

“MY LOVE INVOLVES THE LOVE BEFORE”: TENNYSON’S *IN MEMORIAM A.H.H.*,  
TEMPORO-NARRATIVE PROGRESS, AND THE PETRARCHAN  
LYRIC SEQUENCE TRADITION

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines temporo-narrative progress in Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* as a means of situating that work within the Petrarchan lyric sequence tradition, in relation to which it has most often been treated as tangential. *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, I will demonstrate, exhibits a more persistent sense of temporal progress than is typical in other examples of the Petrarchan genre, by virtue of its containing more frequent direct continuities of thought between individual poems than is typical. Such continuities, however, are not in themselves entirely unprecedented in the genre, so that their more persistent presence in Tennyson's work represents more a stretching than a breaching of generic parameters, and *In Memoriam A.H.H.* in any case also utilizes other, more conventional methods to contribute to its uniquely strong sense of sequence-wide temporo-narrative progress.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to myself, because it was a real pain in the keester.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge, first and foremost, my committee chair, Dr. Joseph Jordan, who was much more generous with his time, for a longer time, than he had to be, and who kept me going with helpful guidance, when I did not particularly want to keep going, or could not see how to do so.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Francesco Petrarca's fourteenth-century *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*Fragments of Common Things*, or *Fragments Composed in the Vernacular*) is a collection of three hundred and sixty-six lyrics, mostly sonnets.<sup>1</sup> These lyrics are spatially separated from one another, and largely capable of standing alone, but they take their fullest meaning and have their fullest effect in relation to one another. The poems are connected by the fact of their single poet-speaker, who is a version, at least, of the historical Petrarch, and by their predominant (though not exclusive) focus on a single subject—the poet-speaker's unrequited love for a woman named Laura. Most importantly for our consideration, the poems of the *Fragmenta* are connected by the progress of linear time. The collection's individual lyrics, the reader is made to believe, are not more or less randomly presented moments in the poet-speaker's affection for Laura, or in his life in general (there are, again, poems which do not deal with love), but are arranged or written in ways that emphasize their sequential occurrence along the biographical timeline of the poet-speaker; the poems follow one another not just spatially, but *temporally*. There are, it is true, several apparently intentional anachronisms in the collection which should not be trivialized, as Teodolinda Barolini among others has thoroughly demonstrated, but linear temporal progress nevertheless predominates in the *Fragmenta*, and the collection approaches something like plot or narrative by primarily following the poet-speaker's love for Laura as it progresses, however

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<sup>1</sup> There are 317 sonnets, 29 canzones, 9 sestinas (including 1 double sestina), 7 ballatas, and 4 madrigals.



erratically, from a chiefly erotic obsession to a more religiously-mediated love, and ends as a rededication on the poet-speaker's part to Christian belief in general.

In short, the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* is a lyric sequence—it is, in fact, commonly acknowledged to be the *first* lyric sequence. While the structural and thematic characteristics just described are by no means without precedent, Petrarch combines and develops them in such a manner that what he creates is largely new. For example, the lyric collections of Roman elegists like Propertius and Ovid—collections known to have influenced Petrarch—are presented, like the *Fragmenta*, by singular poet-speakers who roughly correspond to their historical authors. The poems of these collections, too, focus primarily on their poet-speakers' romantic or erotic feelings for particular women: “Cynthia” in Propertius' collection, and “Corinna” in Ovid's. Temporal progress, however, is not an emphasized concern in these collections. Time is certainly perceived to move forward across Propertius' elegies, for instance—there is, most notably, a final “break-up” between Propertius and Cynthia, and Cynthia even dies, like Petrarch's Laura—but the events which make the passage of time evident in these poems are never really experienced by the reader as plot-points on the way to something larger, or as the culmination of anything overarching, in the way that such individual moments (that is, individual poems) are experienced by readers in Petrarch's sequence. The poems of the Roman elegists may be sequential, but for all the real effect of this sequentiality, they are incidentally so. They are not ultimately interconnected enough, do not build off one another in consequential enough a manner, to constitute the kind of cohesive, plot-inflected whole represented by Petrarch's sequence.

Dante's *Vita Nuova*, written sometime between 1292 and 1294, is a much closer parallel to the *Fragmenta*, and of course a much more nearly contemporary influence on Petrarch, but it

is not, strictly speaking, a lyric sequence. Though the work presents, in a continuous, emphatically sequential fashion, Dante's love for Beatrice as it progresses, like Petrarch's love for Laura, from erotic passion to religious renewal, it does so prosimetrically: its poems come interspersed within chunks of prose, and the prose constitutes a quantitative majority of the sequence that does most of the narrative heavy-lifting. In *Vita Nuova* section III, for example, Dante describes, in prose, his second encounter with Beatrice, at which "she greeted me so miraculously that I felt I was experiencing the very summit of bliss" (6).<sup>2</sup> This greeting, we're told, inspired a foreboding dream, in response to which Dante wrote a poem in which he addresses other poets, asking for their help in interpreting the dream. This poem is then presented in the midst of the narrative prose, and it essentially re-summarizes what the prose has already described. After the poem, Dante explicates, again in prose, the poem's structure ("In the first part I extend greetings and ask for an answer, while in the second I signify what requires an answer . . ." [7]), before closing the section by recounting, still in prose, his fellow poets' interpretive responses to the dream-poem. Section III is then followed by three consecutive sections which advance the narrative of Dante's love for Beatrice exclusively through prose, and the next poem to appear, in section VII, is, like its predecessor, surrounded by prose which, before the poem, narrates the events which led to the poem's creation, and after the poem, explains the poem's structure.

So, again, while Petrarch was not without models in constructing his work, the *Fragmenta* is nevertheless the first true lyric sequence, and over the next several centuries innumerable poets would imitate (with considerable variation, of course) his thematic and structural formula for the lyric sequence genre: would create bodies of spatially separated,

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations from the *Vita Nuova* come from *Vita Nuova*, translated by Musa.

individual poems, mostly or exclusively sonnets, interconnected by their primary focus on a poet-speaker's love for a particular woman, and by the presence of a temporal progress apparent and consistent enough to create, in conjunction with the thematic near-uniformity, a sequence-wide sense of plot.

In English, imitators of Petrarch in this vein begin appearing in the late sixteenth century, the first fully-realized example being Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, initially published posthumously in an unauthorized version of 1591. *Astrophil and Stella* is perhaps the English sequence of this period most like the *Fragmenta* in the strength of its plot-like development—narrative continuity from poem to poem, particularly in the latter portion of Sidney's sequence, is often felt even more strongly than in Petrarch's work—and to my knowledge it is also the only Petrarchan sequence of the Elizabethan period to feature, like the *Fragmenta*, poetic forms other than the sonnet: out of Sidney's one hundred and eight total poems, eleven are "songs" of various stanza structures.

The arc of Astrophil's love for Stella, though, is markedly different than the arc of the Petrarchan poet-speaker's love for Laura. Where the *Fragmenta* shows its poet-speaker in a love which is never reciprocated, but which leads, particularly after Laura's death, to the poet-speaker's rededication to Christianity (he essentially transfers his affection for Laura onto the Virgin Mary), *Astrophil and Stella* is altogether more earthy and secular, and finally darker in tone. Astrophil's love, like the Petrarchan poet-speaker's, long goes unreciprocated, but Stella does eventually admit to loving Astrophil back. She stipulates, however, that their mutual love should remain secret and unconsummated, and when Astrophil, whose passion for Stella is more openly carnal than that of the Petrarchan poet-speaker for Laura, is unable to remain satisfied

with this arrangement, Stella rejects him for good, and the sequence ends with Astrophil's extreme dejection.

Another Elizabethan sequence, Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595), similarly takes liberties with Petrarch's love theme, and while its narrative progress is not as consistently apparent as that of *Astrophil and Stella*, Spenser employs certain elements of temporal organization which are more concrete than anything that appears in Sidney's sequence, and which recall some of the most overt elements in Petrarch's establishment of clear temporal progress.

The *Amoretti* again privileges "chaste" or spiritual love, in contrast to the more corporeal emphasis of *Astrophil and Stella*, but Spenser rewrites the Petrarchan script by having his poet-speaker (who roughly corresponds to Spenser himself) not only win over his beloved (a woman corresponding to Spenser's eventual wife, Elizabeth Boyle), but marry her. Spenser makes plentiful use of Petrarchan conceits about the pains of love and the unresponsiveness of the pined-for lover, but the *Amoretti* as a whole, as Reed Way Dasenbrock puts it, "should be seen as a turn away from the restlessness of Petrarchan love and toward the peace and rest Spenser finds in the sacred world of marriage" (46).

The eighty-nine sonnets of the *Amoretti* follow the course of a courtship that leads to the "peace and rest" of marriage, and the linear temporal progress of this narrative arc is emphasized by references to "real"—in this case, calendrical and seasonal—time. For example, a large portion of the poems take inspiration from the daily prescribed scriptural readings in the Book of Common Prayer for the year 1594, when the sequence was submitted for publication, or from their more general "occurrence" on important dates in the liturgical calendar. Most notably (and

as has been often noted<sup>3</sup>), poem 22 is set on Ash Wednesday (“This holy season, fit to fast and pray” [1]), and forty-five sonnets come between it and poem 68, which celebrates Easter Day (“Most glorious Lord of Lyfe that on this day / Didst make thy triumph over death and sin” [1-2]). Forty-five is precisely the number of days that fell between Ash Wednesday and Easter in 1594, the apparent implication being that each new poem in this “inner or ‘Lenten’ sequence” represents a step forward in time of a day (Hunter 40). I agree with G.K. Hunter that this poem-by-poem daily progress exists at “so high a level of abstraction from the practice of reading” as to go largely undetected by most readers (40), but in any case, the bookend-ing Ash Wednesday and Easter poems do undeniably put temporal progress in the mind of the reader, as do other temporally specific poems within the inner sequence and throughout the *Amoretti*. In poem 60, for instance, the poet-speaker says he has been in love for a year, and elsewhere there are poems commemorating different New Years Days, and others marking the beginnings of different spring seasons. As I have hinted, such concrete, calendrical time also plays a significant role in Petrarch’s sequence, most importantly in the eighteen so-called “anniversary” poems which mark either the number of years that have passed since the Petrarchan poet-speaker fell in love with Laura, or the number of years that have passed since Laura’s death, or the number of years that have passed since both events.

After the Elizabethans, the lyric sequence as well as the sonnet form both went out of vogue in English. The sonnet would resurge in popularity on its own with the Romantics,<sup>4</sup> but

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<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Dunlop, Hieatt, and Hunter.

<sup>4</sup> A resurgence instigated in large part by the poetry of Charlotte Smith, whose *Elegiac Sonnets* (first edition published in 1784) is perhaps the “sequence” in English most explicit in its acknowledgement of Petrarchan influence—it even features several translations from the *Fragmenta*. However, as with the collections of the Roman elegists, temporal progress in the *Elegiac Sonnets* is not consistent or overarching enough to constitute a sequence in the sense in which I have been using the term; there is nothing reminiscent of plot. For effectively the same reason, I do not mention Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* with the Elizabethan lyric sequences above. I agree with Booth that “there is indeed a pervading sense of relationship among [Shakespeare’s] poems, but no consistent sense of progress” (3);

the next noteworthy lyric sequences do not appear until the latter half of the nineteenth century. The best-known example from this time period—or at least the best-known example which is commonly discussed in a Petrarchan context—is undoubtedly Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850),<sup>5</sup> but my primary focus for the rest of this essay will be on another work published in the same year, Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, which has, by comparison, been discussed only cursorily in relation to the Petrarchan lyric sequence tradition, despite its exhibiting the primary characteristics of the genre.

*In Memoriam A.H.H.*, like the sequences I have already discussed, is a collection of spatially separated, individual poems made to cohere by a uniform poet-speaker who presents love-driven thoughts and feelings in a temporally continuous manner that approaches plot. Of course, also like the other sequences I have detailed, Tennyson’s work manifests these Petrarchan characteristics in its own unique ways, with its own unique emphases, and while the work, I contend, stretches rather than breaches the parameters of the genre, *In Memoriam A.H.H.* does stand out to a marked degree even in a tradition in which transformation is rather the rule than the exception.

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Shakespeare’s sonnets “fall easily and automatically into groups and under headings” (1), but the apparent “promise of overall coherence” is never fulfilled (2) .

<sup>5</sup> Like its predecessors, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is notable for the transformations it makes to Petrarch’s love theme, and for the unique way it manifests its temporal progress. For one thing, Barrett Browning reverses the gender dynamic of the typical Petrarchan love-situation by featuring a female poet-speaker who presents her experiences with a male beloved (Lady Mary Wroth was the first in English to enact such a “reversal,” in her much earlier *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* [1621]). Barrett Browning’s sequence is also noteworthy for presenting a love that is reciprocal from the start, and for (perhaps partly in consequence of this auspicious beginning) evidencing its clear temporal progress across a narrative arc which is less dramatic than that of many of its predecessors. The plot-like progress of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is manifested primarily in quietly escalating signs of affection between the two lovers (early professions of love progress to kisses, *et cetera*), and in the poet-speaker’s becoming, over the course of the sequence, slightly less beset by feelings of inferiority and doubt. Temporal progress is consistently evident, but the change the poet-speaker undergoes—from happily but anxiously in love, to happily but less anxiously in love—is a subtler one than, say, Petrarch’s poet-speaker progressing from erotic to religious passion, or Astrophil eventually winning over Stella, only to drive her away again.

The most glaring way in which *In Memoriam A.H.H.* distinguishes itself from its predecessors (while remaining, again, within the parameters of the genre) is in the formal aspect of its constituent poems—not one of Tennyson’s one hundred and thirty-three lyrics is a sonnet. Every poem of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is written in quatrains of iambic tetrameter rhymed *abba* (the famous “In Memoriam stanza”), and the number of these stanzas per poem ranges widely, from three to thirty-six, though most of the poems have fewer than ten stanzas. While form obviously plays a key role in how any poem is perceived, and can influence, or be the product of, the kind of content a particular poem presents in the first place (as in the case, obviously, of the love sonnet), there is nothing, I believe, inherent to the sonnet form that makes it indispensable, rather than merely conventional, to the lyric sequence as I have conceived it. The sonnet rhyme scheme itself exists in multiple configurations in all the sequences I have already discussed, and the multiple non-sonnet poetic forms employed in both the *Fragmenta*, the fountainhead of the genre, and *Astrophil and Stella*, the effective start of the genre in English, demonstrate plainly that formal ingenuity and variety are not only not anathema to the lyric sequence tradition, but have been part of it since its beginning.

*In Memoriam A.H.H.* also stands out starkly among other lyric sequences for its unique manifestation of the Petrarchan love theme, though taking liberties with the love theme is itself, again, standard practice. The poems of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* are presented by a poet-speaker, essentially Tennyson himself, who, over the course of several years, mourns the death of a young man who is named simply as “Arthur” in the text, but who corresponds to Tennyson’s real-life friend Arthur Henry Hallam; Hallam died at the age of twenty-two of an apparent stroke, and his sudden death rocked Tennyson to the core.

Because the historical Tennyson and Hallam were exceedingly close while Hallam was alive, and because *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, as part of its general pervading sense of extreme (supposedly “unmanly”) sorrow over Arthur’s death, also contains many phrases and metaphors which can at least be construed as having homosexual undertones,<sup>6</sup> the question of the precise nature of the poet-speaker’s affection for Arthur has garnered much critical attention.<sup>7</sup> While I do not wish to simply brush aside the importance, both literary and historical, of attempting to answer this question, I do find it sufficient for the purposes of this essay to note simply that the Tennysonian poet-speaker of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* always speaks of his feelings for Arthur as “love”—in some of the best-known lines in English literature, after all, he claims, with Arthur’s death in mind, that “’Tis better to have *loved* and lost / Than never too have *loved* at all” (XXVII.15-16; emphasis mine). Whether this love was (and presumably still is) “merely” a love for a dear friend, or something of a more intimate nature, the emotion in question *is* love, and while Tennyson obviously alters the typical male-female Petrarchan gender dynamic by presenting a love, of whatever kind, between two males, some manner of precedent for this alteration can be found in the sequences of both Wroth and Barrett Browning, in which, as I have already mentioned, female poet-speakers engage with male beloveds.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The poet-speaker, for example, repeatedly compares himself to a widower, or refers to himself as “widow’d” by Arthur’s death, and he frequently longs for physical intimacy of one kind or another between himself and the deceased Arthur. Most often he wishes to join hands with his dead companion, or mourns his inability to do so, but a more suggestive example comes in section XCIII, where the poet-speaker asks Arthur’s spirit to “Descend, and touch, and enter; hear / The wish too strong for words to name” (XCIII.13-14). As Nunokawa notes, “it is difficult for a contemporary audience [and would have been comparably difficult, he argues, for Tennyson’s contemporary audience] to read these lines without thinking that the ‘wish too strong for words to name’ is the love that dare not speak its name” (208).

<sup>7</sup> See Nunokawa as well as Craft.

<sup>8</sup> As Ricks points out, the “most important analogue” for the Tennysonian poet-speaker’s relationship with Arthur probably comes in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (214), the majority of which poems are affectionately addressed, by Shakespeare’s male poet-speaker, to a male “Fair Youth.” As I do not, however, for reasons already mentioned, consider Shakespeare’s collection to be a true lyric sequence, I do not address its precedent in detail here.



Of course, there is also the conspicuous fact that Arthur is dead for the entirety of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Tennyson has generic precedent for this twist on the Petrarchan love theme, too, in no less important a place than the *Fragmenta* itself, the final third of which unfolds after Laura's death, but the *sequence-wide* elegiac orientation of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* does represent, I contend, a more substantial difference between Tennyson's work and its generic predecessors and near contemporaries than does the tweaking of the gender dynamic. On the purely thematic level, the entirety of the Tennysonian poet-speaker's treatment of love thus comes filtered, in one way or another, through a dimension of grief that is not at all present in most sequences. Even more significantly, however, Arthur's being dead, and the Tennysonian poet-speaker's general method of dealing with this fact, are the primary forces behind *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s uniqueness in manifesting what is, ultimately, the most indispensable characteristic of the Petrarchan lyric sequence as I have conceived it: temporo-narrative progress.

The Tennysonian poet-speaker, in the aftermath of his companion's death, is led by his grief to question many of his beliefs about humanity and the cosmos. He desires to believe, for instance, that his and Arthur's relationship will live on in some way, and that he and Arthur will be reunited in the afterlife, and that Arthur's supposed brilliance in life has not been wholly negated by death;<sup>9</sup> he desires, in general, to feel reassured in his sometimes unorthodox Christian

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<sup>9</sup> By the time of his death, Hallam was already a well-respected literary critic, and high expectations and profuse admiration for him were the norm among his friends and acquaintances, among whom numbered many future luminaries besides Tennyson. A quotation from one friend, historian John Kemble, at the time of Hallam's death, is representative: "This is a loss which will most assuredly be felt by this age, for if ever man was born for great things he was. Never was a more powerful intellect joined to a purer and holier heart; and the whole illuminated with the richest imagination, with the most sparkling yet the kindest wit" (qtd. in Hallam Tennyson 106). Because *In Memoriam A.H.H.* thus mourns the death of a young man with great potential, and because it contains certain other conventional allusions and images, it has often, and not unfittingly, been considered in the context of pastoral elegy. Sendry, for instance, details the many correspondences between *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and Milton's *Lycidas* in particular, and Kennedy places Tennyson's work more broadly into the genre. As these and other scholars acknowledge, however, the characteristics of pastoral elegy are not widespread enough across *In Memoriam A.H.H.* for the work as a whole to be considered an example of the genre.

beliefs regarding death and immortality. In his grief, however, the poet-speaker is also prone to pessimism, and he frequently contemplates contemporary developments in geology and pre-Darwinian evolutionary theory that seem to contradict his preferred beliefs, so that he vacillates throughout the sequence between grief and contentment, doubt and faith.

Yet despite his constant vacillations, the poet-speaker's thoughts do lead him incrementally toward consolation for Arthur's death, and by the sequence's end he has resolved his grief (or learned to control it) by teaching his Christian faith to accommodate the doubts raised by science and other more general lines of thought. He finds his way, over the course of the sequence, from overwhelming grief (which is overwhelming love in the face of the loved one's death) to religious reaffirmation.

The arc of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, then, is in its broadest terms reminiscent of the arc of Petrarch's *Fragmenta*, over the course of which work the Petrarchan poet-speaker progresses from overwhelming earthly love to a religious rededication of his own. But Petrarch's poet-speaker is, again, not faced with the death of *his* beloved until two-thirds of the way into the *Fragmenta*—Laura's death is announced in poem 267 of 366—and the other readily apparent differences in the two narrative arcs' particulars, as well as the less apparent differences in the mechanics of their temporo-narrative progress (the methods by which the two arcs are made to be perceived *as arcs*), arise primarily from this difference in the timing of the two beloveds' deaths.

Because *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s Arthur is dead throughout the entirety of Tennyson's sequence, he is more thoroughly "unattainable," as it were, for the Tennysonian poet-speaker than are the beloveds of other sequences for their suitor poet-speakers. Though Laura in the *Fragmenta*, Stella in *Astrophil and Stella*, and the other beloveds in the other sequences I have

thus far discussed are typically reluctant, for at least significant portions of the sequences in which they appear, to reciprocate the affections of their would-be lovers, these beloveds are, nevertheless, always alive (excepting the fact of Laura's late death), and so are at least theoretically capable of being wooed—they are, indeed, sometimes successfully won over, as when Astrophil wins over Stella (however temporarily), or when the poet-speaker of Spenser's *Amoretti* manages to become engaged to his unnamed lover. Successful at their wooing or not, and whether “success” amounts to, or would amount to, sexual consummation, or marriage, or a more basic acknowledgement from the beloved of reciprocal feelings, these poet-speakers are at least able to *set* such concrete goals for their love-feelings—and are able, through the statements or actions of their beloveds, to gauge their success at meeting these goals—because the beloveds in question are alive in the first place.

The Tennysonian poet-speaker, by contrast, dealing from the start of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* with a deceased beloved, is more beholden to indefiniteness in both his goals and his means of confirming their achievement. To the extent that he attempts to “woo” Arthur, for instance, he does so by periodically imploring his dead companion to interact with him in whatever manner possible—most expressly in sections XCI and L, wherein he anaphorically asks Arthur to “come,” and “be near me,” respectively.<sup>10</sup> Decontextualized, such requests are of course much like the requests made by any of the more typical poet-speakers for attention from their beloveds, but because of the uncertainty surrounding both the fact and nature of Arthur's continued existence, ambiguity reigns even when the probability is highest, in section XCV, that the Tennysonian poet-speaker's requests have been answered.

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations from *In Memoriam A.H.H.* come from the Norton edition edited by Gray.

In that section, which is typically put forth as the climax of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, the poet-speaker, while reading old letters from Arthur, falls into a “trance” of some sort (43), under the influence of which he experiences either (a) a literal commingling of his spirit with Arthur’s, which commingling in turn enables a mystical contact with, and comprehension of, some of the monumental issues with which the poet-speaker has been struggling; or (b) a more grounded moment of intense mental clarity, during which the poet-speaker only figuratively interacts with Arthur’s “spirit,” and grasps the truths about death and time in a more basically intuitive sense:

So word by word, and line by line,  
The dead man touch’d me from the past,  
And all at once it seem’d at last  
The living soul was flash’d on mine,

And mine in this was wound, and whirl’d  
About empyreal heights of thought,  
And came on that which is, and caught  
The deep pulsations of the world,

Aeonian music measuring out  
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—  
The blows of death. (33-43)

The poet-speaker writes that his former companion’s “*living* soul” was “flash’d” onto his (36; emphasis mine), making it sound as though Arthur’s spirit literally still exists, and thus literally interacts with the poet-speaker’s spirit, but this description of the event is qualified in advance by “seem’d” (35). Saying that something “seemed” or “appeared” to be the case does not necessarily imply that the appearance in question was deceptive—does not necessarily mean that something *only* “seemed” to be the case—but such a word choice does at least raise the possibility that the poet-speaker’s interaction with Arthur’s spirit was merely figurative. The physicality and sense of space with which the two souls are next described as being “wound” together, “whirl[ing] / About empyreal heights of thought,” and “[coming] on that which is” (37,

38, 39), further evoke an actual plane (however ethereal) on which a soul-interaction is literally taking place, but these descriptions, too, could of course be only figurative. The adjective “empyrean” in “empyrean heights of thought” greatly complicates precise interpretation all on its own, having as it does both definite spatial and possible spiritual connotations, either or both of which connotations could apply either literally or figuratively.

Discussion of this matter, which occupies a central place in scholarship of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*,<sup>11</sup> could be drawn out almost indefinitely—I have here considered only the core of section XCV, and oversimplified, to a degree, even this bit of interpretation—but suffice it to say for now that though section XCV marks an important moment for the Tennysonian poet-speaker, it is clear that he is uncertain as to the precise nature of his experience, and the reader is left with the same uncertainty. The poet-speaker’s desire for literal reconnection with the deceased Arthur may well be fulfilled in section XCV, but the experience is just too ambiguous for his conscientiously skeptical self to interpret and present unequivocally.

More to the point, such uncertainty, as I have suggested, is characteristic of the poet-speaker’s condition even when he is grappling, as he most often is, with more grounded moments not centered on the immediate prospect of direct interaction with his deceased companion’s spirit. The poet-speaker’s overarching goal throughout *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is to find a new emotional and intellectual state of being that, by not reasoning away his grief too simply,<sup>12</sup> will allow him to move on with his life in a contented manner that also does justice to his relationship with Arthur. The process of his coming to this new state of being is most often the process of the poet-speaker mentally working his way, as best he can, through the same kind

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<sup>11</sup> For just a small sampling of the many, often conflicting interpretations of section XCV, see Dunn, Moore, and McSweeney.

<sup>12</sup> The poet-speaker early on, for instance, dismisses as facile someone’s written assurances that “Other friends remain,” and “Loss is common to the race” (VI.1, 2).

of difficult to answer questions that feed his uncertainty about the experience in section XCV, but without the immediately relevant external prompting of such an experience, or the possibility, however tenuous, that such an experience represents for external *confirmation* of the poet-speaker's desired beliefs about death and the hypothetical afterlife. Primarily, the Tennysonian poet-speaker has only his own imperfect logic, religious faith, and intuition to aid him and encourage him on his stubborn search for "truths" which he admits can only be definitively "proved" by death itself (CXXXI.10-11).

Fundamentally different, then, from the dynamic at work in more typical lyric sequences, in which poet-speakers are primarily invested in making outward gestures toward their certainly-existing beloveds, and interpreting and reacting to the actions or statements of these beloveds, the insistently abstract, mental orientation of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, arising from the fact of Arthur's being dead, and perpetuated by the relative unanswerability of the questions the poet-speaker finds himself raising, makes the temporo-narrative progress of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* unique among its generic predecessors and near contemporaries by leading to more frequent perceived continuities of thought and feeling between consecutive poems than is common in those other sequences. That is, in determinedly engaging with the various aspects of his various questions, and necessarily uninfluenced (or uninterrupted, as it were) by the actual or anticipated actions of a living beloved, the Tennysonian poet-speaker creates more and larger examples of thematic, essentially argumentative "blocks" than are commonly seen in other works belonging to the lyric sequence genre. Tennyson creates chains of consecutive poems distinguishable not only because the poems of which they are constituted all deal with the same particular aspect of the basic love-grief preoccupation, but also because any given poem in one of these blocks is more likely to represent a continuation, however abstruse, of the thought process or emotional

content in the poem preceding it, than is any particular poem in any more typically Petrarchan sequence to represent the same thing. Though the apparent continuation of a chain of thought or feeling from one poem to another does not, of course, necessarily mean that one poem is actually “set” immediately after another (in fact, this is often observably not the case), such continuity, occurring as frequently as it does in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, and occurring alongside other elements of temporal progress akin to those that I have described as existing in other sequences, creates an uncommonly insistent sense of real-time temporal progress across Tennyson’s sequence.

Demonstrating this uncommonly insistent sense of temporal progress, which represents, as I have said, the most important *difference* between *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and other lyric sequences which appear before or near the middle of the nineteenth century, will be the primary aim of this sequence, but with the broader goal, in highlighting this difference, of showing how Tennyson’s sequence *belongs* more to the Petrarchan tradition than has been commonly acknowledged or believed—I aim to show how the uncommonly insistent sense of temporal progress in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* represents a stretching, rather than a breaching, of generic precedents. I will thus examine multiple “blocks” of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* in order to demonstrate how such blocks tend to work; to show the forms that the Tennysonian poet-speaker’s continuities of thought and feeling tend to take, as well as how and why such continuities tend to periodically, briefly, end. As a concrete point of comparison, I will also examine multiple sections of Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, which I choose for the purpose not only because I find that sequence to be ideally representative of the lyric sequence

genre,<sup>13</sup> but also because it is the sequence, as I have hinted, with the most similarities (however broad) to *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, and is therefore the sequence which promises to be most illuminating in its differences from Tennyson's work. Given length restrictions, this essay can provide only a very incomplete view of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* as a whole, not to mention the *Rerum*, but my goal, again, is only to be representative in showing how Tennyson's sequence *tends* to create its fictional expanse of time and develop across it, in comparison to such tendencies in the other examples of the genre in which I seek to place *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

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<sup>13</sup> I concur with Greene that "everything still to happen in the poetics of the sequence . . . depends on what is articulated as possible by Petrarch's master text" (22).



## CHAPTER 2

### *IN MEMORIAM A.H.H.*'S "PROLOGUE" AND POEMS I-IV

The first block of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* that I will examine—a “block” being, again, a group of consecutive poems interconnected by continuities of theme and argumentation—will naturally enough be the first such block that I perceive in the sequence: poems I-IV. Before this group properly begins, however—before the numbered poems of the sequence begin—there appears an unnumbered poem titled “Prologue,”<sup>14</sup> and despite the fact that this prologue poem does not belong to the first block as I have identified it, it merits brief discussion here, as it is greatly responsible for establishing the reader’s expectation of, and thus influencing the reader’s later perception of, temporo-narrative progress, not only across the opening block, but across the entire sequence. Opening poems which perform this task are in fact something of a convention across the lyric sequence genre, and Tennyson’s “Prologue,” in its particular content as well as in its setting the stage for the perception of temporo-narrative progress, is the point of greatest similarity, as Irene Hsiao notes, between *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and Petrarch’s *Rerum*, specifically (179).

Tennyson’s “Prologue” is essentially a prayer addressed directly to Christ—“Strong Son of God, immortal Love” (1)—in which the poet-speaker, conceding that human beings can have only an imperfect understanding of things like death and the meaning of existence, asks Christ to help him and all of humankind become wiser. The first six quatrains of the poem read as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> The title was added by later editors, and not Tennyson himself, but the poet did leave it unnumbered.

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

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

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:  
Thou madest man, he knows not why,  
He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest manhood, thou.  
Our wills are ours, we know not how,  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be:  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;  
For knowledge is of things we see;  
And yet we trust it comes from thee,  
A beam in darkness: let it grow. (1-24)

These lines evidence a resolution by the poet-speaker of the basic problems he will face in the sequence to come (albeit a resolution that rests on his acceptance of his *inability* to completely resolve his problems, except through religious faith), but a first-time reader has no way of immediately recognizing such a resolution; he or she has only the reasonable suspicion, instilled by the “Prologue” title, that the material of this poem is in some regard prefatory to the larger body of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

In the ninth quatrain of the “Prologue,” however, the poet-speaker shifts from the declarative statements that make up the bulk of the poem, and begins anaphorically asking

Christ's forgiveness for various things. This new tack leads, in the penultimate stanza, to the first reference to Arthur's death ("Forgive my grief for one removed, / Thy creature, whom I found so fair" [37-38]), and finally, in the closing stanza, to an apparent reference to the tenor and nature of the poems to come, through which reference the "Prologue" most substantially creates an expectation of temporo-narrative progress across *In Memoriam A.H.H.* In this final stanza the poet-speaker asks Christ to

Forgive these wild and wandering cries,  
Confusions of a wasted youth;  
Forgive them where they fail in truth,  
And in thy wisdom make me wise. (41-44)

Because the calmly declarative statements of which most of the "Prologue" is constituted cannot reasonably be viewed as either "wild and wandering cries" or "confusions," the reader, again with the implications of the "Prologue" title in mind, must suspect these descriptions to apply to the poems which he or she knows are yet to come. And because the poet-speaker is thus apparently able to describe, at all, poems which for the reader are still to come, the "Prologue" must be situated chronologically *after* the one hundred and thirty-two poems which spatially follow it. In the narratological terminology of Gerard Genette, what is experienced by the reader as "prolepsis," an "evoking in advance [of events] that will take place later" (40), must in fact be retrospection, or "analepsis," on the part of the poet-speaker, since the poems he refers to and describes must have, from his perspective, already "occurred." The "Prologue" takes place at a present moment further advanced in time than any of the respective present moments of the poems of the body of the sequence, which poems all apparently take place during the same broadly-related chunk of past time during which the poet-speaker exhibited feelings and attitudes—"wild[ness]" and "confusion"—distinct from the feelings and attitudes on display in the "Prologue." The poet-speaker has apparently developed past this earlier period of wildness

and confusion, which he characterizes as making up his “wasted youth,” and the reader accordingly has some reason to suspect that the numbered poems of the sequence that are soon to come after the “Prologue” will in some manner represent the *process* of the poet-speaker moving past the earlier period and its attendant feelings—the reader has reason to suspect that the poems of the body of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* will in some manner move forward in time, from whatever point in the past at which they start, toward the present tense of the spatially prior but temporally antecedent “Prologue” poem, and the calmer demeanor therein evinced.

So, the reader approaches Poem I of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* with at least a subliminal expectation that forward temporal movement will be a part of his or her experience in moving forward spatially from poem to poem, and poems I through IV do not contradict this expectation. These poems as a block are representative of how Tennyson’s blocks tend to proceed, in that they form a kind of microcosm of the sequence as a whole: the individual poems are connected by various degrees and forms of continuity, so that they accumulate into an ongoing argument that progresses vacillatingly from extreme grief to qualified consolation.

Poem I finds the Tennysonian poet-speaker in the first throes of his grief over Arthur’s death (as do all of the poems in this block), and he inaugurates the body-proper of his sequence by immediately demarcating his past, when Arthur was still alive, from his present, by disavowing, at least rhetorically, a belief which he apparently held before Arthur’s passing. He writes,

I held it truth, with him who sings  
To one clear harp in divers tones,  
That men may rise on stepping-stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.

But who shall so forecast the years  
And find in loss a gain to match?  
Or reach a hand thro’ time to catch

The far-off interest of tears? (1-8)

He used to believe, he says, that people can profit from dramatic or traumatic changes—events which create “dead selves” by marking off the past from a new reality—by using them as “stepping-stones” to progress to better versions of themselves. Now, however, he has reconsidered this optimistic, pragmatic outlook. In the depth of his new grief over Arthur (it becomes more apparent in the next stanza that this is what is driving him), the poet-speaker is apparently unable to imagine ever progressing past his grief, unable to imagine a time when the “loss” of Arthur could be counteracted by a “gain to match” (5-6). And he suggests that such gain, the hypothetical “interest of [his] tears” (8), would in any case be too “far-off” to provide any modicum of comfort in the present (8).

Accordingly, the poet-speaker now espouses an approach to his grief that is the opposite of what his past attitude would prescribe: rather than looking forward to a self-improving moving-on from his pain, he looks to embrace his grief fully, supposedly demonstrating in the depth of his dark feelings, and in the completeness of his abandonment to them, his loyalty to the deceased:

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drown'd,  
Let darkness keep her raven gloss:  
Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,  
To dance with death, to beat the ground,

Than that the victor Hours should scorn  
The long result of love, and boast,  
'Behold the man that loved and lost,  
But all he was is overworn.' (9-16)

As A.C. Bradley puts it, “the poet will not suppress his grief lest he should suppress love, too” (83).

This ultimate theme of poem I, the poet-speaker's belief that he must cling to the despair of the present in order to keep his feelings for Arthur alive, is the theme of poem II, as well. Poem II is addressed by the poet-speaker directly to a yew tree in a churchyard cemetery, so that the poem is set in a particular time and place presumably distinct from the hypothetical setting of poem I's vaguer, more purely disembodied lyrical pondering. This clear difference in setting carries already a strong suggestion of forward temporal movement from poem I to poem II, a suggestion boosted by the expectation of forward temporal progress earlier created by the "Prologue," and the "Old Yew" is furthermore addressed precisely because it supposedly possesses the constancy amid death that the poet-speaker looked to possess in poem I; there is a clear thematic and argumentative continuity from poem I to poem II, an emotional elaboration, which implies sequentiality and thus a step forward in time.

First, the yew tree is noted for embracing the gravestones and bodies of the dead (not Arthur's gravestone or body in particular, as he does not come to be buried until poem XVIII, but those of the general dead in the churchyard), in a literal, physical enactment of the poet-speaker's desire, expressed in poem I, for a continued mental embrace of Arthur's memory and the grief that attends it.<sup>15</sup> The yew is said to be "grasp[ing] at the stones / That name the underlying dead" (1-2), echoing in particular the vocabulary of "Love *clasp[ing]* Grief" in poem I (1-2; emphasis mine), and the tree's "fibres" are said to "net the dreamless head[s]" of these dead (3), while its "roots" are said to be "wrapt about the[ir] bones" (4).

The Tennysonian poet-speaker presents this opening multifaceted image as pure description of the yew without direct commentary, and the image is therefore only implicitly

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, one also suspects an unexpressed longing on the part of the poet-speaker for the ability to literally re-embrace Arthur.

metaphorical, though the implication, obviously, is very strong. He next goes on to cite, however, other characteristics of the yew—the typical long life of the species, and the fact that it does not change color with the seasons—which extract from him a more explicit expression of and explanation for his admiration of the particular tree he is addressing:

The seasons bring the flower again,  
And bring the firstling to the flock;  
And in the dusk of thee, the clock  
Beats out the little lives of men.

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,  
Who changest not in any gale,  
Nor branding summer suns avail  
To touch thy thousand years of gloom:

And gazing on thee, sullen tree,  
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,  
I seem to fail from out my blood  
And grow incorporate into thee. (5-16)

The poet-speaker would like to identify with the tree (and indeed imaginatively becomes one with it in the closing lines of the poem) because of its “stubborn hardihood” (14). The yew is long-lived, unaffected “by any gale” (6), and the unaffected self it carries through its long life, the poet-speaker claims, is one of “gloom” and “sullen[ness]” (9, 12). Because the tree does not become visibly brighter in autumn through a change in the color of its leaves, or in spring or summer via new “bloom[s]” (9), it can be said to wear its “gloom,” its darkish green color which the poet-speaker associates with death and grief, all year round, and throughout its life. The poet-speaker is determined to be likewise “stubborn” in resisting any potential brightening of his mood, any potential moving on from the “gloom” brought on by Arthur’s death—a reassertion, as I have said, of the philosophy of wallowing he espouses in poem I.

Poem III carries forward this theme yet again, but the implication of forward temporal progress from poem II to III lies less in the kind of restatement-with-a-difference that links I and

II, and more in poem III's explicit argumentative reconsideration of his determined embrace of grief.

Poem III begins with an apostrophe to personified "Sorrow," the poet-speaker thus dramatizing even further his intimacy with that emotion, but his insistence on cultivating this intimacy has apparently begun to have disturbing mental ramifications he has not foreseen. His heretofore desired closeness with Sorrow is now described as a "cruel fellowship" (1), because Sorrow has begun presenting ideas to the poet-speaker that he cannot bring himself to countenance. "She" (Sorrow is feminized) has been "whisper[ing]," with a "lying lip," dark thoughts of a wider scope than the thoughts which the poet-speaker has so far explored (4):

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

'And all the phantom, Nature, stands—  
With all the music in her tone,  
A hollow echo of my own,—  
A hollow form with empty hands.' (5-12)

The poet-speaker's embrace of his personal sorrow has bled out into a kind of nascent existential crisis, as "Sorrow" has begun preaching to him a vision of the universe which casts it as essentially godless and meaningless. She says, for one thing, that "the stars," which can be taken as representing their literal selves and as symbolizing the concept of fate, "blindly run" (5)—they are subject to no guiding hand, such as a God, and events on earth occur without any profound reason or cause. Additionally, "Nature," despite "the music in her tone," her outward sweetness, is said to be only a "hollow echo" of hollow Sorrow, offering nothing, ultimately, in her "empty hands" (9-12).



Questions and doubts along these lines will be a constant presence throughout the rest of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, but for now, at least, the poet-speaker has determined to reject Sorrow's ideas as untrue, as proceeding, again, from her "lying lip," and his determination to do so leads to the continuity-through-explicit-rebuttal which most strongly suggests forward temporo-narrative progress from poem II to poem III. Explicitly questioning the wisdom of believing such thoughts as Sorrow has just been said to express, and thus implicitly questioning his general unqualified embrace of grief so far in the sequence, the poet-speaker concludes poem III by asking rhetorically about Sorrow,

And shall I take a thing so blind,  
Embrace her as my natural good;  
Or crush her, like a vice of blood,  
Upon the threshold of the mind? (13-16)

The correct option is certainly implied to be the latter, an active *rebuffing* of Sorrow, which approach is, of course, precisely the opposite of the poet-speaker's active embrace of grief in the previous two poems.

Poem IV, the last poem of this first block that I have identified in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, takes up the conviction that grief should not be given free rein, and evidences forward temporal progress from poem III by dramatizing the poet-speaker's ongoing struggle to enact this new belief. The full poem reads as follows:

To Sleep I give my powers away;  
My will is bondsman to the dark;  
I sit within a helmless bark,  
And with my heart I muse and say:  
  
O heart, how fares it with thee now,  
That thou should'st fail from thy desire,  
Who scarcely darest to inquire,  
'What is it makes me beat me so low?'

Something it is which thou hast lost,

Some pleasure from thine early years.  
Break thou deep vase of chilling tears,  
That grief has shaken into frost!

Such clouds of nameless trouble cross  
All night below the darken'd eyes:  
With morning wakes the will and cries,  
'Thou shalt not be the fool of loss.' (1-16)

The poet-speaker describes iteratively his typical nighttime and morning experiences as of late,<sup>16</sup> writing, to start, that when he is sleeping (or perhaps when he is in the semi-conscious interval just prior to sleep), his “will is bondsman to the dark” (2)—that is, his consciously determined thoughts become subject to the dimmed consciousness of a sleeper, and more particularly to the darkness of the grief he has repeatedly cast in terms of blackness or “gloom.”<sup>17</sup> He “sit[s]” metaphorically “within a helmless bark” (3), unable to set the course of his thoughts, and unavoidably finds himself conversing, as it were, with his “heart” (4), which in his unconscious or semi-conscious state is entirely involved with his grief and sorrow, in a manner only slightly more concentrated on its actual source in Arthur’s death than was the broad sorrow that produced poem III’s wide turn into metaphysics. The poet-speaker’s heart, in sleep, “scarcely dares to inquire” the precise reason for its despondency (7), but is nonetheless preoccupied with the overwhelming sense that the poet-speaker has lost “something” (9), “some pleasure from [his] early years” (10). This vague sense of loss becomes so acute as to overwhelm the unconscious poet-speaker, who desperately urges the “deep vase of chilling tears, / That grief hath shaken into frost” to “break” (11-12)—he wishes, it seems, for some emotional coup de grâce (perhaps a

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<sup>16</sup> In Genette’s terminology, “iterative” narration is narration which narrates one time what has happened more than once: “a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same [basic] event” (116). In poem IV, then, the Tennysonian poet-speaker is narrating not only one particular night, but what has lately *tended* to be his experience at night, and in the morning upon waking.

<sup>17</sup> See the case of the yew in poem II, of course, as well as the poet-speaker’s determination, in poem I, to “let darkness keep her raven gloss” (10). The poet-speaker’s ignorance, with which his grief comes to be inextricably linked, is likewise cast as darkness in the “Prologue” poem (24).

revelation as to what the “something” he has lost is) to finish him off, to shatter his already “frozen” psyche and thus release him from his grief, in however self-destructive a manner.<sup>18</sup>

Such have the poet-speaker’s nights been of late, when he cannot submit his thoughts to his own will, but his mornings, he writes, have brought escape from this turmoil, as he is then able to reassert his will and tell himself ““Thou shalt not be the fool of loss”” (16). This last statement, of course, sounds much like the conclusion of poem III, where the poet speaker implicitly determined that he needed to “crush [Sorrow], like a vice of blood, / Upon the threshold of the mind” (15-16), and it thus more forcefully points out, in retrospect, the correspondence of the entirety of poem IV to poem III; both poems depict the poet-speaker first as subject to an unfettered sorrow, and finally as wanting to counteract this sorrow. At the close of poem IV, however, we see the poet-speaker putting his new conviction more into practice. His closing statement to himself is an explicit expression of his intent to rein in his grief, such as the rhetorical question that ends poem III is not, and since poem IV’s iterative narration suggests, again, that the sleeping and waking scene the poet-speaker describes has been played out numerous times, it is furthermore implied that the poet-speaker has been in the *habit*, for some indeterminate but probably not overly long period of time, of actively trying to assert his will in this manner. He has clearly not managed to entirely eradicate his sorrow, to the extent that we can judge his success by the activity of his unconscious mind, but complete eradication has not necessarily been his goal, anyway; we only know that he has more actively embraced the need to control his emotions to some degree, so that he will not be made entirely a “fool.”

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<sup>18</sup> The vase metaphor is one of the most famous, and most beguiling, in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Tennyson explained that ““Water can be brought below freezing-point and not turn to ice—if it be kept still; but if it be moved suddenly it turns into ice and may break the vase”” (qtd. In Gray 8). His dream-state grief in poem IV, then, already has him frozen, paralyzed with tension, and he wishes in his desperation for the final sudden movement that will “break the vase.”

To review, then, after the “Prologue” poem instills an expectation of forward tempo-narrative progress for the sequence, poem I begins the sequence-proper with the poet-speaker’s dismissing, in the wake of Arthur’s death, his past pragmatic attitude toward traumatic events. Instead of using his loss to improve himself, he intends to wallow in his grief as a means of showing loyalty to his relationship with Arthur. Poem II develops the idea of a commitment to wallowing, by presenting the poet-speaker’s admiration for a yew tree which supposedly exhibits a constancy of gloom that he would imitate. Poem III then represents a turn, an acknowledgement by the poet-speaker of the need to temper his surrender to grief, after this surrender begins infecting his thinking on larger issues in a way that frightens him. In poem IV, the poet-speaker, though still very much subject to periods of overwhelming grief, shows himself to have fully embraced the need to try to restrain his emotions.

These four poems form the first block of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, as I have said, and their incremental, continuous movement from utter grief to imperfect solace is paradigmatic of how all of the blocks of the sequence tend to proceed. Such movement is paradigmatic, too, of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*’s overall progress as created by the interactions of the blocks with one another. Most blocks, like the first one, end with a kind of qualified hope. There may or may not then follow a poem or two, unattached to any block, or forming their own miniature block, in which the poet-speaker reflects self-consciously on the worth of his own poems.<sup>19</sup> After these poems, or directly following the end of the previous block, a new block tends to begin with a renewal of the poet-speaker’s grief, brought on by whatever new turn of thought, and the subsequent poems of this new block progress, again, toward qualified comfort. *This* block ends, and another new block starts with another renewal of grief, and so on, and so on. In this broad

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<sup>19</sup> Bradley and others have also noted the presence and typical positions of these literary-critical poems.

way, the blocks interact with one another in a cyclical or recursive manner, but as *In Memoriam A.H.H.* goes on, the griefs that begin blocks tend to be less and less totally overwhelming, as the qualified solaces that end blocks become more complexly and satisfactorily qualified, and so more lasting. The sequence ends—the final block ends—as I have said, with the poet-speaker in a state of mind much like that exhibited in the “Prologue,” a state of religiously-centered serenity which is not much disturbed by the continued presence of grief.

Of course, the blocks do not behave in as wholly uniform a manner as I have spelled out, and the progress of the sequence is not as wholly tidy and linear, even in its recursiveness, as my summary suggests. And in any case, no broad patterns such as these can be detected as early on as in the first block of the sequence. For the moment, it is more immediately important to note how the continuous thought process connecting the first four poems of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is *not* continued by poem V, which as it happens is one of the poems, mentioned above, which stand alone between the end of one block and the start of another, as the poet-speaker steps back to ponder the nature and value of his own poems. The poet-speaker writes,

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

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,  
A use in measured language lies;  
The sad mechanic exercise,  
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,  
Like coarsest clothes against the cold:  
But that large grief which these enfold  
Is given in outline and no more. (1-12)

To be sure, a desire for the relief from sorrow that was deemed necessary in poem III, and which was presented as having become more actively pursued in poem IV, presents itself here, as the

poet-speaker writes that “put[ting] in words the grief [he] feel[s]” acts as a “narcotic” to numb his pain (2, 8), but the modicum of comfort provided by the act of writing is neither the intellectual nor the emotional core of the poem; it is not really the “point.” The poet-speaker’s primary concern, with which he begins and ends the poem, is with the fact that his poetry is unsuccessful in fully depicting his “large grief” (11)—his words, he says, can only show something of a general “outline” of his feelings (12). The thematic link between poem IV and poem V may be the search for solace, but the later poem represents, I contend, a step back from the four poems preceding it; a looking back, but only in a broad and unspecified way that places it outside of the actual continuous thought process of these four poems. The poem that then follows poem V, poem VI, subsequently shows the poet-speaker in a mood of sorrow more unmitigated than that in poem IV, and begins a new chain of thought not directly related to or continued from either poem V or the first four poems of the sequence, except through the continued basic dual theme of grief and solace, and the intimations of temporo-narrative progress which have thrown themselves forward. The poet-speaker writes that an acquaintance of some sort has written to him in an attempt to comfort him, and the poet-speaker dismisses his correspondent’s would-be comforting words with an unremitting despairing cynicism, of which the first two stanzas of the poem give a complete enough picture:

One writes, that ‘Other friends remain,’  
That ‘Loss is common to the race’—  
And common is the commonplace,  
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

That loss is common would not make  
My own less bitter, rather more:  
Too common! Never morning wore  
To evening, but some heart did break. (1-8)

## CHAPTER 3

### PETRARCH'S *RERUM VULGARIUM FRAGMENTA*, POEMS 1-10

I intend to show further examples of the blocks in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, in order to better establish the validity of my generalizations, and to provide a better picture of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* as a whole, and I will set about this fuller examination in the third section of this essay by presenting in outline several consecutive blocks of Tennyson's sequence. Here, however, I find to be the best place to initiate my comparison of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s general manner of temporo-narrative progress—the relatively emphatic continuity of thought just exemplified—with the typical manner of temporo-narrative progress in Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, the progress in this latter sequence being, again, satisfactorily representative, for the purposes of this essay, of the type of progress seen in sequences more commonly placed in the Petrarchan lyric sequence tradition than *In Memoriam A.H.H.* I will examine poems 1-10 of the *Fragmenta*, as these poems make up what I will loosely consider the first “movement” of Petrarch's sequence; I do not call the group a block, and I cut the group off somewhat arbitrarily after poem 10, because of the relatively haphazard continuities of thought and theme these poems evince. *Fragmenta* poems 1-10 are particularly apt for the comparison I intend to undertake, because they appear at the same relative position in their sequence as *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s first block, and because they contain some limited instances of *kinship* with Tennyson's methods as seen in poems I-IV.

The first poem in the *Fragmenta* is a proem like the “Prologue” of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, though it is numbered like the poems that succeed it, and so not as superficially distinguishable

from the rest of its sequence as is Tennyson's "Prologue" from what follows it. But *Fragmenta* 1 performs the same kind of proleptically analeptic function as Tennyson's "Prologue," with the poet-speaker reflecting retrospectively and summarily on poems which for the reader are still to come, and thereby creating a preemptive expectation in the reader of temporo-narrative progress for the sequence. The Petrarchan poet-speaker's proem is similar to Tennyson's in its religious content, too, though it is not addressed to Christ, but rather to the reader, and though the Petrarchan poet-speaker is more openly beset by feelings of shame and regret than was Tennyson's poet-speaker. *Fragmenta* 1 reads,

All you who hear in scattered rhymes the sound  
of heavy sighs with which I fed my heart  
during the time of my first youthful straying  
when I was not the man I've since become:

for the mixed style in which I speak and weep,  
caught between empty hopes and empty sorrow,  
from anyone who knows of love firsthand  
I hope to find some sympathy—and pardon.

I can see now that I was made the subject  
of lots of gossip among lots of people;  
inside myself I'm often filled with shame;

shame is the fruit of all my clever ravings;  
so are repentance and my knowing clearly  
that every worldly pleasure is a dream. (1-14)<sup>20</sup>

The poet-speaker begins this sonnet by referring to the "scattered rhymes" that are presumably to come in his sequence, calling them the products of his "first youthful straying" (1, 3), much as Tennyson's poet-speaker referred in his "Prologue" to the "wild and wandering cries" of his "wasted youth." By referring retrospectively to his "first youthful straying," the Petrarchan poet-speaker of course suggests that he is no longer under the influence of this straying (his love for

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<sup>20</sup> All quotations from the *Fragmenta* come from *The Poetry of Petrarch*, translated by Young.



Laura which, as he goes on to suggest in this poem and explore throughout the sequence, led him away from Christian morality before leading him back to it), and he thus suggests that *Fragmenta* 1 exists at an advanced temporal position from the poems that will follow it. He adds, too, that he was not, at the time of his “straying,” “the man [he has] since become” (4), suggesting even further that the progress of the *Fragmenta* after poem 1 will represent both a forward progress in time toward the temporal setting of poem 1 and a progressive change in the poet-speaker’s character toward the character he exhibits in poem 1.

The Petrarchan poet-speaker next asks for forgiveness, for “sympathy” and “pardon” (8), much as the Tennysonian poet-speaker asks Christ for forgiveness while asking him for more wisdom, but at this point Petrarch’s poet-speaker asks for forgiveness not for his actual behavior, but for the “mixed styles” of his poems to come (5), and not from Christ, but from “anyone who knows of love firsthand” (7)—implicitly, the reader. He does, however, conclude the poem with religious emphasis, by noting that two of the positive “fruit[s]” of his poems and the period they belong to have been “repentance” (13), and the knowledge that “every worldly pleasure is a dream” (14).

*Fragmenta* 1, then, like Tennyson’s opening poem, introduces the main themes of the poems to follow, and sets the stage for the reader’s experience of temporo-narrative progress. After this introductory poem, the *Fragmenta* naturally enough moves on—regresses, as it were, in time, while advancing spatially—to the beginning of what the poet-speaker has called his “first youthful straying,” the start of his love affair with Laura. Both poems 2 and 3 deal with the initial meeting between Laura and her would-be lover, though from slightly different angles, and in so doing, the two poems exhibit, however briefly, the kind of continuity of thought seen in the first block of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

*Fragmenta 2* presents the *innamoramento* rather generally and abstractly—Laura is not even mentioned—as a kind of sneak attack by “Love” or Eros in supposed revenge for the poet-speaker’s past imperviousness to love. In order to “redress a thousand slights in one quick swoop” (2), he says, Love one day “stealthily picked up his bow, much as / a man who schemes a time and place to hurt” (3-4), and the poet-speaker, unsuspecting, had neither the time nor the power to defend himself from this “sudden onslaught” (9). He was left “bewildered and in pain” (10), and has subsequently (as of the time of the poem’s writing) been unable to extricate himself from Love’s control.

*Fragmenta 3* presents the same event more concretely. It reiterates the images of battle and fortification, of the poet-speaker’s heart having been “undefended,” *et cetera*, from Love’s unexpected attack, but this time Laura is mentioned (though still not by name), and the crucial fact of her not reciprocating the poet-speaker’s love is also brought to light:

It was the day the sun himself grew pale  
with grieving for his Maker—I was seized  
and made no effort to defend myself;  
Your lovely eyes had held and bound me, Lady.

It didn’t seem a time to be on guard  
against Love’s blows, so I went confident  
and fearless on my way. My troubles started  
amid the universal sense of woe.

Love found me wholly undefended, with  
the way from eyes to heart completely open,  
eyes that are now the conduit for tears.

He got no glory by it; I was helpless.  
And he let you escape with no attack  
when you were well defended, fully armed. (1-14)

The poet-speaker again says that he did not, at the time of Love’s attack, feel the need to “be on guard” (5), but the attack is now more substantively specified to have come from Laura herself,

who is the subject of address in the poem, and whose “lovely eyes” are said to have “held and bound” the poet-speaker upon his encountering them (4). He also adds a dimension to his denigration of the tactics of the personified Love, by bemoaning the fact that Love attacked *him* when he was “helpless”—Love “got no glory by this,” the poet-speaker says (12)—while leaving Laura, who was “well defended” (14), completely unassailed: a dishonorable way of fighting, the poet-speaker implies, and a cruel one, too, as it precluded even the possibility of Laura’s returning the his affection.

*Fragmenta* 3 also establishes an approximate, primarily symbolic (for the moment) date for the *innamoramento*. The poet-speaker writes that the encounter with Laura at which she “bound” him with her eyes occurred on “the day the sun himself grew pale / with grieving for his Maker” (1-2). These lines have been determined to refer to the day of Christ’s crucifixion, or to the anniversary of that day, when the Gospels claim the sun darkened (“grew pale”) for several hours (Musa 522); the sun’s “Maker” is Christ, and the “universal sense of woe” amid which the poet-speaker further writes that his “trouble” began would be the sadness ostensibly felt by all Christians on the anniversary of the crucifixion (8, 7). The *innamoramento*, accordingly, must have occurred in late March or early April, in concurrence with (we presume) the Good Friday “holiday” as typically observed,<sup>21</sup> and the poet-speaker’s first encounter with Laura, like Christ’s woeful crucifixion which nevertheless had the joyful effect of salvation for mankind, is more broadly implied to represent, for the poet-speaker, the onset of both pain and pleasure, sorrow and happiness—a paradoxical mixture of feelings such as turns out to be the predominant feature of his relationship with Laura.

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<sup>21</sup> This presumption turns out to be not exactly true. The precise date of the *innamoramento* is given much later in the sequence, in poem 211, as April 6, 1327, and the April 6th date, which can be determined to have occurred on a Monday in 1327, suggests, as Mark Musa notes, that in poem 3 the poet-speaker is “not referring to the variable date of Good Friday, but to the date fixed by the death of Christ in absolute time, the *feria sexta aprilis*” (Musa 522).

The move from poem 2 to poem 3, then, from an abstracted depiction of the poet-speaker's first encounter with Laura, to a slightly more literal description of the same event, with added information, represents, specifically, an elaboration of content such as linked poems I and II of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, and represents, more generally, the kind of progressive continuity of thought that connected all of the first four poems of Tennyson's sequence. As I have said, such progressive continuity of thought is the most notable aspect of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s temporo-narrative progress, because of its atypically consistent presence in that sequence; as this assertion further implies, the precise continuity of thought that occurs between *Fragmenta* 2 and 3 is the exception rather than the rule in Petrarch's sequence, though there are sporadic instances, across the three hundred and sixty-six total poems of the *Fragmenta*, of two, or three, or four consecutive poems being interconnected in this way. Such instances, in fact, become noticeably more frequent after poem 267 announces Laura's death, as I hope to demonstrate near the end of this essay. For most of Petrarch's sequence, however, groups of poems are linked, to the extent that they are linked, by broad thematic focuses which are not typically pursued along specific angles of thought from poem to poem, and which exist amidst a perceived scheme of temporo-narrative progress which relies much more exclusively than does *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s scheme of temporo-narrative progress on periodic instances of calendrical or otherwise "concrete" time.<sup>22</sup> Most glaringly, there are the fifteen so-called "anniversary" poems (mentioned near the start of this essay), in which the Petrarchan poet-speaker explicitly notes either the number of

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<sup>22</sup> *In Memoriam A.H.H.* also, of course, relies heavily on instances of concrete time to promote its sense of progress; there are, in fact, three distinct groups of Christmas-centered poems which have been a conventional means of dividing *In Memoriam A.H.H.* into three large sections, each section representing a year's unfolding between two Christmases (see Bradley, for instance, as well as the next section of this essay). But this essay seeks more importantly to drive home the fact that *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s uniqueness in its manifestation of temporo-narrative progress is *founded* mostly in the unique level of continuous thought between consecutive poems, which continuous thought works *in conjunction* with more generically-typical methods of temporo-narrative progress, such as the presence of calendrical time, to create a sense of temporal progress which is overall more striking and emphatic than is typical across the lyric sequence genre.

years that have passed since he fell in love with Laura, or the number of years that have passed since her death, or the number of years that have passed since both events.<sup>23</sup> There are also other poems which date themselves more allusively, or with less direct relevance to the main love theme of the sequence, as when poem 3, not exactly an anniversary poem, marks the date of the *innamoramento*, or when other poems reference contemporary historical events. Furthermore, because the Petrarchan poet-speaker has, as I noted in my introduction, a *living* beloved for most of his sequence, in contrast to the Tennysonian poet-speaker's always-dead beloved, Petrarch's poet-speaker is also critically in a position to respond more frequently to small-scale "events"—new acknowledgements or slights from Laura, mostly—which, though not dated even vaguely, necessarily suggest a setting in a precise moment in time, and thus, like the anniversary poems, suggest also the passing of time, when other poems move implicitly or explicitly toward them and away from them.

So, to continue my examination of the opening poems of the *Fragmenta*, after the proem initiates the expectation of temporal progress, poems 2 and 3 corroborate this expectation both by reverting to the start of the love affair between the poet-speaker and Laura, and so further indicating that the sequence will provide something like a linear narrative of the affair, and by evidencing a continuity of thought from one poem to the other which implies incremental temporal progress. Poem 3 also sets a date for the *innamoramento*, though allusively, and throws this further evidence of concrete temporal situatedness forward. The next several poems provide one more example of directly continuous thought between poems, but poems 4 to 10 overall proceed in a more diffuse manner than the opening three poems of the sequence: they tend to be connected only by their broad thematic and temporal relation to the opening enthusiasms of the

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<sup>23</sup> Poems 30, 50, 62, 79, 101, 107, 118, 122, 145, 212, 221, 266, 271, 278, and 364.

poet-speaker's love, and by a vague sense of ongoing temporo-narrative progress created by various "occasional" or event-centered poems. Poem 4 reads as follows:

He who showed endless providence and art,  
the master craftsman of this shining world,  
who made the hemispheres, this one and that,  
and proved a Jove, more mild than a Mars,

who came here to illuminate the leaves  
that had concealed the truth for many years,  
took John and Peter from their fishing nets  
and gave them portions of his Paradise;

He, for his birth, did not bestow himself  
on Rome, but chose Judea, since he cared  
among all states to elevate the humblest.

And now he's given us a sun from one  
small village, so that we thank Nature and  
the place that gave the world this fairest lady. (1-14)

The Petrarchan poet-speaker explicitly equates Laura's humble origins in a "small village" (13)—probably Carpentras, France, near Avignon (Young 4)—to the birth of Christ in Judea, and he suggests more implicitly that Laura is Christ-like in general; she is a "sun" that presumably illuminates the poet-speaker's world in the way that Christ is said to have "illuminate[d] the leaves" of the Bible (12, 5).

There is a broad thematic logic in putting such a poem on Laura's origins immediately after two poems on the origins of the poet-speaker's infatuation with her, and the poet-speaker, in comparing Laura to Christ, also carries forth the religious element present in poem 3, in the poet-speaker's tying of the *innamoramento* to the date of Christ's death. But such relations to what has come before are more abstruse than the direct continuity of thought seen between *Fragmenta* 2 and 3. There is no *precise* thought process observably at work in the move from poem 3's treatment of the *innamoramento* to poem 4's explication of Laura's origins, and the

reader's sense of temporal progress is therefore mainly reliant on whatever expectation of progress has floated forward from the more deeply connected first three poems of the sequence.

The next poem, poem 5, is only linked to poem 4 through its dealing, again, with a subject broadly aligned with the newness of the poet-speaker's love-feelings. Ostensibly addressing himself to Laura, the poet-speaker in poem 5 describes the emotional process he undergoes when trying to write of his new love, punning as he goes, in an untranslatable manner,<sup>24</sup> on the syllables of Laura's name, Latinized here to "Laureta" from the French "Laurette" (Young 5):

When I breathe out my sighs and call your name,  
That name that Love has etched upon my heart,  
I start it out with something LAUdatory  
To get those first sweet accents into sound;

your REgal state, which I encounter next,  
doubles my strength for such high enterprise,  
but "TAper off!" the ending roars, "her fame  
must rest on shoulders better fit than yours.

Thus LAUd and REverence are quickly taught  
whenever someone calls you, you so worthy,  
oh so deserving of respect and praise,

unless Apollo feels no morTAl tongue  
should ever be presumptuous to speak  
of his sweet laurel boughs, forever green. (1-14)

Laura's name represents, like her birthplace in poem 4, a sort of primal element in the poet-speaker's love for her, but the poem cannot be said to arise in any more particular sense out of what has come directly before it. Poem 5's primary function is to lavish Laura with fulsome praise, and to introduce, in the closing lines of the poem, a correlation between Laura and the

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<sup>24</sup> The translator, as in Petrarch's original, highlights in capital letters the syllables that are meant to pun on the syllables of Laura's (Laureta's) name, but the effect is largely lost in English.

laurel tree—between Laura and the nymph Daphne, and Laura and poetry<sup>25</sup>—which the Petrarchan poet-speaker will exploit throughout the *Fragmenta*. Poem 5’s strongest immediate contribution to the temporo-narrative progress of the sequence, lacking as it is direct connection with its predecessor, comes from the iterative manner of narration the poet-speaker employs in describing his supposed writing process. He says, effectively, that “*whenever* I try to write about you, Laura, it goes something like this,” suggesting that he has performed the task on several occasions, and this in turn suggests that some more or less significant chunk of time has passed since the *innamoramento*, since it would take the poet-speaker such a chunk of time to perform, several times, the task of writing about his love.

*Fragmenta* 6, in contrast to poem 5’s relative discontinuity with its immediate predecessor, creates a brief resurgence in direct continuity of thought between poems by linking itself directly with *Fragmenta* 5 much in the way that the two *innamoramento* poems were linked. The poet-speaker develops in his own idiosyncratic manner the just-introduced Apollo-Daphne dynamic between himself and Laura, drawing out this mythological parallel to highlight the more self-destructive aspect of his exuberant infatuation. He writes in the octave of poem 6 that

My mad desire has gone so far astray  
pursuing her, who turned away to flee,  
and, free and clear of all the snares of Love,  
runs easily ahead of my slow pace,

that when I try to call desire back  
and take him home by some safe path, he balks,  
nor can I round him up or shepherd him  
since Love has made him riotous by nature; (1-8).

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<sup>25</sup> Daphne, of course, was the nymph pursued by a love-stricken Apollo, before being turned into a laurel tree by her father. The laurel was subsequently adopted by Apollo, one of whose primary domains is poetry.



Laura, like Daphne from Apollo, is said to have fled from the poet-speaker's "mad desire" from the start, unaffected herself, as previously intimated, by any love-feelings. Though sensing the hopelessness of his pursuit—Laura "runs easily ahead of [his] slow pace"—the poet-speaker finds himself unable to guide his desire back "home," to corral it back into reasonable proportions. His desire, in fact, is said to control *him*, steering him frequently in the direction that most threatens his well-being:

and when he takes the bit by force from me  
then I submit to him and to his mastery;  
he carries me toward death against my will

and brings me sometimes to the laurel tree  
whose bitter fruit, once gathered and consumed,  
deepens one's woes instead of soothing them. (9-14)

The poet-speaker's desire, against his better judgment, brings him habitually "to the laurel tree"—it brings him into Laura's presence, perhaps, when it can, but more probably leads him mostly to recurring thoughts of Laura, which, because of her refusal of his love, are "bitter fruit" that only worsen the poet-speaker's condition.

*Fragmenta* 6, then, carries on seemingly directly from *Fragmenta* 5, taking up a thread of thought from its predecessor and developing it. This direct continuity of thought between consecutive poems is short-lived, however, as the next poem in the sequence, poem 7, takes a rather jarring, though not entirely unrelated, turn, initiating a run of four poems, to close this first "movement" of the *Fragmenta*, which are primarily related to each other, and which primarily foster a sense of temporo-narrative progress, by their being mostly occasional poems addressed to people other than Laura.

After the very distinct focus at the end of poem 6 on the pains of love, poem 7 begins, surprisingly, with the poet-speaker inveighing high-handedly against "gorging and sleep and

lounging on pillows” (1). These practices, he says, “have banished every virtue from this world” (2), and he even goes so far as to claim that “all heavenly lights by which we see the way / to shape our human lives have been snuffed out” (5-6). Poem 7, it turns out, is a kind of pep-talk addressed to an unnamed “friend” of the poet-speaker who apparently has aspirations to be a poet (13), and the reason the poet-speaker begins by decrying society’s lack of virtue is because this supposed moral depreciation has left poetry (and poets) largely underappreciated: “whoever wants to bring us streams from Helicon,” the poet-speaker writes, “is [now] pointed out and called a prodigy” (7-8). Despite these unfavorable conditions, however, the poet-speaker concludes poem 7 by encouraging his friend to pursue his “great-hearted quest” for poetic mastery (14), as the underappreciated art itself may serve as a means of helping to restore to society the virtues it has supposedly lost.

Poem 7 thus picks up the subject of poetry treated explicitly two poems earlier in poem 5 (the punning “Laureta” poem), and implicitly in the immediately preceding poem’s continued preoccupation with the laurel metaphor. In its reflections on virtue, poem 7 is also seemingly related to poem 6’s explication of the moral danger in which the poet-speaker’s desire for Laura has placed him. But the actual reading experience of transitioning from poem 6 to poem 7 is so jarring, and the impetus for the treatment of the poetic and moral subjects in poem 7 is so different, ultimately, from the impetuses for the same subjects in poem 6 and other earlier poems, that poem 7, despite its correlations with what has come before, is above all else experienced by the reader as a sudden breaking off from the love-matter previously uniformly at hand; in poem 7, the reader’s sense of connection with what has come before is primarily an experience of disjointed continuity, of thematic *non*-connection which does not, however, disrupt the sense of sequentiality.

Poem 8 continues this sense of disjointed continuity. It is an oddly-framed occasional poem which returns to the implications of love explored in earlier poems (not including poem 7) without adding much—it is mostly a restatement of sentiments, general in themselves, which Petrarch has already expressed in multiple poems in almost precisely the same terms.

The poem was apparently meant to accompany (or in its original form did accompany) a gift of small game killed and sent to an unidentified friend, and the poet-speaker inhabits the voice of these dead animals in order to draw a parallel—and a distinction—between the animals and himself. Addressing their intended recipient in the third-person plural, the newly-killed animals say that they have been sent by a “tearful man” (4), presumably the poet-speaker, and that before being reduced to their current condition,

we passed our lives in tranquil peace and freedom,  
as every living thing desires to do;  
we had no fears as we went on our way  
of stepping into snares that caught us up. (4-8)

The animals, in terms especially reminiscent of those in *Fragmenta 2*, say that they previously lived carefree lives, unsuspecting of danger, until they were “snare[d]” by literal snares in the way that the poet-speaker, in the *innamoramento* poems, says that he was figuratively snared or attacked by love. The animals, though, claim to have one advantage over the poet-speaker, one “solitary consolation” for their recent doom (11): the fact that they are already dead, while the poet-speaker “remains in someone else’s power, / facing his own end, bound with a stronger chain” (13-14). Not only, they suggest, will the poet-speaker’s love lead him to death (“his own end”), as the poet-speaker himself claimed in poem 6 (“[desire] carries me toward death against my will” [11]), but the bond of love to which the poet-speaker is subject is implied to be even more lasting than that of death, and to cause more suffering in advance of death than the animals underwent before being killed themselves. This is striking stuff, but the only bit of newness in

poem 8's treatment of the poet-speaker's love situation, besides the unusual rhetorical frame, is the ominous (in this context) twist of thought about the bond of love being stronger than the bond of death. Because of the strange rhetorical frame, however, or because of the particular "occasion" underlying it, temporal progress is again felt to be proceeding, however indistinctly, while the thematic content of the sequence is at something close to a standstill.

The next poem, poem 9, is another occasional poem which has no precise connection with its immediate predecessor, and which rehashes love-implications and images from other earlier poems without adding to or developing them in very remarkable ways. The poet-speaker writes in his own voice this time, but poem 9, like poem 8, is meant, ostensibly, to accompany a gift to an unknown recipient. This time, the gift is truffles.

The first nine lines of the poem are given over to a long evocation of the power of the spring sun to reinvigorate the earth—to penetrate even "underground, where daylight never goes" (7), and there create truffles such as the poem is meant to accompany. The poet-speaker then reappropriates this sun imagery as a metaphor for Laura's effect on himself (recalling poem 4, where Laura was implied to have the same sun-like illuminating nature as Christ), but he ends the poem with a sadsack differentiation between the spring sun and the Laura-sun. Laura

turns her sweet eyes upon me and stirs up  
the thoughts and words and deeds that deal with love:  
but any way she rules or governs them,  
spring still can never happen in my heart. (10-14)

Like the spring sun that brings to life underground delicacies such as truffles, Laura "stirs up" fond love-thoughts in the poet-speaker, but because she is apathetic to his love, as mentioned in several previous poems, his "heart" cannot be as unmitigatedly bright and fruitful as the spring.

Poem 10, the final poem of this first “movement” of the *Fragmenta*, is yet another occasional poem addressed to someone other than Laura, with little substantial connection to the poem that directly precedes it, other than a vague but important sense of ongoing biographical time. This poem is the first of several throughout the *Fragmenta* addressed to Stefano Colonna the Elder, an important Italian political figure and friend of the historical Petrarch, and its composition has been dated to 1330, when Petrarch made a trip to the home of Colonna’s son, Giacomo, in the Pyrenees (Musa 526).

The poet-speaker first praises Colonna as a “Glorious Column” (a play on his last name) who is “carrying great Latium’s reputation” (1, 2), before moving on to describe the natural beauty surrounding his temporary abode in a manner vaguely reminiscent of the description of spring verdure which occupied much of poem 9. This broad similarity, however, and a brief mention of love, are the only tenuous thematic connections of poem 10 with its predecessor; the poem ends with the poet-speaker’s conclusion that the sole flaw in his idyllic getaway is the elder Colonna not being there to enjoy it with him.

The first ten poems of Petrarch’s *Fragmenta*, then, are a rather mixed bag of temporo-narrative progress compared to the first block of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, but such progress nevertheless exists in Petrarch’s sequence, if only in a different, slightly less emphatic way than in Tennyson’s. Petrarch’s poems are primarily interconnected through the broad thematic focus on the poet-speaker’s love for Laura as it unfolds somewhat haphazardly across a backdrop of biographical, concrete time less bolstered than in Tennyson’s sequence by the more immediately experienced sense of temporal progress created through the perceived sequentiality of points in an ongoing argument. The earliest poems in the *Fragmenta*, as in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, instill in the reader a strong expectation that temporo-narrative progress will occur across the entire

sequence, and this expectation is periodically confirmed and reinforced, sometimes by continuities of thought between consecutive poems, but most often by individual poems' references, however vague or implicit, to particular moments in time, or to the passage of particular expanses of time.

## CHAPTER 4

### A GROUP OF BLOCKS: *IN MEMORIAM A.H.H.* POEMS XXVIII-XLIX

I would now like to present, in a moderately detailed outline, several consecutive blocks of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, with an eye toward better establishing, in as efficient and readable a manner as possible, my primary assertions that (a) there is a *sequence-wide* persistence, in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, of blocks of consecutive poems which, like poems I-IV, are interconnected by more or less direct continuities of theme and thought; and (b) that each of these blocks tends to show a movement by the poet-speaker from predominating grief to qualified solace, as the sequence itself moves, overall, from overwhelming grief to qualified religious consolation.

I choose for this purpose poems XXVIII-XLIX, largely because such a choice enables me to suggest, at least, the progress of the sequence as a whole. I have already talked in some detail about the beginning of the sequence (albeit only the *very* beginning), and have talked in at least a summary fashion about the end of the sequence (the poet-speaker's finding of religious quietude amid his ongoing grief, which final state of mind is figured to a degree in the "Prologue" poem). While poems XXVIII-XLIX do not quite reside, numerically, in the precise center of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, they do roughly coincide with the poet-speaker's turn into what might be considered the heart of the sequence. The turn is not overly dramatic (every forward movement in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is gradual and prone to periodic reversals), but it is nevertheless in these poems that the poet-speaker is most perceived to have passed beyond his initial utter grief at Arthur's passing, into the more strongly intellectual (though still emotion-driven) investigations

into the mysteries of religion and science, as they pertain to death and human existence, that will occupy him for the rest of the sequence. Poems XXVIII-XXX, with which this large group of blocks begins, also happen to constitute the first of three Christmas-centered groups of poems in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*—poem LXXVIII and poems CIV-CV make up the second and third groups—which, being seen to mark three separate, successive Christmas holidays, create an explicit internal chronology for the sequence of three years.<sup>26</sup> I am skeptical, on the whole, of seeing in this year-by-year division of the sequence into four parts an overwhelming correspondence to any more substantive changes than the chronological, but in any case the first group of Christmas poems does more or less coincide with the first large-scale developmental change in the sequence, and the blocks which occur between the first two Christmases might loosely be referred to as the center of the sequence. There also occur in poems XXVIII-XLIX certain explicit ties with the first block I explored, poems I-IV, which enable me to point out succinctly other particular methods by which Tennyson makes temporo-narrative progress evident. There are instances, too, in addition to the Christmas poems with which this group of blocks starts, of the kind of concrete, calendrical time which exists in Tennyson’s sequence as in the *Fragmenta*, if only in a role, as I have said, less utterly vital to the reader’s sense of temporo-narrative progress than in Petrarch’s work.

To briefly situate this group of poems more specifically within the sequence, then, poem XXVII, the poem which directly precedes the first Christmas poem, and thus represents the end of the last block before poems XXVIII-LXXVII, is one of the best-known poems in the sequence, ending with the Tennysonian poet-speaker’s famous contention that “’Tis better to

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<sup>26</sup> The majority of the sequence, in any case, obviously occurs across three years. After the third Christmas, there are twenty-seven poems across which no particularly significant amount of time is indicated to pass, but the sequence ends with an “Epilogue” poem that surprisingly claims to be set “thrice three years” after Arthur’s death (10).



have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all” (15-16). This contention, an ostensibly consoling one, comes after several poems in which the poet-speaker has been questioning his perhaps overly-rosy view of the time he spent with the living Arthur, and trying to weigh the pleasure of this time (imperfect or not) against the depth of his pain in the wake of Arthur’s death. His conviction that, current pain or not, he would not undo his relationship with Arthur is a momentary victory in his attempt to recover from grief.

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XXVIII-XXX: First Christmas Block

The following three poems, as I have already said, are temporally-centered around the Christmas holiday, and they show the poet-speaker (and his family) beset, first, by a gnawing sense of Arthur’s absence, and then somewhat comforted by the belief, in essence, that he is “in a better place.”

XXVIII.

Taking up the poignant but relatively comforting ambivalence of XXVII (“’Tis better to have loved and lost”), the poet-speaker writes that church bells he hears ringing near Christmas time “bring me sorrow touch’d with joy” (19)—the joy of the season, presumably, and the sorrow of Arthur’s not being alive to celebrate with him.

XXIX.

It is now Christmas Eve, and the poet-speaker, more beset by his grief, wonders how he and his family can go about their ordinary holiday activities when they have “such compelling cause to grieve” (1). He gloomily submits, however, to at least the mechanical observance of festivities, since “Use and Wont” should not “miss their yearly due / Before their time” (11, 15-16).

XXX.

The poet-speaker now speaks of the same Christmas Eve in a more or less immediate past tense. He says that it proceeded “sadly” (4), with “one mute Shadow watching all” (8)—presumably Arthur or the spectre of his death—until the poet-speaker and his family, through tearfully singing a “merry” Christmas song they sang with Arthur the previous Christmas (15), gradually came to comforting, emotion-driven convictions about Arthur’s supposed state in the afterlife.

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XXXI-XXXVI: The Afterlife and Faith

On the heels of the comforting, but emotion-driven and largely conventional beliefs reached on Christmas Eve, the poet-speaker in these next six poems considers the afterlife in earnest for the first time in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*. Skepticism, accordingly, is more in play than it was on Christmas Eve, but using biblical and imaginary examples, the poet-speaker works his way, albeit a littler erratically, from doubt of the afterlife back to a simple (more fleshed out, but inconclusively so) belief in it.

XXXI.

The poet-speaker considers the biblical story of Lazarus, brought back from the dead by Christ, and is tantalized by the fact that Lazarus is not recorded as giving any account of “what it is to die” (7).

XXXII.

The poet-speaker now considers Lazarus’ sister, Mary, whom he suggests was too glad at her brother’s revivification to entertain “subtle thought” or “curious fears” (9)—she simply bathed Christ’s feet “with costly spikenard and with tears” (12). He would like to be like Mary and

others “whose lives are faithful prayers” (13), but he rhetorically questions if there is, indeed, “blessedness like theirs” (16).

### XXXIII.

The poet-speaker now considers a hypothetical brother and sister of his own time. The brother, through doubt-fueled intellectual “toil and storm” (1), has arrived at a religious faith independent from the strictures or dogma of particular institutions, while the sister’s unerringly happy and confident faith is based in “form” (9)—in conventional formal doctrines and observances. The poet-speaker warns the hypothetical brother not to meddle with his sister’s simpler faith, not to “confuse” it “with shadow’d hint” (7), because such a faith is just as “pure” as his (9), and her example may in fact save him from slipping too far into sin as a result of his ceaseless questioning.

### XXXIV.

In a seemingly desperate attempt to cut off his doubts about the existence of an afterlife, the poet-speaker simply states that if humans are not in some sense eternal, then “earth is darkness at the core, / And dust and ashes all that is” (3-4). Life would be meaningless, and it would be better to die immediately, to “sink” out of the suffering of the world into the relative “peace” of the grave (13), “like birds the charming serpent draws” (14).

### XXXV.

He wonders, on second thought, if love might provide satisfactory enough meaning to go on living, even if he knew there was nothing beyond the grave. After consideration, the answer to this question is negative, because “If Death were seen / At first as Death, love had not been” (18-19).

### XXXVI.

In an apparent surge of simple faith, though, such as that exhibited by the biblical Mary in XXXII, and the hypothetical sister in XXXIII, the poet-speaker now seems content to trust in his intuition that life continues after death, even if he cannot at present confirm this belief with reason. He praises Christ for the example of his parables, through which divine truths are made intuitively palatable for everyone.

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### XXXVII-XXXIX: Reflection on his Poems, and Spring

The next few poems represent, with an atypical twist, the kind of block mentioned earlier (see the discussion of poem V in section 2 of this essay) in which the poet-speaker steps back momentarily to reflect on the poems he has just presented, or on the nature of his poems in general; poem XXXVII explicitly reflects on the religious content explored in the previous block, and XXXVIII reflects, more generally, on the consoling function of his poetry. Poem XXXVIII also happens to be one of the several poems, occurring throughout the sequence, which are set in spring, and thus function, like the groups of Christmas poems, as concrete temporal markers, though they are vaguer than the Christmas poems, being only seasonal. Poem XXXIX, the third poem in this block, does not reflect on the poet-speaker's poetry or foregoing poems at all, but it is another spring poem, and I place it with the two predominantly literary-critical poems of this block because its content is only *more* tangentially related to the poems that succeed it.

### XXXVII.

As a means of pausing for reflection on the foregoing poems, the poet-speaker presents a supposed “conversation” between the muses “Urania” and “Melpomene.” Urania, though traditionally the muse of astronomy, is here presented by Tennyson, in imitation of Milton in *Paradise Lost*, as the muse of heavenly or religious poetry (Gray 30). Melpomene is the muse of tragedy and elegy.

Neither of these two figures literally appear in any of the foregoing poems, but Urania berates Melpomene for having just “spoken” out of her depth, encroaching on Urania’s proper territory—the poet-speaker is acknowledging that the fundamentally elegiac poems of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* have wound their way into religious or philosophical considerations that they are ill-equipped to handle properly. “Melpomene” apologizes and acknowledges her presumption, just as the poet-speaker acknowledged his inability to reason his way to proof of the afterlife in XXXVI. She explains that she got carried away by the depth of her emotion, by her “brooding on the dear one dead, / And all he said of things divine” (17-18).

### XXXVIII.

In this first spring poem of the sequence (several months have thus passed since the Christmas block), the poet-speaker acknowledges his persisting gloom, writing that he “loiter[s] on” with “weary steps” (1), his “prospect and horizon gone” (4). Even the onset of spring, “the blowing season” (5), gives him no joy. Nevertheless, he gets a “doubtful gleam of solace” from the poetry he writes (7), and if Arthur does still exist in some manner that allows him to “care for what is here” (9), perhaps he is not ungrateful for the poet-speaker’s “songs” (11).

### XXXIX.

This poem revisits the supposedly changeless “Old Yew” of poem II, and though it doesn’t reflect on the poet-speaker’s poetry like the previous two poems, it does carry on the spring setting of poem XXXVIII, before the next poem, XL, begins a new block by beginning a thread of argument to which the content here has no apparent connection.

The poet-speaker writes that now, in spring, the yew—“old warder of these buried bones” (1)—responds to his “random stroke / With fruitful cloud and living smoke” (2-3); it sends up a cloud of pollen, as Tennyson himself clarified (qtd in Gray 31), and it can thus be said to experience its own “golden hour” (6), contrary to the poet-speaker’s grief-sunk assertions about its perpetual “gloom” in poem II.

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### XL-XLVII: The Nature of the Afterlife and Memory

In the next eight poems, the poet-speaker reassumes the concern with the afterlife with which he was occupied in poems XXXI-XXXVI, before the self-reflective, mostly spring-situated block. Now more confident in the *existence*, at least, of the afterlife, he speculates on its parameters more esoterically than before. New reasons for gloom and fear arise as the poet-speaker theorizes on the nature of memory and spiritual ascendancy in the afterlife, but the block ends with his assertions—assured, though not entirely free of doubt—that he and Arthur, after the poet-speaker’s own death, will be able to continue their relationship much as it existed before Arthur’s death.

#### XL.

The poet-speaker wishes he could forget “the widow’d hour” (1), the grief of parting itself, and look on Arthur as a newly-wed “maiden” who has simply “take[n] her latest leave of home” (3, 6). The father and mother of such a maiden, the poet-speaker writes, are sad at her parting, but joyful, too, as they know she is going to “enter other realms of love” (12). The comparison is finally untenable, however, because the maiden can return home any number of times, and make and share new memories, whereas the poet-speaker and Arthur “have shaken hands” for the final time until the poet-speaker’s death (29): “My paths,” he says to Arthur, are for now “in the fields I know. / And thine in undiscovered lands” (31-32).

#### XLI.

Remembering Arthur’s precociousness in spiritual matters while living, the poet-speaker fears that, by the time of his own death, Arthur will have so spiritually ascended, in the afterlife, that the poet-speaker will not be able to catch up, as it were. He wishes hopelessly that he could “leap the grades of life and light, / And flash at once” to Arthur (11-12).

#### XLII.

But the poet-speaker and Arthur were never on truly equal grounds even in life, the poet-speaker comforts himself. “It was but unity of place” that made him think he “rank’d” with Arthur (3, 4). Accordingly, once they are both in the spiritual or heavenly realm (a new same “place”), the two should indeed be able to be reunited, even if the heavenly Arthur has ascended to things beyond the poet-speaker’s comprehension, and has to act as a kind of spiritual tutor.

#### XLIII.

Continuing his rather unorthodox speculations on life after death, the poet-speaker now wonders if, perhaps, souls go into a kind of sleep after death, a kind of “intervital” stasis (3), until all souls

are awakened simultaneously at the end of time (Gray 33). If this were the case, the poet-speaker speculates, then perhaps nothing would be “lost” in the passage from human life to eternal life, and Arthur’s memory of and love for the poet-speaker would be fully intact when the two are reunited.

#### XLIV.

Even if such a full mental continuity with one’s earthly life is *not* possible in heaven, the poet-speaker now argues, perhaps something of one’s previous life is still retained; he considers this idea by pondering the opposite process. Man, being born and growing, slowly forgets his pre-birth existence in the heavenly realm, though he may still receive, from time to time, “a little flash, a mystic hint” of his previous state of existence (8). So, too, might Arthur, in his new spiritual state, be able to periodically receive some vague intimation of his life on earth, and of his love for the poet-speaker.

#### XLV.

Taking up again the parallel of human development, the poet-speaker writes that “a baby new to earth and sky” must slowly learn to distinguish itself from its surroundings, must grow to self-consciousness. It would make no sense, then, he contends, and human life would be wasted, if such development were completely thrown aside in the afterlife, and man had to “learn himself anew / Beyond the second birth of Death” (15-16).

#### XLVI.

The poet-speaker, still using earthly life to illuminate heavenly, now confidently asserts (he does not ask questions, or hedge his statements) that memory indeed *improves* after death. “We ranging down the lower track” (1), he writes, can have only an imperfect memory of the events in our earthly past, but in the heavenly realm, no such “shade” falls on the “eternal landscape of



the past” (5, 8), which spreads out before us in unending clarity. This being the case, the “five years” he and Arthur shared will undoubtedly be the “richest field” in the observable landscape of the poet-speaker’s past (12).

#### XLVII.

Continuing his confident assertions, the poet-speaker rejects the hypothetical notion that souls, after death, are merged into one “general Soul” in a manner that obliterates individual, personal identities (4). Aside from rankling his sense of the importance of the individual, such a scheme of things would also preclude his reuniting with Arthur, so the poet-speaker asserts that “Eternal form shall still divide / The eternal soul from all beside; / And I shall know him when we meet” (6-8). He does admit some doubt as to this proposition, but still in a hopeful way: he says that even if the rejected notion of the “general Soul” were true, Arthur would find some way to say a final “farewell” to the poet-speaker (16), and warn him in advance that “we lose ourselves in light” (16).

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I will end my outline there, but the two poems that follow this last block, poems XLVIII-XLIX, are once again a block in which the poet-speaker steps back to reflect on what he has just presented, as he did in poems XXXVII-XXXIX, and much earlier in poem IV. In poem XLVIII, the poet-speaker, as if growing more self-conscious after his largely confident assertions at the end of the previous block, takes care to note that the preceding poems should not be “taken to be such as closed / Graves doubts and answers here proposed” (2-3). They should not, he protests perhaps too self-consciously, be expected to answer definitively the kind of questions he has been asking, because they are, after all, “of Sorrow born” (1); his poems are ultimately emotion-driven, wandering musings more than they are a truly systematic attempt to arrive at

philosophical or religious truths (there is an echo here of the Urania-Melpomene dichotomy presented in poem XXXVII). The poet-speaker plays up the same angle in a different way in poem XLIX, writing that his poems are constantly effected by any number of “glanc[ing],” “random influences” of thought and emotion (2).

Though the foregoing blocks constitute, still, only a small sampling of *In Memoriam* A.H.H. at large, I hope my outline begins to flesh out the picture of temporo-narrative progress begun in section 2 with my minutely-detailed examination of poems I-IV. Like that first block, the blocks in my outline are composed of individual poems (some blocks containing several more poems than others) interconnected by strong continuities of thought which lead the poet-speaker, over the course of each block, from relative sorrow or uncertainty to relative consolation or assuredness. Though each block, in turn, tends to be strongly related to the block that precedes it, each new block represents the poet-speaker’s pursuit, in some sense, of a new angle; a belief in which the poet-speaker has just become confident now brings up a new reason for doubt or gloom, or a relatively spontaneous renewal of grief casts a different light on an assured belief, and the poet-speaker goes through the same approximate process as before, though starting from a new relative sadness and ending at a new relative contentment. The periodic blocks or single poems in which the poet-speaker reflects on his poems *as poems* sometimes put a hitch, as it were, in an otherwise direct connection between one primary branch of thought and another—as when the muse and spring poems of block XXXVII-XXXIX come between the Lazarus-afterlife poems of XXXI-XXXVI and the memory-afterlife poems of XL-XLVII—but even in cases such as these, the self-reflective blocks, in reflecting on the immediately foregoing poems, continue the theme of those poems, and they often, too, seem to forecast the gloomier emotional tenor that

will soon present itself at the start of the *next* block, through an admission of the foregoing poems' imperfections or incompleteness.

The blocks in the outline also contain poems which exploit other important methods of temporo-narrative progress, besides the direct continuity of thought between poems, that Tennyson utilizes across *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Methods, mostly, more conventional to the Petrarchan lyric sequence genre in general, and reminiscent, especially, of effects in Petrarch's *Fragmenta*. Chief among the poems that exhibit such methods are those that reference or make apparent the passage of concrete, calendrical time, such as was seen to be so indispensable to the reader's perception of progress in Petrarch's sequence. The Christmas poems of XXXVIII-XXX as I have said, create with the other two groups of Christmas poems in the sequence an easily discernible chronology of three years, each group marking off retrospectively, with its appearance, the passage of one year, and so periodically providing relatively defined evidence of "real" temporal progress to go on top of the more constantly experienced sense of progress created by the continuities of thought between most poems. I have also shown, in poems XXXVIII and XXXIX, the first two of four spring poems (LXXXIII and CXV are the others) which are spread throughout *In Memoriam A.H.H.* in a manner similar to the Christmas poems. Related, but even more vaguely temporally-situated than the spring poems, and having less precise precedent in the *Fragmenta*, are poems like the two addressed to the churchyard yew tree—poem XXXIX in the outline above, and poem II treated in section 2 of this essay—which directly respond to one another across a significant distance, and so emphasize the fact, retrospectively, that they and the poems that come between them belong to the same broad swath of time. In poem XXXIX, the poet-speaker "corrects" his supposition from poem II, thirty-two poems earlier, that the yew tree is never subject to change, arguing in the later poem that even

the yew has its momentary escapes from gloom, its “golden hour[s].” In reversing himself in an explicitly self-referential manner, in a repeated (with a difference) context, the Tennysonian poet-speaker creates a strong tie between the two far-flung poems which reinforces retrospectively and summarily both the temporal and emotional or intellectual progress the poet-speaker has undergone in the space between the two poems.

## CHAPTER 5

### TWO CONSECUTIVE PETRARCHAN BLOCKS

It remains for me to show instances of Petrarch's sequence behaving more like Tennyson's, relying on direct continuity of thought between poems more completely, and at greater length, than *Fragmenta* poems 1-10 were seen to do, those poems being roughly representative, in their heavy reliance on calendrical time and event-centered poems, of Petrarch's approach to fostering the reader's perception of progress throughout the *Fragmenta*. There were, of course, even in poems 1-10, instances of direct continuity of thought between poems, and such instances naturally occur to some degree throughout the whole of Petrarch's sequence, but they appear more sporadically than in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, and rarely extend across more than a few consecutive poems, so that their felt effect is more diffuse.

Continuities of thought between poems do become more common, however, and extend more often across longer stretches of consecutive poems, in the last third of the *Fragmenta*, after Laura's death is announced in poem 267. I argued in my introduction that the Tennysonian poet-speaker's not having a living beloved to present him with new external promptings—new rebuffs or encouragements, *et cetera*, that he is compelled to interpret—is in large part responsible for *In Memoriam A.H.H.*'s atypically abstract, thought-centered orientation. The same explanation might reasonably be given—and the evidence bears out the supposition—for the Petrarchan poet-speaker's increased continuity of thought after the death of his beloved: faced no longer with the miniature dilemmas that arose in his active pursuit of Laura, and with fewer significant

fluctuations in his “relationship” with her being possible, the poet-speaker inclines toward more deliberate thinking, beginning, after Laura’s death, his more earnest turn away from earthly considerations toward religious rededication.

And yet, the *Fragmenta* never quite matches, even in its final third, the depth and insistence of continuity manifested in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* For one thing, there are even in this late portion of the sequence few instances of back-to-back, related chains of thought of any remarkable length, such as the outlined consecutive blocks of Tennyson’s sequence were seen to constitute; large blocks, in the *Fragmenta*, are not consistently followed by other large blocks which pursue new but related angles of thought. What’s more, the poems of the blocks that do exist in the *Fragmenta* evidence nothing remarkably close to the internal pattern of progress from sorrow to solace that is typical of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*’s blocks. While the Tennysonian poet-speaker himself repeatedly admits that his poems are not exactly systematic, continuity of thought between poems in the latter third of Petrarch’s sequence translates even less than in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* to orderly progress, shading still toward the relatively haphazard repetition of themes typical of the entire sequence.

I present in outline below, then, one of the few readily apparent pairs of consecutive blocks in the *Fragmenta*—poems 273-278 and 279-286. The first of these blocks is slightly closer knit in the progressive sense of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, while the second, though still obviously made coherent by continuity of thought, spins its wheels more, especially in its last several poems.

### 273-278: The Need to Move On, and His Inability to Do So

After Laura's death is announced in poem 267, twenty-one years into the poet-speaker's infatuation with her (so poem 271 informs us), the poet-speaker is predictably at a loss, and he gives way to complete sorrow for several poems. Compounding his despair at Laura's death is the additional death, announced in poem 269, of Stefano Colonna the Elder, the dear friend mentioned first in poem 10 and then recurring throughout the sequence. The Petrarchan poet-speaker remains very much subject to his grief and sorrow for much of the remainder of the *Fragmenta*, but poems 273-278, despite the poet-speaker's continued absorption with the plain fact and depth of his loss, represent at least the beginning of his attempts to move past this absorption, and to interpret his sorrow and fate in a larger context. The last poem of this block, poem 278, claims to be set three years after Laura's death.

#### 273.

The poet-speaker chides himself for still dwelling hopelessly on the past. He demands rhetorically, "What are you doing? Thinking? Why look still / backward to times that can return no more?" (1-2). He urges himself not to continue repeatedly renewing "this deadly enterprise" (9), his still over-passionate love and longing for the deceased Laura, and says that he should instead "search for Heaven" (12)—he should redirect his thoughts toward religion.

#### 274.

The poet-speaker again wishes his "cruel thoughts" would give him "peace" (1). He elaborates now that having these "inside foes" (4), when he is already besieged by the external forces of "Love and Death and Fortune" (2), is too much for him to handle. He goes on to implicate his "heart" (4), more specifically, as a "traitor" (5), because it clings to his past feelings and so acts

as a kind of spy or emissary for the aforementioned foes, allowing them to continue effecting him mentally.

275.

Presenting his sense of persecution from a different angle, the poet-speaker now tries to excuse himself to his eyes, ears, and feet, which body parts have apparently been “mak[ing] war against” him because they cannot “see,” “hear,” or “find” Laura “anywhere on earth” (9, 10, 11). Their inability to do these things, the poet-speaker says, is not his fault: they can blame “Death,” as the poet-speaker himself has just done in poem 274 (the poet-speaker’s body parts are of course also “himself,” but the division is this poem’s fiction). Or, he suggests more optimistically, and with recurrence to the “search for Heaven” suggested in 273, they can “praise the One / who binds and frees, opens and shuts at once, / and after grieving brings us joy” (12-14). They (his earthly body parts and faculties) can put Laura’s death into its proper, ultimately positive perspective, and celebrate the fact that, though they can no longer perceive her, Laura is in an improved state.

276.

Taking up the previous poem’s consolatory aspirations, the poet-speaker, without glossing over his continued sense of loss, now says that because he has been deprived of Laura’s “angelic sight” (1), he “tr[ies] to ease [his] grief a bit by speaking” (4)—by writing poetry. Apparently the practice is not especially effective, however, because the poet-speaker once again in despondency blames “Death” for taking away the “single balm” his heart had “against the sorrow that this life contains” (7, 8).



277.

“If Love does not come up with some new counsel” (1), the poet-speaker says, some replacement for the “single balm” that Death has taken from him, he is “going to trade [his] life for something else” (2). He has grown suicidal, at least in talk, because his “desire thrives, despite the death of hope” (4). Turning abruptly back toward self-determination, however, he writes that he “must invent a guide because the true one / is in the earth” (9-10). Or rather, Laura, he corrects himself, is not, most importantly, “in the earth,” but in heaven, where she “shines the brighter” (11), though beyond the reach of his earthly eyes.

278.

But Laura, even from heaven, and even in her higher spiritual state, “rules” him and “drains [his] strength” (6). He wishes, as he has wished before, that he could “be rid of mortal things,” but the implication here is less religious than previously, and more purely suicidal and love-driven: he wants to die (again, at least in the melodramatic rhetoric of his poetry) and thereby “follow” Laura (9). Any delay in dying is a prolonging of his woes, he says, and he writes that it would have been “good to die, three years ago today” (14)—the poem is presumably (and surprisingly, given that the poet-speaker has apparently been in something close to the beginning stages of grief throughout these poems) set on the third anniversary of Laura’s death.

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279-286: Nature, and Laura’s Consoling and Instructive “Visitations”

After the foregoing six poems in which the Petrarchan poet-speaker dwells on his overwhelming awareness of Laura’s absence, trying rather inconclusively to steer his thoughts and feelings in the direction of heaven and consolation, a block follows, poems 279-286, in

which Laura is perceived to become unusually present, at least in spirit, and to provide something of the comfort and spiritual direction the poet-speaker has just been seeking.

279.

The poet-speaker writes that when amidst pleasant nature scenery—when he hears, for example, “green leaves / that summer breeze is stirring very softly, / or the faint murmur of lucid waters” (1-3)—he “sees” Laura, who asks him “from afar” (8), seemingly in response to his wish for death at the end of poem 278, why he is letting himself waste away “before [his] time” (9). She affirms the poet-speaker’s largely unheeded inclination toward optimism in the previous block, telling him not to weep for her, since “dying made my day / an endless one” (12-13).

280.

The poet-speaker still speaks of nature’s consolatory function, but now he refers more specifically to the Vaucluse, a mountain valley near Avignon where the historical Petrarch sometimes resided, and where he may have first met Laura. “No other valley,” he writes, contains / so many nooks and caves where one can sigh” (5-6), and everything there—“the waters, . . . the breeze, the branches; / the little birds and fish, the flowers, the grass” (9-10)—“beg[s] me to always remain in love” (11). Idyllic or not, however, the beauty of the place and the passion it inspires him to persist in are earthly dangers, as Laura warns him from Heaven: she urges him to “scorn this world and all of its sweet hooks” (14).

281.

Now the poet-speaker, still talking of the many times he has taken “refuge” in the Vaucluse (1), claims to have just *literally* seen Laura there (as opposed to his previous “seeing” her in heaven). She appeared to him, he says, “in the form of nymph / or other goddess, rising from the bed

of . . . the river Sorgue” (9-11), and her face, evidencing pity for him, seemed to admonish him, yet again, to follow a more heavenly path.

282.

After this dramatic claim, the poet-speaker thanks Laura, “soul in bliss” (1), for visiting him during his “afflicted nights” (2), in his dreams, where he knows her, as in the previous poem, by her “walk, voice, face, and dress” (14).

283.

As if turning from his nightly recognition of Laura to thoughts of the fact of her earthly beauty, the poet-speaker inveighs against Death for having “stained the loveliest face / and quenched the most beautiful eyes ever seen” (1-2). His focus, however, turns quickly back again to her ethereal visitations, which she is said to make, again, out of “pity” for him” (9). He adds grandiosely that “if I described the way she speaks and shines / I would inflame all hearts with love” (12-13).

284.

Perhaps with something like his old love for the living Laura more in mind than it has been, the poet-speaker writes that Laura’s coming to visit him, and reentering his “soul’s shut gate” (6), is “like a lady coming home again” (9). Both “Love” and his soul are overwhelmed by Laura’s “light” (12).

285.

Next, though, he portrays Laura as tending to him in a profounder way than that of just a lover. She in her spiritual visitations tends to him with greater “heartfelt counsel in a crisis” than a mother to her son, or a wife to her spouse (4). Again as a spiritual tutor, she tells him “what to avoid and what I should pursue” (11), and urges him “not to tarry lifting up his soul” (13).

As in poem 283, the poet-speaker says that if he could describe the effect Laura has on him it would overwhelm the reader. When she visits him, he likewise says once more, she “tutors me to go straight on” (9). Most importantly, perhaps, he now seems to realize that, beyond simply taking comfort from her presence and the seeming affection for him she manifests in her willingness to counsel, he must consciously “learn to bend [him]self to her calm will” (12), to actually take her urgings toward spiritual betterment to heart.

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The next poem, poem 287, brings an end to the repetitive concentration on Laura’s visitations by announcing yet another person’s death—that of Sennuccio del Bene, a poet friend of Petrarch’s to whom, like Stefano Colonna, multiple poems throughout the *Fragmenta* are addressed. Several of the poems which come shortly after this new death announcement show the poet-speaker embracing his need for spiritual improvement with the new energy forecasted at the end of poem 286, but these poems are interspersed rather regularly with poems of seemingly tangential material, so that only pairs of truly connected consecutive poems, rather than lengthier blocks of the kind just explored, can be said to exist.

The poems followed in the outline, though, represent, as I have said, the span of the *Fragmenta* which perhaps comes closest to replicating (without quite doing so) the extended continuity of thought between poems, and the kind of relatedness between blocks, that makes *In Memoriam A.H.H.*’s temporo-narrative progress most unique. The first block that I just treated, poems 273-278, follows the poet-speaker as he wrestles with competing impulses—he is inclined to wallow in his sorrow by dwelling on the loss of Laura, while he also sees the need to put his loss and feelings into perspective, and find solace by both thinking on Laura’s better dwelling

place, and redirecting his own behavior and thoughts toward ensuring his own salvation. He asserts the validity of the higher spiritual perspective in most of the poems of the block, but seems to do so without quite taking it to heart. His sorrow, indeed, is seen to increase across the block, until, in poem 278, even the heavenly Laura, now apparently infected with the poet-speaker's earthly passion for the earthly Laura, is depicted as "drain[ing]" him (6), and he wishes he had died when she did.

The first block thus acts in some sense like one of Tennyson's, by tracing the poet-speaker's "progress" from one state to another—he *regresses* to a deeper spiritual darkness than the one in which he started. But though connected by apparent continuities of thought, the poems of this block are more blankly repetitive in theme and argument than the poems in most blocks of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*—certainly more than the poems of any particular block of that sequence that I have shown—so that their progress, though real, feels somehow both subtler and more erratic. Fittingly, the final poem of the block, poem 278, strikes a more purely Petrarchan note by asserting the passage of three years of concrete time since Laura's death.

Critically, the second block explored above, poems 279-286, amounts to a response to the first block, through its presenting Laura's renewed *presence* in the poet-speaker's life, and showing the poet-speaker comforted. The two blocks being thus divergently connected to one another, something like the relationship between blocks seen in Tennyson's overall more continuous sequence is created. The second block ends, too, in more or less the opposite way as the first, with the poet-speaker finally taking responsibility, if still only theoretically and somewhat tepidly, for his own need to embrace the spiritual side of things, and consciously pursue spiritual progress. His coming to this new attitude, however, does not arise in any precise sense out of his continuous thought process across the poems of the block. These poems mostly

show the poet-speaker in near-exuberant happiness, despite his continued pain, since he has been “seeing” or hearing from Laura regularly; though the precise nature of Laura’s “visitations” change, the poems of this block are overall even more thematically and argumentatively repetitive than those of the previous block, and the poet-speaker’s sudden (though understated) stronger embrace of Laura’s repeated counseling at the end of the block in poem 286 is seemingly more of a sudden leap of faith than it is the result of an internal argumentative process. Such a sudden leap is not unlike the perceived leap of faith in poem XXXVI of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, which poem ends the Lazarus-centered block (poems XXXI-XXXVI) with the poet-speaker’s sudden simple decision to believe in the afterlife, after questioning its existence inconclusively throughout that block. But the Petrarchan poet-speaker’s leap, coming at the end of a string of poems which are more repetitive, with vaguer, more incremental progress, both stands out more, for its unexpectedness in the midst of the relative stasis of relative repetition, and is more anticlimactic, being more understated in its expression, and having less actual effect on the poem it which it is presented—the Petrarchan poet-speaker’s decision is made only at the end of the poem, so that we see it only as an announced intention, rather than experiencing the decision’s effect throughout the poem.

CHAPTER 6  
CONCLUSION

I find it difficult to conclude this thesis without simply recapping things I have repeated many times throughout it; the inherent nature of my pursuit, to establish the existence of *patterns* in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, has necessarily led to frequent reiterations, which in turn make a holistic conclusion more important for a *sense* of conclusion than for any real tying up of loose ends.

My most fundamental contention, my starting point, has been that Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* manifests temporo-narrative progress—the most definitive characteristic of the Petrarchan lyric sequence genre—in a manner more insistent than is typically seen in works more often considered part of the Petrarchan lyric sequence genre. Tennyson's more insistent progress stems primarily from his sequence's containing more frequent direct continuities of thought between consecutive poems than is typical, these more frequent continuities in turn arising at least in part from the primary *thematic* difference between *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and the works I consider its generic kinfolk: the Tennysonian poet-speaker has a “beloved” like the poet-speakers of other sequences, but his beloved, Arthur, is dead from the start of the sequence. To the extent that he is “pursuing” his beloved, then, Tennyson's poet-speaker is pursuing consolation for his beloved's death, which pursuit amounts to his attempting to mentally puzzle out ultimately unknowable philosophical or religious truths about death and (im)mortality. He is more continually and unavoidably in his head, so to speak, than the poet-speakers of more

typical Petrarchan sequences tend to be. This much I hope to have demonstrated most strongly (albeit through an admittedly small sample size) in sections 2 and 3 of this essay, which first minutely examined continuities of thought between the opening four poems of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, and then emphasized the persistence of these continuities by showing in contrast the opening ten poems of Petrarch's *Fragmenta*, those poems evidencing some continuities similar to those in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, but being mostly interconnected by vague-ish thematic ties and a sense of ongoing concrete temporality created by multiple event-centered poems.

Of course, *In Memoriam A.H.H.* does not just proceed in a straight discursive line from start to finish, either—continuity of thought does not always mean regularity or orderliness of progress, primarily because it does not preclude the Tennysonian poet-speaker's having an ultimately emotional impetus for many of his intellectual movements. His inability to actually reason his way to proof of many of the things he desires proof of indeed means that he *must* rely on emotional reasoning, or religious faith, to settle things for himself that cannot truly be settled. This fact is most evident, perhaps, in the emotional process from relative grief to relative solace that tends to recur in each "block" of the sequence, and to thus instill in the reader a sense of circularity and repetition even while consecutive blocks follow separate but related angles of thought. Still, such recursiveness amid progress is far more regular and discernibly continuous than the vacillations between emotional extremes in Petrarch's *Fragmenta*, which happen much more haphazardly and erratically, producing a much more amorphous emotional progress than in Tennyson's sequence, even across the few substantial blocks of poems which are interconnected by continuities of thought akin to those in *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

The primary shortcoming of this thesis, of course, is the relatively few poems and blocks of both *In Memoriam A.H.H.* and the *Fragmenta* that I have been able to show. Aside from



curtailing my ability to prove beyond a doubt my most important assertions about phenomena which I perceive to exist sequence-wide in either work, length restrictions have also left me unable, for instance, to give a full sense of the *feel* of calendrical time in each sequence, the poems which contain calendrical or otherwise concrete temporal references being largely spread too far apart from one another, in both sequences, to allow multiple examples to be examined in context among any one string of consecutive poems. Ideally, too, Petrarch's *Fragmenta* would not have to stand in for all of the Petrarchan lyric sequences which predate or appear more or less contemporaneously with *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, though I think it performs this task well, all things considered.

Along the lines of this last point, I would like to emphasize, finally, that I have here sought to place *In Memoriam A.H.H.* only in its context in the main line of the Petrarchan lyric sequence tradition, which most scholars of the subject, including myself, see as effectively ending in the mid-nineteenth century—Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is typically put forth as inaugurating a new kind of lyric sequence, largely stripped of plot-like temporal progress, which would become, as Rosenthal and Gall put it, “*the modern poetic form*” of the twentieth century (*vii*).<sup>27</sup> This thesis might be expanded to incorporate discussion of this new type of sequence, or to discuss sequences appearing even after *Leaves of Grass* that are clearly Petrarchan in influence or might otherwise be profitably compared to *In Memoriam A.H.H.*; George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862), for instance, in the first case, and Berryman's *Dream Songs* (1964, 1968) in the second. For now, though, I have said enough.

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<sup>27</sup> Aside from *Leaves of Grass*, Pound's *Cantos* and William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* are among the major works which meet Rosenthal's and Gall's, and my, criteria for this new branch of the genre.

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## VITA

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