ISLJ Best Conference Paper by an Emerging Scholar Award 2023

RECUSATIO, PROLEPSIS, AND POPULAR SENTIMENT IN TENNYSON'S JUVENILIA

Eric Bontempo
Assistant Professor, Abilene Christian University

IN MARCH 1827, Charles Tennyson and his younger brother, Alfred, published a volume of 109 poems "written from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, not conjointly but individually" (Tennyson and Tennyson, Advertisement). They entitled their volume *Poems, by Two Brothers*, even though they enlisted their eldest brother Frederick, then aged nineteen, to contribute four of his own poems. Charles seems to have spearheaded the endeavour, penning the volume's prefatory poem and contributing 53 additional poems.[1] The younger Alfred contributed 50 poems to the volume as a fifteen- to seventeen-year-old, most of which have largely gone unnoticed in recent studies of Tennyson's juvenilia; these have, instead, tended to focus on such later teenage works as "Timbuctoo." Moreover, most such critics have approached Tennyson's juvenilia as merely showing signs of the poet's later mastery of sound and metre.[2]

However, Tennyson's early poems in *Poems, by Two Brothers* are remarkable for their insistence on maturity, a feature that Laurie Langbauer calls prolepsis. Juvenile writers in the early nineteenth century, according to Langbauer, "would not await the expectations of childhood development … that they had to grow and mature to be good writers. They acted proleptically, they wrote and published to seize their future immediately instead" (4). This prolepsis is evident in what is presumably a jointly written advertisement for their volume, in which the two brothers boldly announce their entry into the profession of poetry: "But so it is: we have passed the Rubicon, and we leave the rest to fate; though its edict may create a fruitless regret that we ever emerged from 'the shade,' and courted notoriety" (Tennyson and Tennyson, Advertisement). With this language and their subsequent volume of poems, Charles and Alfred Tennyson participate in a common schoolboy tradition of writing poetry as if already imagining themselves fully fledged poets. Moreover, in announcing their crossing of the Rubicon and "submitting to the microscopic eye of periodical

Journal of Juvenilia Studies 6.2 (2024), pp. 99–116. DOI: 10.29173/jjs134

Criticism" (ibid.), they strategically decide to disavow their youthful influences by means of the classical rhetorical strategy of *recusatio* (disavowal).

Yet while both Tennyson brothers participate in the normative schoolboy tradition of writing poetry in imitation of classical Greek and Latin poets, Alfred's imitation also extends into the vogue for sentimental literature, including the gothic, that was popularized in Tennyson's boyhood in such novels as Ann Radcliffe's Gothic romances and in gift books, poetry albums, and literary annuals like the *Keepsake* and the *Forget-Me-Not*. In so combining his schoolboy training in classical poetry with his reading of popular sentimental and Romantic literature, which were generally considered feminine and commercial, Tennyson forges a distinctive poetic voice and effectively launches himself into the vocation of poetry. This distinctive poetic voice, I argue, links to what Harold Nicholson has elsewhere referred to as the "School-Miss Alfred style" (103). Encoded in several juvenile poems is an "aesthetic considered traditionally feminine, and therefore distastefully sentimental to … critics," which "involved themes and expressions of the heart, usually involving women characters and domestic situations" (Ledbetter, "Protesting" 57). Tennyson, on his entrance into the vocation of poetry, self-consciously wrestled with his own inheritance as a reader, the male-dominated world of poetry criticism, and the evolving literary marketplace that had become more populated by women readers.

Like that of many Victorians, the Tennysons' childhood included a thorough education in the Greco-Roman literary tradition. According to Theodore Redpath, a young Alfred was made by his father to "recite by heart on successive mornings all the four books of Horace's *Odes*. That amounted to over one hundred poems, a good three months, autumn discipline!" (qtd. in Wright 143). The young Tennyson later reflected that his expertise in Horace's *Odes* made him stand out amongst his peers: "They use *me* as a lesson-book at schools, and they will call me 'that horrible Tennyson.' It was not till many years after boyhood that I could like Horace" (qtd. in Wright 143, original emphasis). In *Poems, by Two Brothers*, both Tennyson brothers call upon that schoolboy training in Greco-Latin poetry in order to establish themselves as poets in their own right, oftentimes quoting Virgil, Horace, Anacreon, Cicero, Ovid, and Juvenal, among others, in epigraphs for their original poems.[3] In so doing, the Tennyson brothers imitate fundamental rhetorical strategies that they learned from these classical poets, including the *recusatio*.

The classical *recusatio* developed in the Augustan Age as a way for poets to elevate their own contemporary aesthetic by disavowing its preceding antitype (Davis 92); it is a strategy of negation that offered Charles and Alfred Tennyson a template for imagining themselves as mature, professional poets through disavowing their youth and the works associated with it. The brothers learned *recusatio* from Horace and Virgil and employ it time and time again throughout *Poems, by Two Brothers* as they experiment with many different poetic forms, metres, and *topos*. One example of the *recusatio*, which a young Tennyson would have read, may be found in "Nolis longa ferae": one of Horace's odes addressed to Maecenas (book 2, poem 12).[4] Here,

Horace presents himself as unfit for the task of composing an encomium to Caesar in the elevated manner required by the ode. Feigning humility and explaining that his own Muse is the lyre (symbol of pastoral poetry), he disavows the ode, citing his own poetic limitations and the constraints of the genre: "On me the Muse has laid her charge to tell / Of your Licymnia's voice, the lustrous hue / Of her bright eye" (lines 13–15). Yet, through this disavowal, Horace elevates his status as a pastoral poet. Virgil also employs the same basic rhetorical strategy in Eclogue 6, "To Varus."[5] Under the guise of self-deprecation, Virgil represents himself here as being inadequate to the task of writing an epic in celebration of the emperor, using that argument to justify the pastoral mode he employs in the Eclogue: "When I sought to tell / Of battles and kings, the Cynthian god / Plucked at mine ear and warned me" (lines 3b–5). As Gregson Davis points out, though, these examples of the *recusatio* are ambiguous because both Horace and Virgil include epic (elevated) diction in their disavowals. Thus, they include the very thing they are telling their audience they are excluding.

It is Horace and Virgil's *recusatio* model that both brothers, Charles and Alfred, adapt in *Poems, by Two Brothers*, in order to bolster their claims as poets. In some poems, this disavowal serves a proleptic function as the brothers feign maturity by disavowing their youth (even though both are still schoolboys at this point). In others, Charles and Alfred disavow the poetry (and poetics) of all their predecessors in an attempt to establish—and elevate—their own contemporary aesthetic. By implementing the *recusatio* model that they learned from Horace and Virgil, then, they align themselves as close students and experts of Augustan and modern poetry, while at the same time rejecting that mode, in order to dispel any notion that the young Tennysons were *too young* to be published as poets. Not merely imitating to flatter, the Tennysons sought to use the *recusatio* model as an inheritance that could open out onto new futures for their own contemporary poetry.

Charles Tennyson, for example, situates his poem "In Early Youth I Lost My Sire" near the beginning of *Poems, by Two Brothers*, quoting Virgil in the epigraph ("Hinc mihi prima mali labes [Hence my first evil slips]"). It is a poem that employs both prolepsis and *recusatio* to construct the speaker as a grown adult lamenting, and reflecting on, the loss of childhood innocence. To achieve this, Charles simultaneously attaches himself to Virgil through the inclusion of the epigraph while, at the same time, distancing himself from that educational bedrock by claiming that he has lost his (poetic) sire. Insistently using the past tense in order to write proleptically from the perspective of reflective maturity, Charles laments that his "youthful heart" has become "A play-thing for the fiends of hell" (lines 31, 33). The young poet describes how a seemingly irrevocable distance has developed between himself and the "fruits of virtue" that the youth's sire had previously inculcated in him (line 11). The basic strategy of the *recusatio* operates in two steps: in the first stanza, Charles claims to have lost his sire, occasioning his disavowal of virtue; in the second stanza, Charles then uses the disavowal to justify the poet's development of

the "chief" vice of "vast ambition" (line 26), a sad but seemingly necessary pre-requisite for the young Tennyson's future prospects as a poet.

The logic of this *recusatio* thus accomplishes two rhetorical aims for young Charles. First, it allows him to subtly include evidence of virtue even as he laments the loss of virtue. In particular, he displays the wisdom to recognize his errant ways:

> From this I date whatever vice
> Has numb'd my feelings into ice;
> From this—the frown upon my brow;
> From this—the pangs that rack me now. (lines 17–20)

This cataloguing of the poet's felt shortcomings implicitly endorses the virtue of wisdom. It is a thorough, introspective cataloguing, emphasized by the weightiness of the long dashes. Nevertheless, I would also argue that, under the guise of self-deprecation (disavowal of virtue), Charles actually constructs a virtuous persona; after all, the chief vice to which he admits in this poem is nothing worse than that of poetic ambition.

Second—and crucial to the logic of the *recusatio*—the young poet finds an antitype through which he can cast himself as a mature poet ready to be put "under the microscopic eye of periodical Criticism" (Tennyson and Tennyson, Advertisement). In closing the poem, Charles remarks, "I knew the rainbow soon would fade!" (line 40). Representing himself as inadequate to the task of composing an encomium to the virtues of childhood, Charles also takes up the role of cynic; in this way, he gives himself an air of experience and postures himself as having crossed the Rubicon into adulthood.

Alfred, likewise, practises the *recusatio* throughout *Poems, by Two Brothers*, and it is Alfred's contributions to the volume that occupy the remaining space in this essay. Both brothers had ambitions of becoming professional poets (as did many young boys in the nineteenth century), but Alfred alone would achieve this rank while Charles would become ordained as a minister and write poetry in his spare time. One early observable difference in their work is Alfred's interest in the popular, sentimental style of poetry—an interest that critics of the day would have dismissed or condemned but that cultivated wide reading networks among the general public (which was becoming increasingly female). Much as his older brother does, a young Alfred experiments with his poetic sense of self through the basic rhetorical strategy of the *recusatio*, disavowing classical genres; however, Alfred's juvenilia show him looking for his antitypes not just in competing classical forms but in modern, sentimental poetry.

Arranged near the beginning of the 109-poem volume, Alfred's "The Exile's Harp" contains a post-Romantic depiction of the exiled, isolated, wandering (male) poet with which the young poet wants to identify.[6] Using the logic of the *recusatio*, Tennyson disavows the "Harp of" his "fathers" (line 13), announcing his intentions

and poetic allegiances in the process; specifically, he intends to distance himself from the pastoral mode. Harps, lyres, and fountains are all associated with pastoral poetry, and the poem begins with an assertion that Tennyson will "hang" the harp, the poet's lyre, "by the side of the fountain," leaving it behind forever (line 1). Ironically, however, the ensuing lines display Tennyson's already adept ear for the pastoral cadence: he writes of the "whispering branch of the long-waving / willow" (lines 2–3) and the "hoarse gale of the / mountain" (lines 3–4). These enjambed lines place the direct object on its own line, thereby giving the pastoral description its own space. Furthermore, this stanza's Alexandrine lines are characteristic of the pastoral genre and would normally be used to describe an idyllic, pastoral setting.

Such a demonstration of skill in the rejected genre is characteristic of the classical *recusatio* that Tennyson would have encountered in his Horatian training as a child, a key feature of which is the adumbration and incorporation of the rejected material (Davis 94). In this poem Tennyson claims to abandon the harp because he feels unfit and unworthy to play such an instrument: "For where," he asks, "is the heart or the hand to awaken / The sounds of the soul-soothing sweetness again?" (lines 11–12). With such a question, Tennyson strategically feigns humility; as the poem's deft handling of pastoral elements demonstrates, he actually believes that he does possess the heart and the hand to awaken "soul-soothing sweetness."

The *recusatio* continues in the chorus of "The Exile's Harp," where, instead of offering "soul-soothing sweetness," the young poet is now positioned through the preceding disavowal to launch into a different poetic mode and metre. Underscoring his claim of being an exile from the idyllic pastoral, Tennyson launches a chorus composed in rapidly succeeding lines of trimetre:

> Oh! Harp of my fathers!
> Thy chords shall decay,
> One by one with the strings
> Shall thy notes fade away;
> Till the fiercest of tempests
> Around thee may yell,
> And not waken one sound
> Of thy desolate shell! (lines 13–20)

The hastening pace of the chorus constructs a dichotomy dividing that which is being disavowed (the pastoral) from that which is being promoted (a neo-Romantic elegiac mode). Sensing that the harp is ill-suited for the compositions of an exiled poet (which, proleptically, the poet already envisions himself as), Tennyson uses this elegiac mode to express the loss he feels at finding the harp barren and "desolate." It is mute for him; it can "not waken one sound"; therefore, he must disavow it if he is to continue on this self-selected path of exile poet.

To make it clear that he is disavowing the harp by choice (and not because he lacks the skills), Tennyson then uses the next stanza and the closing chorus to demonstrate his facility with the whole range of skills required of a poet (at the young age of fifteen or seventeen years old no less). Before leaving the harp behind forever, the young Tennyson remarks that he will "fling a wreath round" it (line 21) so that others "shall remember the hand that hath / crown'd thee" (lines 25–26). These actions are adumbrations that Tennyson includes in his *recusatio* to demonstrate that he can be the type of poet he is disavowing *if he wants*. Here in this poem, however, he strikes out on his own path, conveying at once a respect for the traditional pastoral mode of Virgil and others, as well as a desire to take his own poetry in new directions:

> One sweep will I give thee,
> And wake thy bold swell,
> Then, thou friend of my bosom,
> For ever farewell! (lines 41–44)

Like his brother Charles's poem "In Early Youth I Lost My Sire," which announces the loss of childhood innocence, Alfred's "The Exile's Harp" concludes with a severing of old ties.

The *recusatio*, then, is one rhetorical strategy by which Alfred Tennyson thinks, writes, and acts proleptically, thereby posturing himself as the antithesis of the inexperienced poet that he actually was. Prolepsis itself, defined as "the action of anticipating a possible objection or counter-argument in order to answer or discount it, or to deprive it of force" (*OED*), can also be understood as a rhetorical stance and a style of argumentation that young Victorian boys learned in grammar school in their studies of classical rhetoric (Langbauer 5). Alfred Tennyson understands the rhetorical limitations faced by an adolescent who pens poems in modes not meant for juvenile poets, so he works out ways to discard childish or child-like qualities from his poems. Cognizant of the periodical critic's gaze from the very start in the volume's Advertisement, Tennyson proleptically anticipates their objections to his youth and naïveté by imagining himself as the poet who can always-already resist and overcome those critiques.

"The Sun Goes Down in the Dark Blue Main" finds Tennyson again practising those rhetorical strategies of prolepsis and disavowal that, I argue, go hand in hand in his juvenilia. At a very basic level, this poem is about poetry's inability to restore youth once it has departed, which is an appropriate thesis for a poet seemingly obsessed with moving past youth into maturity: "what charm can restore the flower / Of youth to the old and hoary," it asks (lines 11–12). His youth has, surely, not departed. Nevertheless, Tennyson invokes Virgil for his poem's epigraph ("Irreparabile tempus" [irretrievable time]) to announce his intention of proleptically narrating "in advance an event that will take place later" (Genette 40). Tennyson envisions a specific moment in time in the future when he will look back on his lost

youth wistfully. Can the act of constructing a poem retrieve lost time? Although this three-stanza poem repeatedly asks the question with some degree of hope, the epigraph from Virgil as well as the internal rhyme scheme point to the ultimate futility of reclaiming lost time. Moreover, in this early poem, a young Alfred not only reflects on this futility but also does so in a way that anticipates and defends against criticism that may ask how a young person could possibly have anything serious to say about such a thing.

The three stanzas of this poem are eerily similar, almost frustratingly so. As Jane Wright notes, the poem can seem redundant due to "the reduplication" of the poem's main question along different lines (143). Further, as the three stanzas unfold, both rhetoric and metre contribute to the frustrating reduplication of the poem's themes. Rhetorically, each of the three stanzas follows a statement-exclamation-question pattern in *abab* rhyme scheme; each considers a different scenario but then turns from that scenario to ask a question, each beginning in the same way: "what charm can restore." However, each stanza ends without offering an answer to this question:

> The sun goes down in the dark blue main,
> To rise the brighter to-morrow;
> But oh! what charm can restore again
> Those days now consign'd to sorrow?
>
> The moon goes down on the calm still night,
> To rise sweeter than when she parted;
> But oh! what charm can restore the light
> Of joy to the broken hearted?
>
> The blossoms depart in the wintry hour,
> To rise in vernal glory;
> But oh! what charm can restore the flower
> Of youth to the old and hoary?

On Wright's reading, the speaker of the poem tries, but ultimately fails, to tempt (charm) readers into believing that poetry should have the power to restore the losses of time, joy, and youth, respectively (143). The answer to the three questions should be poetry itself; it should be this very poem. However, the enjambed lines in the questions in stanzas two and three ("light / Of joy," "flower / Of youth") generate a "self-conscious displacement" of charm's power (Wright 143). As a result, the poem cannot complete the restoration; it can only continually return to what has been lost. Disappointingly, that is the extent of charm's power, Tennyson suggests. By the third stanza, the question becomes more personal and more metaphorical. The speaker's initial optimistic recognition that the "wintry hour" gives rise to "vernal glory" is immediately undercut with the exclamation "but oh!" because the restoration of each

season with each passing year ultimately frustrates the task of the poet. No charmed language can restore "the flower / Of youth to the old and hoary" (lines 11–12). That time is irretrievable, according to Virgil, and Tennyson applies that wisdom without being trite about it.

Though in his juvenilia Tennyson consistently strives to elevate his stature as a poet through the rhetorical strategies of prolepsis (always-already envisioning his future self as a poet) and the *recusatio* (disavowing his youthful identity in order to arrive at that always-already achieved destination), Tennyson's use of *recusatio* cannot be fully appreciated if we only consider it in terms of competing classical genres (epic, ode, pastoral, and so on). As part of his journey to "cross the Rubicon" into the professional marketplace of poetry and of "periodical Criticism," Tennyson also disavows the idea that good poetry has no dealings with the marketplace but belongs to a higher realm. In other words, his juvenilia seek to establish credibility in part by demonstrating that it can meet the expectations of a general reading public that has been rapidly growing and diversifying (St Clair 13). Whether participating in the normative schoolboy tradition of writing poetry in imitation of classical Greek and Latin poets or writing in the popular, sentimental style that Nicholson calls the "School-Miss Alfred" style, he uses the classical strategy of *recusatio* to both disavow certain classical genres and to demonstrate his mastery of antitypes—classical and contemporary.

Read in this way, the poems Alfred contributes to *Poems, by Two Brothers* that experiment with a sentimental mode are not completely at odds with the volume's main intention to present a thorough schooling in and mastery of the classical tradition in poetry. Several of the 50 poems that Alfred contributes as a fifteen-year-old reflect his childhood encounters with popular literature, and in some of these, including "The Passions," "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow," "On Sublimity," "We Meet No More," and "To Fancy," Tennyson branches out into a sentimental mode. Andrew Lang, in his recent biography of Tennyson, finds little to praise in Tennyson's juvenilia: "These poems contain, as far as I have been able to discover, nothing really Tennysonian" (5). Lang takes his cue from Tennyson's own perception of the poetry he composed as a youth. When, in 1868, Tennyson learned that copies of *The Lover's Tale* (composed at age nineteen) were circulating, he apologetically remarked, "Allowance must be made for abundance of youth. It is rich and full, but there are mistakes in it …. The poem is the breath of young love" (qtd. in Lang 5). While modern literary critics will typically reproduce Tennyson's own stance towards his juvenilia, I argue that *Poems, by Two Brothers* affords readers a glimpse into Tennyson's quite successful experimentation with a sentimental mode that had overtaken the poetry marketplace in the 1820s.

"The Passions," for example, attests to Tennyson's engagement with a popular, sentimental mode as part of his efforts to write and act proleptically. He uses the most popular of Gothic romances, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as a platform from which he can make yet another *recusatio*, this time disavowing the passionate,

sentimental feelings that are at the very heart of the genre. Here, Tennyson constructs a future self who reaches back to tell the fourteen- or fifteen-year-old some crucial information that only a poet with significant life experience can apprehend. It begins with the speaker stating "Beware, beware, ere thou takest / the draught of misery": a warning given from the perspective of one who has already taken that draught and awoken "the scorpions that sleep" within. The imagery in these opening lines is derived from a passage in volume three of *Udolpho*: "You have passions in your heart—scorpions; they sleep now—beware how you awaken them! they will sting you even to death!" (455). Sister Agnes, who is soon to be revealed as Signora Laurentini, heiress of the house of Udolpho, speaks these words to Emily St. Aubert as a warning. That dynamic of an experienced woman (Sister Agnes) giving advice to a young person (Emily St. Aubert) is reproduced in Tennyson's poem: the young poet already envisions himself as the Sister Agnes figure, one who has experienced much sadness from awakening the "scorpions."

As in his later poetry, a young Tennyson here demonstrates "a thorough integration with the aesthetic and literary community of women writers" (Ledbetter, "Protesting" 57). Just as Tennyson's later poem "The Victim" was inspired by Charlotte Yonge's *A Book of Golden Deeds*, "The Passions" is rooted in his reading of Radcliffe's Gothic novel and his exploration of feminine subjectivity (ibid. 58). In this imitation, however, there is a slippage. The epigraph that Tennyson chooses from the novel very clearly states, "beware *how* you awaken them [the scorpions / the passions]" (emphasis mine). Radcliffe's emphasis is on the proper mechanics of awakening: Sister Agnes warns Emily St. Aubert to awaken her passions cautiously (recognizing that the awakening is inevitable in a young girl). By contrast, the speaker in Tennyson's opening stanza warns the youthful person to keep the passions asleep and dormant—to repress the passions even: "Beware, beware, *ere* thou wakest / The scorpions that sleep in thee" (emphasis mine). By replacing *how* with *ere*, Tennyson offers a reinterpretation of *Udolpho* from the perspective of an adolescent boy imagining himself as an experienced man. Thus, he inadvertently reveals the strictures and expectations of Victorian manhood foisted upon his boyhood. The putting to sleep, or death, of the passions here is also consistent with the Christian consolatory rhetoric that can been seen in the Tennyson brothers' other juvenilia in this volume.[7] Even though Tennyson may be reading *Udolpho* with some unavoidable boyish bias, "The Passions" nonetheless works rhetorically as an act of prolepsis.

Moreover, in the third and fourth stanzas, Tennyson also performs a *recusatio*, disavowing the very thing that he enacts. Both stanzas begin passionately with two exclamations of "Yet oh!" even as the speaker exhorts the listener to live in tranquility and to avoid rousing the passions. Through the *recusatio* in these specific stanzas, Tennyson deftly showcases his range as a poet to encompass both the reflective and the sentimental. The internal rhyme scheme, moreover, permits Tennyson to create strong associations between youth and tranquility that outmatch "the rancour of hate" incited by the passions:

Yet oh! yet while the rancour
  Of hate has no place in thee,
While thy buoyant soul has an anchor
  In youth's bright tranquil sea:

Yet oh! yet while the blossom
  Of hope is blooming fair,
While the beam of bliss lights thy bosom—
  O! rouse not the serpent there! (stanzas 3–4)

Here, similar to what we find him doing in "The Sun Goes Down on the Dark Blue Main," Tennyson uses enjambment to link concepts together metrically: "the rancour / Of hate" (stanza 3) and "the blossom / Of hope" (stanza 4). While the first enjambed phrase is immediately stifled because "rancour" (presently) has "no place in thee," the "buoyant soul" can stay afloat in "youth's bright tranquil sea" because, crucially, it has an "anchor." Tennyson does some anchoring of his own across these two stanzas: there is internal rhyme and alliteration between "buoyant" and "bright" that outmatches the now stifled "rancour / Of hate" mentioned in the preceding lines. Even though Tennyson transitions from a nautical metaphor to a botanical metaphor in the fourth stanza, he maintains the alliteration of "b" words: "blossom," "blooming," "beam," and "bliss" continue the hopeful tone begun in the third stanza with "buoyant." Between the buoyancy in the nautical metaphor and the "blooming" that occurs in the fourth stanza, Tennyson expertly promotes youth from a place of distanced reflection.

Even so, the syntax in these two stanzas betrays Tennyson's reflective posture. With both stanzas beginning with ejaculations ("Yet! Oh!") and ending with subordinated dependent clauses ("While …"), the tranquility of youth is unstable. Despite the internal reflective mood of the two stanzas, each is enclosed by exclamation points as a reminder that, in this poem, the as yet still slumbering passions exert their will. The speaker's imperative to "rouse not the serpent there!" conveys the sentiment and the feeling belonging to an individual who has experienced the throes of passion and is not yet fully distanced from that experience. Sentiment, feeling, and passion creep into Tennyson's poem just as Sister Agnes forewarned that passion is wont to creep into a maturing young person's mind in *Udolpho*. In constructing this strongly worded imperative, Tennyson can demonstrate proleptically a posture of maturity based both on reflection and sentimentality. In a later stanza, the speaker, presenting himself as experienced, reflects on the dangers of succumbing to passion by foregrounding feeling and sensation:

When the world has rent the cable
  That bound thee to the shore,
And launched thee weak and unable

To bear the billow's roar;

Then the slightest touch will waken
Those pangs that will always grieve thee,
And thy soul will be fiercely shaken
With storms that will never leave thee! (stanzas 6–7)

Tennyson's allusion to the conversation between Sister Agnes and Emily St. Aubert in Radcliffe's novel here guides the reader in interpreting the poem's complex rhetoric, all of which develops the argument that there is no safe way to awaken the sleeping passions. The "buoyant soul" that had been anchored inevitably becomes unmoored and realizes that it is actually "weak and unable" in the event that the sea is anything but "tranquil." This realization by the speaker is made real through the emphasis of touch in stanza 7. With some sexual undertones, the speaker explains to the auditor that even "the slightest touch" will set in motion feelings and passions that cannot be rolled back. As a poet who is attempting in *Poems, by Two Brothers* to represent himself as a mature poet whose course has already been rolled out, "The Passions" provides Tennyson ample opportunity for this self-authentication. That explains why the final stanza's emphatic warning—"Beware, beware" (lines 29, 31)—works proleptically: he already envisions what it is like to have experienced this awakening; thus, a poetics of sentimentality is an important mode for him to establish credibility as a poet.

Unsurprisingly, while the epigraphs that Tennyson selects are predominantly from male writers and primarily reflect his schoolboy training, the way that the poems operate in relation to those epigraphs suggests that a teenage Tennyson was feeling out his own poetic stance—points of alignment with his male predecessors and points of departure. Still, his engagement with more contemporary source material, such as Radcliffe, Edmund Burke, James Beattie, and Lord Byron, fosters a curious blend of classical and contemporary aesthetics. It should be remembered that Charles, too, engages with many of the same literary personas as Alfred. In this blending of aesthetic movements, however, Alfred more frequently found opportunity to experiment with sentimentality. "The Passions," as well as other sentimental poems in *Poems, by Two Brothers*, was composed at about the same time as a notable rise in periodical poetry printed in gift books and literary annuals, such as the *Keepsake* and *Forget-Me-Not*, which ran through enormous print runs and various editions until the 1850s when those specific titles fell out of vogue. Tennyson, in his early twenties, looked ambivalently at this genre of popular poetry, writing in a letter to Richard Monckton Milnes on 21 December 1836, "Provokt by the incivility of Editors, I swore an oath, that I would never again have to do with their vapid books …. To write for people with prefixes to their names is to milk he-goats: there is neither honour nor profit" (qtd. in Ledbetter, *Tennyson* 8). As Ledbetter observes, Tennyson here makes a pointed critique of the efforts of aristocratic editors like, for instance,

Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley and other editors "with prefixes to their names," because they "often sought authors who would write without pay while saving their large budget for literary celebrities such as Scott" (ibid.). Tennyson's own romantic ideals about poetry, espoused throughout the Advertisement in *Poems, by Two Brothers*, existed in tension with a growing understanding of the business of poetry as it stood in the early nineteenth century. Even a fifteen-year-old Tennyson challenges himself to write poetry "of sparkling thought untouched … as old as the truth" that is also consciously seeking to "court notoriety" (Tennyson and Tennyson, Advertisement). He strikes a delicate balance between more masculine poetry that he learned from his schoolboy training and the contemporary vogue for expressive, sentimental poems of the heart that had recently been penned by Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley—and other models that had been circulating in the popular periodical press.

"I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow" stands out as Tennyson's disavowal of a particular type of expressive poetry (reflection) that is also an avowal of his own aesthetic preference (a poetics of sensation). When a teenage Tennyson composed this poem, he set out to imitate the popular Romantic trope of the isolated (male) poet wandering in a natural scene from which he is alienated. Christopher Ricks identifies Shakespeare's Lear as a primary source for this juvenile poem because the first stanza depicts a maddened, solitary wanderer trapped within a storm. The transformation of this stormy scene into a "waste of existence" in stanza 4 also hearkens back to Lear's growing insanity on the heath induced by his daughters' desertion. Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" may be additional source material for the young poet; in this case, however, instead of Wordsworth's reflective aesthetic being Tennyson's prototype, it is the antitype. Unlike Wordsworth's ubiquitous lyric that commences, "I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills," Tennyson's wanderer lyricizes:

> I wander in darkness and sorrow,
> Unfriended, cold, and alone,
> As dismally gurgles beside me
> The bleak river's desolate moan.
> The rise of the volleying thunder
> The mountain's lone echoes repeat:
> The roar of the wind is around me,
> The leaves of the year at my feet. (lines 1–8)

In addition to Tennyson reworking Wordsworth's positive view of the natural environment into a threatening one, he also notably chooses the present tense for his lyric, eschewing the "renovating virtue" of the reflective past tense so common in Wordsworth's lyrics. Tennyson abides in the sensory world, in the felt realities of the speaker he is inhabiting.

Reading "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow" as a *recusatio* of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" only makes sense if the poem is understood as Tennyson acting proleptically. The closing refrain, which is repeated with some variation in every stanza, conspicuously refers to "leaves" and "feet," which, of course, are both terms with double meanings: "The roar of the wind is around me, / The leaves of the year at my feet." Situated in this melancholic, alienated setting, the speaker feels the gravity of his task as a poet in the mid-1820s. Conscientious of the "leaves of the year," that is, the abundance of contemporaneous poetry, "at his feet," that is, influencing his metre, the speaker must decide what to do with this poetic inheritance. Will it inspire him to greatness, or will it leave him stymied and impotent?

Read proleptically, the poem's second stanza shows the speaker's initial paralyzing despair: "Not a friend that I lov'd but is dead." Feeling out his own future as a poet, Tennyson recognizes it as a lonely, perhaps empty, future. By 1827, many of Tennyson's boyhood poetic idols were dead—Keats, Shelley, and Byron all died in their primes—and Tennyson muses in this lyric poem whether his fate must necessarily be the same: "Oh! when shall I rest in the tomb; / Wrapt about with the chill winding sheet?" Like the double meanings Tennyson employs with "feet" and "leaves" in the refrain, here is another obvious reference to the act of writing poetry: the "sheet" enwrapping him evokes the very poems composed on sheets of paper. In the third stanza, he looks back on "visions of youthful delight" as bygone times despite the fact that he is, in reality, in the prime of his youth.

In the final two stanzas, Tennyson becomes reconciled to his fate, deciding that he has no choice but to pursue his poetry. As stated in the Advertisement to *Poems, by Two Brothers*, he has crossed the Rubicon. Poignantly, the final refrain in the last stanza becomes Tennyson's own invitation: "*Let the roar of the wind be around me, / The fall of the leaves at my feet*" [emphasis original]. The use of the present tense registers immediacy and finality. By leaning on sensation rather than balanced reflection, Tennyson can assert himself as a fully fledged poet.

Likewise, another sentimental poem, "We Meet No More," eschews reflection and instead meditates on present-tense sensations felt by the poet. It closely follows "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow" in the sequence of *Poems, by Two Brothers* and may also be classed as a sentimental poem of the "School-Miss Alfred" style so important to Tennyson's early poetry. Similar terrifying elements—"the roaring blast," "angry seas," and "a distant shore"—exist concurrently with the "lonely thoughts" of a fully fledged poet. The lyric is directed inward and conveys alienation. However, what makes "We Meet No More" distinct from Tennyson's other sentimental poems in this collection, such as "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow," is the direct address to the unknown, possibly imaginary, female figure Ellen, the object of the speaker's affections:

> We meet no more—the die is cast,
> The chain is broke that tied us,

Our every hope on earth is past,
And there's no helm to guide us:
We meet no more—the roaring blast
And angry seas divide us!

And I stand on a distant shore,
The breakers round me swelling;
And lonely thoughts of days gone o'er
Have made this breast their dwelling:
We meet no more—We meet no more;
Farewell, for ever, Ellen! (lines 1–12)

In recent assessments of Tennyson's juvenilia, scholars have dismissed the young poet's pronouncements of finality and permanence in poems such as this one as the immature ramblings of a fifteen-year-old. For example, the editor of the 1999 Norton Critical Edition of Tennyson's poetry leaves a condescending footnote to the lines in the fourth stanza of "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow": "Shall I fly to the friends of my bosom? / My God! I have buried them all!" This note reads, "The degree to which Tennyson was aware of the incongruities in the pose of a boy of seventeen speaking out on a wasted youth filled with vice and mortal sin is open to speculation" (23). Committing one of the cardinal sins when approaching literary juvenilia, this editor supposes that this young boy cannot possibly understand what it is like to feel the type of loss that he is describing because of his youth and inexperience. The Norton editor frames "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow" as unoriginal because the young Tennyson must have merely been imitating mature poets with little thought of his own. A more robust understanding of the juvenile tradition in the nineteenth century, however, can open up new, more generous readings of such apparently melodramatic poems.

One could imagine a condescending footnote in the Norton style following the final line, "Farewell forever, Ellen!" that says, "Forever is a long time. Whether a fifteen-year-old could appreciate such finality is open to speculation." A more generous reading of this poem could acknowledge that, by including this personal love poem in a volume of poetry intended to launch a poetic career and "court [public] notoriety," Tennyson envisions a future for himself as a sentimental poet, understanding this mode's popularity with the reading public that was becoming increasingly female. Less than five years later, Tennyson would re-work his meditation on this melancholic sentiment and publish "No More" in the literary annual *The Gem*. In "No More," the speaker grieves with "gushing" tears over his dead love—a common trope in gift book poetry.

Despite Tennyson's reticence about a poetics that seeks notoriety, he relied on literary magazines, annuals, and gift books to expose his poetry to new readers and to provide him with much needed financial support. After Tennyson revised his

adolescent poem "Armageddon" into "Timbuctoo" during his first year at Cambridge, for instance, he submitted that poem to the *Cambridge Chronical and Journal* where it was published on 10 July 1829. With the encouragement of his best friend Arthur Hallam, he would go on to publish individual poems in *The Gem* (1831), *Friendship's Offering* (1831 and 1832), the *Yorkshire Literary Annual* (1832), *The Keepsake* (1837), and *The Tribute* (1837). Ledbetter points out the irony: "Tennyson's entire career is inseparable from a dependence on the very format he supposedly hated, and generations of scholars have largely ignored or devalued important contexts provided by periodicals" ("Protesting" 54). Yet such publication is entirely consistent with Tennyson's objective in adolescence, if we take the advertisement that he and Charles co-wrote seriously: to "emerge from the shade" of easy youth and court "notoriety" in their bold poetic venture.

Repeatedly throughout *Poems, by Two Brothers*, Tennyson experiments with different poetic modes and engages with widely different poetic muses, all to achieve this emergence. In another instance of prolepsis and *recusatio*, the philosophical poem "On Sublimity" finds Tennyson envisioning a future for himself as a poet by demonstrating that he understands literary history and the poetic tradition that he is joining. Drawing on his learning from Edmund Burke, whose work on the sublime he quotes in the poem's epigraph, he offers a rejoinder to the pastoral poetry of the Latin and Greek poets that constituted his childhood education:

> O tell me not of vales in tenderest green,
> The poplar's shade, the plantane's graceful tree;
> Give me the wild cascade, the rugged scene,
> The loud surge bursting o'er the purple sea:
> On such sad views my soul delights to pore …. (lines 1–5)

The rest of the poem amounts to an encomium to sublimity and those poets who take up the sublime in their work, despite the fact that doing so is melancholic work. The teenage Tennyson uses this poem as a metric to identify the stuff of his poetry as that which deals in the immense, the sublime, the magnificent, and the profound; he also uses it to demonstrate the confidence to give a blessing in the final stanza to those bards who feel "the genuine force of high Sublimity" by willingly straying from "the emerald green of Fancy's vales" into the gloomier, more melancholic terrain of sublime poetry.

This is an early instance of Tennyson striving to aestheticize death and grief—subjects that he will take up again and again throughout his lifetime. Several more lyrics by Alfred in *Poems, by Two Brothers* seek to be tear-jerkers as the young poet has surmised this to be an essential tool in the poet's toolkit. This toolkit, again, Tennyson has inherited from his grammar school lessons as well as from his reading of contemporary popular, sentimental verse. Eloquently written verses and tales about love or lost love, death, nature, and children dominate the contents of gift books.

Poems about Christianity, exotic travels, married life, moral lessons, and medieval romance were acceptable and typical subjects. Consequently, most of the poems included in the volume contain an epigraph taken from some classical source—such as Horace, Milton, or Beattie—that afford him the opportunity to delve into these topics. In "And Ask Ye Why These Sad Tears Stream?" Tennyson quotes a line from the Ovidian ode, "Sappho to the Absent Phaon," which translated means, "You my dreams bring back to me." Essentially, then, Tennyson imitates this epigraph in his poem but repurposes it according to the conventions of modern sentimental poetry, that is, in order to induce genuine tears in readers. In doing so, Tennyson does not just recapitulate a classical source to legitimate his boyish feelings; rather, he attempts to demonstrate a mastery of this classical source material to show that he is up to the task of being a professional people's poet. He wants to capture the Sensation that Ovid brings to mind.

The guiding aesthetic in the literary annual and gift book genre popularized during Tennyson's teenage years was to give voice to the desires of the heart, particularly the hearts of female readers, the primary audience for gift books and poetry albums. When Tennyson contributes to such publications in his early twenties, he is inhabiting a poetic persona quite distinct from the kind of persona associated with the sublime: "Tennyson had long been writing in context with women readers and writers, enough to inspire criticism from Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1864 when he derided Tennyson as 'a poet adapted to a mixed audience of school-girls and Oxford dons'" (qtd. in Ledbetter, "Protesting" 57).[8]

It is not the intent of this essay to chart out a new trajectory of the growth of a poet as Jerome Buckley once did; only to seek foreshadowing of Tennyson's later greatness in his juvenile poetry would do his juvenilia injustice. My goal, rather, is demonstrate that, when composing his fifty-poem contribution to *Poems, by Two Brothers*, a young Tennyson does more than imitate—he acts proleptically, already envisioning himself on an equal plane with the many authors he quotes in his epigraphs or otherwise invokes. More concretely, we can see him following a *recusatio* model initially inherited from his Horatian training as he feels out the continuities and disjunctions between his own work and that of his literary models, necessary to developing his own original poetic persona. By consistently disavowing youthful immaturity and other antitypes brought to the fore by his engagement with outside sources, Tennyson can find his own type. This process, which began for Tennyson in childhood, continued into adulthood in his Cambridge years with Arthur Hallam. Hallam's classification of Tennyson as a Poet of Sensation rather than as a Poet of Reflection is, of course, well-known. Hallam praises Tennyson's first solo publication in 1831, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, saying, "He sees all forms of nature with the 'eruditus oculus [learned eye],' and his ear has a fairy fineness. There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his impassioned song, more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it" (1195). To make his argument, Hallam disavows Wordsworth and the poetry of Reflection in

order to align Tennyson with Keats, Percy Shelley, and the Poets of Sensation: the same logic of prolepsis and disavowal is at work here in Hallam's essay as in *Poems, by Two Brothers*.

NOTES

[1] For the 1893 facsimile edition of the 1827 first edition, editor Hallam Tennyson relied on his uncle, Frederick, to assign authorship to the poems published in this volume, and many of the poems cannot be accurately assigned. Hallam observes his father's wish that none of the poems in this volume be included in any future edition of Alfred Tennyson's collected works.

[2] For examinations of Tennyson's closet drama "The Devil and the Lady," see Tucker, "Strange Comfort." See also Peterson, "'And envy me.'" For examinations of Tennyson's "Armageddon," which would be revised into "Timbuctoo," see Ricks, "'Armageddon' into 'Timbuctoo.'" See also Kroll, "Tennyson and the Metaphysics of Material Culture" for additional analysis of "Timbuctoo" and for brief remarks on the juvenile poem "Memory."

[3] The following poems by Alfred in *Poems, by Two Brothers* are but a few that quote a Greco-Latin poet for the epigraph: "Remorse," "The Dell of E—," "The Vale of Bones," "Did Not Thy Roseate Lips Outvie," "Friendship," "And Ask Ye Why These Sad Tears Stream," and "The Walk at Midnight."

[4] See Wright, "The Charm of Tennyson" for an account of Tennyson's Horatian education (143). See *Carmina* 2.12 for the text of this ode, and see Davis, "The Disavowal" for an analysis of Horace's *recusatio* (93).

[5] See *Eclogue* VI. 3ff.

[6] When Byron died in 1823, a distraught fourteen-year-old Tennyson purportedly ran out of his home and carved "BYRON IS DEAD" into a tree. See Ricks, *Tennyson*, p. 13.

[7] See "On the Death of My Grandmother" (Charles), "Time: An Ode" (Alfred), "The Grave of a Suicide" (Alfred), "On a Dead Enemy" (Alfred), "The Dying Christian" (Charles), and "The Dying Man to His Friend" (Alfred) in *Poems, by Two Brothers*.

[8] Ledbetter also notes that "Harold Nicholson recalls yet an earlier complaint in Lytton's *The New Timon* (1846) about Tennyson's … style. The aesthetic traditionally considered feminine, and therefore distastefully sentimental to these critics, involved themes and expressions of the heart, usually involving women characters or domestic situations" ("Protesting" 57).

WORKS CITED

Davis, Gregson. "The Disavowal of the Grand '(Recusatio)' in Two Poems by Wallace Stevens." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 17, nos. 1/2, Nov. 1982, pp. 92–102. doi:10.2307/1316398.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cornell UP, 1980.

Hallam, Arthur. "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry." *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, edited by Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle. Broadview, 1999, pp. 1190–1200.

Hill, Jr., Robert, editor. *Tennyson's Poetry*. Norton Critical Edition, 1999.

Horace. *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace*. Translated by John Conington. London: George Bell, 1882.

Langbauer, Laurie. *The Juvenile Tradition: Young Writers and Prolepsis, 1750–1835*. Oxford UP, 2016.

Ledbetter, Kathryn. "Protesting Success: Tennyson's 'Indecent Exposure' in the Periodicals." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 43, no. 1, Mar. 2005, pp. 53–73. doi:10.1353/vp.2005.0018.

———. *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals*. Ashgate, 2007.

Lang, Andrew. *Alfred Tennyson*. Good Press, 2022.

Nicholson, Harold. *Tennyson: Aspects of His Life, Character and Poetry*. London: Constable, 1923.

Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. 1794. New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859.

Redpath, Theodore. "Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome." *Studies in Tennyson*, edited by Hallam Tennyson. 1981. Macmillan, 1982.

Ricks, Christopher. *Tennyson*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1989.

St Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge UP, 2004.

Tennyson, Arthur, and Charles Tennyson. *Poems, by Two Brothers*. With four poems by Frederick Tennyson. 1827. London: Macmillan, 1893. Facsimile reproduction of first edition with additional poems by the brothers and preface by Hallam Tennyson.

———. Advertisement. *Poems, by Two Brothers*, ix.

Tennyson, Hallam. Preface to Tennyson and Tennyson*, Poems, by Two Brothers*, ix.

Virgil. *Eclogues*. Translated by J. B. Greenough. Boston: Ginn, 1895.

Wright, Jane. "The Charm of Tennyson." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2021, pp. 141–60. doi:10.1353/vp.2021.0008.