# WOMEN ILLUSTRATING TENNYSON IN THE LATE-NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

*Clare Broome Saunders*

Tennyson's lack of enthusiasm for book illustration is well documented: as William Holman Hunt recalled in *Pre-Raphaelitism and The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905), Tennyson demanded that 'the illustrator should always adhere to the words of the poet,' stipulating that, 'an illustrator ought never to add anything to what he finds in the text' (Holman Hunt, 2:125). For Tennyson, the text itself provided all the colour and texture that the reader needed to inspire their imagination, and the poet's visionary perspective should not be filtered through other creative lenses before reaching the reader. Hallam Tennyson records in his *Memoir* his father's insistence that: 'Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours, and every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy with the poet' (Tennyson, *Memoir*, 2: 127).

Here, Tennyson is echoing the views of his late friend Arthur Henry Hallam who, in his essay 'On the Characteristics of Modern Poetry' (1831), which includes a review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical (1830)*, identifies the superiority of Shelley and Keats alongside their contemporaries in their ability to 'live in a world of images': 'Hence they are not descriptive, they are picturesque' (Hallam, 542). This is the same quality that Hallam suggests is epitomized in Tennyson's 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights,' writing, 'This poem is a perfect gallery of pictures; and the concise boldness, with which in a few words an object is clearly painted is sometimes […] majestic as Milton, sometimes[…] sublime as Aeschylus' (Hallam, 549). Hallam, like Tennyson, insists that poetry is visual enough, providing abundant pictures for the reader, without need of further illumination.

Despite Tennyson's reservations, his work inspired a vast range of visual art and illustrations, as Julia Thomas suggests:

> The proliferation of illustrated editions of Tennyson's poetry in the Victorian marketplace can be accounted for by the fact that the verses provided a blank canvas for artists. With their juxtaposition of the domestic and the political, and their settings in the contemporary world and an imaginary medieval past, the poems supplied a range of subject matters that could be adapted by individual artists and different aesthetic styles' (Thomas, 22).

Foremost among these illustrators were the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, who were attracted precisely by the 'many glancing colours' and picturesque nature of Tennyson's language. However, Tennyson objected vehemently to what he saw as the liberties taken in their work. Perhaps the most famous of all the illustrated versions of Tennyson is the Moxon illustrated edition of *Poems* from 1857. The fact that this was widely referred to as The Pre-Raphaelite Tennyson – with the illustrators – John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti 'considered joint authors in the book' (Kooistra, 38) demonstrates Tennyson's point. The Pre-Raphaelite approach favoured a central figure at a moment of great crisis or intensity, so that the Pre-Raphaelite illustrations became, in Lorraine Janzen Kooistra's phrase 'embodied interpretations of Tennyson's poetic texts' (49). These illustrations 'were designed to belong to the material book and the social world of readers' (49) – but as such, the large, full-page works were easy to remove from the context of the text and could enjoy a life of their own quite separate from the poem that they illustrated.

Tennyson seemed to object less to women illustrators – perhaps, as Kooistra suggests, because he saw them as less of a threat to his authorial authority (182). In many ways, illustration was seen as a feminine pursuit, inspired by and secondary to the masculine authority of the work, and Tennyson certainly approved of Eleanor Vere Boyle's planned illustrations for *The May Queen* in 1861 (Thomas, 25). However, for the Pre-Raphaelite women of what Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn (1989) identify as the third generation of the Pre-Raphaelite movement,

from 1880 to 1910, Tennyson's work provided the inspiration and the space they needed to explore their own socio-political and artistic ideals. This article will first consider how three of these women artists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illustrated *Idylls of the King*, exploring work by Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale, Jessie Marion King, and Florence Harrison. It will go on to focus on illustrations for a rare version of *In Memoriam* from 1892, published in the year that Tennyson died, illustrated by the Irish-born Scottish artist Phoebe Anna Traquair, which demonstrably did win Tennyson's approval.

The Arthurian subject matter of *Idylls of the King* proved particularly compelling for these women illustrators. This may seem rather surprising at first: in what Tennyson called the 'parabolic drift' (Tennyson, *Memoir*, Vol. 2, 127) of his epic, and his allegorizing of figures from his medieval source texts – mainly Malory, but also Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh *Mabinogion* (Tennyson, *Memoir*, Vol. 2, 121) – the women of Arthurian legend are unquestionably restricted and reduced from their original roles in medieval literature. It is not just the women characters who are so affected: since the *Idylls* is a powerful reshaping of a medieval story to express Victorian social values and anxieties, concentrating especially on how individual behaviour undermines social stability, many of the knights are similarly recast from their original roles in medieval Romance. Tristram, the quintessential courtly lover becomes Tennyson's cynical materialist and consumer, demanding, 'Come, I am hunger'd and half angr'd – meat/ Wine, wine – and I will love thee to the death' ('The Last Tournament' lines 713-15). Gawain, like Tristram, is changed: no longer the knight of perfect courtesy of the medieval tradition, whose loyalty is beyond question, Gawain is a self-serving opportunist.

The women, however, are separated for particular comparison and scrutiny, as the publication of the first four *Idylls* 'Elaine', 'Enid', 'Vivien', and 'Guinevere' as *The True and the False* in 1859 demonstrates– they are depictions of true or false womanhood. Enid, Geraint's good but

disobedient wife from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the *Mabinogion*, becomes a silenced Griselda figure, communicating only with gesture. Elaine is rendered a rather insipid, obsessive lover. Vivien is an evil, fallen, serpentine seductress, not the powerful sorceress who demands equality with Merlin. Guinevere fares worst of all: since Arthur must be the ideal man and ideal knight, he is stripped of all sexual misdemeanours. This means the account of Arthur's incest with his half-sister and the product of their union, Mordred, from Malory's source text, is removed, along with the epic father-son struggle at the heart of most of the medieval versions of the fall of Camelot. Rather than being accused of treachery for choosing for her lover the greatest knight - Lancelot - and destabilizing the kingdom, Malory's 'trew lover' and great queen becomes the adulteress, negated as false wife, fallen woman, and bad queen, grovelling on the floor at Arthur's feet, like the repentant sex worker at the feet of Christ in the New Testament (Luke 7: 36-50). Marsh and Gerrish Nunn suggest that 'Any artist tackling Tennyson's *Idylls* […] was more or less obliged to rework the Victorian division of femininity into self-sacrificial, asexual virtue and self-indulgent, sexual vice' (Marsh and Gerrish Nunn, 148). However, many women at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century found the space in Tennyson's epic to comment imaginatively on their own lived experience and society.

**Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (1872-1945)** first produced black and white illustrations for Tennyson's *Poems* in 1905, but in 1909 was commissioned by the Leicester Galleries in London to produce a series of twenty-eight illustrations for *Idylls of the King*, which were exhibited in autumn 1911. Critics have accused Brickdale of being uninspired in her illustrations, for example, to quote Muriel Whitaker, 'One feels that Tennyson would have approved her attention to 'what the writer said'(Whitaker, 270); and Marsh and Gerrish Nunn suggest that perhaps the weight of tradition inhibited Brickdale because 'her works broke no new ground but seem in a sense to represent summaries of previous

endeavours' (Marsh and Gerrish Nunn, 148). However, it is worth looking again at Brickdale's illustrations, to see the ways in which she does offer a fresh interpretation of the poems. In her illustration for 'At which the King/ Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by' (facing 70), Vivien in her green and gold certainly fits Tennyson's description, and the coils of hair seem snakelike: but the tiger skin is far from serpentine. It suggests a power and cunning, the 'fearful symmetry' of William Blake's impressive beast ('The Tyger', *Songs of Experience,* 1794). Brickdale removes the idea of the Fall in Genesis and negative depictions of Eve, which the serpent in the poem invokes: 'lissome Vivien…/Writhed toward him, slided up his knee/ Clung like a snake' ('Merlin and Vivien' lines 236-240). The animal image Brickdale uses suggests power and fearsome intellect. These qualities are also suggested by the illustration for 'Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm' (facing 86) where Vivien plays chess in luxurious Middle Eastern surroundings, focusing on the King piece, as she focuses on Arthur as a means to gain her political power. Vivien in these images is a political operator, deftly playing political games, not a sexualized temptress.

While Brickdale's images of Enid do present a wimpled, demure wife, Elaine and Guinevere are similarly more complex than Brickdale's detractors allow. Brickdale is neither as celebratory of the chaste maid, nor as condemnatory of the fallen queen, as a literal illustration from the text would suggest. Brickdale's illustrations do not touch on the subversive nature of Elaine's desires or actions: they consistently present a rosy-cheeked childlike, very young woman - and a busy 'sweet and serviceable' one. A key aspect of illustration is the choice of text on which to focus: 'Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,/ There kept it, and so lived in fantasy' (facing 110) suggests Brickdale's view of Elaine as a tragic figure with a baseless unrequited love, rather than one harmed by the relationship of Guinevere and Lancelot. Similarly, the most striking aspect of 'But to be with you still, to see your face,/ To serve you, and follow you thro' the world' (facing 118), is the contrast between the remarkably aged Lancelot and the youthful Elaine, this again suggesting

the poignancy of the maid's fantasy of a life with the experienced knight, which seems faintly ludicrous. In Brickdale's illustrations, none focuses on Elaine's corpse, in stark contrast to the majority of images of The Lady of Shalott/ Elaine of Astolat figure, as in Gustave Dore's illustrations for the Moxon Tennyson and numerous Pre-Raphaelite depictions, which highlight the supine corpse on the barge. Brickdale's final illustrations focus on the suffering that Elaine's needless death causes: 'So those two brethren from the chariot took/ and on the black decks laid her in her bed' (facing 134) focuses on the grief of the bereaved brother and father.

As Frontispiece for the volume, Brickdale chooses to illustrate the moment when 'Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,/To fetch her, and she took him for the King,' the knight here with a face of Edwardian serenity that sits strangely on medieval armour. Brickdale's choice is significant: from the outset she prioritises the relationship of Lancelot and the Queen as their love predates Guinevere's first meeting with the King, which allows Guinevere her significance in medieval versions of the legend, particularly Malory's, as 'trew' lover and good queen. The sober nun in Brickdale's final illustration, 'The sombre close of that voluptuous day/ Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King' (facing 172) comes in stark contrast to the golden-haired young queen seen in previous illustrations. Guinevere seems far from content in this state, brow furrowed in a frown, eyes heavy and sorrowful, with remorse for her part in the fall of the kingdom, or grief at being separated from Lancelot. Yet, by showing Guinevere as an active member of the convent with a basket of bread to give as alms, Brickdale avoids the penitent queen grovelling at Arthur's feet confrontation, which is the lasting image offered by many illustrators, notably Doré. Brickdale focuses instead on what happens after Arthur leaves Guinevere in the convent, when the former queen works again towards a ruling position of power and influence, chosen to be abbess for her good deeds, and intrinsic authority. Brickdale portrays the sober and repentant Guinevere in a role of dignity, and potential power, thus highlighting the positive ending to Tennyson's *Idyll*, which lifts the queen from the convent floor to a position of social and moral redemption

- ‘for her deeds and her pure life’ as well as the ‘high rank she had born’ she is chosen as abbess.

**Florence Susan Harrison (1877-1955)** was an Australian-born artist, based in UK (often confused with Emma Florence Harrison of the Glasgow School) who illustrated *Guinevere and Other Poems* in 1912, a new edition of which, with fewer illustrations, appeared in 1923. Harrison’s images present a rich depth of colour characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite art, but, like Brickdale, her focus at the end of the ‘Guinevere’ *Idyll* is on Guinevere’s grief and Guinevere’s story, not Arthur’s. In Harrison’s illustration for ‘Guinevere’, the front covers, title pages, and headers are particularly significant.

**[Image 1:**

**Florence Susan Harrison (1877-1955)**

**Cover for *Tennyson’s Guinevere and other poems,* 1923]**

The front cover of the book shows a crowned Guinevere in a pose reminiscent of Joan of Arc, whose image was very much in the public eye in 1912, because of the use of Joan of Arc by Suffragettes and Suffragists. Joan epitomized the ideal of militant woman, and the political potential for women, uniting women across all classes and backgrounds, and claimed as a patron saint by the suffragette Women’s Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.), before her actual canonization by the Catholic Church in 1920. The covers of the *Votes for Women*, the official publication of the W.S.P.U from 1907 and *The Suffragette*, its successor publication edited by Christabel Pankhurst from 1912, were dominated by images of Joan of Arc. Women dressed as Joan led suffragette processions and rallies, particularly on the Grand May Day Processions, which took place around the anniversary of Joan’s execution, 30th May. Suffragists and suffragettes identified with Joan: after the tragic events of the 1913 Derby, when Emily Davison was killed as she tried to tie a suffragette flag to the King's horse, fellow suffragettes cast Davison as a modern-day Joan of Arc in W.S.P.U. eulogies: the night before her death, she had apparently laid a wreath at a

statue of Joan of Arc in London. The impetus of St Joan's canonization in 1920 increased her cultural significance: George Bernard Shaw's play *St Joan* premiered in 1923, the same year as second edition of *Tennyson's Guinevere* illustrated by Harrison. Harrison's cover shows Guinevere, with closed eyes raised to heaven, clasping a long sword in both hands, the rich swirls of her art deco gown hiding the bottom of the sword. Rather than suggesting culpability, this image is of a medieval warrior queen, presented as a martyr and tragic heroine.

This positive view of Guinevere is uppermost from the very cover, with the same cover image used for both the 1912 and 1923 editions, and continues in the title page for the 1912 edition (Harrison produced a revised title page for the 1923 edition that echoed the cover), which similarly places Guinevere against a backdrop of Camelot. Again here, there are stars falling and clouds billowing around the queen and the kingdom, portentous of its downfall. Guinevere is clearly portrayed as queen, crowned, fingering an orb, dominating the image with her dignified presence. In the header image, the crowned queen, still clutching the long sword, eyes still raised heavenwards, is now no longer veiled and robed: she is bound by brambles which seem to come from Camelot and pierce the title scroll, so her gown no longer falls in rich swirls: even her hair is fettered in the braids of a crispinette. The image is a sacrificial one, as if suggesting that Guinevere's personal happiness has been sacrificed to her role as queen of Camelot although, with tragic irony, she unwittingly brings about its destruction. Guinevere's queenship is foremost; the upper-case letters highlight the fact that 'QUEEN Guinevere had fled the court'. Of course, for the reader in 1923, Harrison's illustration is a reminder of images used in the First World War, during which Joan of Arc was seen widely as the symbol of sacrifice and chivalry (Broome Saunders, 101-2).

**Jessie Marion King (1875-1949)** who was part of the Glasgow School of Art in the last decade of the nineteenth century, provided illustrations for Tennyson's *Guinevere* and *Elaine*, when these works were published as

Routledge's 'Broadway Booklets' in Spring 1903. King's illustrations are notable for her refusal to constrain any of the characters in the *Idylls* to the 'parabolic' roles ascribed to them: both the men and the women of the legend are nuanced and developed through her illustrations. The armoured Arthur in her unusually touching illustration for 'O golden hair with which I used to play' (*Guinevere*, facing 34), who lovingly fingers the kneeling Guinevere's flowing hair, is thus a far cry from the stern Teutonic warrior of Doré's engraving. King presents Arthur as desolate yet loving; neither Malory's political sovereign nor Tennyson's severe moralist, he is not simply remembering past pleasures but torturing himself by reliving them for the final time. King's Arthur behaves differently from expectations. Guinevere, on bended knee before the King, seems sad and regretful as she touches his cloak, but is bending as a subject to a king, not prostrate as a sinner before a Christ-substitute, which is the dynamic most obvious in Tennyson's text. It is an image of medieval courtliness, the focus on the king's grief and the lamenting of his wife, who loves another, rather than on judgment, righteousness and penitence. The poignant sorrow of Arthur's personal tragedy is obvious here.

King's choice of text in *Elaine* is consistently unexpected and striking. King illustrates 'Kiss'd the hand to which he gave' (facing 38), showing a moment when the innocent maid is introduced to the 'courtesies of the court' (41). Gawain presents the prize diamond for the maid to give to Lancelot, with words that encourage her to believe that Lancelot reciprocates her love, that it is not a mere childish fantasy: 'he wore your sleeve: would he break faith with one I may not name?' (40). King's other two illustrations that depict 'Elaine' focus on the 'naked shield.' A shrewd Elaine discovers the knight's true identity in 'Stript off the case and read the naked shield' (Frontispiece). She is active again in 'And gave the naked shield' (facing 54), kneeling before Lancelot and presenting the shield, in a reversal of the traditional chivalric formula of kneeling knight presenting gifts to his liege lady. King shows Elaine at moments of activity, and, like Brickdale, does not offer an image of the beautiful corpse on a barge. Elaine's activity heightens the dignity of her conduct, and thus the

tragedy of her death: this Elaine is a perceptive woman in a tragic trap, rather than a self-deluding child.

The ambiguity of Tennyson's texts was the aspect on which women illustrators of his poems capitalized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The *Idylls* do, after all, end on a note of hope: despite the anxieties Tennyson has expressed for the selfishness, materialism, and lack of spirituality he sees in his present day, the possibility of Arthur, the recognition of the potential ideal in humanity offers a sense of promise: 'And the new sun rose bringing the new year' ('The Passing of Arthur' final line). Tennyson did not live to see these illustrations by Brickdale, Harrison, and King, but it is easy to imagine that his response to these Third-Generation Pre-Raphaelite women artists would probably have been similar to his response to their earlier male counterparts in 1857. They are inspired by his work to interpret and make creative use of the spaces to reflect their own socio-political concerns. However, there is evidence that one woman illustrator from this period did receive Tennyson's approval in the very last year of his life. **Phoebe Anna Traquair** illustrated an extraordinary copy of *In Memoriam* in 1892. It was commissioned by Henry Cunynghame, a friend of William Holman Hunt, and is now kept at the Rubenstein Library in Duke University, North Carolina. In an inscription in the front pages, Cunynghame offers a full account of Tennyson's encounter with the work:

> In 1892 Holman Hunt introduced me to Mrs Traquair the artist who decorate the Catholic Apostolic Church in Edinburgh who he said was the greatest artist living in the art of manuscript illumination. I agreed to employ her to illustrate Tennyson's In Memoriam and to bind the volume.
>
> I shewed the book to Miss Maud Stanley of Alderley who told me that she was about to visit a house where she would meet Tennyson and that she would shew him the book. On her return she said that she had shown the book to Tennyson but that he said that her illustrations did not represent his idea of illustrations to his poem. She asked him to put his name to it but he refused but said he would take it away and look at it.
>
> Next morning at Breakfast he brought back this book and said, 'There's your book'. He had written his name on the title page.

Henry Cunyngham KCB

Having had the opportunity to look at the book in more detail, Tennyson changed his mind. He died shortly afterwards on 6th October 1892.

**[Image 2:**
**Title Page, *In Memoriam A.H.H*. in manuscript with gouache and gilt illuminations on vellum by Phoebe Anna Traquair, Edinburgh, 1889-1892. Rubenstein Library, Duke University. Reproduced with kind permission of David Traquair]**

It is interesting to consider what it was about Traquair's work that won Tennyson's approbation. Phoebe Anna Traquair was born Phoebe Anna Moss in Dublin in 1852. Traquair was inspired by childhood visits to see the medieval manuscripts housed at Trinity College, particularly the *Book of Kells*, to pursue a career in art. This led to an introduction to her future husband, the Scottish palaeontologist Dr Ramsay Heatley Traquair, who was seeking an illustrator for his research papers: the two married, moved to Edinburgh in 1874, and Traquair illustrated her husband's papers for the next thirty years while raising their three children. However, Traquair's main artistic inspiration came from literature: fascinated by the interaction between the poetic and the visual imagination, she forged a career as an illustrator and an illuminator, but moved to work on large scale murals, tapestries, embroidery, altar crosses, chalices, altarpieces, furniture decoration, and enamel jewellery as well as book illustration. Traquair became one of the first women honorary members of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1920, preceded only by Christina Robertson in 1829 and Fanny MacIan in 1854 (Cumming 2022, 126: Chapter 5 n. 21) and continued working in her long career right up until her death in 1936 at the age of 84.

Throughout all her work, Traquair's main creative purpose was to celebrate the potential of the human mind and spirit, and the importance of human experience. She was drawn to authors such as Dante in whose

work she saw the ideal synaesthetic combination of the visual, poetic, and musical. Dante is the most constant inspiration for Traquair's art: after she published her first illustrated Dante 1890, a further illuminated edition of Dante, his *La Vita Nuova*, followed. A letter to her nephew Willie in 1891 about her illustrations for Dante articulates Traquair's approach to book illustration, which perhaps begins to reveal the reasons for Tennyson's approval of her work:

> You see I adapted the diagrammatic manner on purpose, it being necessary in a set of consecutive drawings meant to guide the reader and not to confuse him by pictures suggested by Dante which is quite a different matter and of which we get plenty but I think to simply follow Dante and let the poet suggest his own pictures is best.
>
> (Phoebe Anna Traquair to Willie Moss, Edinburgh, 1 February 1891 NLS MS8122 folio 6)

Here Traquair articulates her approach to book illumination and illustration - 'I think to simply follow Dante and let the poet suggest his own pictures is best'- and this is evident in all Traquair's illustrations, particularly in her ambitious and intricate project to illustrate Tennyson's *In Memoriam* in the following year.

Margaret Armour's article 'Beautiful Modern Manuscripts,' in the special issue of *The Studio* in the winter of 1897, places Traquair as one of the 'leading artists in the revival of illumination' (Marsh and Gerrish Nunn, 133). By this point, Traquair had produced numerous illustrated volumes: several sonnets from DG Rossetti's *The House of Life*; Tennyson's *In Memoriam* in 1889-92; Robert Browning's *Saul* 1893-4; and William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere*, which she illustrated with the *Song of Solomon* in early 1897. Traquair worked on illustrations for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) for five years from 1892 to 1897: these brought her fame in London as a leading illustrator, when they were exhibited in 1898 (Cumming 2022, 59; Marsh and Gerrish Nunn, 133). Armour's article is a prequel to this major exhibition: in the article, Traquair is given space to explain her artistic approach, that she turned to illustration herself because of 'a great desire to project feelings or emotions, and a consciousness that direct transcript from nature did

not relieve me of the burden of feeling which for the moment was master' (Armour 51). Traquair strove to communicate meaning through the interaction of image and text, and she articulates the differences she sees between decorative art and fine art:

> all decorative art, of which illumination is but a department, being in its very nature an accompaniment, as an instrument is to the voice; and, in this, absolutely different from a picture, which stands alone on its own merits; the desired end being a whole, in which the sympathy between parts is perfect [...] If I meet with a book which stirs me, I am seized with the desire to help out the emotion with gold, blue, and crimson; or is it a wall, to make it sing (Armour, 52).

Here Traquair is clearly referring to the two of the decorative arts for which she is most famous: book illustration and mural paintings. However, it is worth noting that Traquair objected to the term 'decorative art': in a letter to her nephew Willie from 13th January 1892, she notes 'the more one studies the history of art the more one wonders at people talking about 'Decorative Art' as if all art from prehistoric times down to the 16th century was not all Decorative' (Phoebe Anna Traquair to Willie Moss, Edinburgh 1 February 1891 NLS MS8122 folio 14).

Traquair's first project of painting a wall to 'make it sing' was completed during 1885 and 1886: she was commissioned to decorate the mortuary chapel in the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh and, in the words of the Scottish art historian and critic James L. Caw, she transfigured the walls with 'beautiful pictures which spoke of love and hope and reunion' (Caw 144). This focus on the hope of an afterlife would later be reflected in Traquair's illustrations for *In Memoriam.* Traquair started work on her extraordinary mural cycle for the Song School of St Mary's Episcopalian Cathedral in Edinburgh in autumn 1888, taking as her theme the canticle, *Benedicite Omnia Opera* 'O All Ye Works of the Lord, Praise the Lord': the focus is on images of celebration and of Creation.

When Traquair returned to the Song School mural after her Italian trip in 1889, she was energized by her experience of Italian medieval art: the whole is suffused with a riot of Renaissance decoration, inspired by Botticelli.  Traquair's creative ambition saw every section of the walls covered in exquisite detail and vibrant colour. In the murals Traquair traces a spiritual journey, a celebration of life and human experience in all its myriad forms. Figures from contemporary art, music, and literature – Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Tennyson – mingled with those long dead and portraits of actual churchmen and choristers from the cathedral.

**[Image 3:**
**Phoebe Anna Traquair, *The Powers of the Lord***
**South Wall of the Song School of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh (detail)**
**(Photo: Clare Broome Saunders. Courtesy of St Mary's Cathedral)]**

Traquair had the highest esteem for Tennyson and his poetry. In a letter to her nephew Willie from 1891, when she notes that she is in the middle of the *In Memoriam* project for 'Mr Cunyngham, friend of Holman Hunt's', she muses on the idea of genius:

> what we call genius is only a peculiar avidity for acquiring knowledge with power to apply it in direct individual ways. That is unusual amount of knowledge acquired and individuality strong enough to mould such knowledge in its own way. Another quality one sees in genius is the turning everything to account: pain of all kinds for instance, or joy. […] Take Tennyson: Maud must have been the fruit of much pain. Dante almost all he did, and what spring[s] from joy was a joy born of pain often it is a joy in objects quite apart from the artist, as in some of Shelley's songs, the joys in external nature, or imaginary spirits etc.'
>
> (Phoebe Anna Traquair to Willie Moss, Grantown on Spey August 1891 NLS MS8122)

On learning of Tennyson's death, Traquair writes:

> So Tennyson is no longer breathing our air. Oh Willie you live in hard times. You can never know what it is to hear that Browning has a poem in the press, or Carlyle is writing something new or Tennyson, or Ruskin. What a clutch of stars they were.

(Phoebe Anna Traquair to Willie Moss, Aberlour House, Aberlour 15 October 1892 NLS MS8122)

It is clear, therefore, that Traquair had a great respect for Tennyson's poetry and insisted on the central importance of the text - 'let the poet suggest his own pictures is best' - both of which would suggest she might find favour with Tennyson. The process of grief articulated in *In Memoriam*, and the ultimate hope in the afterlife, is the subject of Traquair's murals for chapel of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children. The expression of her Christian faith in the redemption of the soul is a central and constant concern of her work, which would make Tennyson's poem an obvious choice for illumination.

Traquair's illustrated edition is a collection of ninety individual vellum pages, which she handbound in full calf leather over boards, and for which she designed silver clasps. It is a surprisingly small folio, 189 x 165 mm, pen and ink, gouache and gilding. From the very opening to the Prologue, text dominates the page, with vignettes illustrating the central poetic images next to each of the stanzas. Throughout the 1880s, Traquair studied and copied thirteenth century manuscripts, and their influence is obvious in her illustrations. In a visit to London in Summer 1884, she visited the British Museum and made some copies of illuminations from the Bible of William of Devon (Mitchell, 66). From 1885 to 1887 Traquair corresponded with John Ruskin, who loaned her what is now called the Brantwood Bible (France c.1280), and the mid-thirteenth century *Blue Psalter* (Mitchell 67-8). As Mitchell suggests, these copying exercises in the late 1880s offer Traquair the means to acquire technical expertise in the art of illumination and 'were formative in enabling her to create her own masterpieces from 1890 onwards' (Mitchell, 71).

Traquair's blending of the medieval and the modern is a key aspect of all her artistic output. In her review of Traquair's murals for the Catholic Apostolic Church in Edinburgh, which is now the Mansfield Traquair Centre, Margaret MacDonald (later MacDonald Mackintosh) comments on the way

in which Traquair uses the inspiration of the thirteenth century manuscripts to create contemporary art:

> The fruit of one age is the food of another, and it is with the fruit of the medieval age that this artist has sustained her art. Her work glows with the feeling and colour of the mediaeval school, yet she has rendered her thoughts in a way that is completely modern (Macdonald 1897).

These adaptations and variations from the thirteenth century manuscripts with which she had been engaged are obvious in many of her illustrations for *In Memoriam*. For the second lyric, the 'Old Yew, which graspest at the stones/That name the underlying dead, Thy fibres net the dreamless head/ Thy roots are wrapped about the bones,' Traquair combines expected medieval motifs with rather more abstract images. The image on the bottom right shows an abstract depiction of a row of corpses lying amid the tree roots which is reminiscent of some of Blake's images for Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1824-7, while the initial letter 'O' is starkly modern. The image for Lyric 22 is remarkable and shows the clear inspiration of Traquair's work on *The Blue Psalter*. The illustration at the top, essentially the initial illuminated letter 'T,' encompasses the whole of the lyric: the path in the background; Death the 'Shadow fear'd of man' snatching Hallam and breaking their 'fair companionship,' spreading his 'Mantle dark and cold;' the speaker fearful of the Shadow who 'sits and waits for me' behind him. However, most striking is the way that Traquair literally lets the text speak for itself. She makes the crucial final two stanzas red, which balances the red of the image, so that the text is illuminated: the words are ablaze, she makes them 'sing' (Armour, 52).

**[Image 4:**
**Plate 34, *In Memoriam A.H.H*. in manuscript with gouache and gilt illuminations on vellum by Phoebe Anna Traquair, Edinburgh, 1889-1892. Rubenstein Library, Duke University. Reproduced with kind permission of David Traquair]**

A similar technique can be seen for Lyric 34. The opening stanza of this lyric is one of the key moments of *In Memoriam*:

> My own dim life should teach me this,
>
> That life shall live for evermore,
>
> Else earth is darkness at the core,
>
> And dust and ashes all that is [.]

This is a core expression of the struggle of faith and doubt in the poem. Traquair illuminates the initial letter 'M' with the image of Christ's hands exhibiting the wounds of the nails as evidence of his Resurrection, as he did to Doubting Thomas in the New Testament (John 20: 24-29). The drops of blood issuing from these wounds become flames that frame the whole verse, in which appear images of Christ supporting the doubter and dead Hallam and carrying them with him into the afterlife. Traquair's image provides the assurance of faith with which the speaker is wrestling in this verse, and once again she presents key text in red ink and lets it speak for itself. This is again seen in Lyric 86 'Sweet after showers': at the top section of the initial letter 'S', the Blake-inspired red winged angel breaks the waves of grief and agony, and the 'Doubt' and 'Death' that are highlighted in red in the poem. In the bottom curve, the speaker sits in calm contemplation of a serene landscape, his mind having flown 'To where in yonder orient star/ A hundred spirits whisper "Peace"' in the final lines.

In the second half of Lyric 106 'Ring out the want, the care, the sin' this same combination of the expected medieval illumination and the modern abstract elements is clear. The red-winged monk ringing the bell in the bottom right-hand corner of a typically thirteenth century motif comes as a contrast to the images in the initial letter 'R'. Here, a red-winged angel greets the dead Hallam in the bowl of the letter, as he has flown up from the resting corpses in between the bottom two strokes. The final triumphant lines in red 'Ring out the darkness of the land,/Ring in the

Christ that is to be' are highlighted in red, emphasising the message of hope.

A crucial aspect of the blending of medieval and modern is the fact that Hallam is portrayed recognisably throughout the illustrations, Traquair foregrounding Tennyson's late friend and the process of his grief. The initial letter of the first lyric 'I held it truth, with him who sings/ To one clear harp in divers tones,' seems typical of the thirteenth-century manuscripts with which Traquair had engaged so intricately. However, the illustration for the later stanza 'Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd', in the vignettes at the bottom of the page, shows Christ representing Grief holding above the waves a slumped drowning figure who resembles Hallam, and who comes as a contrast to the opening stylized medieval figures. Halfway through Lyric 6, comes the focus on the speaker's sister Emily, 'the unconscious dove/ That sittest ranging golden hair' unaware of the hand of death behind her. The final line here 'unto me no second friend' shows the speaker bowed in grief before Hallam's ghostly image. A spectral Hallam takes the speaker's hand in Lyric 119, 'Doors, where my heart was used to beat/So quickly,' which recalls the raw grief of Lyric 7, echoing the third of line of its second stanza, both Lyrics situated at Hallam's house at 67 Wimpole Street in London. Lyric 119 is a key moment of progression for the speaker, and offers fulfilment, replacing 'A hand that can be clasp'd no more' with 'I take the pressure of thine hand,' against a dawning sky, with the promise of acceptance and relief from grief.

The obvious influence of Blake is another aspect of Traquair's illustrations which would have appealed to Tennyson. Tennyson was a great admirer of Blake's illustrative work: Sibylle Erle notes that Tennyson's copy of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1826) had 'pride of place in his collection at Farringford on the Isle of Wight in the early 1860s' (Erle 2015). According to a list kept at the Tennyson Research Centre in Lincoln, Tennyson displayed it on his drawing-room table well before he received Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863). Emily

Tennyson recorded in her diary that Tennyson acquired Blake's 'Job' on 9th April 1856 - it was a present from his friend Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford. Clearly, therefore, Tennyson was an admirer of Blake long before his more general recovery as a result of Gilchrist's biography.

Blake is arguably Traquair's main artistic inspiration, and, with Dante, her greatest influence. Traquair painted Dante and Blake side by side on the North Wall of her Song School Mural in Edinburgh to highlight this joint vision of creative force. The influence of Blake can be seen throughout the Song School Murals, one example being the clear link between the angels in Blake's illustrations to the *Book of Job* (1826) 'When the morning Stars sang together, & all the Sons of God shouted for joy', and the red-winged angels on the West Wall of the Song School, which she painted 1891, at the same time as she is working on the illustrations for *In Memoriam*. As in all Traquair's work, there is clear evidence of this Blakean influence in her illustrations for Tennyson's poem. Lyric 23 exemplifies this with red-winged seraphs and rainbows in the main vignette. The red-winged, trumpet blowing angels in Traquair's image for Lyric 28 represent souls who have reached heaven, a union of human and divine, marking the change in the speaker's grief as the year has progressed. Blakean red-winged seraphs and rainbows feature in Lyric 37, and in Lyric 44 'How fares it with the happy dead', where they linger leaning over the bar of the initial letter 'H', watching the speaker's grief below on earth.

**[Image 5:**
**Plate 44, *In Memoriam A.H.H*. in manuscript with gouache and gilt illuminations on vellum by Phoebe Anna Traquair, Edinburgh, 1889-1892. Rubenstein Library, Duke University. Reproduced with kind permission of David Traquair]**

Tennyson and Traquair also share theological and spiritual inspirations. Tennyson's original title for *In Memoriam* was 'The Way of the Soul'.

Traquair's most ambitious and successful embroidered textiles was a series of four works that she called *The Progress of the Soul* (1893-1902), which present the allegorical journey of the soul to heaven. Traquair represents the soul in the human form of Denys l'Auxerrois in the four panels that make up the artwork *The Entrance, The Stress*, *The Despair* and *The Victory*. Traquair considered *The Progress of the Soul* embroideries her 'great hymn to life' (Cumming 2022, 121), and they were among her favourite pieces. She bequeathed them to the National Gallery of Scotland on her death in 1936, so that anyone could visit and share the joy and consolation of her vision. It is the same consolation that the speaker shares at the end of *In Memoriam*, with the reassertion of faith. It is no surprise that Traquair's final illustration for *In Memoriam*, in which a red-winged angel embraces the soul, is almost the same composition as the final panel of *The Progress of the Soul*, *The Victory* (1902), where Denys is awoken to eternal life with a kiss from a red-winged angel (Cumming 2022, 81). Both are influenced by images of Jerusalem being embraced by Jehovah in Blake's *Jerusalem*.

Traquair clearly found Tennyson's *In Memoriam* inspirational: but perhaps in looking more closely at her illuminations of his text, Tennyson saw in Traquair a shared vision and artistic purpose, a connection with each other and a shared influence in Blake. Traquair celebrates these connections in her final mural scheme in 1920, for the Italiante Manners Chapel near Thorney Hill on the edge of the New Forest. For this mural, commissioned in memory of the recently deceased Lady Manners, Traquair took as her theme *Te Deum Laudamus*, a song of faith and praise. As she wrote to her sister Amelia, she included portraits of a range of figures who she considered 'all sing the Te Deum, tho' they don't often know it', the 'Te Deum' meaning to her 'every beautiful and every fine thing' (Cumming, 2022, 116-7). Scriptural images of the Madonna, John the Baptist and the Apostles appear alongside men of science like Joseph Lister and Louis Pasteur, flanked again by key literary and artistic influences. Here behind the altar, Tennyson and Blake stand side by side: over their shoulders she includes her own self-portrait.

**[Image 6:**
**Tennyson and Blake, Manners Chapel, All Saints Church, Thorney Hill, Hampshire, UK. Courtesy of The Rev Dr Benjamin Sargent]**

When Traquair's near contemporary and countryman William Butler Yeats visited Edinburgh in 1906, he recognised the ways in which encounters with Traquair's art reflect his experience of Blake:

> I have come from her work, overwhelmed, astonished, as I used to come long ago from Blake, and from him alone. She differs from all other modern devout painters but him in this supreme thing. The nearer she approaches the divine the more passionate become the lines — the more expressive the faces, the more vehement is every movement. To the others the world is full and the spirit empty [.] [Letter from W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 13 June 1906]

It is difficult to be certain why Tennyson changed his mind and acquiesced to the request to sign approval of Traquair's illustrated version of *In Memoriam*. Perhaps it was that her illustrations, unlike those of the earlier Pre-Raphaelites and her contemporary Third Generation Pre-Raphaelites, maintained the poetic text as the central focus of the image; perhaps it was because, like Yeats, he found that an encounter with her work illuminated their shared inspiration, William Blake. Or perhaps it was because her artistic vision, like his in *In Memoriam*, exposed the spiritual struggles of the individual, fraught with grief, loss, and doubt, and sought to reconnect the individual to society, to beauty, and ultimately to the divine.

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