



# In Memoriam

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In Memoriam is Tennyson's tribute to his friend Arthur Henry Hallam who died at the age of 22, written over a period of 17 years.

The original title of the poem was "The Way of the Soul", and this might give an idea of how the poem is an account of all Tennyson's thoughts and feelings as he copes with his grief over such a long period, including wrestling with the big philosophico-scientific questions of his day. It is perhaps because of this that the poem is still popular with and of interest to modern readers. Owing to its length and its arguable breadth of focus, the poem might not be thought an elegy or a dirge in the strictest formal sense.

The poem is not arranged exactly in the order in which it was written. The prologue, for example, is thought to have been one of the last things written. Critics believe, however, that the poem as a whole is meant to be chronological in terms of the progression of Tennyson's grief. The passage of time is marked by the three descriptions of Christmas at different points in the poem, and the poem ends with a description of the marriage of Tennyson's sister.

"In Memoriam" is written in four-line ABBA stanzas of iambic tetrameter, and such stanzas are now called In Memoriam Stanzas. Though not metrically unusual, given the length of the work, the meter creates a tonal effect which often divides readers - is it the natural sound of mourning and grief, or merely monotonous? The poem is divided into 133 cantos (including the prologue and epilogue), and in contrast to its constant and regulated metrical form, encompasses many different subjects: profound spiritual experiences, nostalgic reminiscence, philosophical speculation, Romantic fantasizing and even occasional verse. The death of Hallam, and Tennyson's attempts to cope with this, remain the strand that ties all these together.

Excerpt:

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 ;  
[...]

## In Memoriam Details

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# From Reader Review In Memoriam for online ebook

## Hanna W. says

Great, masterful poem of mourning. Perhaps ran on a bit too long, but, overall it was enjoyable.

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## Taylor says

Part of me swears Terrence Malick was Tennyson in another life....except I don't believe in that sort of thing. How else can I explain the similarities between their work? It turns out that being ultra personal with what you share in your work (film or poetry) is most universal. Tennyson wrote In Memoriam for his best friend, Hallam, who passed away suddenly at a young age; Malick made Tree of Life for his two brothers who passed away.

I've always loved Malick's films because they're the physical representation of poetry--Tennyson's epic poem is that poetry.

I recommend reading Canto 131 with Psalm 131, and the Prologue with Job 42.

For fans of Malick and existentialism coming to a hopeful conclusion.

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## Nina Kristin says

I am not a big fan of poetry, but I did like some of the pieces of this poem.  
"It is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all"

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## Trevor Lloyd says

Finally got round to finishing this! It confirmed that I don't much like long poems (apart from Wordsworth's). It may be that I am just a far too impatient reader for some poetry; I found myself just rushing to finish it, and overall read it to get it of the occasional quotable line or phrase - a terrible way to read really. But it could be that it just dated or I am a child of my time!! There are some beautiful lines reflection on faith and doubt, and on love and life and death, and surprisingly on geology, evolution and time. it is good and moving in parts. But overall, I was bored - and not sure that was down to me, to him or simply to the time gap.

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## Lauren says

Hands down one of the most phenomenal and moving pieces of poetry I have ever had the privilege of reading. Beautiful to read aloud and muse on. The fragmented style that this exceptionally lengthy elegy

takes on has unique rhythm and movement that makes it difficult to put down.

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### **Akanksha Chattopadhyay says**

DNF-ed. Can't say aloud that I didn't like it, can I? Perhaps I could never attain the right mood! I promise to come back to you in future, and hopefully be able to appreciate then the greatness that has kept the world enthralled for 167 years now.  
Until then!

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### **Jonathan says**

I read a free version of the poem. My rating is for the poem alone.

When looking at reviews of this poem, one of the first things you'll notice is that there are a lot of 3 star and 1 star reviews. I think many of the 3 star reviews are from people who hated reading the poem, but feared scorn from their academic peers if they were totally honest. The other group hated the poem, and didn't care what others thought. I'm sure there are plenty of high school students in the latter group.

I love the poem, but I believe the real reasons for people not "getting it" are two-fold. The first is that Tennyson's poetry is full of words and uses of words that we are unfamiliar with today. It's generally not fun to read something if you have to grab the dictionary every other line. The second reason is you must have experienced both deep friendship and loss for Tennyson's elegy to truly resonate with you. Otherwise, you are merely a spectator to another man's grief for over a hundred pages.

Thoreau said that we must put as much effort into reading as the author did into writing, and while I doubt that is possible for this poem, there are some things that can be done to better appreciate it.

1. Slow down-this is the most important step. It's easy to skim when reading poetry, but you'll quickly find that you don't know what the last 3 pages meant. If you have to, read out loud or at least move your lips. Poetry was meant to be heard as well as read.

2. Review-Tennyson broke his poem up into several smaller poems. At the end of each section, pause and make sure you can summarize at least some of what he said (don't expect to get it all.) If you can't, then reread. Most of the mini-poems are 4 to 5 stanzas, at most. In addition, they each tend to focus on a particular theme or perspective. Understanding by chunks will make it easier to see how everything fits into the whole.

3. Take breaks-your mind can only handle so much concentration at once.

If you do these steps I think you will find that In Memoriam is not only a poetic masterpiece, but is also a rather deep philosophical treatise on the meaning of life, memory, evolution, faith and grief.

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### **Bookdragon Sean says**

I've been reading a lot of poetry lately, and I'm starting to get a real taste for it. This poem is an emotional

and heartfelt lament to someone who was very dear to the poet. Indeed, Tennyson has lost someone very close to him and spent seventeen years making this poem in his memory. Well, that's devotion for you. His poetry is a real pleasure to read because of this, and structurally speaking it's wonderful. The rhymes and metre are superb. Each verse in itself is a feat of poetic form. However, I think Tennyson's lament could have been said in perhaps ten verses of the poem. Instead there are one hundred and fifty or so of them. Individually they're all great to read, but when taken together it was simply too much. Here's one of my favourites though:

*"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."*

This is the first stanza of the fifth set of verses, so it comes very early on. I think it perfectly sums up the main motif of the entire work. Tennyson feels his loss deeply, but he questions this grief. His friend's death is the will of God, so to question the necessity of the death is to question God. Therefore, his grief reveals his doubting soul to the world. He is insecure about faith; he begins to look towards science for the answers. But, instead of condemning either science or religion, he suggests that they can coexist. Knowledge gained through science is God's will. Scientific understanding can add to religious faith and an understanding of the world, so together they can work. Through this combination of ideas he grieves further for his friend.

This was all good, but I really don't recommend reading the whole thing because it begins to grow incredibly repetitive. He considers his loss from so many angles that it's practically mind boggling. I wouldn't say he goes too far, but in terms of actual emotional effect it's awfully drawn out. Each verse centres on the same thing, and whilst not directly saying the same thing, it felt repetitive. I would have stopped reading if I didn't have to study this for university. I just think that everything that needed to be said was said very early on. Anything that came later was surplus and unnecessary.

I much preferred The Lady of Shalott

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**Nidhi Singh says**

Touching. Till it got tiresome.

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**Derek Mong says**

Perhaps the finest, most moving elegy ever written.

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## Amy Ahn says

Shortly following his close Cambridge friend Arthur Hallam's death in 1833, Alfred Lord Tennyson began composing a long series of short poems that would later constitute the collection of poems in this book. As a whole this published piece served two functions--1) to fashion an elegy through which Tennyson could express his mourning for the loss of his friend, and 2) to commemorate the figure of Arthur Hallam by recalling him in the past.

Not light reading for sure. The lines maintain a dirge-like quality in the very monotony of their un-narrative content. There's definitely a very prominent (and relentless) overtone of grief throughout, but sorrow is probably one of the few thematic frameworks that deliberately provide cohesion for the 100+ fragmentary short poems found here. It's hard to tell how Tennyson intended the poems to cohere in other ways (if he did at all). However, there is a sort of therapeutic labor in moving through the text, which I suppose is reminiscent of the operation of grieving, and eventually, recuperating.

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## Mina Soare says

Esthetic and declarative, *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is vaguely reminiscent of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (one seldom grows tired of a good "thou" and "dost"). It is more compact, not as accessible for the casual reader, which lessens the impact. It is much more extensive in its exploration of one theme.

While Tennyson occasionally makes use of the more conspicuous elements of style, some repetition and even the occasional parallelism, there is not denying that this elegy stands mainly on the raw strength of its message. If anything, enclosed rhyme (ABBA) quatrains such as those present here, have a somber musicality that I'm particularly fond of, yet there is something in the rhythm that disrupts it, whether it is an intended irregularity or not.

Regardless, it was a great pleasure to read it, much improved by (view spoiler)

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## Ezra says

My review is for the poem only.

This lengthy poem by Lord Tennyson was a required read for my Principles of Literary Study class, a course required for all English majors at my university. I normally would not have chosen to read this poem on my own, but it was an interesting read. Personally, I found it too dark in tone and mood - as it is a poem about the author's grief towards the death of his close friend - to enjoy reading, especially in a short amount of time (a week and a half of continuous reading and analyzing). However, there were plenty insightful sections and quotes that I had seen before but not known were from this particular piece. I certainly hadn't planned on this being my first read of 2015, but here we are.

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## Hayden says

I'm really not a huge fan of poetry, but I have determined over the years that if I *was* to have a favorite poet, Tennyson would probably be the most worthy candidate for the position. That being said, this one was just so long that after I got through about half of it, I was getting impatient for it to conclude already. (and I've also realized that my version, which is in an anthology, actually doesn't include the *entire* poem, which I'm a little annoyed about because it didn't *say* it was abridged. At any rate, the vast majority of the poem was in there, so I'm not sure how much I missed, but it couldn't have been much.)

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## Wreade1872 says

A very long poem lamenting the loss of a friend and brother-in-law. I don't give ratings based on quality only enjoyment. And overall i thought this was pretty meh.

There are times when it sparkles but the quality seems very uneven. I like poetry best when its telling a story or painting a picture.

I understand this was written over 17 years but it feels like there was a significant gap before the final 5th, as suddenly it becomes more philosophical and the grief seems severely reduced from the first 4/5ths.

The read does raise some interesting questions though. Due to its length it can come across (perhaps quite wrongly) as self-centered, being so focused on the authors grief with seemingly no thought for anyone else's. Including his sister who was married to the deceased. In fact she barely gets a mention until the end.

I also wonder how much of this affection was returned. Call me cynical but in my experience love/friendship is never mutually strong.

I've always had trouble processing/appreciating poetry that isn't story based (like Idyll's of the King which is awesome!) and this read has none nothing to show that i've grown over the years :) .

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