Three Elemental Steps to the Sensual Experience of Nature: Air, Water, and Earth in Alfred Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*

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The land and the sea, the animals fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests mountains and rivers, are not small themes.

~ Walt Whitman, Preface to *Leaves of Grass*

Thy voice is on the rolling air
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

~ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “In Memoriam” CXXX

Abstract

Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Walt Whitman are often contrasted with one another. Tennyson was England's Poet Laureate during the Victorian Age whose greatest theme was the past; Whitman was America's bard of the open road, equality his grand theme. This close reading of nature imagery in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* sets out to highlight the similarities between the two poets, rather than their differences. By looking at examples of the elements air, water, and earth in Tennyson and Whitman's multi-layered use of nature this study emphasises the importance both poets give to the sensual experience of going out into the natural world. Tennyson and Whitman's speakers face different situations and emotions, but both poets advocate this sensual experience. This thesis champions that aspect of their poetry, as it is considered integral to their nature imagery.

Contents

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The aim of this thesis was to do justice to what I consider to be integral to both Tennyson and Whitman's nature poetry, namely the sensual experience of the world around you. I found this similarity between the two poets seriously lacking in scholarly criticism. Therefore, I set out to give it some well-deserved attention and I am glad to find I succeeded in this quest. I hope anyone who reads this thesis can agree with me at least a little. I will now follow Tennyson and Whitman's example and go out for a long walk and "read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of [my] life" (Whitman, "Preface" 11).

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Introduction

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) were arguably among the greatest poets of the nineteenth century, whose works and lives are still widely discussed and analysed to this day. Both are renowned for their "scene-painting," "a capacity for linking scenery to the states of mind" ("Alfred, Lord Tennyson" 1158), evident in their dynamic and layered nature descriptions. Tennyson and Whitman do so in several ways, which is particularly apparent in their best-known works, "In Memoriam A.H.H." (published by Tennyson in 1850) and *Leaves of Grass* (by Whitman in 1855). In these works, nature serves as an external representation of the inward world of the speakers. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how often the speakers are literally surrounded by nature and are thus part of it. This ties in with the importance Tennyson and Whitman give to sensual experience, which is most evident in their speakers' interactions with and reactions to nature. An example of this is "In Memoriam" XCV, [1] in which the speaker goes through a myriad of emotions as his senses are stimulated during his nocturnal garden stroll, as "it is only when the poet becomes 'the receiver of multiple sensations' that his senses are awakened to the powers of the natural world" (Waters 41).

Because nature is so dominant and multi-layered in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*, these works will provide the primary sources of this comparative analysis. Although Whitman altered and added to *Leaves of Grass* several times, the "In Memoriam" 1850 and *Leaves of Grass* 1855 editions will be used because they were the first versions and came out relatively shortly after one another. Since Tennyson and Whitman were contemporaries and even corresponded with one another on and off from 1871 and till at least 1887, the two poets have been extensively compared to each other. Such comparisons have hardly ever focused on

[1] Section numbers will be referenced as such, after the name of the poem and outside the quotation marks. In accordance with the editions of "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* used for this study, the sections of "In Memoriam" are given in Roman numerals and the *Leaves of Grass*' sections in decimal numbers.

a close reading of only one work per poet, not to mention the combination of *Leaves of Grass* and "In Memoriam" or a sole focus on the presence of nature. Scholars have mostly paid attention to Tennyson and Whitman's status, different writing styles and lives (Bergman; Schmidgall), or specific nature imagery within a larger literary movement (P. Fletcher; Killingsworth; Waters; Yang).

Because both "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* are long and complex texts, the presence of nature in these poems will not be discussed in its entirety. Instead, the usage of nature in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* will be compared through the classical elements air, water and earth, which form the three central chapters of this paper. These elements can be divided into many subcategories, such as wind and the cosmos for air, various kinds of precipitation and bodies of water for water, and soil and plants for earth. Through these examples of imagery, the elements have a strong presence in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*, which is why they serve as the scope of this study. Nature in these works is expected to be very different as Whitman set his poems in the American landscape he was familiar with (Killingsworth 12), while Tennyson used nature he himself had actually beheld in England and on his travels in Europe (P. Fletcher 50; Bush xvi). It must also be taken into account that "In Memoriam" is an elegy and *Leaves of Grass* a work celebrating America and equality. The differing natures and genres will be acknowledged and discussed, but the focus will be on the (surprising) underlying similarities.

The classical elements allow for the opportunity to compare the different nature imagery used by Tennyson and Whitman in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* within the same element categories. Although the poets have different poetical styles and purposes, the essence of their natural imagery is similar through their emphasis on the emotional and sensual experiences of/in nature.

Academic Discussion

There is no shortage of commentary and studies on Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Walt Whitman, as outlined by, among others, John D. Jump in *Lord Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Heritage* (1) and The Walt Whitman Archive, edited by Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price. Tennyson and Whitman produced a vast amount of work, having not only written poems, but also plays (Tennyson), prose, critical essays and reviews (Whitman). They lived long lives and both died in 1892 at the ages of 83 (Tennyson) and 72 (Whitman). Given these oeuvres and lives to work with, it is understandable that many scholars have chosen to either focus on particular themes or on general overviews. Even editors of anthologies and collected (critical) works, which generally encompass a great variety of critical angles and analyses, mention the choices they had to make in leaving out specific works or themes (Ricks vii; Mazenno 6-7).

Works discussing both poets together often focus on comparing their general writing styles, limitations and skills (Bergman; Friedman; Schmidgall) instead of analysing their poetical themes, like nature. T.S. Eliot, in "Whitman and Tennyson", appears to provide one of the more balanced comparisons. He outlines their differences as well as their similarities without seeming to favour one over the other, arguing that "both Tennyson and Whitman made satisfaction almost magnificent…Whitman succeeds in making America as it was, just as Tennyson made England as it was, into something grand and significant" (206-7).

Tennyson and Whitman are widely regarded as being part of the canon of poetry and English-language literature in general. In the critical discussion of "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* and the theme of nature, it becomes evident there is also a rather canonised set of research topics. Discussion of nature in "In Memoriam" is often used in arguments about religion (Hough) or the feminine (Adams). If nature is the primary theme, it is usually discussed in relation to other work by Tennyson (Ricks; Mazzeno; Bush). There appears to be

a similar trend in studies of *Leaves of Grass*, which tend to focus on the depiction of America and its civilisation (especially democracy) rather than its nature. Examples of this trend are Allen Ginsberg's essay "Taking A Walk Through *Leaves of Grass*" and the collection of essays Whitman experts Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price compiled in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*. Of the eighteen essays they included in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first version, ten are on America, but none on nature explicitly.

The studies that do concentrate on nature in Tennyson and Whitman do not always focus specifically on "In Memoriam" or *Leaves of Grass*, as critics often look at their entire oeuvres. Scholars frequently analyse one specific element, such as gardens (in Tennyson: Waters, P. Fletcher) or the sea (in Tennyson: P. Fletcher; in Whitman: Yang). In *Gardens and Grim Ravines: The Language of Landscape in Victorian Poetry*, Pauline Fletcher discusses many nature elements in Tennyson's poetry and provides an in-depth discussion of several "In Memoriam" passages. Yet, Tennyson and "In Memoriam" are only used to examine how they fit into the traditions of Victorian poetry. In criticism on Whitman's nature, much attention is bestowed upon the importance the poet gives to equality, which carries through in all of his themes. Jerome Loving argues that "[i]n this sense Whitman the poet was like nature itself, which, in the words of his friend John Burroughs, 'does not care a fig more for one creature than for another, and is equally on the side of both'" (363).

Both Tennyson and Whitman are acknowledged for their use of the senses. "Tennyson '*feels*' rather than 'believes' " (Bergman 496) and Whitman's "work contains a complete philosophy of seeing and looking, extending all aspects of the sense of sight while maintaining the power to absorb" (A. Fletcher 94). Although much has indeed been written on nature in Alfred Tennyson and Walt Whitman's work, their nature imagery has hardly ever been compared to each other. This comparative analysis will fill this niche.

Chapter 1: Air

"We have had, in this country, a summer more fit fore the infernal regions – but now the delicious Virginia September has set in, balmy cool, & one dilates & feels like work again."

~ Whitman in a letter to Tennyson,

2 September 1872

"...& send you in return my thanks & New-Year's greeting on the wings of this East-wind, which, I trust, is blowing softlier & warmlier on your good gray head than here, where it is rocking the elms & ilexes of my Isle of Wight garden."

~ Tennyson in a letter to Whitman,

15 January 1887

In their correspondence, Tennyson and Whitman repeatedly talk about favourable winds, with two of the most prominent passages serving as epigraph to this chapter. In "A Word About Tennyson",[2] Whitman also wrote that "[y]es, Alfred Tennyson's is a superb character, and will help give illustriousness, through the long roll of time, to our Nineteenth Century. In its bunch of orbic names, shining like a constellation of stars, his will be one of the brightest" (403). The aspects of air they themselves often discussed with regard to each other have provided the inspiration of the air imagery that will be examined in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*, namely the themes of open air and light. For the purpose of this analysis, the cosmos will be the primary subcategory of air imagery.

[2] "A Word about Tennyson" first appeared in the *Critic* on 1 January 1887. It was included in Whitman's *Complete Prose Works*, published in 1892, which is the version referenced in this study.

1.1. Open Air

Tennyson and Whitman often use the word "air" in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*. They repeatedly pair it with adjectives like "wide" and "open", enhancing the concept of open, limitless air, something free. This openness can elicit feelings of absence and loneliness, as well as an interconnectedness beyond what the senses can experience.

A side of nature Tennyson's speaker particularly struggles with is its indifference with regard to life and death, and this is distinctly tangible in air imagery. Pauline Fletcher argues that this is because "the cosmic landscapes of *In Memoriam* lack this human significance [of Hallam's presence]" (24) and uses section III as an example. Here, "Nature stands - / With all the music in her tone, / A hollow echo of my own - / A hollow form with empty hands" (lines 9-12) amidst blind stars (5) and "the dying sun" (8), which characterise the emotional state of the speaker. He is aimless and adrift like the seemingly randomly appearing stars, and sorrowful like the setting sun. This early in his mourning, the speaker's grief has closed him off from his surroundings and his senses, as he is blind and unable to perceive nature's sounds as anything but a "hollow echo" (11). The speaker feels desolate, as the air does not affirm his need for confirmation of his grief.

The five stanzas of "In Memoriam" XI all start with the word "Calm" followed by specific nature imagery: leaves, open countryside, plains, air and seas (and thus encompassing all three elements that provide the focus of this study). Nature seems to move and breathe with the speaker, breathing being another aspect that can be associated with air. There is a "[c]alm and deep peace in this wide air" (13). Although the speaker feels "if calm at all, / If any calm, a calm despair" (15-16), he does express feeling calm, which is an emotion he has not felt in any prior section. This open air allows a sense of space, to give room to his grief and let it breathe with nature, as it is all around him and stimulates his senses.

On many occasions in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman describes how happiness cannot be found in any manmade artefact or institution ("Song of Myself" 50, "A Song for Occupations" 1 and 2). It can be found in the air, specifically the *open* air: "The sun and stars that float in the open air …. the appleshaped earth and we upon it …. Surely the drift of them is something grand; / I do not know what it is except that it is grand, and that it is happiness"[3] ("A Song for Occupations" 3.57-8). This contrasts starkly with Tennyson's wildly grieving speaker early in "In Memoriam", who is left feeling desolate by the air's vastness, as he is at that point still largely confined by his grief, which closes him off from sensually experiencing his surroundings. Whitman's speaker, on the other hand, wonders at the grandness of the cosmos and finds happiness in it, experiencing the open air in both an emotional and sensual manner.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman does not only emphasise the openness of the air, but also the great motion of it. In "Song of Myself" 45, the speaker talks about the cosmic systems as '[w]ider and wider they spread, expanding and always expanding, / Outward and outward and forever outward" (1184-5). They are forever in motion. More so than open plains or open seas, it is the open air that connects the greatest amount of people, as the same (or at least near-identical) sky covers a greater amount of land. By being able to share the same sky, people share something personal, which corresponds with Whitman's words: "And I swear I never will translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air" ("Song of Myself" 47.1247).

In one of her letters to Whitman, close friend and art historian Mary Whitall Smith recalls a story Tennyson told her upon a visit to his house: "[H]e was walking out one evening looking at the stars, so absorbed that he fell into a puddle; but he noticed afterward that the star was in the puddle also! Thereupon we all tried to think of something witty in reply.

[3] The two and four dot ellipses throughout *Leaves of Grass* are Whitman's and are thus included as such in the quotes. The three dot ellipses are inserted for the purpose of this study.

Something about poet's feet tangled among stars". In "Who Learns My Lesson Complete", Whitman writes with a sense of wonderment "that the moon spins round the earth and on with the earth is equally wonderful, / And that they balance themselves with the sun and stars is equally wonderful" (26-7). It is easy to imagine Whitman right next to Tennyson, both their "feet tangled among stars", as they are both equally awed and terrified by the open and limitless sky above and around them.

1.2. Light

Both Tennyson and Whitman play with the presence and absence of light, and how this affects the speakers. In *Leaves of Grass*, most of the poems seem to take place during the daytime. Yet, in line with his great theme of equality, Whitman does not often seem to favour light over the dark. "In Memoriam", on the other hand, is often set in gloomy and dark places, befitting the grief of the speaker.

Through contrasting dark with light, Tennyson shows the changing stages of his speaker's grief and the willingness of his speaker to rise with the light instead of staying down in the dark. This contrast is exemplified in section CXXI. Tennyson's speaker compares Hesper, the evening star, to Phosphor, the morning star. Of Hesper, he says "Sad Hesper, o'ver the buried sun / And ready, thou, to die with him, / Thou watchest all things ever dim / And dimmer, and a glory done" (1-4). The speaker describes her by using words like "[s]ad" (1), "ready … to die with him" (2), "dim / And dimmer" (3-4). When calling upon Phosphor, the speaker's tone is completely different: "Bright Phosphor, fresher for the night, / By thee the world's great work is heard / Beginning, and the wakeful bird; / Behind thee comes the greater light" (9-12). The evening star is visible at night, during an absence of light, and it indicates a lower morale in the speaker's mood. In contrast, the appearance of Phosphor is paired with words of hope, a new beginning. The speaker's reaction to and association with

dark (evening star and night sky) versus light (morning star and sky) exemplify a change in his grief. He no longer retreats into darkness, rather pitying it now, and he is instead drawn to and energised by the light.

"The Sleepers" poems stand apart from the rest of *Leaves of Grass* because Whitman focuses on the night rather than the day, as the "phantasmagoria in "The Sleepers" knowingly touches upon the wilder edges of Tennyson" (Bloom xxviii-xxix). For one of the first times in *Leaves of Grass*, the speaker expresses feelings of doubt and aimlessness as he is "[w]andering and confused …. lost to myself …. ill-assorted …. contradictory" (1.4). When talking about a buried coffin, the speaker says that "[i]t is dark here underground …. it is not evil or pain here" (78). He continues by saying "it is blank here" (78). The next lines, the closing lines of section 2, furthermore express a preference to the light, which sums up the presence of light in both poets' imagery. It is akin to what Tennyson's speaker is working towards in his grieving process. After all, "it seems to me that everything in the light and air ought to be happy; / Whoever is not in his coffin and the dark grave, let him know he has enough" ("The Sleepers" 2.79-80). Everything that lives, can see the light and breathe in the air, should consider itself lucky, happy. Being alive, being able to experience life, light, the air, is enough.

Chapter 2: Water

> "Since all is flux, the sea, as the primordial flux itself, paradoxically becomes the only possible symbol of eternity and stability."
>
> ~ Pauline Fletcher,
>
> *Gardens and Grim Ravines: The Language of Landscape in Victorian Poetry* 36

Although water imagery in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* can be found in numerous forms of precipitation and bodies of water (rain, rivers, snow), the focus of this chapter will mainly be on one category in particular: the sea. Sea imagery is very much embedded in Tennyson and Whitman's own experiences and their preference for nature imagery that is familiar to them. For Tennyson, his "love of the sea was no doubt partly based on happy childhood memories of the coast at Mablethorpe" (P. Fletcher 35), while Whitman had "a look about him … of the gray, eternal sea that he so loved, near which he was born, and that had surely set its seal upon him" (Burroughs 62). Both Tennyson and Whitman link the sea strongly to the theme of life and death as well as to its effects on the emotional states of their speakers through the rhythm of the waves and tides (P. Fletcher; Yang; Bloom).

2.1. Life and Death

Tennyson and Whitman both link the sea strongly and frequently to life and death, for which they often call upon ship imagery to almost literally bridge the divide. The two poets also touch upon the sea's indifference with regard to this tension. Like the cosmos, the sea can "be described as an antisocial landscape, since it represents a realm beyond the demands of the life of the shore" (P. Fletcher 32-3).

The sense that "Whitman viewed the sea as both cradle and grave" (Yang) is made explicitly clear in "Song of Myself" 22. His speaker addresses the sea as "Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves" (459). He acknowledges this characteristic and expresses a desire to be part of it, saying "You sea! I resign myself to you" (451), "We must have a turn together" (454) and "I am integral with you" (461). To the speaker of *Leaves of Grass*, the sea encompasses all that is life. The sea is both "Howler and scooper of storms" (460) and the "capricious and dainty sea" (460), like the speaker is both "the poet of goodness only" as well as "the poet of wickedness" (466). The speaker addresses the sea with a sense of equality, a great theme of *Leaves of Grass*, and he proclaims to "stand indifferent" (470) as well. Like the sea, the speaker's "gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait / I moisten the roots of all that has grown" (471-2). Whitman's speaker does not consider the sea's indifference to be unfavourable, but rather regards it as an example of the sea's equality in the eyes of life and death, goodness and wickedness.

Tennyson emphasises the deathly aspect of water by often coupling words of grief with verbs like "drown", "flood" and "sink" or a phrase like "glooming wave" (LXXXIX.45). Section I includes the line "Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned" (9). At this point in his grieving process, the speaker feels he cannot love his departed friend Hallam without grieving him too. Yet, more than any other element, water also (re)connects the speaker to Hallam, the dead Hallam. "In Memoriam" XIX describes how he died near the Danube and was laid to rest near the Severn, having been brought home across the sea. This relationship between life and death is further symbolised by ship imagery (sections VI, IX, X, XII, XIII, XIV, CIII). Not only is Hallam literally transported across the sea by ship, the speaker in "In Memoriam" CIII also imagines to travel from the land of the living to that of the dead by ship himself as he "dream'd a vision of the dead, / Which left my after-morn content" (3-4). The speaker regards it as a pleasant dream. On the journey across the sea to the land of dead, "the

forward-creeping tides / Began to foam, and we to draw / From deep to deep, to where we saw / A great ship lift her shining sides" (37-40). This ship carries the speaker's departed friend, "[b]ut thrice as large" (42), who has come to take them to the realm of the dead. The sea not only brings the dead to the living, but also the living to the dead, connecting and reconnecting the two worlds.

Tennyson and Whitman find the perfect imagery to comment on life and death with the sea. It is vast and merciless, indifferent and always in motion. It is the epitome of life even though it can also easily kill. Because of these characteristics, Tennyson and Whitman's speakers gain acceptance of its crueller aspects and are able to reconnect with a dead friend ("In Memoriam") and the self (*Leaves of Grass*).

2.2. Swaying and Whirling

The sea is always in motion and never quiet. The waves and tides provide a natural rhythm, which Tennyson and Whitman repeatedly link to the mental state of their speakers. Both poets strongly emphasise the importance of sensually experiencing the sea. Hearing and seeing the sea has a profound effect on their speakers. For the speaker in "In Memoriam", the cadence of the sea is a calming lullaby, for Whitman's speaker it provides energy.

For the grieving speaker in "In Memoriam", the motions of the sea produce a sense of calm. In XIX, Tennyson describes how "[t]he tide flows down, the wave again / Is vocal in its wooded walls; / My deeper anguish also falls, / And I can speak a little then" (13-6). The coming and going of the tides and waves lift his extreme pain, lift a weight off his chest, and he is able to find his voice. In "In Memoriam" XI, the repetition of "Calm" as the first word of each stanza also creates a certain cadence. In the section's water stanza, this cadence can be found in the waves: "Calm on the seas, and silver sleep, / And waves that sway themselves to rest, / And dead calm in that noble breast / Which heaves but with the heaving deep" (17-20).

By using words like “sleep” and “sway themselves to rest”, Tennyson evokes the sense of a lullaby, connecting it to a sleeping state, a sense of calm, similar to section XI’s air stanza as discussed in the chapter on air. The calm of the air helps the speaker to breathe, the calm of the sea helps the speaker to rest.

The great motion of the sea matches the style of Whitman and he often uses strong words to enhance this flux. In “Song of Myself” 37, he writes that “[t]he whirling and whirling is elemental within me” (954). By using the word “whirling”, and repeating it, he creates a sense of the whirling sea. Whitman combines it not just with “elemental”, but also with “within me”. He links it to the emotion of and within the speaker. This “whirling and whirling” is integral to the speaker, to feel this great continuing motion within him. It is not only an integral part of the speaker of *Leaves of Grass*, but also of Whitman himself. He described his poetry to his biographer Horace Traubel as follows:

> Its verses are the liquid, billowy waves, ever rising and falling, perhaps sunny and smooth, perhaps wild with storm, always moving, always alike in their nature as rolling waves, but hardly any two exactly alike in size or measure (metre), never having the sense of something finished and fixed, always suggesting something beyond. (qtd. in Yang)

Tennyson emphasises the calm that can be found in the coming and going of the waves and tides, the natural cadence of the sea, as they “sway themselves to rest” (“In Memoriam” XI.18) and simultaneously his speaker. Whitman accentuates the motion of the sea, the “whirling and whirling” (“Song of Myself” 39.954) that is also “elemental within” (954) his speaker. Both poets focus on the imagery of the waves and tides of the sea, its cadence, to create different mirrors of their speakers’ emotions. For Tennyson’s speaker, the

sea calms his wild grief. For Whitman's speaker, the sea energises him. Although the sea garners different reactions from the speakers, these reactions are both enabled through experiencing the sea through the senses.

Chapter Three: Earth

"I have been laid up here nearly all the time ... not well enough to go out in the world & go to work – but not sick enough to give up either ... I keep up & dressed, & go out a little nearly every day."

~ Walt Whitman in a letter to Alfred Tennyson,
24 July 1875

"I am very glad to hear that you are so improved in health, that you move about the fields & woods freely & have enjoyment of your life."

~ Tennyson in a letter to Whitman,
24 August 1878

Both Tennyson and Whitman were avid walkers. Going out and being able to do so was of great importance to the two men. This is evident in their correspondence, as they regularly measure their health by their (dis)ability to go out for walks. There is a sense of openness and freedom about their walks, to "go out in the world"[4] and "move … freely", [5] expressed in this chapter's epigraph. These themes will be the focus of this study's comparison of earth imagery in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass.* As with the open air and open water in previous chapters, the comparison will focus on the openness of earth and the sense of truth found in the cycle of life and passing of the seasons reflected in the earthly world. To compare earth imagery in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*, this study will look at the natural world of plants, trees, open plains and soil.

[4] Walt Whitman in a letter to Alfred Tennyson, dated 24 July 1875. The quoted words are part of this chapter's epigraph.
[5] Tennyson in a letter to Whitman, dated 24 August 1878. The words are part of this chapter's epigraph.

3.1. Open Earth, Open Mind

Like the open air and open water, the open earth is a setting of endless possibilities, of freedom. The open earth theme, a sense of the open road, is particularly characteristic of American poetry,[6] including Whitman's. As poet Neeli Cherkovski states, "the first rule for the Whitman tradition" is to "tak[e] to the open road both physically and spiritually" (xi). It is a road of discovery.

In "In Memoriam", the open plains and countryside often provide a space for the grief of the speaker to be. Section XI is a prime example. There is a "Calm and deep peace on this high wold, / And on these dews, that drench the furze / And all the silvery gossamers / That twinkle into green and gold" (5-8). "[W]old" means "open country" (OED 3a), further evoking the sense of openness. This is emphasised again in the next stanza with the use of "great plain" (9). Even though he is full of despair, the speaker is able to find and acknowledge not only calmness in his earthly surroundings, but also "a deep peace" (5). Although the speaker is not yet able to take comfort in these aspects this early in his mourning, he does acknowledge them, letting them be and "drench the furze" (7) and "twinkle into green and gold" (8) just as much as they let his grief be.

The open country not only brings a sense of calm to Tennyson's speaker, it also brings him closer to Hallam. Through the trees Hallam loved to sit under and the walks they took together, shown in section LXXXIX, the speaker's dead friend retains a spiritual presence in nature. The speaker, at this stage in his grief, can look back fondly on the times they were "in livelier moods, / Beyond the bounding hill to stray, / And break the livelong summer day / With banquet in the distant woods" (LXXXIX.29-32). The open country helps the speaker to preserve Hallam's presence in a way that opens up his emotions and senses rather than cut them off.

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[6] Notable examples are the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (in particular "The American Scholar" oration from 1837) and *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, published in 1854.

As a walker, there is also the opportunity to wander into earthly nature and become a part of it in a literal sense. In the *Leaves of Grass* poem "There Was a Child Went Forth," the speaker talks about a child that went out every day for whom "the first object he looked upon and received with wonder or pity or love or dread, that object he became, / And that object became part of him" (2-3). The first and most prominent objects listed are earthly matters, as "The early lilacs … / And grass, and white and red morningglories, and white and red clover … all became part of him" (4-6). In becoming one with nature, the speaker also expresses an openness of the mind. The child opens his mind to the world around him, enabling him to merge with it. Again, there is a strong emphasis on the sensual experience of the world.

Going out into the wilderness is both a communal and an individual endeavour. In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman shows how his speaker becomes part of the cycle of nature as he goes out "[a]lone far in the wilds and mountains … / Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee" ("Song of Myself" 10.168-9). By going out alone, far off into the wilderness, the speaker is able to come closer to his feelings. As he experiences the openness of the mountains and trees around him, he is able to open his mind to himself.

Tennyson's speaker in "In Memoriam" does not seem to walk on an open road. In the early stages of his mourning, he is entrapped by his grief and doubts. It is the open earth that opens up his grief and turns it into an open road of its own, eventually leading to an acceptance of his loss and letting go of his grief. As Whitman, "the bard of *Leaves of Grass* 'gets out' in the Wilderness" (Bloom xxi) and the wilderness of the self, so does Tennyson's speaker in the wilderness of his grief, as they both become one with their earthly surroundings.

3.2. Truth

More so than any classical element, earth is most acutely and visibly affected by the seasons, the natural indicators of time passing. There is a sense of undeniable truth in the earthly world showing life does go on and perseveres through the heat of summer to the cold of winter. For Tennyson, gardens are the prime example of this, as they "register change, loss, and the passing of time – the processes which animate the associations of place" (Waters 300) and the "mapping [of] the inner life" (Waters 303). Whitman is more interested in the interconnectedness and equality of the flora, as his "earth … [is] a lover" (Killingsworth 50).

The changing stages of the speaker's grief in "In Memoriam" are reflected in his attitude towards his surroundings, especially towards imagery that changes throughout the seasons. In section II, he addresses the yew tree near the grave of Hallam. While usually "[t]he seasons bring the flower again" (5), this is not the case for this particular yew tree. As it is, "O, not for thee the glow, the bloom, / Who changes not in any gale, / Nor branding summer suns avail / To touch thy thousand years of gloom" (9-12). The tree becomes a mirror for the speaker, as "Sick for thy stubborn hardihood, / I seem to fail from out my blood / And grow incorporate into thee" (14-6). The yew tree is a strong literary symbol, its associations going back centuries (Ferber 245). Yews are evergreens often found in churchyards in Britain, can become over a millennium old and "thrive in sun or shade, in moist or dry soils" (Dirr 792). They would thus be able to grow and bloom no matter the season and "the species' unique abilities of regeneration make the yew tree the perfect symbol of nature's power of renewal and rebirth" (Hagender 14). By linking not just any tree, but the yew in particular, with his speaker, Tennyson emphasises the latter's denial to acknowledge his surroundings. By denying to acknowledge the changes in the tree, he can pretend that time is standing still. By pretending that time does not move on, the death of his friend will be easier to ignore for the likelihood that he is not truly gone as it is still recent. The speaker thus denies the earthly

truth of the cycle of life. By denying this truth of change, he remains stuck in a world of gloom.

In a latter stage of his grief, the speaker in "In Memoriam" finds he can depend on the seasons to coach him through his grief. Even though "we know not anything; / I can but trust that good shall fall / At last – far off – at last, to all / And every winter change to spring" (LIV.13-6). At this point, it is still a dream of his (17) and he is only at the beginning of opening up, but it is a start. The speaker is crying out for help, opening up himself and his grief to the influence of the world around him. The perseverance of plant life and trees throughout the seasons not only helps him to acknowledge and accept the changes in his surroundings, but also within himself. Nothing evidences life more than spring turning into summer into autumn into winter and so forth. The earth shows the speaker that life does go on. It tells him the truth.

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman finds truth in the equality of the cycle of life. Even the tiniest plant contributes to the cycle of life and "a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars" ("Song of Myself" 31.662). Here, Whitman explicitly mentions the title of the poetry collection, no less putting it on a par with the light-years-long travel of the stars. The poet refers to the title several times, but never so explicitly as on this occasion. In his introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, Harold Bloom links the title to Whitman's printer job, as "leaves are printers' sheets, and grass, extempore stuff thrown in to fill them up" (xxvi). The leaves can then be the pages and the grass the words. In the natural world, both components of the title are earthly matters. If the leaves are the pages and the grass the words, *Leaves of Grass* is a literal work of nature. By reading the collection the reader then also becomes part of nature.

In Whitman's poetry, not only do all earthly matters contribute to the cycle of life, but his speaker as well. He proclaims that "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the

grass I love, / If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles" ("Song of Myself" 52.1329-30). The speaker is the soil. He is one with nature, a *part* of nature. He is equal to everything else that contributes to the cycle of life, and so is every other human being, for "[l]eaves are not more shed from the trees or the trees from the earth than they are shed out of you" ("A Song for Occupations" 3.81).

The earth is in constant flux, trees and plants growing and dying, spreading seeds for new plants. It is hard to ignore for Tennyson's speaker, who finds that the very phenomenon that confronted him with the fact his friend was no longer among the living is also the one thing that releases him from his stagnant grief. For Whitman, this constant motion showcases the equality and connectedness of all things living. They are able to experience the truths of life and death and interconnectedness showcased in the earthly nature they go walking in.

Conclusion

At first sight, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Walt Whitman create different poetic subjects in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass*. "In Memoriam" is an elegy, a work of grief that focuses mainly on loss and death. *Leaves of Grass* celebrates the equality and interconnectedness of all living and evolving things. This close reading of Tennyson and Whitman's use of nature provides the chance to look at their speakers in varying natural settings and emotional states, by comparing their nature imagery related to the classical elements air and water and earth. Through their imagery, both poets strongly focus on the sensual experience of nature.

Both Tennyson and Whitman emphasise the openness of nature, creating a metaphorical and literal space to breathe and open the mind to the senses and thus to the world. Whether it is amidst feelings of doubt and loneliness ("In Memoriam") or exuberance and celebration (*Leaves of Grass*), nature is ubiquitous throughout both works. It shows the speakers that life does go on. Nature in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* is as much life-affirming as it is death-affirming.

In the open air and light, Tennyson and Whitman show how the themes of air can express freedom, a sense of community, indifference and loneliness, despair and hope. In all the "whirling" and "swaying" of the sea, Tennyson and Whitman create a space for their speakers to accept death and embrace life as they are accompanied by the ever-present cadence of the waves. On the open road and amidst seasonally changing flora, Tennyson and Whitman's speakers express varying reactions to earthly matters. Tennyson's mourning speaker struggles through resistance and denial to a sense of acceptance and gratefulness. Whitman's speaker equals all earthly matters and things in motion to one another, himself included.

As discussed in the introduction and academic discussion, Tennyson and Whitman both have produced a great oeuvre. Even when focusing on only one work per poet and only

analysing the specific elements air, water and earth, there were still many themes that could not be included. Other work written by Tennyson and Whitman might have done much to contribute to the debate. This study built upon the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* because of it being the first edition and its publication date. This is, however, also the shortest version. Many great nature poems were included in later editions, including the "Sea-Drift" poems featuring "Out of the Cradle". This study examined the classical elements air, water and earth. However, it did not examine the fourth element, fire. Air, water and particularly earth were found to have a greater and more explicit presence in the poems. Together they extinguished fire. The strict division between air and water and earth also meant all-encompassing nature imagery could not be included. Other suggestions for further studies on Tennyson and Whitman's nature in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* are animal imagery or a comparison between grass in *Leaves of Grass* and trees in "In Memoriam".

All together, Tennyson and Whitman's speakers in "In Memoriam" and *Leaves of Grass* have different sensual experiences in different natural settings. The themes the poets connect them to, however, show great similarities. They both use the elements to comment on life and death, nature's indifference and how these themes reflect their speakers' emotional states. Their speakers find a similar truth: opening up one's mind and senses to the natural world also opens up one's emotions.

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