, ll. 7-8, TRC, UK.

These poets specifically interpret the famously reported moonlit death scene in order to navigate their personal responses to Tennyson's death.

Some poets employ the newspapers' accounts of the death to insert themselves into the 'story' of Tennyson's death. In doing so, they act as chroniclers of the event. James Joseph Barrett, a 25-year-old mercantile clerk, feels, hears, and observes Tennyson's death:

Twas the sound of the bell of Death –  
I could feel death's icy breath!  
...  
I heard God speak to him.  
...  
But the singer is gone.  
I saw God take him by the hand,  
And lead him from our land.<sup>332</sup>

Barrett's imagined ability to hear and see God taking the Poet Laureate into the afterlife is intended to assure Tennyson's family of the Poet Laureate's 'good death', while simultaneously elevating himself as a worthy observer and narrator of a virtuous scene.

Like Barrett, another death correspondent, Alice Godwin (Appendices 7 and 8) composes two poems from the perspective of a first-person narration. While she may have been present for the funeral events, it is likely that her described attendance was imagined and informed by descriptions in the press. On the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1892, 27-year-old domestic servant Alice Godwin reflects upon Tennyson's funeral, the chorus, and the clamour of the crowds outside Westminster Abbey. Her poem is written from the vantage point of Westminster Bridge (Fig. 14):

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<sup>332</sup> James Joseph Barrett, 'And the Singer Answered God', 12 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-2, 5, 16-18. TRC, UK.

Yes, he is gone outside I stand in sorrow  
Hundreds around me still I seem alone  
Alone upon the bridge I weep in silence  
While now they bear him gently to the tomb.<sup>333</sup>

It is tempting to consider that Godwin may have attended the funeral event as one of the ‘hundreds’ who mourned outside of the Abbey. Firstly, she was employed as a ‘Housemaid’ at a private residence in Kew, Richmond (although she includes her family’s home address in Southampton with the correspondence)—approximately nine miles from Westminster, and potentially within range of attendance. Secondly, she has noted at the top of the poem in faded ink: ‘On Westminster Bridge’ (see Fig. 14), seemingly indicating the location of her composition. It is not possible to know if Godwin was physically present to record the events, or if she was imagining herself on the bridge. Enticing though it may be to consider Godwin’s writing as a rare record providing a working-class woman’s first-person observation of Tennyson’s funeral and his public mourning event, Godwin’s described presence was possibly illusory. Godwin may have been employing the literal locations of the death and funeral and the widespread press reports as inspiration for her poems, and to symbolise her responses to Tennyson’s progression from his death to the afterlife. Godwin had also enclosed a poem dated the 6<sup>th</sup> October, the day of Tennyson’s death, with a similar remark at the top: ‘Over the river’ (see Fig. 15). This annotation, which also functions as the poem’s title, is written in identically pale ink to the later poem. This suggests that both comments/titles were added retroactively to their respective poems at the same time (and, in part, to function as postscripts to differentiate the poems from one another). Considering the 6<sup>th</sup> October poem, in which Godwin observes the death from ‘over the river’: it is unlikely, if

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<sup>333</sup> Alice Godwin, ‘In Loving Memory’, 6 October 1892, poem, ll. 8-12, TRC UK.



not completely impossible, that any member of the public would have had access to the river banks in Haslemere at the time of Tennyson's death.

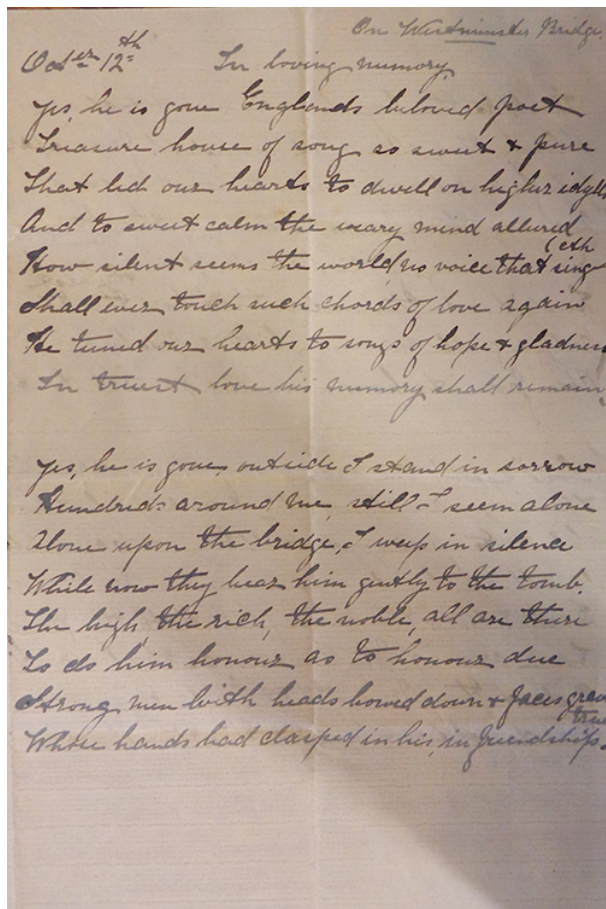


Fig. 14. Alice Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', 12 October 1892, poem. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

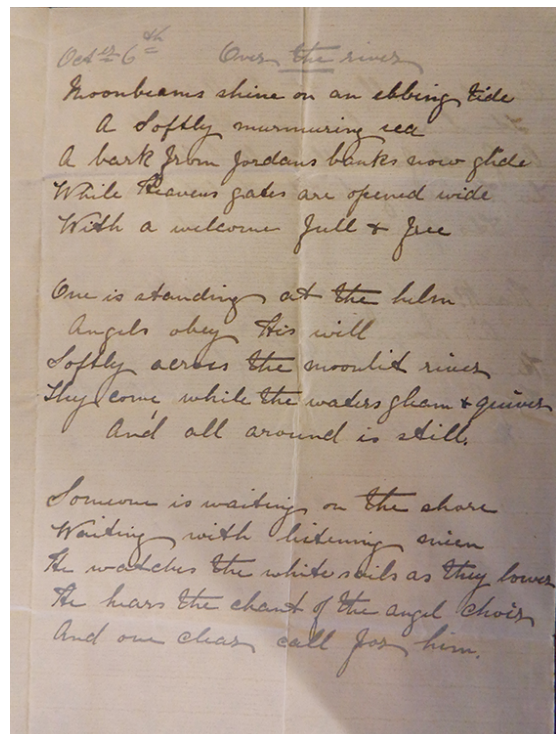


Fig. 15. Alice Godwin, 'Over the River', 6 October 1892, poem. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

As seen with J. Brown, Mary Gaddess, and J. Joseph Barrett, Alice Godwin's two poems, 'In Loving Memory' (12 October 1892) and 'Over the River' (6 October 1892) both repurpose the hundreds of British newspaper reports and illustrations that narrated Tennyson's death and funeral by the 12<sup>th</sup> October of that year.<sup>334</sup> As Samantha Matthews stated: "only a small proportion of those touched by the poet's death could be present at the

<sup>334</sup> British Newspaper Archive, <<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>>, [accessed 25 March 2016].

funeral, and many literate people participated vicariously by keeping abreast of the news.”<sup>335</sup>

If she wasn't present, Godwin's poem, 'In Loving Memory' provides a clear example of such vicarious funeral participation, with its details made available through press coverage.

For example, in the 15 October 1892 *Punch* illustration entitled 'Crossing the Bar' (Fig. 17), Tennyson is depicted wearing a crown of poet's laurel, standing upright with his face illuminated by light within a small bark, unambiguously representing his poem. Along with this illustration, *Punch* reproduced lines 9-12 of 'Crossing the Bar':

“Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;” – Tennyson<sup>336</sup>

Godwin adapts lines 3-4 of the poem— “And may there be no moaning of the bar, / When I put out to sea”<sup>337</sup>—within her own piece, 'In Loving Memory': “Thou with thy Pilot in a peaceful haven / For thou hast crost the bar beyond regretting.”<sup>338</sup> Perhaps most compellingly, she also clearly describes the sounds of the choir singing the musical adaptation of 'Crossing the Bar' during the funeral service:

Hark to the boyish voices sweet & clear  
Slowly they chant, it soundeth from afar  
While angel voices seem to join the song  
“And may there be no moaning of the bar”<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Matthews, p. 249.

<sup>336</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Crossing the Bar', *In Demeter and Other Poems*, (London: Macmillan, 1889), ll. 9-12, cited in *Punch, or The London Charivari*, 15 October 1892.

<sup>337</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Crossing the Bar', *In Demeter and Other Poems*, (London: Macmillan, 1889), ll. 3-4.

<sup>338</sup> Alice Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', 12 October 1892, poem, ll. 36-37, TRC, UK.

<sup>339</sup> Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', ll. 17-20.



Fig. 16. 'The Funeral of Lord Tennyson in Westminster Abbey: The Benediction'. *The London Illustrated News*, 13 October 1892, depicting the invited Mourners. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry.

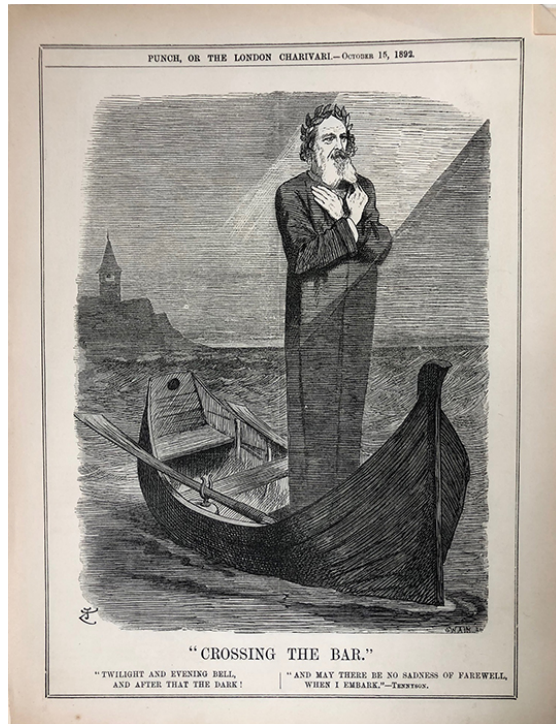


Fig. 17. 'Crossing the Bar'. *Punch, or, The London Charivari*, 15 October 1892, characterising the deceased Alfred Lord Tennyson as he 'crosses the bar'. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry.

In lines 10-11, she weeps alone, expressing her individual sorrow for the death of Tennyson and his 'silent' words, while symbolically or physically present on Westminster Bridge amongst the nation's mourners. At first, Godwin grieves in isolation from the community, despite being amid crowds of funeral spectators: "Hundreds around me still I seem alone / Alone upon the bridge I weep in silence." Godwin's subsequent lines 12-15 indicate that class, gender, and 'true' bonds with Tennyson separate her from others in attendance:

The high the rich, the noble, all are these  
 To do him honour as to honour due  
 Strong men with heads bowed down & faces grave

Whose hands had clasped in his, in friendship. (true)<sup>340</sup>

These lines suggest that Godwin's solitude and silence may have been acts of deference to members of the elite classes and those who knew him: 'true' friends, strong men, and the wealthy. Indeed, once the 'high, the rich, the noble' have moved from the scene, Godwin's feelings change from isolation to belonging, now mourning as part of the community:

Thine eyes are closed, thy lips are silent now,  
Silent to speech, yet still thy words are written  
On all our hearts who mourn thee truly now.  
Hark, tolleth the passing bell, doth thy free spirit  
Hover around the mourners as they stand  
O, dost thou know that Englands [sic] sons are weeping  
Her daughters mourn for thee throughout the land.<sup>341</sup>

By line 29, Tennyson's soul has departed, and at this point, Godwin has changed her language to that of national mourning. Like Martell and Brown, Godwin has included herself within an emotional community: despite the loneliness she articulates, for Godwin it is "*our* hearts who mourn thee truly now." Furthermore, 'mourn thee truly' implies that her personal isolation may have been in reaction to the crowds attending the spectacle out of curiosity rather than to genuinely mourn Tennyson. Indeed, it seems that Godwin suggests that the spectators have moved along, leaving the 'true' mourners on the bridge to grieve as a community.

Godwin's description of England's sons and daughters weeping and mourning further asserts a nation that is united in grief. Samantha Matthews (2002) argues that the news, which

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<sup>340</sup> Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', ll. 12-15.

<sup>341</sup> Godwin, 'In Loving Memory', ll. 26-32.

covered the particulars surrounding Tennyson’s funeral (such as digging of the grave within the Abbey at night)—and particularly in conservative newspapers such as *The Telegraph*—created and sustained “a national drama . . . framed in imperial language” in which people willingly participated “to restore confidence damaged by the Laureate’s death” in response to “the mass need to claim and possess the nation’s poet, mounting to a high pitch of nationalistic rhetoric.”<sup>342</sup>

Alice Godwin introduced her poems with a brief letter to Emily:

Dear Madam

Will you please forgive me if I have done wrongly in sending the verses, but I thought I would like you to see them.

Yours most respectfully & in sympathy

Alice L Godwyn

Writing on thin, plain paper in pale ink that appears to have been thinned with another liquid, Alice, for reasons which are unclear, has spelled her surname ‘Godwyn’, differently to the recorded spelling ‘Godwin’ seen in all of her census records and those of her family members. Godwin shares no details about her life with Emily: the letter is polite, apologetic, almost hasty, and without introducing her role or her wider community as seen in other death correspondence. While she apologises for the potential intrusion ‘in sending the verses’, she does not declare her social status or working details as others such as Annie Martell and J. Brown did. Godwin’s verses appear to be original drafts that include annotations and revisions. While we will never know if she made additional drafts for herself or to send for publication; it is more likely that an aspiring poet would have retained the rough drafts and sent along the finessed copies (as we will see later in this chapter with Matthew Johnston).

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<sup>342</sup> Matthews, pp. 261-262.

What is evident is that Godwin was keenly literate, insightful, and capable of complex poetic composition. At the 1881 Census, sixteen-year-old Alice Godwin lived at home with her mother Martha (a tailoress) and her siblings. While her younger siblings were listed as scholars, including her thirteen-year-old brother, Alice was no longer attending school; but her verses indicate familiarity with Tennyson's poetry, along with an awareness of the events surrounding Tennyson's idealised death and funeral as reported in the press.

Indeed, both of Godwin's poems are adaptations of 'Crossing the Bar' and portray Tennyson's living body being transported to an idealised death. For example, in her poem 'In Loving Memory', lines 21-24 ("No moaning of the bar', glorious soul / Hushed were the waters that bore thee to thy rest / Only a gentle murmur like a psalm / Bore from its bosom, sounded from the depths") draw on Tennyson's lines 4-9 ("And may there be no moaning of the bar, / When I put out to sea, / But such a tide as moving seems asleep, / Too full for sound and foam, / When that which drew from out the boundless deep / Turns again home"). Godwin's references to "No moaning bar" and "the boundless deep", along with the "hushed waters" that transferred his body while surrounded by "gentle murmurs" creates a tone similar to Tennyson's description of his ideal death in 'Crossing the Bar'. These, along with the "tide" that "seems asleep" are unmistakably taken from 'Crossing the Bar' as a means for Godwin to imagine her participation in both the death that Tennyson envisaged for himself, and in the private funeral service within Westminster Abbey.

Like portions of 'In Loving Memory', Godwin's 'Over the River' also adapts 'Crossing the Bar':

Moonbeams shine on an ebbing tide  
A softly murmuring sea  
A bark from jordan's banks now glide  
While heavens gates are opened wide



With a welcome full & free<sup>343</sup>

Like Tennyson's piece in which he describes the desire for a peaceful death and an assurance of an afterlife, Godwin similarly observes Tennyson's tranquil death and the transferral of his body to heaven. Godwin's lines 1-2, "Moonbeams shine on an ebbing tide / A softly murmuring sea" reflect Tennyson's evening scene in lines 1 and 4: "Sunset and evening star, [ . . . ] When I put out to sea,".

In lines 11-13, Godwin then reimagines Tennyson's solitary crossing of the bar as a more reflective waterside scene attended by others:

Someone is waiting on the shore  
Waiting with listening [undecipherable]  
He watches the white sails as they lower  
He hears the chant of the angel choir  
And one clear call for him.<sup>344</sup>

'Someone' is waiting—Arthur Henry Hallam?—and sailors are lowering their sails in sombre tribute. She also interprets Tennyson's lines 1-2, "Sunset and evening star, / And one clear call for me!" in her poem's lines 14-15: "He hears the chant of the angel choir / And one clear call for him."

Godwin's lines 16-20 imagine Tennyson's passage across the water into the afterlife:

One clear call & the bark can launch  
It bears him o'er the tide  
A fond farewell to all held dear  
To Heavens gate the Pilot steers

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<sup>343</sup> Godwin, 'Over the River', ll. 1-5.

<sup>344</sup> Godwin, 'Over the River', ll. 11-15.

Its portals open wide<sup>345</sup>

Again, this echoes Tennyson's lines 5-8: "But such a tide as moving seems asleep, / Too full for sound and foam / When that which drew from out the boundless deep / Turns again home."

Godwin's piece concludes with a reimagining of Tennyson's final lines 15-16—in which he yearns to meet his "Pilot": "I hope to see my Pilot face to face / When I have crost the bar". Instead of *seeing* the Pilot's face, Tennyson *hears* "His Master's voice":

Hark?<sup>346</sup> angels greet him with their song  
A song of joy and love  
He enters with that glorious throng  
His Masters voice hath said Well done  
He dwells in rest above.<sup>347</sup>

Godwin may have intended for 'his Master' to be interpreted in the same manner in which Tennyson intended his readers to view 'my Pilot' as God. In Godwin's verses, Tennyson's encounter with the Pilot/Master stretches beyond the initial meeting that Tennyson depicted. Tennyson is received with a congratulatory message from his Master ("well done").

Godwin's first three lines, "Moonbeams shine on an ebbing tide / A softly murmuring sea / A bark from jordans banks now glide" reflect lines 5-6 of 'Crossing the Bar': "But such a tide as moving seems asleep / Too full for sound and foam." Although it is impossible to confirm, Godwin may have also drawn this scene from press accounts. For example, the 13<sup>th</sup> October illustration in *Punch* (Fig. 17), depicts Tennyson, moonlit, gliding across calm water

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<sup>345</sup> Godwin, 'Over the River', ll. 16-20.

<sup>346</sup> The question mark appears to have been added later. The ink is fresh and dark, in contrast to the fading ink by this point in the poem. See Fig. 9.

<sup>347</sup> Godwin, 'Over the River', ll. lines 21-25.



in a bark. However, 'Over the River' is dated the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892. Along with Tennyson's verses, early press depictions of Tennyson's crossing may have influenced Godwin's peaceful depiction rendered under moonlight, such as the 6th October *Pall Mall Gazette* (Fig. 7). Equally, the widely published notice from Tennyson's Dr Dabbs, with its peacefully moonlit death scenario may have informed Godwin's adaptation, as it did countless news articles and illustrations.

Godwin 'observes' both of these journeys while reflecting on newspaper accounts. In doing so, she is placing herself 'alone' in the private particulars of Tennyson's death. She simultaneously places herself among the mourners gathered outside of Westminster Abbey. Finally, in lines 38-40, she concludes 'In Loving Memory' in the language of both communal mourning and confirmation of Tennyson as a moral leader ("We would not grieve thee with our falling tears / But follow in thy footsteps, drawing nearer / Nearer to Heaven & thee in coming years"). For Godwin, 'we', as a community, 'follow in thy footsteps' of Tennyson, bringing his followers nearer to both Heaven and Tennyson. Godwin plainly refers to Tennyson's readers as followers, thus idealising Tennyson as a paternal community leader.

### **Fatherly ideals, community, and cultural kinship**

Like Godwin, a death correspondent who signs herself as 'Ms M Collins' (Appendix 9) also adapts Tennyson's published work in a 13<sup>th</sup> October 1892 elegy, which, like Godwin's, imparts affirmations of communal mourning, while functioning to present Tennyson as a paternal moral guide. Ms Collins is identified in the 1891 Census as Matilda M Collins. In her work entitled 'These to his memory', Collins adapts both Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and the Bible, while presenting Tennyson as an immortal paternal figurehead. Collins states that Tennyson will continue to live through the moral and religious lessons she contends he shared with 'us', and through the love of his community of admirers. Unlike the previous examples we have seen, Collins did not qualify her elegy with a personal introduction.

Instead, she underscores the contents of her poem with a conclusion that offers her personal characteristics (Fig. 18):

Oct 13th 1892

M\_ M Collins (Spinster)  
Aged 90 – 5th Oct next  
12 Southeast Place  
Lyncombe Hill  
Bath

This ought to have been sent 3 weeks ago

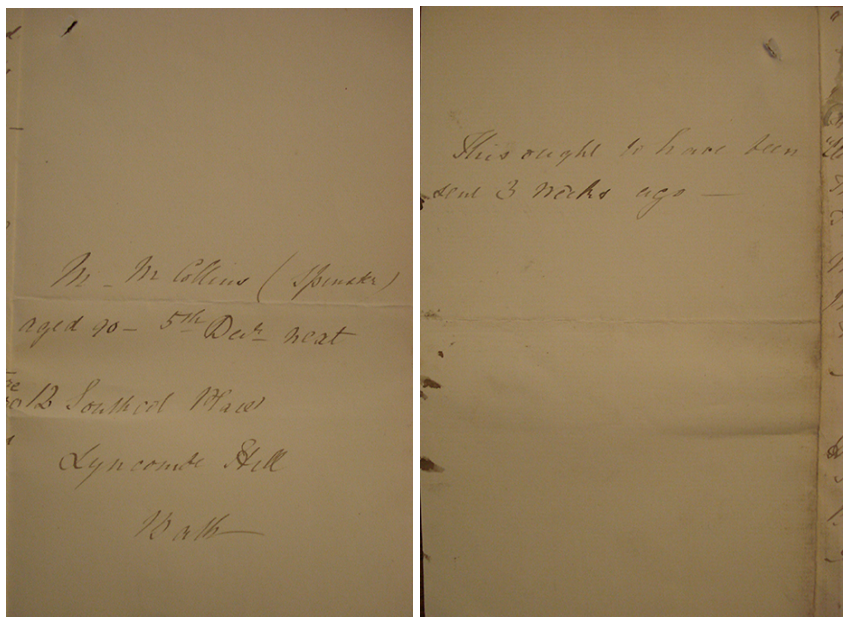


Fig. 18: Signature and note by Ms M Collins, 13 October 1892. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

Collins is keen to announce that she is nearly 90 years old. ‘Spinster’, included prominently with her name, is her identity, but her age is her achievement. Collins lets the unnamed reader know that she has had the benefit of time to form her knowledge of Tennyson’s work.

Significantly, Collins claims Tennyson for all the classes in the first four lines of her elegy:

“Sing out wild bells”, across the moor  
“Ring out” to tell the rich and poor  
That our loved Poet good and great

Has left us for a happier state.<sup>348</sup>

Collins's meaning is clear: Tennyson is 'our loved Poet'. The message that 'sings' from the wild bells—that Tennyson has departed—is for everybody, 'rich and poor'. The public is a community that is connected through their common grief for the poet.

Collins's lines repurpose *In Memoriam* section CVI, particularly lines 1-4, Tennyson's poem about the second Christmas Eve after Arthur Henry Hallam's death:

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.<sup>349</sup>

The year has passed – it is 'dying' – but so is Tennyson's initial pain. He wills the bells to ring out to denote the significant easing of his emotions, which are equally measured against the passage of the closing year. However, Collins instead invites the bells to 'sing out' to celebrate Tennyson's memory. Her message is celebratory. The bells 'Ring out to tell the rich and poor' that 'our loved Poet' is in 'a happier state'. Apart from the first lines of section CVI, Tennyson's use of the term 'ring out' is synonymous with 'stamp out'. For Tennyson, the bells that 'ring out' symbolically vanquish strife. Specifically in Section CVI, Tennyson wishes the bells to subdue, for example, 'false pride' [line 17]; and 'foul disease' [line 21]. Conversely, for Collins, the bells that 'ring out' are triumphant. In Tennyson's version, the bells that 'ring in' are triumphant. This is underscored in the final line of section CVI: 'Ring in the Christ that is to be.' Whilst both Tennyson and Collins are depicting traditional church

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<sup>348</sup> Ms M Collins, 'These to his Memory', 13 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-4. TRC, UK.

<sup>349</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, stanza CVI, ll. 1-4.

bells that summon worshippers to prayer or ceremonies, Collins's sole reference to bells is designed to send a message of the afterlife 'to all'.

Although the 89-year-old spinster Ms M Collins does not disclose her social class, the 1891 Census for England, Wales and Scotland identifies Matilda M Collins as an unmarried lodger "living on her means" in the home of a 67-year-old widow in Bath. Local census details suggest that Collins was residing in a neighbourhood of middle-class and upper-working-class families. Heads of households include a retired surgeon, a county court officer, and an electrical engineer. Single women and widows include a journalist and a schoolmistress. Children in the neighbouring homes are in school, with the exception of one teenaged child working as a gold jeweller's apprentice. Only one household employs a domestic servant living in their home, indicating that this is a neighbourhood of professional working people in careers requiring education and/or formal training, but who may not have had the means to employ household staff, or who employed 'daily' rather than live-in servants.

Ten years earlier, in 1881, Collins resided with her widowed sister Marget [sic] and a domestic servant in Bath. She is listed as the Head of Household, with the occupation "House Property,"<sup>350</sup> suggesting Collins may have enjoyed middle-class comfort as a property owner. The only other census details for Collins are from 20 years prior. In 1861, at the age of 56, Collins was a Schoolmistress. She was an unmarried head of household in Liverpool, living with her sister Harriett (also unmarried), three boarders, and two servants. Collins's occupation shows she was educated and her census details demonstrate that she possessed sufficient financial means to live her adult life as a spinster. That she chose to sign her name

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<sup>350</sup> "House Property" is not known to be a typical occupation in the 1891 Census for England, Wales and Scotland. See: 'Victorian Occupations', *London Census 1891 Transcription Blog*, <<http://www.census1891.com/occupations-c.php>>, [accessed online 18 September 2021].

as ‘Ms M Collins (Spinster)’ and highlight her advanced age suggests pride in both her unmarried status and her maturity. Her occupations and class are omitted from her personal introduction and her poem. For Collins, including herself amongst the ‘rich and poor’ in the national celebration of ‘our loved Poet’ is sufficient.

Collins’s poem continues with religious imagery, which present Tennyson as a virtuous exemplar. Her celebration of the afterlife resumes with the hope for heavenly reunions, stating: ‘May all his loved ones meet him there’. In Collins’s subsequent three stanzas Tennyson is a dutiful servant:

He did not bury in the earth  
The talent given at his birth  
But used it well and kept it bright  
And thus could help us to the light<sup>351</sup>

These lines are a direct reference to the Bible’s Matthew 25, ‘The Parable of the Talents’. In the King James version quoted here, the term ‘talents’ is interchanged with ‘goods’. In other versions of the New Testament, the ‘talents’ in this parable are represented as either gold or money. In every version, the consistent message is about putting these ‘goods’ to work for the betterment of both self and community, and a warning against hoarding these.

The meaning behind Collins’s reinterpretation of this parable is clear: Tennyson was a profitable servant; thus, a good Christian. Her poem asserts his talents as gifts, stating: “For God had given him a mind . . . Lofty and pure, calm and refined” and acknowledges that these talents were not hoarded, but were shared with ‘us’ as moral messages:

He sent to us from time to time  
His noble thoughts, in noble rhyme

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<sup>351</sup> Collins, stanza 3, ll. 1-4.

Lessons of virtue, truth and love  
Such as are given us from above.

We thank him for a bounteous store  
And we shall prize them more and more  
Now that our dear and valued friend  
No longer can a lesson send.<sup>352</sup>

While in the first two sections of her poem she depicts Tennyson as a dutiful, moral servant, the later stanzas see Collins rendering Tennyson as a spiritual guide. This is not necessarily a contradiction; in both contexts, Tennyson is leading ‘us’ through his actions: first by his example; then by sending us his lessons. But Collins does not depict Tennyson as holy or unattainably spiritual. She is clear that Tennyson was a mere, humble human by implying that his ‘lessons of virtue, truth and love’ do not originate with himself: her subsequent line, “such as are given us from above”, suggest that they are holy gifts given to Tennyson. She concludes her work by casting Tennyson as simply ‘our dear and valued friend’.

Although he is a friend, Collins simultaneously portrays Tennyson as mentor, such as a teacher to his pupils (“no longer can a lesson send”). With the repeated references to Tennyson’s ‘lessons’ in her poem, and as a former schoolmistress, Collins’s teacher metaphor seems both clear and self-reflective. Collins, as a former teacher, is ‘lowering’ Tennyson into her sphere, rather than ‘elevating’ herself—as seen with Ford speaking as an equal to Emily. For Collins, Tennyson’s value is through his humble work as a teacher, and his immortality persists through the lessons he imparted. She represents Tennyson as a paternal figure by evoking him as a faithful servant: both through her biblical reference to the Parable of Talents, and by depicting Tennyson as a humble and moral community leader.

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<sup>352</sup> Collins, stanzas 5-6, ll. 17-24.

Indeed, several mourners, both communal and individual, expressed their loss of Tennyson in terms of mourning a father: either that of the ‘family’ of their nation or world (communal mourners), or of themselves (individual mourners). These paternal figures are depicted as both spiritual and familial fathers. For context, Reverend George Gilfillan in 1854 described an idealised fatherly role as ‘the Fatherhood of God’, stating: “He should stand up before his family consciously as a model; and should rejoice at nothing so much as in seeing his well-regulated life and dignified bearing, and benevolent feelings, insensibly imbibed by, and gradually appearing in, his children.”<sup>353</sup>

In Trev Lynn Broughton’s and Helen Rogers’s 2007 study investigating the nineteenth century “macroeconomic and macropolitical change and the day-to-day negotiations shaping fatherly identity and practice”<sup>354</sup> the authors note that this paternal ideal crossed denominations and appeared in sermons and hymns from 1850 through the First World War. For Broughton and Rogers, The Fatherhood of God features “an attempt positively to identify core elements of the father’s role. Christ’s description of Heaven as ‘My Father’s house’ entitled commentators to ascribe to the afterlife all the qualities of idealized domesticity.”<sup>355</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Broughton and Rogers state, the Victorians had inherited the notion that adherence to evangelical protestant behaviours was synonymous with respectability. This led the Victorians to carry forward “a highly moralized understanding of the family as a microcosm of God’s kingdom, and a concomitant reverence and deference to the position of head of household representing God’s authority within the family.”<sup>356</sup> They state that “the ‘paternal idea of God’ offered . . . a personal source of

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<sup>353</sup> Rev. George Gilfillan, *The Grand Discovery; or, The Fatherhood of God*, (London: Blackader, 1854), p. 13. While it is impossible to know the reach of Gilfillan’s lectures and the published volumes of his talks into the working classes, his works were widely circulated until his death in 1878.

<sup>354</sup> Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (eds), ‘Introduction: The Empire of the Father’, in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>355</sup> Broughton and Rogers, pp. 16-17.

<sup>356</sup> Broughton and Rogers, p. 16.

security and support that was partly spiritual, partly practical: “Do you want advice? Consult your Father. Do you need supplies? Ask them of your Father. Do your difficulties appear insurmountable? Appeal to your Father. God is not merely a Father in name – He has a Father’s nature.”<sup>357</sup>

The death correspondence indicates that social and economic changes in Great Britain by the nineteenth century fin de siècle influenced the writers’ notions of home, community and family.<sup>358</sup> The Industrial Revolution influenced middle-class households in particular, as the majority of work for pay had previously taken place within the home. John Tosh ([1999] 2008) argued that the pre-Industrial Revolution “business of the household . . . often drew on the labour of wife, children, apprentices and servants.”<sup>359</sup> Therefore, domestic relationships were also “relations of production, and they were managed by the paterfamilias”<sup>360</sup> such as the traditional master/apprentice relationship.

These developments contributed to the developing notion of “separate spheres”, or the increasing separation of home and family from work and education. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the ideal middle-class home came to be seen as a refuge from the responsibilities of paid work. By contrast, the concept of separate spheres was more challenging for the working classes. Karl Ittman (1999) argues that the separation of the home and workplace primarily served to make “the [working-class] family an adjunct of the mill.”<sup>361</sup> Nevertheless, the dissolution of the home as a place of work created changes in the

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<sup>357</sup> Broughton and Rogers, p. 17.

<sup>358</sup> See Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers (eds), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2007), particularly Broughton and Rogers, ‘Introduction: The Empire of the Father’, pp. 1-28; Megan Doolittle, ‘Fatherhood, Religious Belief and the Protection of Children in Nineteenth-Century English Families’, pp. 31-42; and Julie-Marie Strange, “Speechless with Grief: Bereavement and the Working-Class Father, c. 1880-1914’, pp. 136-152. Also see John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* ([1999] 2009), particularly ‘The Decline of Deference’, pp. 145-169 and ‘The Flight from Domesticity’, pp. 170-194.

<sup>359</sup> Tosh, p. 3.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.



relationships among working-class families and middle-class families alike.<sup>362</sup> Although extended-kin households had been declining since the eighteenth century (more than 50% of households prior to the Industrial Revolution included extended kin), between 1850 and 1885, 20% of households still included extended kin, which could include non-immediate family members, lodgers, boarders, or servants.<sup>363</sup> Therefore, it is clear that despite middle-class ambitions for separate spheres, non-immediate family, boarders, and workers still lived in one in five British Victorian households at the time of Tennyson's death.

Furthermore, despite the shift away from traditional master/apprentice paternalism, Tennyson is consistently portrayed within the death correspondence as a household or community paternal figurehead. This demonstrates that for many Victorians, notions of idealised domesticity and gendered family roles remained a desirable tradition at the fin de siècle, including gendered motherly and fatherly labour. Julie-Marie Strange (2012) investigated more than one hundred autobiographies from those self-identifying as holding “‘respectable’ working-class values”, published between c. 1870 and 1910, to ascertain notions of ‘breadwinning and attachment’ between children and fathers. Her findings show that for many late Victorians reflecting upon their childhoods, both a mother’s and a father’s love were frequently demonstrated not necessarily through tactile affection or sentimentality, but through work and earning on behalf of their families.<sup>364</sup> The correspondence from S. Gertrude Ford, Annie Martell, and John Brown exemplify Emily as a personification of a woman’s labour functioning as an act of love, and as evidence of the family’s respectability. Similarly, the poems of Martell, Brown, and others demonstrate that readers interpreted

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Steven Ruggles, *Prolonged Connections: The Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth-Century England and America*, (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1987), pp. 11-12.

<sup>364</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Fatherhood, Providing, and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working-Class Families’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1007–1027, (1010-1011).

Tennyson's 'labour'—writing poetry and imparting lessons—as acts of 'love' in his role comparable to that of a 'father' to an emotional community of mourners.

While these death correspondents appropriated Tennyson's mentoring roles into household and community spheres, others presented him as a royal figure, thus existing beyond their domestic spheres while holding paternal authority and influence upon their lives. Indeed, the role of Poet Laureate naturally translated into paternal notions of Tennyson as a 'Poet King'. For example, nineteen-year-old Jessie Hadley from Hampshire writes: "Hush! Do you hear the angels sing, / The flutter of their snowy wings? / They come to take our Poet King".<sup>365</sup> 'AK' asserts that Tennyson was "King of Bards".<sup>366</sup> Annie Martell concludes her elegy: "he who is, So near & yet so far / Will reign for aye, the poet King / Th'o he has crossed the bar."<sup>367</sup> An anonymous death correspond renders Tennyson as "the noble king. / Of the great Table Round, whose praises ring."<sup>368</sup> These varying examples communicate Tennyson's Poet Laureateship as holding royal authority and the paternal influence of a king.

Paul Hann (see Appendix 10) provides another example of Tennyson as paterfamilias. Hann wrote to Hallam Tennyson from Islington, London, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1892. Like communal mourners Annie Martell and John Brown, Hann promptly sets himself apart from the 'upper classes', self-identifying as 'working' twice in the first line of his introductory note (Fig. 19):

May it please Your Lordship

To accept the enclosed lines as a tribute from a working Stone Mason – you have received many from the upper classes no doubt, but not from working men[.]

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<sup>365</sup> Jessie Hadley, 'Lines on the death of Lord Tennyson', undated (c.1892), poem, ll. 25-27, TRC, UK.

<sup>366</sup> A.K., 'Lines on the Death of Lord Tennyson', November 1892, poem, l. 1. TRC, UK.

<sup>367</sup> Martell, ll. 24-28.

<sup>368</sup> Martell, ll. 36-37.

I enclose the Harvest Home, to show that I sometimes write a few lines in my humble way.

Yours Obediently

Paul Hann<sup>369</sup>

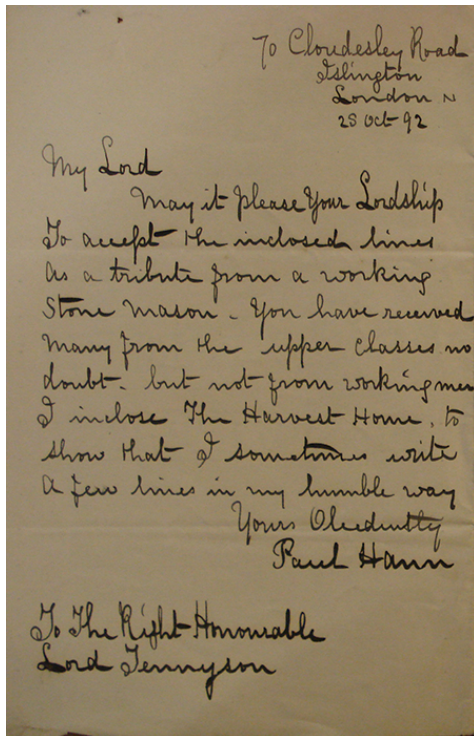


Fig. 19. Paul Hann introduction letter to Hallam Tennyson. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

Hann acts as a voice for ‘working men’. He speaks as a representative of his community to ensure that Tennyson’s family knows that working men are among Tennyson’s readership. Paradoxically, he also highlights the presumed rarity of his letter and poem. In this sense, he individualises himself, either through his ability to write poetry—a skill he insinuates is atypical—or through his willingness to share this writing with the Poet Laureate’s family, both of which the death correspondents prove was not as unusual as Hann apparently believed.

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<sup>369</sup> Paul Hann, untitled letter of introduction, 25 October 1892, letter, TRC, UK.

Paul Hann was 61 years old when he sent his poem in 1892.<sup>370</sup> The 1891 Census for England and Wales shows he was widowed and living alone in Islington, North London. True to his introductory letter, his census-listed occupation is Stone Mason. Indeed, Hann's occupation is listed as a Stone Mason beginning with the 1851 Census, in which Hann is 20 years old, through to the 1891 Census (excluding the 1861 census, in which there is no record of Hann). His marital status is 'Widower' from the 1871 census until the 1901 census, when the 70-year-old Hann is remarried at last and now a 'Stone Mason – Retired'. Hann appears for the final time in the 1911 census, a 'Pensioner, O.A.' and still married at the age of 80. With the exception of the final years of his life, the available Census information for Hann records a largely solitary life. As we also saw with S. Gertrude Ford's Census records, Hann's frequent changes of address suggest the need to relocate when work required him to do so.

Paul Hann's Census records show that he was widowed and had no children. He also appeared to lack a consistent residence until his remarriage and retirement between the ages of 60 and 70. Yet unlike many of the writers seen in this study, Hann has not written about personal loss, struggles or loneliness, neither in his introduction, nor in his poem. The personal identity Hann discloses is rooted in his occupation of skilled labour and being part of a wider social group of 'working men'. Although he states that poetry from a working man must be rare, his poem focuses upon communal remembrance of Tennyson – singing of 'his praises' and telling of 'his love' in the unified voice of a group of mourners.

This type of communal remembrance was based in the male-orientated support networks that Julie-Marie Strange (2007) has identified within the working classes. These

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<sup>370</sup> According to the 1891, 1871 and 1851 Censuses for England and Wales, Hann's birth year is listed as 1831, suggesting this is his accurate birth year; however, the 1881 Census lists his birth year as 1827. There is no record of Hann in the 1861 Census.

connections existed beyond the sphere of close friends and relatives, depending upon “work or trade union identities, or friendships and acquaintances forged in the public house.”<sup>371</sup> Indeed, as an unmarried craftsman in mid- and late-nineteenth-century England, Hann’s support network, if it existed, would have come from a wider social community through work, friendships, relatives not residing with him, and possibly, church. As the censuses indicate that Hann lacked both a family of his own and an extended household for at least 20 years, including the year of his communication to the Tennysons, his community would have come from people and networks outside of his domestic sphere.

Strange clarifies that support among the grieving male labouring classes was often symbolic rather than verbal. Using the autobiography of Albert Jasper, born in 1905, entitled *A Hoxton Childhood*, Strange describes Jasper’s recollection of one such symbolic expression of sympathy which stemmed from a workplace relationship:

Jasper recalled accompanying his father to donate a collection of money to a workmate whose infant had died. Jasper’s narrative details little verbal exchange between the adult men except that relating to an invitation to view the corpse and the awkward presentation of the gift. To the point, conversation was not necessary. The bereaved father opened the door to the Jaspers with his ‘eyes swollen red’, an indication of sleeplessness and sorrow. In presenting the workplace donation, Jasper’s father enacted the sympathy of workmates, whilst the offering, given as a sign of respect for the deceased, avoided any suggestion of charity. Moreover, donations made from wage earnings could be read as an expression of solidarity among workers and breadwinner fathers.<sup>372</sup>

The custom of demonstrating solidarity among workers is perhaps reflected in Paul Hann’s introductory statement, “you have received many [poems] from the upper classes no doubt, but not from working men.” If symbolic—silent—support was the perceived norm for male mourners in the working men’s community with which Hann identifies himself, it follows

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<sup>371</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, ‘Speechless with Grief: Bereavement and the Working-Class Father, c. 1880-1914’, in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century*, Broughton and Rogers (eds), p, 143.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

that skilled working-class writers such as Hann would have believed condolence letters and poems from the working-classes to the 'elite' were unusual among their community. However, like Hann, many of Tennyson's working-class mourners utilised words and language as their offered currency of unity. Furthermore, their solidarity in grief often crosses class boundaries from the working class and poor to the elite, as we have seen with John Brown, Alice Godwin and Annie Martell.

Like Matilda M Collins, Hann uses a celebratory tone rather than a mournful one in his poem, which comprises six pairs of couplets in closed tetrameters.<sup>373</sup> Although awkwardly composed in varying meter, Hann's poem, 'A Harvest Home', is primarily written in iambic tetrameter and rhyming couplets:

A Cedar hath fallen both great and tall  
His fragrance like dew-drops from heaven does fall  
Thy influence through generations shall run  
To illuminate the world thou bright sun  
We'll sing of thy goodness tell of thy love  
Who sang so sweetly of mansions above  
Knowing that all to his Saviours belong  
Gratefully render'd his talents in song<sup>374</sup>

The first six lines are particularly rhythmic and evoke the oral tradition. Indeed, Hann explicitly refers to acts of communal singing and prayer in lines 5-6, stating that we will "sing of thy goodness" and "tell of thy love." This language of communal devotion is evocative of the congregational singing of hymns at a funeral or during worship.

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<sup>373</sup> Although Hann has not end-stopped his lines with punctuation, each line contains a 'complete' phrase or idea.

<sup>374</sup> Paul Hann, 'The Harvest Home', 25 October, 1892, poem, ll. 1-8, TRC, UK.

Notably, Tennyson refused to write hymns, viewing hymn composition as the realm of ‘common’ people, stating in a letter to Robert Warren, President of Magdalen College, Oxford: “a good hymn is the most difficult thing in the world to write. In a good hymn, you have to be both commonplace and poetical.”<sup>375</sup> However, Ian Bradley reminds us that, “[d]espite his reticence about joining the ranks of hymn writers” Tennyson’s verses from *In Memoriam* and ‘Crossing the Bar’ – particularly “Strong son of God, immortal love” and “Sunset and evening star”—featured widely in Victorian hymn books.<sup>376</sup> Thus, as Hann attested, Tennyson’s ‘talents’ were indeed ‘rendered’ in songs, which Hann and his community will continue to sing.

Representing Tennyson as a cedar is a further indication that Hann’s elegy is reverential. Rather than describing Tennyson as a Yew—a tree prevalent in English churchyards and a symbol of longevity that Tennyson himself employed three times in *In Memoriam*<sup>377</sup>—Hann instead uses biblical imagery to evoke Tennyson as a moral figurehead. Hann’s cedar allegory may relate to the ‘Cedars of Lebanon’ from biblical scriptures. In this context, cedars symbolised righteousness (e.g., “The righteous shall grow like a Cedar in Lebanon”, Psalms 92, V. 12). This context would serve to represent Tennyson as a symbol of morality.

Although there is anxiety in Hann’s language—the cedar has fallen—there is hope for Tennyson’s immortality through continued acts of communal remembrance. The “fragrance” – or lingering influence – of Tennyson’s virtue falls from heaven “like dew-drops”, and Tennyson’s “influence through generations shall run”. For Hann, although generations have the potential to benefit from Tennyson’s moral lessons, he is conscious that ‘we’—Hann’s

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<sup>375</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir* Vol. IV, p. 183.

<sup>376</sup> Ian Bradley, ‘Victorian hymn-writers’, *Abide With Me*, (London: SCM Press, 1997), p. 106.

<sup>377</sup> See Tennyson, ‘In Memoriam’: “Old Yew, which graspest at the stones”, stanza II, l. 1; “Dark yew, that graspest at the stones”, stanza XXXIX, l. 4; and “the mouldering of a yew”, stanza LXXVI, l. 8.

community—must ‘sing’ tributes to continue the influence of his works. In this regard, Hann’s piece clearly evokes the congregational singing of Christian hymns. Hann’s language differs from the language of remembrance expected in a funeral sermon. Instead, Hann asserts that Tennyson’s influence must be preserved to illuminate the world—the language of communal veneration. In doing so, Hann’s poem positions Tennyson as the ‘holy father’ of collective worship.

Like Hann, another death correspondent praises Tennyson through collective worship, but instead does so indirectly – through God. The anonymous poet writes on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1892:

England’s great son is borne unto the tomb.  
Earth’s grief is lost in worship pure and high  
[...]  
Father of Lights! Giver of perfect gifts!  
Teacher of teachers! Strength and Light Divine,  
All that we seem to lose is found in Thee,  
All things are ours, for all alike are Thine.<sup>378</sup>

England is bereaved of its great son, but the world is comforted through worship. The poem then worships God for his perfect gifts, teachings, and divinity. The poem’s penultimate line, ‘All that we seem to lose is found in Thee’, suggests two things: first, that these gifts are imparted through Tennyson’s poetry, and second, that we will continue to find them through worshipping God. The impetus for Anonymous’s call for this worship is the continued access to Tennyson – thus indirectly exalting him. Indeed, Anonymous concludes the poem by assuring us that Tennyson’s poetry belongs to us because, like ‘all things’, they are God’s. He

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<sup>378</sup> Anonymous, ‘In the Abbey’, 12 October 1892, poem, TRC, ll. 8-9, 13-16.



is England's family (son), and is now conferred to a position of reverence as a holy father whose works provided his 'family' with the strength, divinity, and lessons of God.

Broughton and Rogers argue that the *paterfamilias*, or the 'paternal idea of God', provided Victorians with security through an idealised combination of a father's spiritual and practical support. They further argue that paternally related cultural metaphors such as the 'empire of the father' and Gilfillian's 'fatherhood of God' "worked not only to establish a man's relationships within his own family, but, importantly, to distinguish relationships of responsibility, power, and subordination outside it."<sup>379</sup> Until the mid-eighteenth century, the paternal head of household was viewed as the father figure for all members of his household. For middle-class households, this included servants, apprentices, governesses, and wet nurses, who were deemed members of his family.<sup>380</sup> For working-class households, older children often took a parental role to younger siblings, or worked away from their biological home as servants, where their employer, as male head of household was "in loco parentis."<sup>381</sup> Broughton and Rogers refer to the "Victorian *paterfamilias*" as a deteriorating caricature. They assert that increasing feminist challenges to male power by the 1870s caused a waning in the tendency for families to defer to the paternal head of the household. Perhaps in reaction to this declining paternal hierarchy, the death correspondents clung steadfast to idealised male domestic roles, including paternal dominance. By considering Broughton's and Rogers's study in tandem with the tendency for many death correspondents to idealise the fading cultural norms of male household and domestic dominance, the correspondence further functions to express anxieties relating to the perceived loss of moral conventions that

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<sup>379</sup> Broughton and Rogers, p. 8.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> Broughton and Rogers, p. 8-9.

favoured traditional paternal household roles, as seen in Hann's poem as well as the correspondence lamenting the loss of chivalric traditions in Chapter 1.

Even as the family dynamic was shifting, legal sovereignty, such as The Legal Custody Act of 1839, prioritised the rights of the biological father over the mother and, Broughton and Rogers argue, invoked "the rule of the father" into the legal sphere.<sup>382</sup> Indeed, reform of family law seeing mothers as equal child custodians was repeatedly rejected until 1923 out of fear "that it would weaken the authority of the father within his family."<sup>383</sup> By further applying Broughton's, Rogers's and Strange's arguments beyond "domestic fatherliness" and into wider domestic spheres—to include both biological and communal kinship—we can see evidence of such communal grieving and solidarity in the written communication of those who expressed grief for Tennyson. These expressions of cultural kinship often took the form of gendered domestic roles, which were regularly articulated in terms of worship or religious symbolism. This can be seen with Paul Hann, with Anonymous, and with 15-year-old S. Gertrude Ford, who laments Tennyson as a departed husband while comparing her love to religious devotion, crying: "[H]ow this heart has loved him! As we love / The Christ whom he so long and nobly served."

As well as communal mourners identifying themselves as members of a wider societal family, both individual and communal mourners assigned Tennyson as a male head-of-household to both the 'family' of the wider community (Paul Hann), as a holy father (Anonymous), and as a paternal figure to themselves as individuals (Fanny Edge). The memoriam poems within this study demonstrate that whether directly stated or implied, the

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<sup>382</sup> Broughton and Rogers, p. 9.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

Victorian idealisation of the paterfamilias continued to thrive for the death correspondents in 1892.

### **Brethren of the muses nine**

On 31 October 1892, Matthew Johnston (Fig. 20 and Appendix 11), wrote an elegy for Tennyson, which he signed, “Your Lordship’s obedient servant, Matthew Johnston, Inspector of Police, Bridgeton, Glasgow.” The 1891 England, Wales and Scotland Census confirms his occupation. Johnston was 42 years old and living in Bridgeton, Glasgow with his wife Elizabeth and five children. Elizabeth Johnston was also 42, with no occupation noted. Their 21-year-old son William worked as a marine engine fitter in Glasgow. The four younger children ranged in age from two to thirteen, and those who were old enough attended school, demonstrating the value the Johnstons placed on education. No domestic servants are listed, indicating that the Johnstons lived in a financially modest household at 223 Baltic Street.<sup>384</sup>

Baltic Street ran parallel to the train line for the forthcoming Baltic Station that opened in 1895 for the growing industrial community, which included families and several manufacturers.<sup>385</sup> Baltic and Clyde Linenworks occupied approximately a half-mile of the street on which Johnston’s family lived, and Baltic Jute Company occupied the adjacent street. Further manufacturers (a cotton mill, an iron works, a pottery company, a gas works, a print and dye works, a carpet manufacturer, a brick works, and a water works) were within a half-mile radius of the Johnston home. Neighbouring street names evidence the region’s textile manufacturing roots, for example, Muslin Street. Indeed, Bridgeton’s east-end industrial community was founded on the textile trade in the late eighteenth century, in

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<sup>384</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/archive/84645285>>, [accessed 2 April 2018].

<sup>385</sup> John Bartholomew F.R.G.S., ‘New Plan of Glasgow with suburbs, from Ordnance and Actual Surveys, constructed for the Post Office Directory, 1892-93’, *Scottish Post Office Directories*, <<http://maps.nls.uk/view/109707740>>, [accessed 2 April 2018].

support of Glasgow's growing trade as the nation's second city for exports. By the nineteenth century, Bridgeton exported leather, carpets and textiles globally, and was considered the "The World's Greatest Engineering Centre."<sup>386</sup>

Local records from 1891-1892 document Johnston as being the "officer in charge of Bridgeton Police Office".<sup>387</sup> Furthermore, as Inspector of Police, Johnston would have been expected to uphold the civic virtue of his burgh. Both of his responsibilities placed Johnston in a prominent, authoritative position at work and within his locality.<sup>388</sup> It is difficult to confirm the reach of Johnston's authority at the time he wrote his elegy, as Bridgeton's population data for the period is not recorded. However, relevant 1891 data demonstrates that Bridgeton was a growing, industrially important, working-class municipal suburb, in which Johnston held a position of prominence.<sup>389</sup> While neither the population of Bridgeton nor the number of Bridgeton Police workers were recorded, Census Street Data shows that Baltic Street where Johnston lived held 863 residents in 1891.<sup>390</sup> Indeed, the Bridgeton suburb of Glasgow and its inhabitants are intertwined with industrial production. Yet, Johnston does not acknowledge this in his introduction to Hallam Tennyson, instead using lines 11-12 from Tennyson's 'Break, Break, Break' (1842).<sup>391</sup>

### Dedicated

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<sup>386</sup> 'Bridgeton Exhibition', *Glasgow City Heritage Trust*, <[www.glasgowheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Bridgeton-exhibition-pdf.pdf](http://www.glasgowheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Bridgeton-exhibition-pdf.pdf)>, [accessed 3 April 2018].

<sup>387</sup> 'New Plan of Glasgow with suburbs, from Ordnance and Actual Surveys', *Scottish Post Office Directories*, <<https://digital.nls.uk/directories/browse/archive/84645285>>, [accessed 2 April 2018].

<sup>388</sup> For more details about the developing social authority and respectability of Inspectors of Police in the nineteenth century, see: Neil Davidson, Louise A. Jackson and David M. Smale, 'Police Amalgamation and Reform in Scotland: The Long Twentieth Century', in *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 95 Issue 1, pp. 88-111, March 2016.

<sup>389</sup> Joan MacKenzie, 'The Highland Community in Glasgow in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Non-Assimilation', Thesis, University of Stirling, 1987, Fig. 8.2, p. 310, <<https://bit.ly/3ADPrbS>>, [accessed 2 June 2018].

<sup>390</sup> *1891 Street Census for Glasgow*, <[www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//research/census-records/street-indexes/1891/1891-glasgow.pdf](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//research/census-records/street-indexes/1891/1891-glasgow.pdf)>, p. 11, [accessed 8 April 2018].

<sup>391</sup> "And the stately ships go on / To their haven under the hill; / But O for the touch of a vanished hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still!" Alfred Tennyson, 'Break, Break, Break', ll 9-12.

To Lord Hallam Tennyson

In affectionate memory of his Father Lord Alfred Tennyson, Poet Laureate

“Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand”

“Or the sound of a voice that is still.”

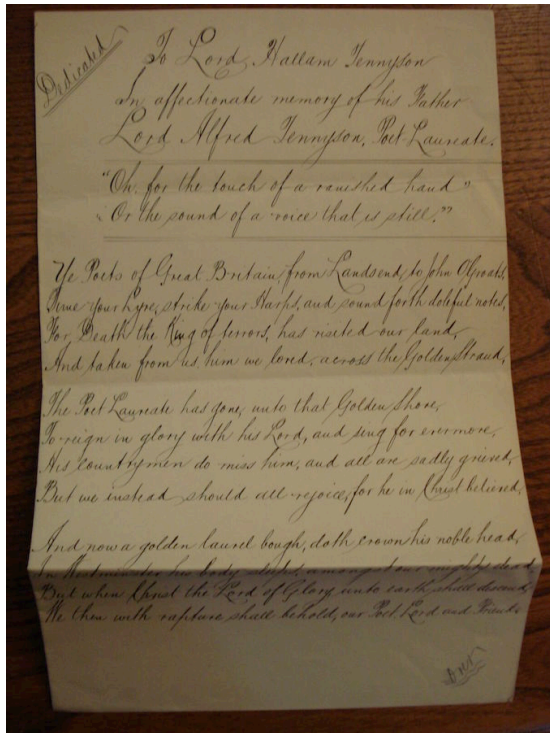


Fig. 20. Matthew Johnston, untitled, 31 October 1892, poem. Source: Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK. Photo: Jean-Marie Sherry, August 2013, with permission from the Tennyson Research Centre.

‘Break, Break, Break’ was Tennyson’s early elegy to Arthur Henry Hallam, in memory of Arthur’s 1833 sudden death in Vienna, and his body’s transport home by sea.<sup>392</sup> By prefacing

<sup>392</sup> The date of composition for *Break, Break, Break* is unconfirmed. Arthur Henry Hallam was buried in January 1834, but many of the works that comprise the two-volume poetry collection, published in 1842, were written shortly after Arthur’s death and burial (indeed, as well as many sections of *In Memoriam*). Christopher Ricks (1972) says: “In ‘Break, break, break’ (probably written in early 1834), there is an equanimity, a transparency, matched with a puzzling obliqueness of logic or argument[.] By the summer of 1834, Tennyson was entering upon the more serene manner . . . that would characterise the poems of 1835-7.” - Christopher Ricks. *Tennyson*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, [1972] 1989), pp. 133-134. Furthermore, the elegy falls within the so-called ‘decade of silence’ that followed Arthur’s death. During this period, Tennyson continued to write poetry, but did not publish until 1842. Peter M. Sacks (1985) elaborates: “It was (Arthur) Hallam who had written the brilliant and sympathetic review of Tennyson’s early poems in 1831 and who had continued to appreciate and find publishers for his friend’s work at a time when Tennyson felt most crushed by his hostile critics. The influential Lockhart and Croker had abused the Poems of 1832, and even though Tennyson wrote some of his finest poems in 1833, he would not publish another volume until 1842. According to his son, Tennyson “was so far persuaded that the English people would never care for his

his elegy with these two verses, Johnston offers Tennyson's words to Hallam as a source of comfort. Yet in his own poem, he neither adopts the poem's irregular, but roughly anapestic trimeter in ABCB rhyme, nor its melancholy nature. Instead, Johnston's elegy offers rhyming couplets and an ultimately celebratory tone:

Ye Poets of Great Britain from Landsend to John O'Groats  
Chime your Lyre, strike your Harps, and sound forth doleful notes.  
For Death the King of terrors, has visited our land,  
And taken from us him we loved, across the Golden Strand.  
The Poet Laureate has gone unto that Golden Shore,  
To reign in glory with his Lord, and sing for evermore  
His countrymen do miss him, and all are sadly grieved,  
But we instead should all rejoice, for he in Christ believed.<sup>393</sup>

Johnston's couplets are loosely structured in iambic heptameter. However, its effect evokes the ballad tradition. Although ballads are often in common meter consisting of quatrains of iambic lines, alternating tetrameter and trimeter – if heard in song or recitation, they sound similar to the iambic heptameter of couplets that Johnston employed in his elegy. Despite the irregularities in their meter and feet, Johnston's lines read as fourteeners. If recited or sung, these would be heard as seven-foot couplets, as Johnston's original composition is written:

**Ye Poets of Great Britain from Landsend to John O'Groats** (Iambic heptameter,  
fourteen syllables)

**Chime your Lyre, strike your Harps, and sound forth doleful notes.** (Trochaic  
heptameter, twelve syllables)

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poetry, that, had it not been for the intervention of his friends, he declared it not unlikely that after the death of Hallam he would not have continued to write." Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (New York: Macmillan, 1897) Vol. 1, p. 97, quoted in *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Peter M. Sacks (ed), (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 170.

<sup>393</sup> Matthew Johnston, untitled, 31 October 1892, poem, ll. 1-8, TRC, UK.

For **Death** the **King** of terrors, has **vis-i-ted** our **land**, (Iambic hexameter, thirteen syllables)

And **taken from** us **him** we **loved**, **across** the **Golden Strand**. (Iambic heptameter, fourteen syllables)

Johnston's elegy therefore appears to be adapted from the common meter of the ballad stanza. This is important, because Johnston's compositional decisions suggest that his influence came from the oral tradition of ballads. This, in turn suggests that Johnston may have participated in these traditions within his community. Indeed, when presented orally, the common meter presents the meter of a fourteener and the *AABB* rhyme for the listener. For example, 'Amazing Grace', written in 1779 by English poet and Anglican clergyman John Newton in 1779, employs the common meter in *ABAB* rhyme – but when sung, could be heard as a fourteener in *AABB*:

**Amazing grace!** How **sweet** the **sound** / That **saved** a **wretch** like **me!**

**I once** was **lost**, but **now** am **found**; / Was **blind**, but **now** I **see**.<sup>394</sup>

While Johnston's poem is structurally rooted in the common meter of the ballad tradition, it also loosely resembles the irregular ballad structure and narrative content of Scottish muckle songs – another ballad form from the oral tradition. David Hopkin, Valentina Bold, and David Morrison explain that the distinction between the content within “the more homely ‘broadsides’ about sailors’ homecomings, rustic love and urban poverty” and the ‘muckle songs’ is that the latter were “concerned with royalty, nobility, war, tragedy, and the supernatural.”<sup>395</sup> In particular, Johnston's narrative focus on Tennyson's nobility and

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<sup>394</sup> John Newton, 'Amazing Grace', 1779.

<sup>395</sup> David Hopkin, Valentina Bold, and David Morrison (eds), 'Introduction: Broadside Ballads and the Oral Tradition', <[https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow\\_broadside\\_ballads/introduction\\_broadside\\_ballads\\_.htm](https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/~dumfries/files/layer2/glasgow_broadside_ballads/introduction_broadside_ballads_.htm)>, [accessed 22 May 2018].

morality appears to reflect the muckle sangs' traditional subjects such as royalty, nobility, and bravery.<sup>396</sup> Johnston's poem opens with a call to 'Ye Poets of Great Britain' and asks them to play music (1 – 2) to accompany a tale of the noble dead (Lord Tennyson) (9 – 10):

Ye Poets of Great Britain from Landsend to John O'Groats  
Chime your Lyre, strike your Harps, and sound forth doleful notes.  
For Death the King of terrors, has visited our land,  
And taken from us him we loved, across the Golden Strand.  
...  
And now a golden laurel bough, doth crown his noble head,  
In Westminster his body sleeps amongst our mighty dead.<sup>397</sup>

Although the meter, stanza and content of Johnston's poem therefore appears to follow both the printed and oral tradition of ballads, his use of couplets and the content of his poem also loosely follow Classical elegiac conventions. This includes calling to muses; the sounds of lyres and harps; a procession of mourners; an accusation of a deity for causing a death; and a final consolation. As we've seen, Johnston's opening stanza calls to the nation's poets to mark Tennyson's death with a din of music from lyres and harps and accuses the "King of terrors" of robbing the nation of a loved one.<sup>398</sup>

Although Classical elegies traditionally included processions of mourners and/or the natural world joining together to grieve, the content of Johnston's elegy demonstrates differing layers of communal mourning. Johnston's first two verses call to poets to join together, but they indicate that Poets are of a population separate from himself: 'Ye Poets . . . Chime *your* Lyre, strike *your* Harps'. His next two verses suggest that both the poets *and* his

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<sup>396</sup> See, for example, 'King Estmere', in Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Volume 2, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), p. 60. Attributed to *Percy's Reliques*, edition of 1794, stanza I, l. 64; and *Reliques*, edition of 1765, stanza I, l. 58.

<sup>397</sup> Johnston, ll. 1-4, 9-10.

<sup>398</sup> King James Bible, Job 18:14: "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors."



countrymen are joined in communal mourning: ‘Death . . . has visited *our* land . . . (a)nd taken from *us* him *we* loved.’

The second stanza idealises Tennyson as reigning ‘with his Lord’ – not simply joining his Lord, but *reigning*, suggesting that the deceased Poet Laureate is now both royal and divine. The stanza furthermore involves both music and immortality, with Tennyson now singing eternally. It acknowledges the communal grief of his countrymen, then offers consolation through Tennyson’s faith. This is a cause for celebration (which we have also seen with Collins and Hann):

The Poet Laureate has gone unto that Golden Shore,  
To reign in glory with his Lord, and sing for evermore  
His countrymen do miss him, and all are sadly grieved,  
But we instead should all rejoice, for he in Christ believed.<sup>399</sup>

The third stanza again elevates Tennyson in terms of Classical tradition, as seen with the poets’ crown of laurel. Although Tennyson’s body ‘sleeps amongst our mighty dead’, the stanza simultaneously idealises Tennyson in religious terms, envisioning Tennyson appearing alongside ‘Christ the Lord of Glory’ as his countrymen raptly watch:

And now a golden laurel bough, doth crown his noble head,  
In Westminster his body sleeps amongst our mighty dead.  
But when Christ the Lord of Glory, unto earth shall descend,  
We then with rapture shall behold, our Poet, Lord and Friend.<sup>400</sup>

As ‘Poet’ and ‘Lord’, in the context of his previous lines, Tennyson is distant, idealised, and holy. Tennyson is both at a distance from and simultaneously near to Johnston’s countrymen,

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<sup>399</sup> Johnston, ll. 5-8.

<sup>400</sup> Johnston, ll. 9-12.

by asserting he is ‘our Poet, Lord and Friend’. Although poets are part of Johnston’s community of mourners, they are ‘other’ to him, and of sufficient social distance that they must be called to in terms of ‘you’ and ‘your’. By contrast, Tennyson is ‘our’ poet – the country’s poet.

By calling Tennyson ‘Lord’ in this instance, Johnston is now referring to Tennyson’s aristocracy, again suggesting the distances between Johnston, his countrymen, and the aristocracy. But Lord Tennyson is also our friend. His status (poet) and title (Lord) are equal to his role as a friend, which places him as a member of Johnston’s community.

The fourth and final stanza refers to muses in a Classical fashion. They call to and instruct poets (brethren of the muses nine) to cease their mourning; and offers the immortality of Tennyson’s words as a final consolation. But here we also have a final assertion of Tennyson’s role in relation to his countrymen: he is ‘our father’:

So brethren of the muses nine, wipe all your tears away,  
For though our father Tennyson, is gone from us today,  
The noble works he’s written, for all times shall endure,  
And may we too, like unto him, make our election pure.<sup>401</sup>

Matthew Johnston doesn’t simply allude to Tennyson’s paternal role. He states it clearly: “our father Tennyson, is gone from us today”. Like Paul Hann and Anonymous, Johnston is also asserting that Tennyson is immortal through his ‘noble’ poetry, and that Tennyson’s works will eternally impart his guidance and lessons. Thus, as seen with Hann and Anonymous, Johnston refers to Tennyson as a spiritual father who provides continued moral leadership. The final line instructs us to follow his guidance regarding faith and conduct and

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<sup>401</sup> Johnston, ll. 13-16.

make similarly ‘pure’ decisions – clear indications of Tennyson being presented as a paterfamilias.

Considering Johnston’s dedication to Hallam Tennyson, ‘In affectionate memory of his Father Lord Alfred Tennyson, Poet Laureate’, Johnston may be suggesting that Hallam is included as a brother amongst mourners, countrymen and poets. The elegy opens in memory of *his* (Hallam’s) *Father Lord Alfred Tennyson*; and closes with the conclusion that *our father Tennyson* has left *us* – suggesting Tennyson is father to all. Johnston has added a nuance with the capital F for Hallam’s Father. Whether Johnston has capitalised the letter F for Father in a form of deference, or in religious terms (e.g., Holy Father) is uncertain. However, he explicitly depicts Tennyson as father to a brotherhood of communal mourners.

Johnston calls to the country’s poets in terms of exaltation as “Ye poets of Great Britain” and “brethren of the muses nine”. Yet, the poets are regarded as his countrymen. This context and his choice to include Classical elegiac elements within his piece implies a self-identification with both the country’s poets (even whilst using ‘othering’ terminology, e.g., *ye* poets, as opposed to *we* poets) and with unnamed distant countrymen—rather than with a community of physical or professional proximity. His elegy also notably refers to *countrymen* and *brethren* of the muses nine. Although it is possible that his terminology is simply the result of hegemonic masculinity in the English language, his words convey masculine grief and condolence.

The patriarchal language of Johnston’s elegy is surprisingly disconnected from his decision to exclude his associations with his policing community and his working-class burgh. Indeed, Johnston would have worked his way through the policing ranks, and undoubtedly spent time among local fraternities of working men. When Johnston concludes

his elegy with a brief note of religious condolence to Hallam Tennyson, his signature is the only instance where his implied links to professional and regional communities are included:

And may God bless and comfort you, and  
Your dear Mother, in your great Bereavement,  
Is the earnest and heartfelt prayer of my Lord,  
Your Lordship's obedient servant,

Matthew Johnston  
Inspector of Police  
Bridgeton Glasgow

Johnston elected not to identify his working counterparts in isolation from the mourning public. Instead, he refers to his community by writing on behalf of all countrymen. For Johnston, communal expressions of mourning take place through the tears and music of the brotherhood of poets as they play their lyres and harps. The image evokes the Classical elegiac tradition of lyres; the Christian religious tradition of angels with harps; and the combined verses of poets, suggesting the music of a band and the songs of voice choirs. In addition to church choirs, pipe and drum bands, brass bands, and male voice choirs were commonplace in the industrial and colliery communities of mid- and late-nineteenth-century Great Britain.<sup>402</sup>

As seen in the analysis of Johnston's meters, the communal image Johnston creates is suggested through echoes of the oral tradition of ballads. This poetic structure, along with his promise to sing about Tennyson, evokes a church congregation singing hymns; or the male voice choirs seen in the various industrial regions in the late 1800s Great Britain, such as Yorkshire, Durham, Wales, and Glasgow (the latter of which had its roots in the morally

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<sup>402</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*, (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 303.

motivated Temperance Movement).<sup>403</sup> As also seen with Paul Hann, Johnston attests that Tennyson's immortality is retained through communal songs, while comfort is found by following Tennyson's lead in religious instruction, moral conduct and faith in the afterlife – and its promise of reunion.

Being among Glasgow's leaders and in a position of authority, in a modest but middle-class position of employment, the moral intonations of Matthew Johnston's elegy can be viewed as more than those of condolence: Johnston is asserting his status of leadership and authority. As the head of his police station in charge of his workplace community, he is head of his 'household' of employees: a paterfamilias role to his men. He is perhaps imparting this social status to Hallam by including his role in his signature. Unlike the correspondence from J Brown and Paul Hann, Matthew Johnston's note of condolence does not suggest deference. Rather, he is asserting his own respectability through his moral leadership of both his police force and the 'brethren' of poets.

As the 'father' of his primarily labouring-class community, and through his official role, Johnston would have held an elevated position over the rest of this working-class community. However, his community's associations with working men's clubs suggest the likely social and male working communities that may have influenced his compositional decisions. Johnston's verses—with their complex associations combining biblical influences, elegiac traditions, and likely roots in the oral tradition—demonstrate that he employed the theme of the paterfamilias to function as a consistent thread by which he articulates the Poet Laureate's physical death and literary and spiritual immortality. By aligning himself with a venerable class of poets, Johnston portrays "Father Tennyson" as the paterfamilias to himself, the community of poets, and the nation's mourners.

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, as Paul Hann and Matthew Johnston each demonstrate, Tennyson's metaphorical, paternal, familial and community roles provided amateur poets with language by which to verbalise their grief or offer consolation. They further assert their own social and community roles, both factual and metaphorical—as brethren, children, pupils, and fathers—to position their social 'family' as communal defenders of traditions in order to prevent the 'death of poetry'.

## Conclusion

Following Tennyson's death on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892, a nationwide sense of loss compelled the British Victorian public to write to Tennyson's family as part of the countrywide acts of mass mourning. The Tennyson Research Centre archive revealed that in addition to the condolence correspondence from societal elites such as Queen Victoria, hundreds of working-class and non-elite individuals from the Victorian public also chose to write commemorative letters and memorial poetry to Tennyson's family. From the archive's corpus of unpublished and previously unknown correspondence, I made a selection which particularly emphasises these working-class and non-elite responses. This thesis drew from this selection of unpublished, handwritten poems and condolence letters in order to understand Victorian mourning culture, the broader societal, cultural, and literary influences on British Victorians, and Tennyson's place within these cultural considerations.

Although virtually all of the verses studied here could have been dismissed as repetitive platitudes of sympathy, and mere preservations of the old ways, this study shows that the death correspondents were actively reflecting upon and communicating about their changing society, and the impact this had on family, community, work, literacy, and literature at the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, the correspondence reveals nuanced information about tradition, literacy, community, and family at the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, and the interplay across these cultural categories.

The poets examined in this thesis originate from diverse individual circumstances. They include Alice Godwin, a 26-year-old domestic servant for a Kew household, who adapts 'Crossing the Bar' in two separate poems to envision Tennyson's death and ascension to heaven; S. Gertrude Ford, a 15-year-old girl from a family of woolen mill workers, who mourned in 'mutual sisterhood' with Emily Tennyson; and Matilda M. Collins, an 89-year-old retired headmistress from Bath, and Paul Hann, a widowed 60-year-old stonemason, who

both employed biblical imagery to represent Tennyson as an archetype of paternal morality and a communal remembrance.

### **Education, reading, and literary tropes**

Despite the variety of personalities, ages and educational opportunities, the breadth of correspondence nonetheless demonstrates common reading influences and literary tropes. Complicating the public's need to immortalise Tennyson through verse were historically persistent impediments for the working classes and poor to access or sustain formal education compared to that which middle-, upper-, and elite classes experienced, particularly secondary or tertiary education. By examining the varieties of education available to the poor, working-class, lower-middle-class, and middle-class communities that are represented in this study – in conjunction with the analysis of this previously unresearched poetry – this research provides new opportunities for understanding non-elite education, literacy, and cultural influences. These poems and letters demonstrate the ways in which working-class and poor people put their often-limited educational opportunities to use, and what they were able to achieve with their limited resources.

The correspondents draw upon and employ a wide range of literary forms and images to convey their responses to Tennyson's death, including elegiac conventions, Biblical imagery, adaptations of Tennyson's own poetry, Arthurian themes, and popular oral forms, such as ballad and hymn. In doing so, they demonstrate the various educational opportunities that were available to the working-class and middle-class populations throughout the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, their literary decisions reflect their reading habits, and demonstrate how reading influenced working-class and non-elite culture in general.

Despite the increased access to education by the *fin de siècle*, whether auto-didactic or through formal schooling, even the death correspondents who possessed sufficient abilities



and interests to participate in the mass-mourning act of writing condolence correspondence may have faced impediments to compose their verses. This included overcrowded homes creating a lack of privacy, such as the ‘wife of a working man’ Annie Martell, writing from her busy Kilburn home with 10 additional family members. There was the challenge of insufficient time, such as John Brown may have experienced when working long hours in a Dovenby coal mine. Other obstacles might be a lack of access to sufficient writing materials, including Kew domestic servant Alice Godwin, who wrote her two poems on plain paper with watered-down ink – verses that she appears to have written a single draft, complete with errors and annotations, all of which indicate the need to be frugal with her paper and ink.

Further complicating these barriers was the comparatively high cost that Tennyson’s books of poetry commanded. Blair states that “for most working-class readers contemporary Victorian poetry was unaffordable.” Blair cites Gerald Massey, “one of Tennyson’s most ardent lower-class supporters” (1851) who stated, in part, that “Tennyson is least known among [the lower classes]. . . . There are thousands who have heard or read his ‘May Queen,’ . . . [with] no further knowledge of his works: and thousands have never heard of him.” Massey blames the costs: while Shakespeare cost 4s, “the works of Tennyson will cost me 20s.”<sup>404</sup> However, the breadth of poetic compositions analysed here demonstrates that the correspondents persevered with reading despite obstacles. We can often see reflections of their reading habits through their writing.

The death correspondence identifies that newspapers were, unsurprisingly, the most common reading materials at the time of Tennyson’s death, and this thesis argues that the press strongly informed many of their poems. The correspondents interpreted newspaper

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<sup>404</sup> Gerald Massey, ‘Tennyson and His Poetry, I’, in *The Christian Socialist* (20 August 1851), cited in Kirstie Blair, ‘Men my Brothers, Men the Workers’, author’s draft article, 2009, p. 13.

illustrations and articles relating to the death and burial as a way to reflect upon their roles within the nation's mass mourning. As described in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the death notices from Tennyson's doctors Dabbs and Clark presented a 'good death' scenario. Clark's press statement imagined Tennyson's death as a moonlit scene, which particularly informed newspaper articles and illustrations. These press sources subsequently influenced the language that Tennyson's readers used, as seen with death correspondents Eleanor Henry, Gladys Fanquier, Alice Godwin, and James Joseph Barrett.

Others used the press reports and illustrations to visualise the final moments of Tennyson's life, doing so in order to imagine sentimentalised versions of women's domestic roles within the perfect home. As seen in Chapter 2, the nineteen-year-old collier John Brown designs Tennyson's deathbed as an exemplar of a wife's attendance at her husband's good death, while envisioning his own future ideal death: "I trust that when I am called from earth / my end may be like his, / Calm and filled with holy peace / thus ebbd away his life / from the watchful care of her he loved / A true devoted wife."<sup>405</sup> While it is may be most straightforward to consider that the death correspondents were simply retelling a mythologised version of Tennyson's death and the national mourning aftermath as a first-person observer, I conclude that these writers were also simultaneously and consciously inserting themselves into private family moments in order to devise individual relationships with Tennyson.

The varied meters and disparate contents of the poems within this study reveal the influence of both oral and written traditions on the compositions of the death correspondents. Through these clues, this research demonstrates that Victorian working-class and poor correspondents actively pursued reading and writing, and shows the ways in which their

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<sup>405</sup> Brown, ll. 15-20.

individual roles within their communities may have impacted upon their writing. Some of their poetic compositions may have resulted from amateur reworkings of poetic traditions that contained repeated tropes (e.g., laurel wreaths, a poet's immortality, etc). Deeper analyses of this correspondence and its authors, for the first time in 130 years, shows that while the death correspondents' influences and compositions were as individual as the people who wrote them, they nonetheless shared themes of kinship, community, and tradition.

### **Kinship**

I have demonstrated that, within the correspondence of mourning and condolence, Victorians from across the classes used the language of kinship—sometimes directly, sometimes metaphorically—when writing to the Tennyson family. In some cases, individuals possessively claimed that Tennyson was their own (see S. Gertrude Ford and Fanny Edge). These authors used language suggesting that they were mourning Tennyson as an object of unrequited love or as a husband so that they communicated grief in the language of widowhood. In other cases, Tennyson is claimed for the wider cultural 'family' and members of a local community (see Paul Hann and Matthew Johnston). These latter writers commonly view Tennyson in language that is imbued with nuanced themes of fatherhood – whether Tennyson is a spiritual father to his readers, or a brethren of the wider population that honours their Father/God. From these recurrent tropes of domesticity—including marital, paternal, and sibling—cultural patterns emerged. These included elevated, spiritual domesticity, such as queenly wives, blessed widowhood and spiritual fatherhood; and claiming Tennyson as a member of a cultural 'family'. Across this body of correspondence, the ways in which Tennyson 'belonged' to his readers is demonstrated across the different classes. This suggests some of the ways in which a national figure such as Tennyson functioned as a symbol of national unity. The correspondents' verses communicated the

importance of kin and community uniting to mourn for a male figurehead, typically conveying themes of fatherhood. These include creating a version of Tennyson as the paterfamilias ('Fatherhood of God'), as exemplified by the stonemason Paul Hann, who renders Tennyson as a departed father but attests that his spiritual children will continue their prayers (Tennyson's influence) through song. As Tosh states, "the Victorian era was one of strengthened paternal moral authority" with Evangelical fathers in particular spending considerable time in prayer with their children as part of their main spiritual duty.<sup>406</sup> Death correspondents such as Paul Hann and Glasgow Inspector of Police Matthew Johnston employed their verses to reinforce the paternal authority as an embodiment of the ideal Victorian home. Others, including 10-year-old Jessie Hadley and 81-year-old Eleanor Henry, mythologise Tennyson as the Poet King, an additional metaphor for a father's authority. Indeed, although Hann specifically refers to the Poet Laureate as 'Father Tennyson', these words alone do not communicate concepts of a father's role in the Victorian household. The family and community remembrance is the key to Tennyson's immortality and to retaining the moral values he represented.

Eleanor Henry and S. Gertrude Ford allude to Emily's self-sacrifice for the betterment of her husband's ambitions. This reflects both the nineteenth-century notion of a wife's idealised domestic role, and incorporates the intertwining of marital roles for the betterment of a husband's ambitions—as seen in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Through the examination of these verses, this study is able to demonstrate that these death correspondents were communicating paternal roles in varying contexts of their homes, regions, and nation, in order to find comfort in retaining the social morality they feared losing.

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<sup>406</sup> Tosh, p. 90.

Women death correspondents in particular claimed to share Emily Tennyson's grief, which they utilised to engineer brief and often one-way opportunities for communication in a form of 'sisterhood'. I contend that they did so, in part, by applying notions of a wife's service to her husband. As Queen Victoria demonstrated in her condolence letter to Mary Todd Lincoln, the counterpart to women's shared grief is the notion of sisterhood in grief. S. Gertrude Ford describes herself and Emily together as "Sisters in mutual love and suffering." Mary Gaddess, "a weary hearted woman, from afar . . . Sends greetings to another lonely heart" (Lady Emily Tennyson). Gaddess acknowledges their lack of acquaintance but concludes that this is irrelevant in the context of their shared mourning: "What matter that the Oceans intervene – / And we each others [sic] faces have not seen. / You mourn a Husband, gone beyond love's call; / And we, a Poet, sweetest of them all."<sup>407</sup> Gaddess tactfully confirms that 'we' mourn Tennyson as the poet, while acting as the appropriate spokesperson of this shared emotion as 'another lonely heart'.

This study further demonstrates that women—from a poor homemaker to the Queen—interpreted and adapted existing social mourning constructs; doing so to devise language of kin and community bonds between widows. Indeed, the death correspondence shows that within the extreme circumstance of an idealised husband's death, some degree of class hierarchy appears to be temporarily suspended within the context of condolence correspondence and elegy composition. This briefly permitted women to offer Lady Emily Tennyson language of unusual intimacy, regardless of their classes. I contend that this mutual 'sisterhood' between real and metaphorical 'widows' briefly enabled literate women of all classes to join in a fabricated but superficially acceptable version of kinship through correspondence.

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<sup>407</sup> Gaddess, ll. 3-6.

## Community and Tradition

As the death correspondents participated in the national, collective act of mourning, they both consciously and subconsciously joined together as communities, which included the ‘kin’ of the Tennyson family and the ‘community’ of other mourners. Building on Barbara H. Rosenwein’s 2006 theory of emotional communities, in which individuals who share an emotional experience and culture form a community based on emotional responses, although they may be unacquainted with its individuals,<sup>408</sup> I contend that the widely published memorials, news features, and illustrations in newspapers and magazines;<sup>409</sup> and the public events surrounding Tennyson’s funeral at Westminster Abbey—for which souvenirs and pamphlets were sold, and tickets were issued, for which 11,000 people applied—increased the death correspondents’ consciousness that they belonged to a wider population of mourners.

Indeed, as described in Chapter 3, some of the death correspondents made a point to identify their social status, occupation, or age. I contend that these writers often did so to show Tennyson’s significance to their social class and cultural communities, as seen with J Brown, “a young gardner”; Paul Hann, the stonemason who self-identifies as “a working man”, and Annie Martell, “the wife of a working man”. Martell’s letter that accompanies her poem asks Hallam Tennyson to consider the impact his father’s works have had on “one of England’s poor”, immediately placing herself within a community of the poor. By investigating the death correspondents’ lives, where possible, we have been able to plausibly identify their literary influences and their societal and economic living conditions to provide valuable contexts to the contents of—and their decisions behind—their written verses. In

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<sup>408</sup> Rosenwein, pp. 163-189.

<sup>409</sup> Between 6-12 October 1892, approximately 290 articles relating to Tennyson’s death and/or funeral were published in British newspapers. See: *The British Newspaper Archive* <<https://bit.ly/3nPXHCd>>, [accessed 26 April 2016].

these instances, the death correspondents' personal information provides additional cultural contexts to the communal language contained within their poetry, thus contributing a valuable body of original working-class writing to the growing scholarly field of working-class literature.

Others imply their social sphere through their poetry, rather than through autobiographical details within their introductions or signatures and do so as a means to include Tennyson as a member of their communities. For example, 'HM' renders Tennyson as a friend to all members of society, but without disclosing details about their own social sphere. HM writes: "All degrees and rank and station more or less will mourn thine end / And will feelingly acknowledge that the world has lost a friend."<sup>410</sup> For HM, class is irrelevant. The loss of Tennyson unites the world as one community.

### **Tradition: Anxiety and Preservation**

As death correspondents recreated themselves and Tennyson as united members of wider cultural communities, their verses often focus upon family, nation, and unity. Particularly when writing from a communal stance, the death correspondents frequently address various kinds of broader cultural anxieties regarding tradition and their perception that both poetry and moral values were in decline. Yet, simultaneously, some of the correspondents appear to be challenging these very traditions and embracing emerging social opportunities in late-Victorian society.

While Tennyson's physical death provided the correspondents with a *reason* to write, his death also created a fear of a cultural, literary, and moral vacuum. Regardless of their social class or education, the correspondence demonstrates that the death generated literal and

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<sup>410</sup> H.M., 'Lines on the late Lord Tennyson', undated (c.1892), poem, stanza 3, ll. 3-4, TRC, UK.

symbolic anxieties for the public. This was largely owing to their perception that poetry, morality, and tradition had died along with Tennyson. This view provided many death correspondents with an urgency to write, often doing so to create Tennyson's symbolic immortality in order to preserve these traditions.

Building on studies of Tennyson's celebrity prominence in the nineteenth century by scholars such as Samantha Matthews, Charlotte Boyce, and John Morton, I conclude that as they mourned and contemplated the death, Tennyson's readers equally conveyed a sense of grief caused by their perceived concomitant loss of national, moral, and literary traditions. The anxieties associated with the loss of a moral figurehead such as Tennyson for the primarily conservative, traditional, and often nationalistic British Victorians in this study suggest that their individual or communal loss of Tennyson induced trepidation for perishing traditions and the demise of Christian virtues.

Although the poems studied here regularly employed elegiac conventions, such as Tennyson producing songs with a lyre and serving as a Bardic teacher—and these conventions underscored Tennyson's role and significance within British society. The role of 'Poet Laureate to His/Her Majesty', by its appointment and title, naturally carried a position of status that linked literary 'genius' with royalty.

The death correspondents prominently incorporated themes of Christianity, chivalry, myths and legends, nation, and belonging, adapting a range of literature, newspapers, and biblical tales to do so. This includes fifty-one-year-old John Develin from Dublin, who states that Tennyson was a "bold Defender of the Christian Faith / For God, Queen, Country; firm, inviolate."<sup>411</sup> As police inspector Matthew Johnston showed, their works further function as a deliberate means to provide Tennyson with a form of immortality by defending the traditions

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<sup>411</sup> Develin, ll. 29-30.



he symbolised and by singing “of thy goodness” – demonstrating that that at the time of his death, Tennyson functioned for many of his readers as a symbol of tradition in its various forms.

Simultaneously, the correspondence reveals contradictory societal tensions. While many of the correspondents grieved the end of a moral era that was preserved through traditions, some also interpreted Tennyson’s death as an opportunity to challenge past customs. Working-class writers used deferential language, but also hinted at an emerging equality. Some did so by communicating poet to poet (or poet to poet’s family) – such as Annie Martell, the “wife of a working man [and] one of England’s poor”, who signs her poem: “Your obedient Servant, The Composer, Annie Martell.” Like Tennyson, composing forms her identity despite her poverty, thus connecting her with Tennyson. Others adopt submissive language, but also communicate as an equal to Emily – such as working-class fifteen-year-old S. Gertrude Ford. Ford deferentially writes: “Dear Lady . . . To thee I humbly offer – Sympathy” while also claiming that they are “Sisters in mutual love and suffering.”

These shared themes and experiences, along with their counterpart contradictions, provide us with a unique understanding of Victorian life at the *fin de siècle*. While responses to Tennyson’s death form the primary focus of this thesis, these letters and poems reveal significantly more about Victorian society and culture.

My analysis of both repeated compositional patterns and anomalies within the death correspondence exposes paradoxes within the rapidly changing society in the late nineteenth century. For many writers, the death of Tennyson revealed a perceived gap in moral leadership, which yielded distress about the path society would henceforth follow. This anxiety, in turn, influenced writers to compose testimonials to assure Tennyson’s family – and themselves – that they will retain the traditions and morality Tennyson imparted, in order

to preserve past conventions and to provide him with moral and literary immortality. Some mythologised or valorised the Poet Laureate and Emily Tennyson to epitomise gendered societal and domestic conventions. Others concluded that poetry had perished with Tennyson.

As domestic servant Elizabeth Cookson summarises:

This lyre that turned so sweet and high  
Is mute – hangs idle on the wall,  
Its severed chords the hand can tie  
The world is poorer that is all.<sup>412</sup>

This thesis therefore shows that for some Victorians, Tennyson was more than a celebrity poet. Many took the notion more deeply by including Tennyson as a member of their own varied communities. This interpretation of Tennyson and the impact of his death provided the correspondents with the opportunity to reflect on the varying nature of family and community – such as Inspector of Police Matthew Johnston, who assures his ‘family’ (the brethren of poets) that the works of “our father Tennyson” will endure; and looks forward to his ‘community’ seeing “our Poet, Lord and Friend” in the afterlife.

The correspondence demonstrates that Tennyson’s death symbolised a juncture of change for many Victorians. The death of the Poet Laureate created a period of rumination about their ‘present’, in which they mourned the poet’s mortality along with the myriad of conceptual, symbolic, and psychological losses that they associated with his life and his work. This interval of mourning encouraged Victorians to reflect upon past customs, often conveying that tradition had collapsed. Simultaneously, they envisaged their futures,

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<sup>412</sup> Cookson, ll. 19-24.

contemplating the post-Tennyson era as an opportunity to challenge conventions and welcome the developing possibilities for equality in their society.

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## Appendices: Cited poems

Full transcriptions; list of poets transcribed; poet data.

### Appendix 1. Anonymous. 'Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam, Oct 6<sup>th</sup>, 1892'

4 November, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Farewell, great poet; last of Spencer's [sic] stately line,

A proud & fond adieu, not funeral dirge, be thine;

Thy heart is still, thy sweet, poetic soul hath fled,

But great Tennyson, the Laureate, is not dead. 4

Like to thine own ideal knight;

Thou sought for aye to the Holy Grail,

Thy blest reward can never fail.

Farewell, a loyal nation mourns thee – 8

Whom we, on earth, no more shall see;

Whose songs through all the land have rung,

The sweetest songs which man e'er sung. 11

**Appendix 2. A Chambers. ‘Lines on the death of Alfred Lord Tennyson Poet Laureate’.**

October 25th, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Crown him with laurel metely

In moonlight lying sweetly

Song hushed in death completely

While England’s tears flow fleetly 4

Now sung in heavenly metre

All earth’s sweet sound seems sweeter

His tunefulness completer\*

Lay down your wreaths before him 8

On Britain’s earth that bore him

For Britain’s sons deplore him

Wrap close her ensign o’er him

Oct 25-92

A Chambers

The writer will feel pleased [sic]

### Appendix 3. Fanny Edge. Untitled.

Undated (c. 1892). Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln.

He has left the Crown of laurel,

The Crown of light to wear.

He has left his post of honor [sic]

For a higher one up there. 4

But down the countless ages,

His place can ne'er be filled.

None can turn words to music,

like the voice that now is stilled. 8

O' great and mighty Poet,

Thou'st [sic] living, thou'st [sic] not dead

Thou canst not die, while time shall not

Thy glories shall be read. 12

I wonder what thou'st doing,

Up in the Heavenly clime,

Art thou writing wondrous poetry

Art thou penning promise & glory 16

Thou shalt make high Heaven ring.

Art thou writing hymns & and sonnets

For the Angels bright to sing?

Oh! thou [unknown] Poet. 20

Oh! canst thy talent shown,

And let him wear thy mantle.

If he must wear thy crown

Can no one write with able pen 24

To give our hearts relief.

A fitting "In Memoriam"

To tell the nation's grief.

No one can write to [tell?] thy end 28

As thou wrote on thy much loved Friend.

My own beloved Poet,

My hero great and grand,

Oh that before God took you, 32

I might have grasped your hand.

I should have committed [sic] it to me,

The greatest honor [sic] sent

Or to have gazed upon thy face, 36

I should have been content.

And my heart is full of sadness,

But oh I think with pride,

I belong to the same Nation, 40

As my Hero greatest, who died.

And down the countless ages,

In every Land and State,

No Poet e'er shall get compare [sic] 44

With "Tennyson The Great."

**Appendix 4. S. Gertrude Ford. Untitled.**

Undated (c. 1892). Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

To Lady Tennyson

Dear Lady, here my tenderest sympathy

To thee I humbly offer – Sympathy

Unlike to Pity cold and negligent,

Who oftentimes, where she most desires to heal, 4

Succeeds but in inflicting deeper wounds.

But heavenly Sympathy, whose sweet sad eyes

Are always jewelled with the pearls of tears,

And whose fair form in vestal white is robed, 8

Upon the rankling smart of aching hearts

Lays soothing blam with hands whose cool, soft touch

Is in itself a remedy. And she,

My chosen messenger, now comes to thee. 12

O hear her speak! O let her tell to thee

The love and grief which she best express!

She says, her voice's melody subdued

To whispering accents, tremulously soft, 16

My message well delivering to thine ear:

“I loved him too! I loved him passing well

Long years ago, although I knew him not. 20

Thy loss is therefore mine, as mine is thine,

Thine greater of the two, exceeding far

The woe of others by his death bereaved,

In that thou, knowing him so long and well, 24

(Thy love of him proportioned equally

To that sweet knowledge) thus the more must weep

For him whom all his country mourns to-day, 28

Conscious of what in him the world has lost;

And mine the greater, in that never once

I, loving him so dearly, saw his face, –

Sisters in mutual love and suffering we. 32

Ah, dearest Lady, scarce I can forbear

From envying thee, and everyone whose heart

To his was closely linked by Love’s bright chains!

Yet therefore do I pity such the more, 36



Since Time has brought for such a deeper love  
For him who now in realms unknown abides,  
And, with that love, a stronger sense of loss  
Attendant on his sweet translation hence. 40

Now may I speak (for speech can yield relief)  
Of mine own suffering, and reveal to thee  
How fully I can share the heavy cross  
Which God has on thy tender shoulders laid? 44

So mayest thou, perchance, awhile forget  
Thy sorrow, musing on another's pain.

I never saw him. No – these eyes of mine 48  
Have never gazed on that bright countenance,

Majestic with a lordliest intellect,  
And radiant with a spirit half divine,  
Lending to it a pure and lustrous light; 52

These ears of mine have never heard entranced  
The deep melodious music of his voice;

These lips have never told him all the love,  
The tender, reverential adoration, 56

Which I to him, and him alone, have given,  
Even from earliest childhood's peaceful years.  
Nor has this hand within his own been clasped  
For one sweet, wild, winged moment, or returned 60  
An answering pressure, thrilled in every nerve  
By transient contact so electrical,  
As when a sudden flash of light or fire  
Dazzles the senses ere it disappears. 64  
Yet how this heart has loved him! As we love  
The Christ whom he so long and nobly served,  
And whom His followers, having not beheld,  
Yet even dearer hold than life and love, 68  
To I my sweet idea, hero, king,  
Having not seen, yet loved, and love for aye.  
Could but these eyes have seen him, these ears heard,  
These lips addressed, this hand been held in his, 72  
Methinks I could resignedly endure  
The bitter anguish of my hopeless grief.

'Tis not his death I mourn, for rest in heaven  
It brought to him, whate'er it brought to me, 76  
And our unbounded and unending loss  
I sweetly counterpoised and counterchecked  
By his unbounded and unending gain.  
Not this then, is it that I now lament 80  
Thus vainly, but the hard and cruel fact  
In whose unpitying daylight (harshly dry  
And coldly clear as is the wintry noon)  
All vague sweet dreams and tender hopes dissolve, 84  
Slain like the first fair snowdrops of the spring,  
By keen east winds and bloom-destroying frosts –  
The fact that never can I tell my love  
The love I bear him, and the work of good 88  
His influence has within my being wrought,  
Nor ever, on this side the gloomy grave,  
Can feast, if but for once, my hungry eyes  
Upon the god-like face I held so dear – 92  
The fact that through the shadowy vale of death,

Which all men shrink to cross, my feet must pass,  
And I the secrets of Eternity 96  
Probe(?) in their awful import, strange as high,  
Entering another world, another life,  
And leaving far behind the scenes of Time  
Familiar now to me, and passing sweet, 100  
Ere I can realise my cherished hope  
Of meeting with my long-loved, late-lost king.  
He never knew I loved him! O the void,  
The desolation and the wild unrest, 104  
The dead-calm, silent depths of blank despair,  
And deepening shadows of a hopeless night,  
Involved within these words! And now – too late!  
Yet should we not, as others, sorrow thus 108  
Without all hope, for in the life beyond  
The dear Lord Christ will lead us unto him  
We love so well, and with him evermore  
In rapture's perfect peace we then may dwell, 112  
Reigning in heaven, that bright abiding place

Where Genius, Intellect, and sweetest Love,  
Freed from their earthly chains and perfected, 116  
Create a glory sacred to the God  
Who formed and gave to them their power divine.  
There Poesy, her lyre all-musical  
Attuned to hymns of heaven, as with rich chords 120  
Thrilling in all its glistening golden strings,  
Shall stand before the Throne in rainbow robes,  
Crowned with her own fair flowers and glowing fruits,  
And play harmonious strains so silver-sweet 124  
That angel-throngs shall gaze with tender awe  
Upon her loveliest form, while all her sons  
And daughters in her melodies unite  
Their well-according voices. And, of these, 128  
Highest in honour, chief in glorious power,  
He, England's noblest poet, then shall be.  
But what of us whom here he left behind? 132  
How sad is our dark lot, how fraught with pain!  
And chiefly mine, who never in the flesh

May look upon my first and best beloved.

Truly I well might weep and languish thus! 136

Yet weep now thou, O queen of womanhood!

Among all women blessed, richly crowned

By Joy and Honour, beauteous sisters twain,

Thy love-throne in his heart, where thou enshrined 140

Didst safely dwell in rapture deep as calm,

No e'en in death's dark hour didst thence depart,

O, wherefore shouldst thou do so? Thou and he

Have reigned as sovereign-consorts, two in one, 144

United in duality divine.

A royal handmaid, serving thou didst rule,

Obeying guide, and governing submit.

How lofty in a lowliness sublime 148

The sceptre power of this thine high estate,

The majesty of this thy queenlihood!

Well might the angels ministers be styled,

Since they who minister are they who reign. 152

An angel's life and mission, then, were thine,

and at his side, throughout these long bright years,  
Thou didst abide, thy life entwined with his,  
Sharing with him his intellectual throne, 156  
Haloed with threefold glory, born of Love,  
Genius, and sweet Religion, triple powers  
Whose light-invested influences combine  
To make of man a God, of earth a Heaven. 160  
All three, through him, were doubly thine, rich gifts  
Whose value was enhanced a thousandfold  
In that thou didst receive them at his hands.  
Oh, surely that bright splendour of the past 164  
Can even o'er the present's lonely gloom  
She sweet, faint rays of radiance, and thy path  
Illumine still by Joy's all-heavenly face!  
Her angel form shall walk with thee, beside 168  
Sorrow, her counterpart and pale sad shade,  
Until in heaven thy one dear lord and love  
Thou findest once again, when ecstasy [sic]  
Shall be the sweeter for preceding woe, 172

Light fairer for the dark anterior gloom,  
And life more glorious for the death before.  
Thou needest not to weep, but to rejoice.

My God, dear Lady, consolation give 176

To thee and all who mourn that kingly soul

So lately from its temple fled away.

A nation's prayers, a nation's sympathy,

Are thine, and thine is still his tenderest love, 180

Which to the end shall light thy path to heaven,

And in the end be there to welcome thee.



**Appendix 5. J. Brown. ‘In loving memory of the late Lord Tennyson: A Tribute’**

24 October, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Home at last his labour done

he obeyed the masters [sic] call

to leave the fading scenes of earth

where decay is stamped on all, 4

Now Hushed for ever [sic] is his voice

no more on earth we hear

he sleeps the last long sleep of death

that knows no waking here, 8

Though the example of his noble life

will live through fading light

And inspire more, those left behind

with stronger faith and hopes more bright. 12

Now he’s robed in heaven’s own white

in yonder realms of bliss

and I trust that when I am called from earth

my end may be like his, 16

Calm and filled with holy peace

thus ebbed away his life

from the watchful care of her he loved

A true devoted wife,

20

But those whom death has severed here

still have that promise given

the sweet fellowship thy held on earth

may be renewed in heaven,

24

## Appendix 6. Annie Martell. 'In Memoriam'

Undated (c. 1892). Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

I

A chamber lighted only by

The moonlight's feeble ray.

A group stand watching by the bed

Where the dying poet lay

4

II

A laurel wreath upon his brow.

Sweet scented flowers strewn o'er

The couch on which that form lies still

Who soon will be no more.

8

III

Sleep on sweet bard, thou art not dead

But only gone before

Your many friends, who love you now

As hundreds did of yore.

12

IV

Who could not love. & reverence

Th'o in the flesh, ne'er seems

The writer of that poem sweet

"Tennyson's May Queen." 16

V

But with the loved ones left behind

To day, their grief ever share

As fancy, leads us by the side.

Of that ever vacant chair. 20

VI

Farewell sweet muse, a long farewell

Brittania [sic] weeps for you

Submissive th'o she bows & says

Tennyson, adieu. 24

VII

But (all?) in memory – he who is,

So near & yet so far

Will reign for aye, the poet King

Th'o he has crossed the bar.

28

**Appendix 7. Alice Godwin. 'Over the river'**

6 October, 1892. Letter and poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

4 Albert Terrace

Bitterne

Southampton

Dear Madam

Will you please forgive me if I have done wrongly in sending the verses, but I thought I would like you to see them.

Yours most respectfully & in sympathy

Alice L Godwyn

Moonbeams shine on an ebbing tide

A softly murmuring sea

A bark from jordan's (sic) banks now glide

While heavens (sic) gates are opened wide

With a welcome full & free

5

One is standing at the helm

Angels obey his will

Softly across the moonlit river

Thy come while the waters gleam & quiver

And all around is still.

10

Someone is waiting on the shore

Waiting with listening [undecipherable]

He watches the white sails as they lower

He hears the chant of the angel choir

And one clear call for him.

15

One clear call & the bark can launch

It bears him o'er the tide

A fond farewell to all held dear

To Heavens [sic] gate the Pilot steers

Its portals open wide

20

Hark? angels greet him with their song

A song of joy and love

He enters with that glorious throng

His Masters [sic] voice hath said Well done [sic]

He dwells in rest above.

25

**Appendix 8. Alice Godwin. 'On Westminster Bridge'**

12 October, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Yes, he is gone Englands [sic] beloved poet

Treasure house of song so sweet & pure

That led our hearts to dwell on higher idylls

And to sweet calm the weary mind allured

4

How silent seems the world, no voice that ringeth

Shall ever touch such chords of love again

He tuned our hearts to songs of hope & gladness

In trust love his memory shall remain

8

Yes, he is gone outside I stand in sorrow

Hundreds around me still I seem alone

Alone upon the bridge I weep in silence

While now they bear him gently to the tomb.

12

The high the rich, the noble, all are these

To do him honour as to honour due



Strong men with heads bowed down & faces grave  
Whose hands had clasped in his, in friendship. (true) 16  
Hark to the boyish voices sweet & clear  
Slowly they chant, it soundeth from afar  
While angel voices seem to join the song  
“And may there be no moaning of the bar” 20  
“No moaning of the bar” [undecipherable], glorious soul  
Hushed were the waters that bore thee to thy rest  
Only a gentle murmur like a psalm  
Born (sic) from its bosom, sounded from the depths. 24  
Low “neath the sacred roof thou art reclining  
Thine eyes are closed, thy lips are silent now  
Silent to speech, yet still thy words are written  
On all our hearts who mourn thee truly now. 28  
Hark, tolleth the passing bell, doth thy free spirit  
Hover around the mourners as they stand  
O, dost thou know that Englands (sic) sons are weeping  
Her daughters mourn for thee throughout the land. 32

But thou art happy in a fairer region

Tho' loving thee, we could not wish thee back again

Safe o'er the tide whence there is no returning

Thou with thy Pilot in a peaceful haven 36

For thou hast crost the bar beyond regretting

We would not grieve thee with our falling tears

But follow in thy footsteps, drawing nearer

Nearer to Heaven & thee in coming years. 40

**Appendix 9. Ms M Collins. ‘These to his memory’**

13 October, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

“Sing out wild bells”, across the moor

“Ring out” to tell the rich and poor

That our loved Poet good and great

Has left us for a happier state.

4

2

May all his loved ones meet him there

In glorious life his joys to share

Where earthly cares and troubles cease

And all in harmony and peace.

8

3

He did not bury in the earth

The talent given at his birth

But used it well and kept it bright

And thus could (help?) us to the light

12

4

For God had given him a mind

Lofty and pure, calm and refined,

A mind capacious, clear, and strong

To do the right and quell the wrong –

16

5

He sent to us from time to time

His noble thoughts, in noble rhyme

Lessons of virtue, truth and love

Such as are given us from above.

20

6

We thank him for a bounteous store

And we shall prize them more and more

Now that our dear and valued friend

No longer can a lesson send.

24

M\_ M Collins (Spinster)

Aged 90 – 5th Oct next

12 Southeast Place

Lyncombe Hill

Bath

This ought to have been sent 3 weeks ago

**Appendix 10. Paul Hann. ‘The Harvest Home’**

25 October, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

TENNYSON

A Cedar hath fallen both great and tall

His fragrance like dew-drops from heaven does fall

Thy influence through generations shall run

To illuminate the world thou bright sun 4

We’ll sing of thy goodness tell of thy love

Who sang so sweetly of mansions above

Knowing that all to his Saviours belong

Gratefully render’d his talents in song 8

The sun has set on the western shore

And cross’d yonder Bar for-evermore

To shine on heaven’s celestial plains

His song renew [sic] in heavenly strains 12

**Appendix 11. Matthew Johnston. Untitled.**

31 October, 1892. Letter and poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

Matthew Johnston  
Inspector of Police  
Bridgeton Glasgow  
31st October 1892

Dedicated

To Lord Hallam Tennyson  
In affectionate memory of his Father  
Lord Alfred Tennyson, Poet Laureate

“Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand”  
“Or the sound of a voice that is still.”

Ye Poets of Great Britain from Landsend to John O’Groats

Chime your Lyre, strike your Harps, and sound forth doleful notes.

For Death the King of terrors, has visited our land,

And taken from us him we loved, across the Golden Strand. 4

The Poet Laureate has gone unto that Golden Shore,

To reign in glory with his Lord, and sing for evermore

His countrymen do miss him, and all are sadly grieved,

But we instead should all rejoice, for he in Christ believed. 8

And now a golden laurel bough, doth crown his noble head,  
In Westminster his body sleeps amongst our mighty dead.  
But when Christ the Lord of Glory, unto earth shall descend,  
We then with rapture shall behold, our Poet, Lord and Friend. 12

So brethren of the muses nine, wipe all your tears away,  
For though our father Tennyson, is gone from us today,  
The noble works he's written, for all times shall endure,  
And may we too, like unto him, make our election pure. 16

And may God bless and comfort you, and  
Your dear Mother, in your great Bereavement,  
Is the earnest and heartfelt prayer of  
my Lord,

Your Lordship's obedient servant,  
Matthew Johnston  
Inspector of Police  
Bridgeton Glasgow  
31st October 1892

**Appendix 12. Harry Cox. Letter to Hallam Tennyson.**

7 October, 1892. Letter. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

To Hallam Tennyson, Esq.

Dear Sir

Please excuse a working man troubling you at this time of sorrow, but I could not let the sweetest singer of this age pass away without bearing testimony. That the writing of your Father have given me much comfort in times of trouble and sorrow that I was unable to find in any other writer.

His poem In Memoriam have [sic] been a source at which I could at all times find comfort and hope; and helped me to see a clear sky behind the cloud [sic] that was hiding for a time the great directing power.

Now the great and splendid mind is at rest from his Labours

He have [sic] gone from us in full age like a shock of corn in its season

Please accept the heart-felt sympathy for you and your sorrowing ones

Your obt servant,

Harry Cox,

Carpenter



**Appendix 13. W. Hutton Brayshay. ‘In Memoriam Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oct 1892’**

October 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

“Echoes, many”, – so many! but “Voices, few”, – how few! –

Therefore thy great Voice hushed now we strangely, sorely rue.

Voice that would ne’er bespatter with praise the blatant crowd,

Voice that fawned upon no man yet – however high, or proud. – 4

“English” we deemed – and claim thee – as we fair would have England be –

True and trusty and honest, - plainspeaking and fair and free.

True “Knight”, - as of “Arthurs’ tables” – to battle with all things Wrong

And fight for Right with Sword of might, Lance ? true and strong 8

Over “the bar” thou passed – but, still, – from the Fields of Sleep –

Thy words shall seem to reach us yet, borne back home o’er the [undecipherable] deep.

Filling the lawns and the woodlands, - the rocks and the “summer seas”,

With dreams of the days of the deathless past, and the days that shall crown all these! 12

And “the pilots” love that lent thee, and His Wisdom that called away

Shall age have wondering worship from all who loved thy lay.

W. Hutton Brayshay

Oct 1892

“There are in this world many Echoes, but few Voices.” (Goethe)

(Found in “Crown Herald”, Oct/92)

**Appendix 14. Elizabeth Cookson. Untitled.**

Undated, c.1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

The lyre that sounded through the land

Whose melody could charm, delight,

Is silent now, the master hand

That wrote its chords is lost to sight.

4

Departed; still, its echoes ring

In the listeners ear who read

And guide what clustering beauties cling

To the words, as the theme proceeds.

8

Ever and Ever pure the tone,

And sweet the music that is made,

And art consummate also shown,

What ere the subject there displayed.

12

To nature in her every form

The harmony is just and true,

If men rejoice or men do mourn,  
We sympathise and do so too. 16

Of woman in each place it tells  
With depth and insight sure and rare,  
And on her nobler respect dwells  
Till muse enshrined, we see her there. 20

There, Wisdom for a hearing pleads  
(Mute?) the heart of every man,  
And something [undecipherable] [undecipherable] and suit his needs  
Instruct his mind, or nothing can. 24

This lyre that turned so sweet and high  
Is mute – hangs idle on the wall,  
Its severed chords the hand can tie  
The world is poorer that is all. 28

Can those we love from memory fade?  
Those who have gone before,

And in the silent tomb are laid,  
To glad our sight no more! 32

Whilst thought is ours to bestow,  
And recollection last  
The heart within us answers – No! –  
There shrined we hold them fast. 36

Fast as the limpet to the rock,  
Which safe defies the storm,  
Fast now, for no (mis)chance can shock  
The mutual friendships borne. 40

Vain were regrets, still love may dwell  
On acts of kindness done,  
Oh sympathies whose soothing spell  
From care our thoughts have won. 44

When, ere we view the scenes of yore  
Their presence had made glad,

Their absence fondly we deplore –

The place to us seems sad.

48

Ingrates were we if we forgot

Then, whether friends or kin,

And (sooth?) because thy now are not,

Scarce think that thy have been.

52

Elizabeth Cookson

Well

W. Odiham

Hants.

**Appendix 15. Eleanor Henry. 'Lines on Tennyson'**

Undated, c.1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

The evening shadows spread their veils

Our gay autumnal flowers

And glided through the Poet's room

Where sadly passed the hours. 4

And through the veil moonbeams shone

And shimmered on his brow.

Where love had twined a laurel wreath

And glory crowns it now. 8

He heard the Angel's [sic] on clear call

To join the ransomed throng

And tune his harp with golden string

To sing the glad new song 12

He saw the star which guided him

Through many shady dell

No more he'll pass the moaning bar

Nor hear the old church bell. 16

His Pilot, Captain, and his King

Have welcomed him above

And placed him at a table round

Where's naught but purest love 20

And there he'll wait to meet the bride

Who strove his life to cheer

And longs to touch the vanished hand

Now gone from Hazlemere [sic]. 24

**Appendix 16. Mary Gaddess. 'To Ms Tennyson'**

8 October, 1892. Poem. Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, UK.

To Ms Tennyson

A weary hearted woman, from afar –

Sends greetings to another lonely heart.

What matter that the Oceans intervene –

And we each others(sic) faces have not seen. 4

You mourn a Husband, gone beyond love's call;

And we, a Poet, sweetest of them all.

God keep thee! if it be thy tired feet –

Shall tarry long within "this weary land" 8

For Human love is helpless, till you meet –

"God keep thee, in the hollow of his hand"

Affectionately yours

Mary L Gaddess

821 N Arlington Ave

Lafayette Square Baltimore Md

America



## **Appendix 17. List of all correspondents cited in this thesis.**

1. Anonymous. 'Alfred Lord Tennyson In Memoriam, Oct 6th, 1892'. 4 November 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln, UK.
2. A Chambers. 'Lines on the death of Alfred Lord Tennyson Poet Laureate'. 25 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
3. Fanny Edge. Untitled. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
4. S. Gertrude Ford. Untitled. 16 November 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
5. J. Brown. 'In loving memory of the late Lord Tennyson: A Tribute'. 24 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
6. Annie Martell. 'In Memoriam'. Undated, c. 12 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
7. Alice Godwin. 'Over the river'. 6 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
8. Alice Godwin. 'On Westminster Bridge'. 12 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
9. Matilda M Collins. 'These to his memory'. 13 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
10. Paul Hann. 'The Harvest Home'. 25 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
11. Matthew Johnston. Untitled. 31 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
12. Harry Cox. Untitled. 7 October 1892. Letter. TRC, Lincoln.
13. W. Hutton Brayshay. 'In Memoriam Alfred Lord Tennyson, Oct 1892'. October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
14. Elizabeth Cookson. Untitled. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
15. Eleanor Henry. 'Lines on Tennyson'. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
16. Mary Gaddess. 'To Ms Tennyson'. 8 October 1892. Letter. TRC, Lincoln.
17. John Develin. 'The Laureateship'. 28 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
18. Richard Vasey. 'After hearing "The Silent Voices" sung'. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
19. S.J. 'Yet Speaketh'. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.

20. Gladys Fanquier. 'The death of Poet Tennyson'. 6 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
21. James Joseph Barrett. 'And the Singer Answered God'. 12 October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
22. Henry Jackson Pywell. 'In Memoriam Alfred Tennyson October 1892'. October 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
23. H.M. 'Lines on the late Lord Tennyson'. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
24. Jessie Hadley. 'Lines on the death of Lord Tennyson'. Undated, c. 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.
25. Percy A. Wells. 'Rest – A.T'. 2 November 1892. Poem. TRC, Lincoln.

### **Appendix 18. Data relating to all transcribed death correspondents.**

This table includes data relating to all 72 items of correspondence I have transcribed and studied for this thesis, including those who have not been cited in this study. The table cites 57 items of core correspondence. This refers to the 56 poems as core items, plus one solo letter from Harry Cox, as being the primary forms of death correspondence. The additional accompanying letters or notes (15 included with the poems not including the 1 letter from Harry Cox) have the same dates as the poems and are not counted separately. The discrepancy between the number of DCs and correspondence relates to three correspondents having written two or more poems: John Develin: 3 (Eulogium; In Memoriam; The Laureateship); Richard Vasey: 2 (The Answered Prayer; After hearing “The Silent Voices” sung); and Alice Godwin: 2 (Over the river; On Westminster Bridge). Class has been assigned broadly, based on known occupation (last occupation for retirees), or head of household occupation where the writer is not in employment, and follows broad class constructs as outlined in the Introduction.

Table 1.

<b>Death Correspondence</b> Of 72 poems, letters and notes	
<b>Total poems and letters/notes transcribed and researched</b>	72
<b>Total poems and letters/notes cited in thesis</b>	25
<b>Total poems</b>	56
<b>Total letters/notes</b>	16
<b>Poems including letters/notes</b>	15
<b>Poems not including letters/notes</b>	39
<b>Includes personal details</b>	9
<b>Does not include personal details</b>	45

Table 2.

<b>Core Items Compositional Data</b> of 57 core poems/letter	
<b>Dates composed</b>	
<b>Undated c. 1892</b>	24
<b>6 October 1892*</b>	5
<b>12 October 1892**</b>	4
<b>8 October 1892</b>	3
<b>25 October 1891</b>	3
<b>28 October 1892</b>	3
<b>Other dates through 30 November 1892</b>	16
*Date of Tennyson's death. **Date of Tennyson's funeral.	
<b>Titles</b>	
<b>In Memoriam</b>	6
<b>Untitled</b>	5
<b>Lines on the death of Lord Tennyson</b>	2
<b>Other titles</b>	43

Table 3.

<b>Death Correspondent Data</b> of 52 individuals	
<b>Total correspondents</b>	52
<b>Poets</b>	51
<b>Letter only</b>	1
<b>Includes name</b>	40
<b>Initials only</b>	6
<b>Anonymous</b>	5
<b>Undecipherable</b>	1
<b>Data confirmed in 1891 Census for England, Wales and Scotland (CEWS)</b>	27
<b>Data unconfirmed in 1891 CEWS</b>	24
<b>Gender</b>	
According to census data, self-identification, or other. Please refer to my statement on gender identification in the Introduction.	
<b>Female</b>	15
<b>Male</b>	22
<b>Unknown</b>	15
<b>Age</b>	
According to census data, self-identification, or other. Please refer to my statement on self-identification in the Introduction.	

<b>Average age</b>	42.5
<b>Median age</b>	37
<b>Youngest</b>	10
<b>Oldest</b>	89
<b>Location, occupation, and class</b>	
According to census data, self-identification, or other. Please refer to my statements on self-identification and class constructs in the Introduction.	
<b>Location known</b>	32
<b>Location unknown</b>	20
<b>Occupation known</b>	25
<b>Occupation unknown</b>	27
<b>Class known</b>	29
<b>Class unknown</b>	23
<b>Working class</b>	14*
<b>Middle class</b>	11
<b>Upper class</b>	5**
<b>Aristocracy</b>	1**
* 14 Includes two individuals which are confidently likely, but lack triangulation of data. Personal information for these two are not cited in the thesis.	
** Likely misfiled with the general public correspondence. Includes Tennyson's family friends, including the Duke of Argyll, one of Tennyson's pallbearers.	

Chart A.

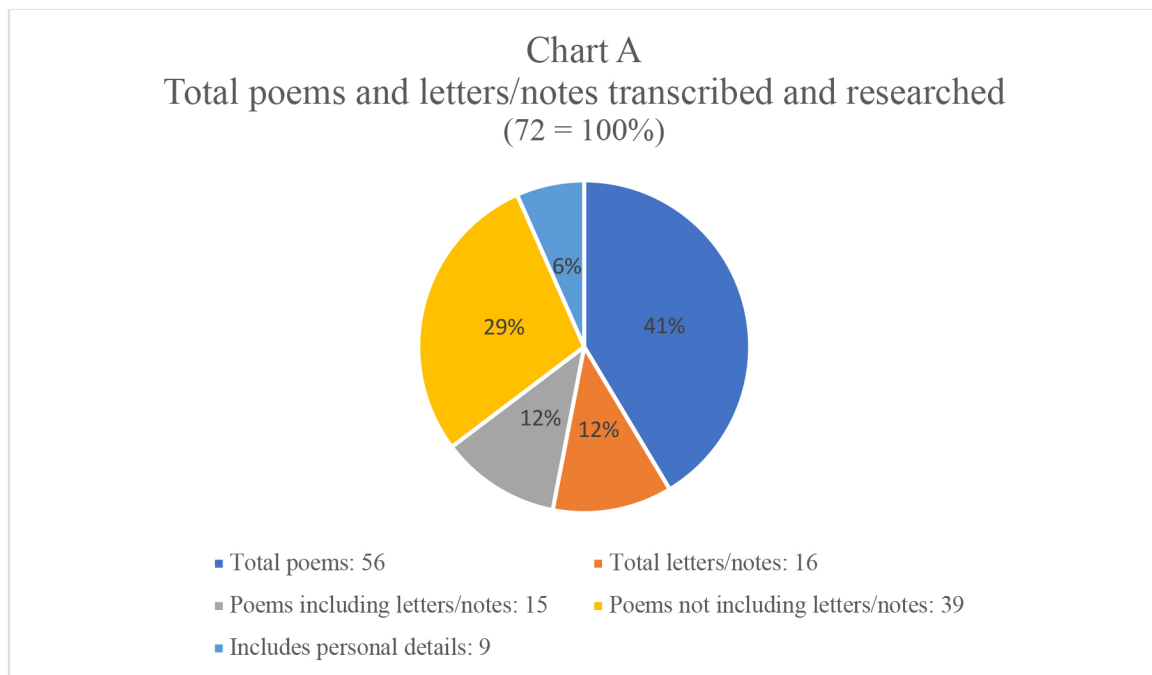


Chart B.

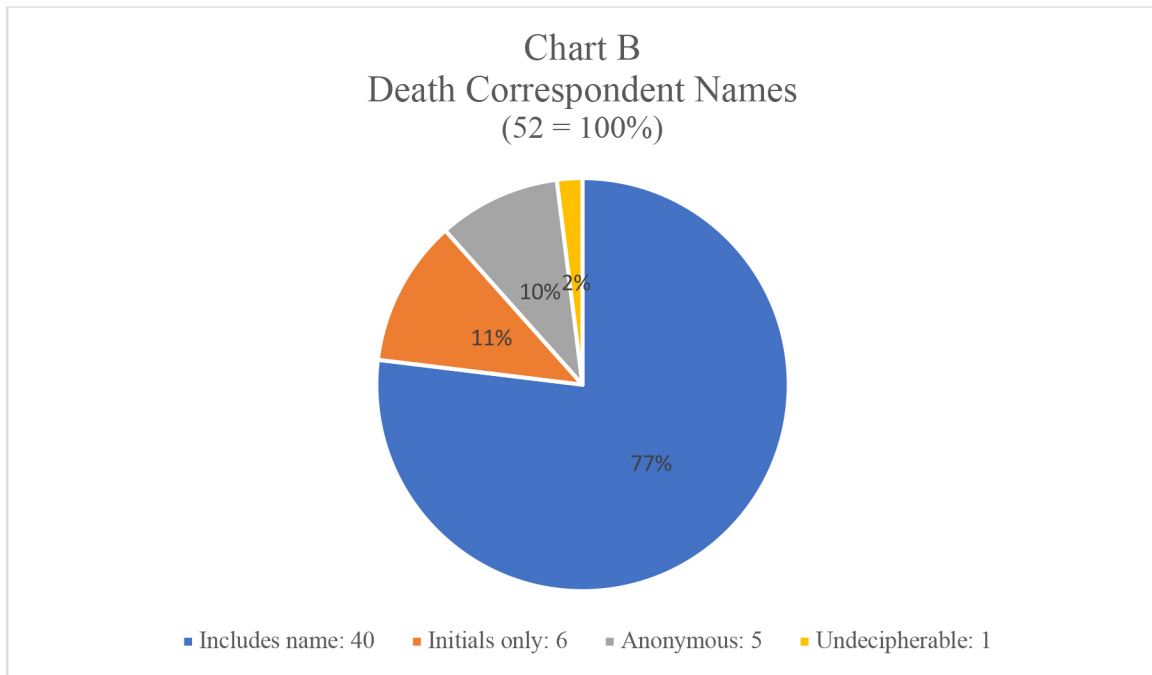


Chart C.

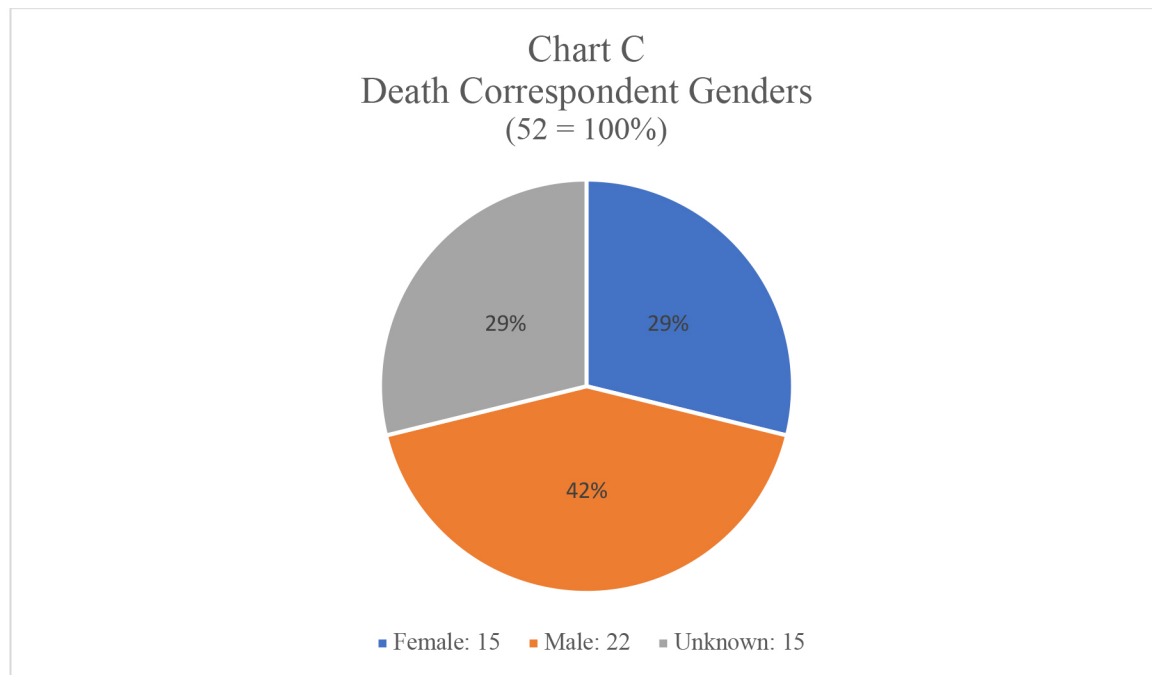


Chart D.

