Editorial Introduction: Tennyson and the Allegory of Art

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Like Ovid's contest of Athene and Arachne, tracing myths into the weft of tapestries,[1] Tennyson allegorized his craft as a weaving: a lacing of varied strands into the imaginative fabric of art. "I describe something which is the result of the impression of a hundred sights and scenes woven into one," he said to H.D. Rawnsley in the spring of 1890.[2] The imaginative act depicted is at once a pulling together of disparate threads and a feat of artistic creation. For Tennyson's imagination could often hold its synthetic weaving and visionary genesis in productive, if excessive, tension. "So fired is his imagination," wrote Christopher North in 1832, "that he beholds in a shred of green fustian a swatch of the multitudinous sea; and on tearing a skreed, thinks he hears him roaring."[3] Hinted at by North's criticism is not only Tennyson's visionary but also his auditory imagination—sounds that echo through the elevating mind of a listener, intensifying and fictionalizing sense.[4] This Special Issue supplies a re-articulated account of Tennyson's "imagination" in its multiple forms: from the global, spatial and auditory to the role of verse form in organic creation. His engagement with prosody, Augustan poetics, classical aesthetics and the charms of rhetoric each shed light on Victorian allegories and philosophies of the imagination. Collectively, these essays offer new perspectives for Tennyson studies as it continues to transform, by interrogating the imaginative process at the core of Tennyson's intellect.

Impelled by the chaotic definitions of the imagination in Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and *Biographia Literaria*, Arthur Hallam wrote in 1828 to secure from Coleridge what no critic has managed to obtain.[5] Through a mutual acquaintance of Coleridge, he requested "*clear*

definitions of Reason, Understanding, Imagination, as he understands the words. It is indeed a crying sin that our terminology should be so indistinct."[6] Whether "our terminology" refers to the "Transcendentalism" of Tennyson's circle or to the sum total of human philosophy, the phrase supports James Engell's judgement that post-Enlightenment ideas of the imagination evolved "in a community of minds" as its terms were "considered together by individual writers."[7] Coleridge's divisions between "fancy" and the "imagination" had similarly evolved in competition with Wordsworth's Preface to his 1815 *Poems*, by distinguishing between types of the "synthetic" and "*creative*" imagination: a force that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create."[8] Extending an aesthetic dialogue with the surviving Romantics, Leigh Hunt's *Imagination and Fancy* would renew such critical distinctions for the 1840s by identifying "fancy" variously as "a combination of images," an "apparition," and "a lighter play of imagination."[9]

Repeatedly, Tennyson's own references to the "imagination" both elide and complicate those categorical distinctions, alert to, even as they challenge, the terms' critical history. In his letters and reported conversations, the imagination ranges from a high Romantic emblem of the idealizing force of verse ("the higher poetic imagination," as he states of "Merlin and the Gleam") to a faculty intimately connected to memory and longing.[10] "Imagination — *The* Fancy — no particular fancy —," he explained to James Knowles when glossing *In Memoriam* LXXXVI ("let the fancy fly").[11] Elevating the concept from *a* passing fancy into an active and cognitive category, the line longs for the very flights of imagination that, like "The Palace of Art," can sequester thought from reality. Those momentary escapes from pained realities are central to the swerves of *In Memoriam*, in what LXXXV terms "imaginative woe" (l. 53).[12] Such is the case in *In Memoriam* CXXII, where the "imagination" is bound to a state of fallenness even in its tenses: the longing "To feel once more […] / The strong imagination roll

/ A sphere of stars about my soul" (ll. 5-7). The lines that follow dramatize an act familiar to Christopher North—of embellishment of details beyond their reality. For only "If" the dead could "enter in at breast and brow" would the speaker reach an amplified state of perception, a chimera in which "all the breeze of Fancy blows, / And every dew-drop paints a bow" (ll. 9, 11, 17-18).[13] The imaginative tensions pull between visual heightening and a transcendent visionary grandeur, a notion of "Fancy" as an illusory force that draws on the word's associations as a store and generator of images.

The "fanciful" and the "imaginative" have long been thought to have reversed in meaning since their classical uses—the imagination's visuality ("*imaginatio*") waning in favour of the fantastic, and fancy's ties with "*phantasia*" displaced by the more discrete senses familiar to Coleridge and Hunt.[14] *In Memoriam*, by contrast, holds each of these associations in generative tension, in sections that cut to the heart of the words' etymologies and renewals. Renewal through word-weaving is precisely the effect at work in *In Memoriam* LXXXIV, where the permeability of memory and fantasy is refigured through the infinitely suggestive "backward fancy" (l. 46). Capturing a retrospective flight of consciousness, the phrase approximates the possibilities of Old English compounds in rerouting linguistic associations through imaginative names and syntactic bonds. In "Ode to Memory," Tennyson had already associated acts of remembrance with fancy, dramatizing the memory's ability to enable congress not only with the dead but with the "myriad-minded" (l. 118), a term caught up with the self-conscious state of art. It is to Tennyson's "myriad-minded" imagination that this Special Issue attends, through articles that range from his receptions and influences to his formal inventions.

Commencing with Shelley's *Alastor*, Seamus Perry explores the notion of an imagination that may be destined to follow only "images of its own longing," and he connects such perils to the power of naming and of names.[15] Names, for Tennyson, act as imaginative emblems by which realities are measured or subsumed, a practice that Perry traces from the classical, in works such as "Ulysses," to contemporary references and resonances. Exploring Tennyson's classical engagement, Jane Wright re-reads Tennyson's uses of the word "charm" through his engagement with Horace's *Carmina* and *Ars Poetica*. For Wright, "charm" invokes not only incantation but an "integration between form and force," in which "sweetness" and "use" are inextricably linked. Her article thus traces a rhetorical tradition that connects aesthetics to questions of poetic responsibility. Tennyson's aesthetic traditions are also woven into James Williams's piece, which approaches Tennyson's prosodic imagination through Augustan poetics. Both his heroic couplets and the blank verse of *The Princess* are read comparatively through Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, revealing the meetings and divergences of metrical cultures.

Connecting prosody to Tennyson's global imagination, Cornelia Pearsall examines the politics of empire surrounding Tennyson's *On the Jubilee of Queen Victoria*. Pearsall analyzes the ode's poetics in tandem with the reception of the Imperial Institute, whose purpose and demolition are approached through the role of literature in shaping, resisting or reflecting imperialism. Challenges of verse form to the readerly imagination are also prominent in Ewan Jones's article, which examines Tennyson's ability to invoke the "ghost" of ballad as a mode of generic exploration. Jones's article expounds the evaluative and moral implications of such composite forms, and their consequences for categories of reading.

Imagining posterity, Tennyson took steps to control his posthumous reputation, among them, as Michael Millgate has observed, his writing of "Merlin and the Gleam."[16] Anna Nickerson's close readings of the poem trace Tennyson's metaphor of transcendent light by tying it to motifs of the poetic imagination. The rootedness of Tennyson's landscapes in spatial and geographic specifics is the subject of Alison Chapman's closing essay, which explores associations of memory and place in relation to understandings of elegy. Her reading of "Frater Ave atque Vale," through Catullus and contemporary travelogues, reflects on the role of the "geo-literary imagination" and chimes with a growing interest in the temporal and spatial alignments of Victorian verse. The multi-faceted imagination that emerges from these articles is intimately woven into, and tested within, Tennyson's style and verse forms. If for Hallam the imaginative faculties could be indistinct, this Special Issue illuminates the range and diffusion of Tennyson's creative syntheses: the acts of word-weaving and myth-making that intertwine in his allegories of art.

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[1] See *Metamorphoses* VI, with its mythological weaving of Pallas Athene and Arachne—an episode which, as Philip Hardie notes, is "now routinely read as a poetological contest in the 'weaving' of poetry": Philip Hardie, "Contrasts," in *Classical Constructions: Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist and Epicurean*, ed. S.J. Heyworth with P.G. Fowler and S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), p. 149. Ovid, *Metamorphoses: Books 1-8*, 3rd edition, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G.P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 292-299, VI.50-145. With thanks to Richard Rutherford for conversation on this point. On the etymological relations of the word "text" to weaving, see also *Tennyson and the Text: The Weaver's Shuttle* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), p. 5.

[2] See H.D. Rawnsley on the "Spring of 1890," *Memories of the Tennysons* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1900), pp. 111, 108; *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Norman Page (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 68-69.

[3] Christopher North (pseudonym of John Wilson), quoted in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 56.

[4] On the act of listening in Tennyson, see Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2018), pp. 49-69.

[5] On Hallam's reading of *Aids to Reflection* and *Biographia Literaria* before his arrival in Cambridge, see *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. Jack Kolb (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1981), p. 233; John Beer, "Tennyson, Coleridge and the Cambridge Apostles," in *Tennyson: Seven Essays*, ed. Philip Collins (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 8; Seamus Perry, "Hallam and Coleridge," *The Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 9, no. 5 (2011): 434. See also Herbert F. Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), p. 51.

[6] Arthur Hallam, letter to John Frere, nephew of John Hookham Frere, December 23, 1828, Hallam, p. 261, emphasis added; Beer, p. 10.

[7] See Arthur Hallam's letter to William Gladstone on the "heterogeneous Metaphysics" and "Transcendentalism" of Cambridge, November 8, 1828, p. 244; James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), p. ix.

[8] *Poems by William Wordsworth: Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author. With Additional Poems, A New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay*, 2 volumes (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815), 1: ix; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 2

volumes, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), 1: xlix-l, 304; 2: 16, 129.

[9] Leigh Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy; or Selections from the English Poets, Illustrative of those First Requisites of their Art* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1844), pp. 30-31, 2.

[10] Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son*, 2 volumes (London: Macmillan and Co., 1897), 2: 366.

[11] James Knowles's notes, recorded in Gordon N. Ray, *Tennyson Reads* Maud (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia, 1968), p. 40; *The Poems of Tennyson in Three Volumes,* 2nd edition, ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 1987), 2: 402. Subsequent lines of Tennyson's verse are quoted from this edition.

[12] See also Harry Puckett, "Subjunctive Imagination in *In Memoriam*," *VP*, 12, no. 2 (1974): 97-124; William E. Buckler, *The Victorian Imagination: Essays in Aesthetic Exploration* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

[13] See also Anna Barton's reading of "the divine imagination" in CXXII: *Alfred Lord Tennyson's* In Memoriam*: A Reading Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), p. 162.

[14] On the contrasting of the "Greek, *phantasia*" with the "Latin *imaginatio*," see Engell, p. 173; Coleridge, *Biographia*, 1: 82-84, 99. See also Chaucer's uses of "fantasie": for example, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III. 1032, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 527. With thanks to Helen Spencer for discussion on the Middle English reception.

[15] Michael O'Neill, "The Wheels of Being: Tennyson and Shelley," in *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), p. 186.

[16] Michael Millgate, *Testamentary Acts: Browning, Tennyson, James, Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 52.